

CME Group Tour Championship

Sunday, November 20, 2022

Naples, Florida, USA

Tiburón Golf Club

Lydia Ko

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back inside the media center here at the CME Group Tour Championship. I think these people in here are itching to talk to you. We'll open it up to questions here.

Q. Nice to see you. A massive congratulations. You've spoken a lot this week about I suppose comparing it to earlier days. But now that you've won, can you tell me how you feel and maybe compare it to when you were winning when you were quite younger?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I feel like it's really difficult to compare, like, when I won the Player of the Year in 2015 to now. I don't even -- I don't do stats very much, so I don't even know what it is actually by numbers, but this year has been special.

To win again at the Gainbridge so early in the season after winning in LOTTE last year, especially when I didn't feel like I was ready, it kind of came to me as a surprise.

Winning in Korea was so special at a place where I was born, and it was my goal to have won there once. And to kind of do that it was like a bucket list thing. You know, coming into these two events in the Florida stretch because I had won in Korea, I wanted to not have too high expectations. And obviously I wanted to end the season on a high but, you know, know that whatever happens and even though there's a lot of things on the line, just know that it's been a great season.

And to be the Player of the Year and to win the Vare Trophy again and to win the CME Group Tour Championship, it's a dream come true. To be able to do it in front of family and my team, you know, it's a very special one.

As much as I'm excited that I have won, I'm also excited for some time off and get ready to become a bride soon (laughing).

Q. Just one more from me. Next year you'll probably



be in line or you might qualify, get enough points to qualify for the Hall of Fame at either the age of 25 or 26. When you know that you're so close to qualifying for the Hall of Fame or being eligible for the Hall of Fame, what does it mean to you to know that that's a pretty high likelihood next year?

LYDIA KO: Yeah. If I could ever go in the Hall of Fame, it would be really cool. Especially with so many of the big names and the legends that are in the Hall of Fame.

I'm sure that's going to be all the questions that everybody here is going to ask me next year as well. Like, you know, you're so close, or how is it going to be, what's your approach?

But, you know, like my mindset going into this week, even though there's a lot of things on the line and these opportunities don't come very often, I just try to focus on my game. I know that if I play good golf and keep putting myself in contention, all of those other things are going to follow.

So I don't think I'm going to think too much about the Hall of Fame. If it happens, that's great, and it will be a huge honor, but it's definitely not the biggest thing as a goal for next year.

Q. Hopefully see you in New Zealand. Will you come back over the summer break, winter break for you?

LYDIA KO: Maybe.

Q. Speaking of becoming a bride very soon, you had your fiance here to watch. What did it mean to have him on site, and what has his presence in your life -- maybe how has it impacted you inside the ropes?

LYDIA KO: Yeah. When I won in Korea, he wasn't there. And then he sent me a text while I was going up the 18th hole because I had enough of a lead that he thought I would win. I called him after my round, and I just started, like, bawling. I was in tears because I wish I could, like, celebrate that special moment with him.

He is obviously a very special person in my life. I think having met Jun -- was I meant to say his name (laughing)? Having met him, I think he motivates and inspires me to

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become a better person and a better player.

I think when I first met him, it was just before -- it was just before my win in Hawaii and then actually a few of the girls said, Hey, he is your lucky charm. I think Megan also said that too (laughing).

I was, like, Yeah, I've got to keep him around.

No, he puts a smile on my face, and I know that no matter if I shoot 79 like I did at Congressional or I shoot 65, he is going to, you know -- he will always love me and talk to me the same way that my golf really is not how he, like, perceives me.

For a while when things weren't going great in my career, I would -- my identity felt so connected to golf. Having met him, I feel like he is introspective in life and in my golf.

After meeting him, I've actually wanted to work harder during the times that I am working and then also enjoy time off. I think I probably had a few more breaks than I did two, three years ago, but I think that's just only helped me to be more focused and be more on when I'm actually doing my work.

So, yeah, he is someone that I'm very thankful for, and I really wanted to win once in front of him. I obviously got off to a great start, and yesterday I played solid. But, you know, it wasn't, like, awesome like Leona's round.

I remembered last year he was saying, Oh, what if she doesn't play well because I'm here? And I don't want him to think that because if I don't play well, it's totally me. It's not anybody around me that's made that happen.

So I wanted to win in front of him, win, like, for him. Obviously me winning today doesn't change anything about our relationship, but I think just to be able to celebrate such a special moment with my loved ones just makes it extra meaningful.

Q. So do you think your mom will stop harassing you about playing as well as you were when you were 15?

LYDIA KO: Oh, hell no. I'm still 5 in my mom's eyes. No, definitely not, but I think my mom especially keeps me super grounded. I'm sure today she might go, Oh, remember that thing that you hit on 14 and it went in the water?

I was, like, Yes, thanks, Mom, yeah.

I think because of her and because of my family, they've been through this journey with me. I remember coming

over to the U.S. for the first time when I was a junior to play the Callaway Junior Worlds in San Diego. And I might sound like I'm born in the 1960s, but at that time navigation wasn't, like, as good as we have now. She printed five pieces of paper of how to get from LAX to San Diego. If you missed one exit, you had to go back to find your route again.

She's been through that with me since day one, like, driving doing that in a foreign country, driving eight hours with me to junior events back in New Zealand as well. I think because of her I was able to, you know -- this kind of moment happens, and I know that she might be one of my toughest critics, but at the same time I know that she says that because she wants me to just keep growing, and I think she keeps me really humble.

I should say thank you more often, but I don't end up saying that, but it's easier to say it when she's not here. But I have to thank her because she does everything for me. I know that life on tour is not easy, and I'm very thankful that my mom and my sister travels with me. They make this so much more fun.

Q. You seemed composed out there and felt fairly calm, especially compared to some of the other competitors. Did you feel that way? How nervous were you? A little trouble on 14. Was there ever a moment of fluctuation where you felt things were in trouble at all, or was it steady sailing?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I thought I would be way more nervous today. I know that last night I couldn't, like, sleep as well, but I normally get the butterflies when I do get nervous.

I remember actually in Korea the cart ride from the putting green to the tee, I was so nervous. I was, like, man, I don't feel very good.

But today I was surprised at how not shaky I was. I get nervous even during pro-ams because I want to play good for our pro-am group. So I was surprised, but I think that might be because I wanted to totally focus on me, and I just said today I want to play golf that I won't regret.

Sometimes I'm not going to hit -- I mean, I duffed a driver today, so I know that I'm going to hit some mis-shots, but at the same time there are going to be plenty of opportunities. On a day like today when you know it's going to be windy and possibly a little bit of rain, you know it's going to be hard for everyone.

So I wanted to focus on me. Just because somebody else made a birdie or a bogey or whatever, don't get, like -- don't change my strategy around that. I actually didn't

realize that Leona had hit it in the water on 14. Obviously lucky on both our parts that we both made it on the same hole.

Not like we were both, like, one was good and then one was not. So in that way I'm sure the bogeys -- yeah, I'm sure we would have loved both birdie opportunities, but it wasn't the worst timing.

But for me from 15 I think there was a lot of adrenaline going, and I started hitting my clubs so much further. I have never hit driver, 8-iron into a par-5 like I did on 17. I also thought this is what Lexi and Nelly probably feels like every day without the wind. I was, like, this must be nice.

But, you know, that's how I think internally I was excited, but I tried to stay calm. Even down to the last hole, I just wanted to play my golf and make sure that it gets handled in my hands and not, like, somebody else's. Yeah.

Q. Then on 16 before that putt I was thinking watching it, if she makes this putt, it's going to be really hard for her to lose. It was a really crucial moment. Do you get a sense in a moment like that, like, before you putt that, do you have a thought this could be really big? Like this could be the thing that effectively ends it?

LYDIA KO: With 17 being a reachable par-5 I knew that anything can happen. I think that was me all day. I am not going to count on somebody making a mistake, and I want to make as many birdies and make as many good putts or shots as possible. And I left it in a perfect position.

But I kept reading the putt, and I wasn't sure if it was left-center or right-center, but I just wanted to be committed and just hit it left-center and put a good stroke on it.

I felt like I was rolling it really well this week, so I just wanted to put a good roll and see what happens. Even if I don't make the birdie on that hole, the next hole is a birdie opportunity as well. So don't get too frustrated about it.

But, you know, it went in, and I did my first-bump which I don't do that very often too. I knew that every shot is going to count. You know, 17, yes, it could be a birdie opportunity, but it is also for the same for somebody else.

You know, 6 she made eagle. Those couple of shots, they can swing very quickly. So I just wanted to make the birdie, yes, to be a little bit more comfortable. I never thought that the two shots were a complete comfortable lead going down the stretch.

Q. I heard you mention that you were excited to have a new picture up as the winner of this tournament

versus you in the glasses. So I'm just curious, when you look back to that girl that year in 2014 maybe versus the woman you are now, how do you compare?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think that week I actually flew from Mexico because we had the Lorena's event the week prior. I was coming into the week a little tired, and I remember I didn't play that great. So that year was the first time that we had the million dollar for the Globe outside of the event. I think if you were a top nine coming into the race that you had the opportunity to win the Globe if you won the event. I ended up doing that.

I think I played extra holes that day, and I was in the playoff with Carlota and Julieta, and all three of us were very different style of players. I think there was a moment in the playoff where I actually thought I had lost because Carlota had hit a really close shot in there, but obviously she ended up missing the putt.

You know, a lot of things have happened since then. I was 17 in 2014. I don't feel 25 right now. There's been a lot of ups and downs both on and off the golf course, but all of those moments have made moments like today. I think, yes, maybe when I was younger, I played maybe a little bit more freely because I was a little clueless at the same time (laughing).

But now, you know, I've gone through my share of ups and downs, and I think that's helped me to realize that, hey, we're going to have good days and we're also going to have bad days. I think my perspective on how I treat the bad shots or the bad events is a lot better now than I did then.

I hope that I've grown more as an individual since then, and I think golf is very relatable to life in general, and I think golf keeps you very humble as well. It's a continuous learning journey, but I'm excited with where I am at in life and at the golf course. But, you know, I don't miss the times of wearing the glasses and having to clean my lenses too. Yeah (laughing).

THE MODERATOR: With the rain today, you would have been cleaning them a lot.

LYDIA KO: I would have been the camera man trying to clean my lenses all day. A lot of things have happened, but I feel like -- I feel more mature than I am then, but still a ways to go.

Q. Just as a follow-up, so would you say you kind of recaptured the same kind of freedom that you were playing with back then just in a different way?

LYDIA KO: I think so. I think I'm freer now knowing that, hey, whatever is going to happen is going to happen. Sometimes I can put my 100% intention, and it does nothing like I intended it to.

Then sometimes I don't think it's going to go great, and it goes great. So I think just all those kind of experiences help me to become more free because at the end of the day it's like a gamble. Yes, you kind of want that to go in your favor, but I can't -- like, just because I become more controlling, it's not going to do any good for me.

So I think just to let go and I've said all year, you know, what's meant to be is going to be. I want that to be, like, how I envision, but at the same time I'm playing alongside the world's best female golfers, and I know it's not easy, so I just have got to focus on me. And if I do a good job of what I have in front of me, then that's all I can really ask for.

Q. How do you celebrate, particularly with all your family there? What do you intend to do?

LYDIA KO: A nice three and a half hour drive to Orlando. Yeah. I've been to the Crane Restaurant here in Naples for five, six times. I've only been here, like, seven days. So they may actually say go there, but probably just drive and a lot of -- my coach and my fiance and my mom, my sister and I, we're all driving back.

So, yeah, probably have a nice warm meal. Very unlike Florida today with the weather, so anything warm sounds good. But, yeah, I think we're making our trip back. No alcohol consumption for me today.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you all for joining us this week and every day, and congratulations to you, Lydia.

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