

CME Group Tour Championship

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Tiburón Golf Club

Lydia Ko

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back, everyone, to the CME Championship Media Center. I am pleased to be joined by Ms. Lydia Ko. Lydia, welcome back to Naples. Overall what is it like to be here at the season finale of 2022?

LYDIA KO: Well, I met Keith Urban today, so that's definitely a start. I learned that he is born in New Zealand for those that didn't know.

Yeah, it's always nice to be here. You know what Terry Duff and the whole of CME Group has done to elevate this tournament over the past nine years, I think, because my rookie year was the first time we had that \$1 million and what he has done continuously over the years has been amazing and awesome for our tour and for women's golf.

Yeah, it's a great place to end. It's only a few hour drive from my house as well. Yeah, excited for a good week. The top 60 players are here, so hopefully we can all showcase some good golf throughout the week.

THE MODERATOR: For you, first off, meeting Keith Urban is also a highlight as well. We just talked to Nelly. Did you see him and go up to him? Did he come up to you?

LYDIA KO: They were passing by on the golf course, and then I was talking to Terry and then Keith Urban was right there. Yeah, it was super cool.

I said, Do you play?

He said, I play the guitar.

Maybe golf is something for him in the future, but he is kind of a country, like, the music genre person, but he kind of jazzes up country music. When I saw that we got tickets to be able to, like, see him tonight, I was super excited and kind of had that fan-girling moment. Only as he drove by I remembered that I maybe should have asked him for a photo (laughing).



THE MODERATOR: You might get one tonight, who knows? As we enter this last tournament of the year, you come in at the top of the Vare Trophy standings, at the top of the Rolex Player of the Year standings, and two wins under your belt this year. When you look at it overall all-encompassing, where does this year stack up for you personally?

LYDIA KO: I think this year has been some of the most consistent golf I've played throughout the year. I think when I look at my nine years on tour, I think I've had seasons where I started the season well, ended the season well or turned around in the middle, but I was never, like, always kind of steadily there from the start to the end, and I feel like I've been in that kind of position coming into this week.

So it's been a year that I'm very thankful for, and to have my first win this year in my second event was definitely like an extra bonus just because going into the season I wasn't feeling super confident about my game and wasn't really sure how it was going to go.

So, yeah, it kind of caught me by surprise, and I was able to take good rhythm from that. And I think really from U.S. Open onwards I have been playing really consistently, and it's been more than I could have ever asked for. And the win in Korea was, like, a cherry on top of the cake.

These last couple of weeks I've been trying not to think too much about the awards and the what-ifs and what could happen because even though it's been a great year for me and something that I'm very proud of, there are other players that have had phenomenal years as well.

I think this season more than any other one there's so many players in contention, and I think it's what makes it super exciting. The person that does end up having the lowest score will end up winning the Vare at the end of the week. Then the person that has collectively played really well this season will get the Player of the Year.

I hope that would be me, but if I don't win that, I don't think I can -- I may be disappointed at the time being, but, you know, when I look back at this week and if somebody said, Hey, you're going to win twice, and one of them being in Korea, I would have said, Are you sure that's going to happen? Yeah, I think there's been so many exciting and



great things so far. I've got no complaints.

THE MODERATOR: Love that. We'll open it up in the room for questions.

Q. Lydia, hypothetically if you were to win the Player of the Year Award, how would you compare how that might feel this time around compared to 2015?

LYDIA KO: I remember being in this room in 2015 before the event started doing my press conference, and I said, if I could choose anything, and at that time if you -- we did it still by to win the globe, like to get the million not as part of the prize money. I said, if I could choose the million or the Player of the Year, maybe the Vare, I would choose the Player of the Year.

Yes, the million is awesome, but I think just to be the best player for that season, it doesn't -- those kind of opportunities don't come very often.

For me a lot of ups and downs whether in golf and in my personal life have happened since 2015. So if I was to get it, it would just be really cool because it would be like a summary, and all of those moments have added this moment right now. Yeah, I think it would be more special.

I think earlier in my career -- not that I did take it for granted, but I felt like it came easier. You know, like maybe a top ten or a win, but now the last few years I've gotten to realize, hey, it's not easy, and the level of competition on tour is getting higher and higher.

You know, your percentage to win is just a little bit more difficult, and I think that is why it would feel special, and it would be, like, meaningful in a different way. But I remember I wanted it so much then. My Rolex here has the 2015 Rolex Player of the Year Award engraved inside it, so it's a good reminder for that.

It would just be special in different ways because I am at a different point in my career to then.

Q. Just one follow-up to that. How would you compare the strengths of your game now to 2015?

LYDIA KO: I hope I'm more experienced. Sometimes those experiences may not be great because I've got more in my memory bank to remember, and some are good and some are not so good.

Then I think I was a little bit more carefree. Just like -- how old was I then? 18 or something? Yeah. Wow, 18 (laughing). I was still a teenager, so I think I was just going around playing golf, and golf was kind of all I think then.

If I had a bad day on the golf course, I didn't feel like a good person. I felt like golf was reflecting who I was, but now I think I have a better gauge of that and better perspective that this is what I do, and I'm very grateful to be able to do what I love. This is what is work for me as well.

It's ticking so many of the boxes that I should be grateful for. If I don't have as a good day, I do get frustrated that I wish it was better, but I don't think, like, oh, I shot whatever. It just doesn't take away my self-esteem, whereas then I think I really correlated both of those, and I don't think it is a healthy position to be in for your mental health as well. In that way I think I'm able to get over it.

I think sometimes, you know, some of my lower moments in my career has helped me to be okay about those times. I think when you first hit it, it's so much more difficult because it's like such a new experience. Whether it's good or bad experiences. But I feel like I've been able to cover some of it in my experiences, so even if I do hit those kind of times, I hope that it doesn't affect me as much as it did a few years ago.

Q. Are you aware of the trifecta that you could complete this weekend for New Zealand golf? Steven Alker won the PGA Champions through an Order of Merit last week. Ryan Fox has been with Rory McIlroy on the DP World Tour. And here you have a chance in Florida as well. It would be quite incredible and just shows you the state of New Zealand golf at the moment.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I actually turned on Golf Channel last week and saw Steven Alker playing. And I didn't get to see the weekend golf because obviously I was playing, but I did see lots of photos that he was holding their season-ending the Charles Schwab cup. That was super cool.

Obviously, he has been around and played so much longer than I have, but to see three kiwis and many other kiwis on different tours. Like Momoka Kobori getting her wins on the LET and now getting full card for LET and the other tours as well.

I think it's very exciting for golf in New Zealand and hopefully this inspires more juniors to take it up and want to be the next Steven Alker or the Ryan Fox or me.

Yeah, it's I think very exciting, and I did see that. And I saw how well Foxy has been playing. So he was, I think, second in the standings. So it would be really cool if it was, like, three kiwis up top.

We're from far down under and for us to kind of come on all these different tours and kind of show the New Zealand flag, I think it would be super exciting, but no matter what happens I think golf in New Zealand has grown. Hopefully this is a start of the kiwis taking our stance in our respective tours.

Q. Just one quick follow-up, Lydia. With all that consistency this year and your being in line for the Vare Trophy and the Rolex Player of the Year Award, can you just explain or elaborate a little bit on the decision to part company with Sean as your coach because clearly you have achieved some great stuff with him.

LYDIA KO: Yeah. No, sometimes it's not about the person, the two people. Sometimes it's about timing in life.

I've just been all over the map, to be honest. I was trying to figure out the logistical things of everything, but I think it was a decision that we both were -- obviously not an easy decision because I respect Sean so much. And he helped me at a point in my career where I had so many questions in my head that I really wasn't sure where I was heading.

He was able to kind of lift me up, and sometimes our conversations were very non-technique or golf-related, and it was just about the mind or breathing or just other stuff outside the golf course. He helped me so much with that.

So it was more like for this time right now it just wasn't a fit for the situation, but, you know, Sean said, hey, I'm always a text or a call away. He said, we're friends, but for me, like, he is more than a friend. He is like a mentor and somebody that I really look up to.

And I know that if I ever need to reach out and, like, contact him and ask for his advice, he is always going to be there for me. I think to have somebody like that in your life, not only just in work, is something that you should be very thankful for because, as all of us know, it's easier to make friends when you are 5 years old compared to when you are 25 or 45 because you just meet so many different people along the way and to meet somebody that you really connect with I think is so much harder as you get older.

Sean is such an incredible person, and I think everybody that really knows Sean knows that he is more than just a golf instructor. He will always be that kind of person for me.

Q. He did say to me this morning, Lydia, that he actually was working on getting to the position, and he said it would come soon where you probably wouldn't

need him because you were playing so well, and I think he said that is every coach's goal.

LYDIA KO: Thank you. Everybody needs a Sean in their life, though.

THE MODERATOR: I love that, and very beautifully said.

Q. You said that it was more difficult to win out here now. Can you talk about the difference in the strength of the field and the tour in general now as opposed to when you won Player of the Year before?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think before it was a little bit more, like, rare to see an up-and-coming star. It might have been every few seasons or every few years from this country and this country. But now there are so many good players.

I think before you would say, oh, there's only, like, South Korean players or American players, a couple of European players that play well, but it's just all over the map of so many new up-and-coming players.

Atthaya is obviously a clear example. She's, I think, still 19. It's weird. I was the oldest one in the group in Korea when I played with Yaeun Hong and Atthaya. I was, like, I have you guys by six years, and I'm only 25.

It just shows, like, there are so many talented players from all over the world, and I think that shows just the level of competition on the LPGA and also the players that have been playing here for so long for them still to be in contention. Like girls that have played ten years on tour and getting their first win, like right Ryan O'Toole's win last year at the Scottish Open.

I think just everybody is improving, and I think because the level of play is getting better and better, everybody -- doesn't matter if you are a No. 1 or No. 100 or 300 or 1,000. Like, you are still pushing yourself to go and see how good you are get, how you can make the good to even be great and great to fantastic.

I think we all push each other, and we're all pushing ourselves to be the best version of ourselves. I think because of that, the level of play is getting so good that sometimes I'll just play, and I'll go, like, wow. It just amazes me.

I think that's just how we're trending in women's golf, and I think that's why there are more and more junior girls in the girls golf program, you know, taking up the game as well. So I think it's a very exciting time.

It's not like the courses are getting easier. The courses are

getting longer. The rules officials have their minds to try and make it as hard as possible for us. Even then the play is still so good.

It just shows how much talent there is. Sometimes I wish more people would come out and watch us play to be able to see how far Nelly hits it or how consistent Jin Young Ko and how good Yaeun Hong putts. I didn't know those things until I played with them and I was, like, oh, my God, they're so good.

I wish more people would come out just to see that in life, and then I think they will be amazed at how talented these players are. Maybe I should take a different marketing position here on tour, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: I'll certainly hire you if you are looking for something.

Q. I would like to ask you about your training. You played so well this year. Then it looks like you gain your muscle. Just wondering mainly what are you working on at the gym?

LYDIA KO: It's good that you said gain muscle. If you said it looks like you got big, I would be, okay (laughing). It's like in Korea sometimes you hear, you look healthy. I'm, like, thank you.

No, I've been trying to be more in routine of my workouts. I think probably Tiger Woods years ago set the standard that working out is part of your routine and your practices.

Everybody has their own different routines. I saw Lexi today working out at L.A. Fitness at 6:00 in the morning. That's not something I would do, but it just shows how important working out and all those things are for players.

To some it may be lifting heavy weights. For me I like to lift heavier and do more compound weight work in my off weeks. Then in tournament trying to do more maintenance, more balance and see where my body is at and being more aware of my body. But I think at first it was really hard because I wasn't used to doing it, but the more I do it, the more I feel like it was able to transfer into my golf game as well.

It's always nice that if you don't have a good day at the office, to go out and sweat it out a little bit just makes you feel better. Yeah, I think the working out has become part of my routine.

Sometimes I really don't want to go to the gym, but when I push myself to go and afterwards I feel like so much better. So it is a part that I'm trying to think more of. I think as

generations go by, I think that is going to be more part of the golf as well. Sometimes I don't think it's just about weight, but there's just so many things you could do in the workout.

Q. I know you've talked over the years about not wanting to play out here too, too long. 30 was a mark for a long time. How important is it to you to reach the 27 points for the Hall of Fame for you before you exit? How much do you think about that?

LYDIA KO: I don't think I think about it on a daily basis. I'm not looking and counting down to how many points. But obviously, coming out into this week, I've had people tell me about it. I don't want to listen to it, but I think I'm, like... see, I clearly don't listen very well. It's like 5-ish, 5, 7. Somewhere around there. As close as it seems, also it's really hard.

When I think about my last three wins in these last couple of years, for me winning in Hawaii, I waited -- I know some people wait longer, but it was three years until pretty much that win. I just know now that it's just not as easy, and that's why when these opportunities come, yes, I would like to grab it because I know they are not around the corner every single time.

Yeah, I would love to for that sake, but I said even if I had one point to go, I don't think I'm going to continue to push and push another season and another season just so that in the hope of me grabbing it. I don't want to tire myself out.

When I feel like it is the time for me to retire, I will only know at that time, but I don't want to leave the game and regret that I should have stopped then rather than trying to keep going and keep going and lose passion for golf.

I do it because I love it and have the drive and motivation to be the best player I can be. And if I can get those accolades being in the Hall of Fame alongside some of the best and the legendary players, that would be a huge honor, but I don't want that to be my driving factor. I want to play the best golf I can here this week and whatever happens, it's going to happen.

For me I think that is my mindset, and my goal is that I don't want to get to a point where I no longer want to play because I've tired myself from trying to grasp it, and I have been close, and I don't get anymore.

I would rather retire the thought of, oh, maybe I could have, and then, like, it's still an exciting thought rather than a tiring thought of I should have done this.

Yeah, I think that's where my mind is at. Who knows? Sometimes I have a long day at the golf course, and I'm, like, I'm retiring tomorrow. And then some days you have great days, and you think this is why we play.

It's kind of like when you play in the pro-am. It's that one shot that gets us coming back. I want to even until the day I stop playing, I want to have that passion, and I don't want to lose that.

I think sometimes it's hard to have that when you are doing something for a long period of time. My role model is kind of like Lorena where she was a little her best. I'm sure if she continued playing, she would have dominated. I'm, like, thank goodness she wasn't playing when I came on tour. But it's, like, I want to retire like that and retire while still playing good golf.

THE MODERATOR: I think I'm going to wrap it up with a question here from the Zoom, which kind of touches on what you were just talking about. But what have the past two years really revealed to you about sustaining your career into your 20s, as you are still in your 20s? Then I'll have a follow-up to that before we wrap.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think I was very fortunate enough to come out and play on tour as a 16-year-old turning 17. And in ways I still can't believe that on my next birthday I'm only turning 26, but when you play during the season, it goes by so quick. I realize now that it's my ninth year on tour already. I feel like I was wearing those big glasses on my rookie year not too long ago.

It's like the saying of when you are having fun, it goes by fast, but life on tour just makes it go by fast as well. I think sometimes when you are not playing as well, you have those lower moments, I think those times feel so long. Like that was my three years from MEDIHEAL win to the LOTTE win, it felt longer if that period of time.

I think all those times build you up to the player you are now. I think if I didn't have those times, I probably wouldn't have some of the mindset I do now. I think I would be more phased by every little thing. I said when you are on tour after a while, there is that line where your 'Give and S' level goes down and down and down. I think in ways it's not, like, a bad idea. It's not a bad thing, and you are just able to play freely.

That's my goal is to play without fear and I'm out there just being free, and that's what I want to continue to do. Sometimes it is easier said than done, but that's why we all have goals that we keep trying to reach too.

THE MODERATOR: A follow-up. What would your advice

be to the younger up-and-coming players navigating careers that are also younger and getting into your age as well?

LYDIA KO: Just because somebody did this at this age, I think it's really hard to compare one player to another. Everybody has their own path. Some people turn professional early. Some people play collegiate golf. Some people come from the Epson Tour. Everybody has their own route.

I think when you start comparing yourself to other people, then it's like nonstop. I have done it before. I'll be honest, I've compared myself to other people.

Then when I went down that road, I realized I was only thinking about the negatives and what I need to do. And, yes, you need that kind of perspective to know what you want to work on, but at the same time you've got to know what are your strengths. That way you're able to keep growing on that and have the confidence in that even when things don't go so well.

I think just trust your journey, and most of the time just stay true to your emotions and your feelings. I think when you are very honest with yourself and transparent with yourself, you are able to get a better idea and do what's best for you because what's best for me is not the right answer for somebody else.

THE MODERATOR: We could listen to you talk all day, but we'll let you go. Thank you for joining us, Lydia.

LYDIA KO: Thank you.

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