

# Meijer LPGA Classic

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Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

Blythefield Country Club

## Hailee Cooper

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome inside the interview area at the Meijer LPGA Classic for Simply Give. We are here with 2026 LPGA Tour rookie and Epson Tour graduate Hailee Cooper. Big deal for you this morning. We just launched your LPGA DriveOn presented by Ford story across all LPGA platforms.

Why was it so important for you to tell your story in this way?

HAILEE COOPER: Yeah, I think a lot of girls can relate to some parts of my story, which I think is really important. A lot of times we look over mental health, how are we're doing, and I think it's really important that people understand that even us on the LPGA, we have struggled with things like that and overcome that, so it's a possibility, so...

**Q. Just take us through that time in your life. I know it wasn't the happiest time to remember. How do you lean on your people and lean on your village to get you through that tough time?**

HAILEE COOPER: I think it was a lot of faith in them, right? I really didn't think I could make it through that time. Didn't really see myself going -- I'm like, wow, I didn't see very far into the future. Just saw what was in the moment. I think it took a lot of people around me to say, hey, this is a temporary time. This is -- God has a lot of other things in store for you, so don't give up now and keep going towards that.

**Q. And now as an LPGA Tour rookie, you can obviously say that they were right, but take us through the journey on the Epson Tour and after you got through that tough time, what you went through on the Epson Tour to get your LPGA Tour card.**

HAILEE COOPER: Yeah, again, after I graduated college I was in a great place mentally, but didn't know if I wanted to pursue golf in that way again because I was really worried about going back to that spot.

So when I started to play pro golf and it was coming easily, like the results, it was -- I think it was resulting from having more fun on the course and not putting so much pressure on myself. I knew in my lowest moments my people got me, right, people around me have me, and so it was as important to remember that while I'm playing.

When I started playing pro golf, too, it was great because I was able to make friends. I had more people to my circle, more friends, more family, just more people that I had in my circle supporting me, so it was an easier transition from amateur golf to pro golf, because I was really letting those people in instead of kind of pushing them out like I had before.

**Q. One of the people you relied on I think throughout your career even now is Gerrod Chadwell, who is the head coach at Texas A&M and husband of LPGA major champion Stacy Lewis. What has Gerrod and Stacy and his family and all of them meant to you over the years?**

HAILEE COOPER: I was going to say, again, I wouldn't be playing golf if it weren't for his kind of influence. Then I wouldn't be -- Stacy has helped quite a bit with my golf game, Chesnee, I baby-sit her a lot. She is great. Dale, deal her dad, has caddied for me.

So I feel like they've done a lot for my game and also just for me. Like I could go over and just hang out. Again, go over and baby-sit Ches and play dolls, do whatever, taking my mind off golf, which is really nice.

So they've done a lot for me not just on the course but for me as a person, so...

**Q. Take us through the moment. I know Epson Tour Championship last year Dale was on your bag, which some thought was odd because Stacy was playing in her last LPGA event in Hawai'i. What did it mean to get that LPGA Tour card after everything you'd gone through, all the work on Epson? Tell me about that moment.**

HAILEE COOPER: Yeah, it was a lot of tears, right? I was



waiting and watching and seeing who was finishing, seeing how the cards were going to fall. When it was official, hey, you got your card, you're No. 10, it was immediate I think relief. It was like, wow, everything that you've done, everything you've been through was for a reason and it's for this feeling. You've done it. You've reached your goal. Now we have to create new goals.

But that moment was really special. My parents were there, mom and dad were there, and we just cried quite a bit. All happy tears.

**Q. I know this is such a dream come true to play on the LPGA Tour. What's the season been like so far as a rookie?**

HAILEE COOPER: It's different for sure, which has kind of been fun, experiencing new places and people. It's an adjustment but I'm enjoying it. My family has been here the last few weeks so it's been a little bit of a change, which is nice.

I'm getting there. Getting the hang of it. Just learning to love it in a different way, love golf in another way, so...

**Q. Comfortability is always mentioned when it comes to finding results. Feel like you're getting more comfortable with each start out here?**

HAILEE COOPER: Yes. I would say each start it's been a little bit easier not having as much first-tee jitters.

It's a process, like figuring out how my game fits each course and each place we go, so trying to figure that out but getting more comfortable week by week.

**Q. This Epson graduating class from last year are a very close-knit group. Couple of them got their first wins last week. Have they shared anything with you about just the experience?**

HAILEE COOPER: Yeah, I played with Gina yesterday in a practice round, which was kind of crazy. I was like, why are you playing on a Monday? You just made the cut and you just won a tournament. She wanted to play nine holes with me so we went and played nine yesterday.

I think all she was saying was how just chill she was the whole week. She was like I used to put so much pressure I think on every shot that I hit and every bad shot. It was like the end of the world. I took it personally. Since I shifted that I've been able to play better golf.

And that's how I think she played last year on the Epson Tour. Last week she said it was a one -- she said they

took it shot by shot. When she hit a poor shot it was not taking it personally. Just let it go and went up and hit it again.

So trying to take some of that advice and brush the bad stuff off.

**Q. Can you put your finger on maybe why you think this graduating class from Epson was so close?**

HAILEE COOPER: I think it's just a great group of girls. We all kind of fit together really well. They were -- felt like I was always paired with one of the girls at the top 10 -- or Top 15 at the end of the year. It was more of like a camaraderie. We were competing every week, but like I wanted to kick their ass, right, but I also want them to win.

I think it's just great group of people. We got close; we were friends. We want to beat each other really bad, but I'd also like to see them succeed. Like I love Gina. I'm so happy that she won. I want to beat her this week. It's good stuff like that, pushing each other.

**Q. Hi diva, how are you?**

HAILEE COOPER: Good. How are you?

**Q. I'm good. I loved what you just said about kind of that mental struggle of rooting for your friends but also knowing these are your biggest competitors. For people who maybe don't understand the intricacies or the nuances of golf friendships like that where you're constantly going up against these people from junior golf to college golf to now, can you touch on the mental strain that can take on you that you want to support your friends but you're also here to do a job?**

HAILEE COOPER: Yes. It's tough because, again, like I want them to succeed. I want them to shoot 65, but I want to shoot 64. It's really difficult because you're trying to root for them and these negative thoughts will come in where it's like, you know, they need to bogey. No, now, they don't need it bogey. I should have birdied.

For me I've tried to shift it from like I can only do all that I can do, right? I want them to do all they can do, but that prep at home and that prep in your mental game, that should be where -- that's what you're relying on so that you don't hope bad for other people.

A lot of times people in golf think we root against someone. Really we're not rooting for anyone. We want to win even more, if that makes sense.

**Q. Totally. And then you shared earlier that you have**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**some goals now that you are the living your dream on the LPGA. Can you touch on a few of those, the list you made for yourself this year?**

HAILEE COOPER: Yeah, so I had getting a couple Top 10s in my goal list. Haven't been close to that recently, but it's still on my goal list. Still look at it. I would love to get just my first top 10 end of this year.

My goal was to be in the top -- so I want to get in the top 100 to keep my card. Not close, but again, trending. We have a couple tournaments left. I can move in there if I have a good week.

So I still would love to get a top 10 out here, but I'd really love to make my like smaller goals, like greens in regulation percentages go up, fairways go up. I had a goal for short game and putting this year and I am over the moon, like I'm really happy with that part of the game. I'm working towards full swing a little bit more, so that would be a great goal to kind of finish out the year, would be having more success hitting greens in regulation and hitting fairways.

**Q. One last question for you about the feature that just went out about you. Can you speak to the level of vulnerability and bravery it takes to put yourself out here? I know LPGA and Ford approached you to tell your story. How do you feel? Lighter now that it's out and you get to share more about your experience? Touch on those thoughts and feelings you have about today.**

HAILEE COOPER: Yeah, no, I like -- I think it makes other people comfortable to share like if they're struggling, right? A lot of vulnerability around mental health stuff is we try to keep everything inside and not bother other people.

It's not bothering other people. Me sharing my story is not going to make somebody else's day harder. It actually might make their day easier. Like, hey, this girl went through something that I'm feeling and this is what can happen.

So it's for me I felt like it was never like a burden. It was just an opportunity to help other people, which I think is what I'm here for. That's why I'm on the LPGA. I want to make the LPGA better. I want to make younger girls, kids, be able to be comfortable playing golf.

With that comes sharing everything, the good and the bad with everything involved in professional golf, life, whatever they want to talk about.

**Q. Amazing. Thank you so much. I love the feature.**

**Good luck and have fun this week.**

HAILEE COOPER: Thanks, girl.

**Q. Addie alluded to Ford's support of your story, and I know you're a part of their Power Her Drive mentorship program Ford offers to rookies to get some off-the-course mentoring as much as on-the-course mentoring. Michelle Wie West is involved. How cool is that?**

HAILEE COOPER: It's been great. I have her phone number, which I think is super cool. It was the first time meeting her really and we were in Phoenix. She was like, hey, guys, let's get a group text going. I was like, you want my phone number? So it was really cool. Michelle Wie put her phone number in my phone.

Growing up watching her, looking up to her, she's been through it all when it comes to professional golf, highs, lows. She started really young. A lot of negative -- positive, negative media around her. She's been really good with filtering like, hey -- filtering when to say no, when to say yes. Helping with the big things, too. Just hey, how are you feeling going into the tournament? What are some -- what's a way you play this hole like at Mizuho, the U.S. Open, things like that.

So it's been very beneficial to have somebody like that at my fingertips. It's huge and such an honor.

**Q. We are going to end on a little bit of an emotional note. Kind of a two-parter here. If you could go back and tell that Hailee that didn't know what she was doing with her life, was really confused, really dark moment, or if you could tell that to somebody that is going through that right now, what advice and what kind of hug would you give to that person?**

HAILEE COOPER: Yeah, like you said, it's emotional. I think I would just say it's okay. Like these other people love you and you're going to make it. You know, these really negative thoughts are not supposed to be there. They're put there by the devil, right? You have people that are pouring so much into you and there is so much you have left to give, so take that and whatever you're going through, like push through that because you have so much more left to give.

It's not over, right? So that's what I what I would say. Give them a giant hug and say you have so much left to offer and no matter if it's in golf or life or whatever. But it's not over right now, so just keep going forward and God has a plan.



THE MODERATOR: Awesome. Thank you for joining us today and sharing your story via DriveOn and I guess nothing better to say than DriveOn.

HAILEE COOPER: DriveOn, yeah, thanks, Sarah.

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