

HSBC Women's World Championship

Thursday, 29 April 2021

Republic of Singapore

Sentosa Golf Club

Sophia Popov

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: How are you feeling after your first competitive round here in Singapore?

SOPHIA POPOV: A lot better now that I'm in the clubhouse and out of the heat. But no, I feel great. I had a really solid start. I haven't played this course before. I haven't been here; it's my first time. So it was really nice. I enjoyed it and yeah, definitely excited about getting -- having a good start.

THE MODERATOR: You said that you came off to a good start, back-to-back birdies on your first two holes. I know you had a bogey on No. 3. How much did that help especially on a course you haven't played before?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, obviously it always settles the nerves. I made two pretty good putts right off the bat, so it's kind of nice to get a good feel with your putter especially when the greens are as good as they are here. If you can get a good read on it, then, you know, it's more likely that you'll -- that you'll make a couple more coming down the stretch. I think it's just -- it was just nice to get off to a good start and have good vibes for the rest of the round.

THE MODERATOR: You were talking about your Twitter post of you and your caddie getting used to the heat. What is it like getting used to the heat and with your first round under your belt, was it everything you expected?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yesterday and day before it felt hotter because I played a little bit later. Today it's all about just being really well prepared and just the fact that you're playing competitively takes your mind off things quite a bit, too.

So it's just been a little bit having to adapt to the climate, but I think overall, I've done a pretty good job. It doesn't feel too bad yet but I might regret saying that.

THE MODERATOR: I was going to say this earlier morning tee time that you had, do you think it led a little bit of an advantage to you.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I think so. It was definitely a



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little bit cooler this morning. Although we didn't have any breeze so kind of just, you know, you're sitting there -- standing there and you're just kind of sweating there the whole time. But I do think that it lent to a little bit cooler air maybe.

Definitely felt that the back nine I was getting really hot and I took out my sun umbrella and that worked pretty well. I think just the fact that you're playing and that just keeps your mind off of it a little. I think if this was just a fun round, I'd be struggling a lot more.

THE MODERATOR: You were able to close with three in your last six holes, I believe, or something around that number. What's it like for you going into round two tomorrow knowing that you'll probably have an opposite tee time than you had this morning, but to be able to close with a strong finish like that.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's nice. I think that -- I left a few opportunities out there so I felt like I could have been lower than I was at that point. So it was just kind of -- it was great to be able to roll in a few more putts my last six or seven holes to finish at the number I feel like I deserved for where my game was at today.

THE MODERATOR: What is it about Sentosa this first day here now that you're getting used to the course here that really lends well to your game and the way that you were able to post the number that you did today.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I think that right now I would say I quite like my kind of mid -- mid- to long-iron game, and I think you need quite a few out here. It's definitely not playing very short. It's kind of -- you've got some longer holes there, too. You're hitting quite a few 6-irons, maybe 5-irons in. So I think that part of my game has been pretty good. You know, and just being able to kind of miss the fairways and the greens in the right spots if you do miss them. And I think that just strategically it sets up well to my eye and -- and just fits well to my game. I couldn't even tell you exactly why.

THE MODERATOR: I know it's your first time here in Singapore and we were just talking about how it's just kind of itching at you that you could be sightseeing now but what's your experience been here knowing you're in a very wonderful city as Singapore.



SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's tough. I love sightseeing. Normally I'm the kind of person I use half my day to just go out there and experience something new and take my mind off of golf. Now it's really hard because you go back to the hotel room. You're by yourself. You have to find other distractions other than just going out. You can't leave the hotel. So I think that's hard for me being the kind of person that I am. I like to be very active. So that's not happening this year. But I think that's something that I can look forward to next year hopefully.

Q. I think part of this question you might have just answered but you mentioned obviously you're playing here in Singapore for the first time, debut in the tournament. What's your first impression, overall impressions of the tournament and really just coming to Singapore, playing here in general, playing in Asia?

SOPHIA POPOV: It's definitely been a very cool experience for me. I think I've watched this tournament over the years and saw the other girls playing and I was never able to qualify for it.

I think that's one of the perks that came with winning the AIG Women's Open last year. I think that's just been kind of almost like a bonus week for me again just being able to enjoy being out here with the Top-70 girls right now and I'm playing on-really really nice golf course.

Q. And your overall experience of playing in Asia. This is one of your first times playing in Asia; correct?

SOPHIA POPOV: It's my third, I think fourth maybe. Played in China. India. A couple, Australia, and then the other one was Australia. It's my third time, yeah.

Q. Since this is your third time playing in Asia, what is it about coming here in these heat and conditions that's different from what we might normally be playing on the LPGA?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I think the last time, we played an event on Sanya, and the conditions were similar. I knew what I was in for. The other girls were preparing me for what it's going to be like.

If I had to guess, it's similar to a summer day in Florida, really. I just think the temperature never drops. It's like it seems like throughout night and the morning, you open the window and it just as hot as it is about 2:00 PM. I think that's the thing that I'm trying to adjust.

Q. There's currently six players right now at 5-under and another five at 4-under. Are you surprised with the way scores are?

SOPHIA POPOV: I don't think so. You know, when I

was out there, I feel like I could have even gone a little bit lower. I was hoping to make that last putt on 18 to go 6-under, but it's just been -- I think the course setup definitely lends to a couple lower scores today and maybe it's not. You know, the wind is not quite as consistent so you do have pockets that -- where it's less windy and you have a chance to really go at some of the flags.

But I definitely think that that's something that depending on the pin positions can definitely change throughout next three days.

THE MODERATOR: With that, do you think there's a number in mind for Sunday?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think that's always hard to say but I think you're going to have to be, you know, somewhere -- I'm assuming somewhere between 17 and 20 would be my guess. But then again, it's all depending on the conditions. If it gets a little bit windier, it could be closer to 15 but I'm assuming it's something around there. But I honestly don't know what it usually plays like, so I think that's just a goal for me and then it's just kind of going after that number.

THE MODERATOR: So you're ready to go low here?

SOPHIA POPOV: I have to. I look at the field and I go, you don't want to lose out on an opportunity to score. The other girls are going to score, so, inevitable.

Q. 67 is a strong start but there are any specific holes you might want to play differently tomorrow?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, definitely. I think that No. 12 is one, I think it it's a tough hole because I was hitting I 6-iron into a pin position that's only about five or six paces on and it's just really hard to hold that, hold that green. I think I didn't quite hit my second shot the way I wanted to, and I had a really, really long putt. You know, I three-putted. So I think that's one that I might strategically might want to play a little bit different, give myself a little bit better of an opportunity to make par. Other than that, I think strategically, I think I played it very well. I think if I missed fairways, I missed them on the right side, so I can't really say that I would play them a lot different.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you Sophia for joining us.

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