

# Cognizant Founders Cup

Tuesday, May 10, 2022

Clifton, New Jersey, USA

Upper Montclair Country Club

## Marina Alex

### Press Conference



**THE MODERATOR:** I'll just kick things off here. Marina, welcome back to New Jersey. You're coming off of your second LPGA Tour win at the Palos Verdes Championship. Just take me through what this off week has been like for you as you have reflected on that win at Palos Verdes.

**MARINA ALEX:** It's been a roller coaster. It's been really cool, though. It's nice to just have the week off. I've been able to just celebrate a little bit, friends and family. Try and recharge myself a little bit.

But I think the timing has kind of been insane mainly because I've gone from the win, which it was incredible. It's been a long time. Now I'm heading into this week, which is a really big home game. Minus Mountain Ridge, this is the closest I have ever played an LPGA event to my hometown.

I think regardless it's going to be a little crazy, and now it's really amplified, but it's cool. I'm trying to enjoy it, and I'm trying to conserve a little bit of energy to get ready for this week because I would like to play well.

**THE MODERATOR:** When you reflect upon the state of your game that we saw at Palos Verdes, you talked a lot about coming back from your injury, about the mentality it had to take to be able to get to that place at Palos Verdes. When you look back on the way that you played that week in California, where would you assess the state of your game as you come into New Jersey?

**MARINA ALEX:** It's probably some of the most consistent golf I've played in a really long time, starting from Boca all the way through to this stretch. I've had a little bit of some lulls. As far as Thailand and Singapore, I don't think I played my best golf. I was kind of not putting that great. I worked some things out when I came back from Asia leading into the first California stretch, and I felt like I was making some progress, so I felt as though if I could match everything up again together, I was going to have a good few weeks, and obviously, it turned into more than a good few weeks.

It really felt different going into 2022. I just put a lot of work in on the offseason, and I felt like I could work out harder in the gym, practice more, work on some stuff in my swing, and I was able to actually make some changes because I had the endurance to put in the reps needed to make the changes. That's kind of the hardest part.

Ultimately, that really I feel like mentally makes you feel comfortable and confident knowing, okay, you put all the prep in. And everything else that happens happens, but you have put your best foot forward. It's very hard when you feel like you can't totally prepare the way you would like to to have the confidence to go in and play well because there's always in the back of your mind, you wish you could have tried a little bit harder, and sometimes physically you just can't, and so that's frustrating.

**THE MODERATOR:** You talk a little bit about saving that energy. This week is a big week. As we said, it's a hometown week, but what did you do in this past off week to kind of preserve the momentum while also preserving your energy?

**MARINA ALEX:** I don't know if I did a great job of that. (Laughing). The first few days were catching up, going out to dinner, a little bit of partying in there, and then I was actually so thankful I was able to catch up with Claude Harmon, my coach, on Thursday and Friday before I left.

That felt very grounding. Get back out there. Work on my swing. Play some golf with him. Just see where everything is at. I'm staying with my godfather this week. He is a director of instruction at a course nearby, and he has helped me with my short game for pretty much my entire life.

He was able to come out with me yesterday. We played nine holes, worked a little bit on putting and chipping. I feel like there are some elements of me trying to get as prepared as I can for this week, but that I'm also trying to juggle the other elements, which are a little out of the norm for me.

**THE MODERATOR:** Out of the norm it being a hometown event. You said it is very much the first time we have



played probably so close to Wayne in your LPGA Tour career. When is the last time you have played this close to where you grew up?

MARINA ALEX: Other than Mountain Ridge last year, the closest that it's ever been is usually ShopRite. Westchester, when we played the first year of KPMG was kind of close. U.S. Open, Bedminster. Yeah, it's few and far between, and it's nice to know that this is going to be a consistent event on our schedule.

THE MODERATOR: Absolutely. The first much a couple of years here in our multi-year agreement. With that as well, how many tickets are you saving for this week?

MARINA ALEX: I don't know. I picked up a dozen yet, and I don't think that's going to cover any dent because I realized that they're dailies and not even weeklies. It will be -- I don't know. I'm just going to field the requests as they come, and hopefully they can electronic transfer tickets for me. (Laughing).

THE MODERATOR: This is the first time the LPGA has been back at upper Montclair for the first time in a little bit. Have you had any familiarity with this course at all?

MARINA ALEX: I do, but I don't remember it. I think that I played. There's three nines here, and I think the one nine we are not playing in addition to the one nine that we are, and I don't know which ones are which. I played at a U.S. Junior Qualifier when I was 12, and I'm pretty sure I shot, like, 93. That's my only memory. (Laughing). I'm hoping I really improve on the 93, if I'm being honest.

**Q. I hope so too as well. With that, you talk about how you came out yesterday, played nine holes. What do you see first about this course that you like about it?**

MARINA ALEX: It's a great course. It is traditional in courses for New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, the Northeast. Tree-lined, tight fairways, some elevated greens sloping back to front.

I think the biggest difference that I see especially from Mountain Ridge is there's not a ton of elevation change out here. As far as a walk goes, it's pretty flat, which is kind of nice, but I think it just requires very consistent trajectories on your ball.

If you have a lot of movement on your golf ball, it might lend you into getting into some trouble. There's some angles I feel like off the tee where you need to place yourself in the right or left side of the fairways to have a better approach into the green because they do have some overhanging tree limbs, which it's a pretty subtle, but cool

element of this golf course.

At least I noticed on the nine that I played, which was our back nine I played yesterday. You can hit a nice drive, but then you might be slightly blocked out by a tree and have to work away from the pin or the middle of the green so positioning yourself is important off the tee.

I mean, that's very much a skill set, I feel, for most LPGA players. They're so accurate off the tee. I think that it really is a great course for us to play.

**Q. I wanted to follow up on what you just said about the golf course. That's very classic Tillinghast. You see it at Ridgewood and some others. How familiar are you with Tillinghast?**

MARINA ALEX: Pretty familiar. I grew up at a course playing -- well, in addition to I played Passaic County, which is a local course, for a long time, but my parents ended up joining North Jersey Country Club in Wayne, and I have a feeling that was a Tillinghast as well. Just a lot more undulated than this one.

It is a very, very common part of his architecture. It's just extreme subtly where you may feel like you have hit a good shot, but you are kind of not in the right place, so you kind of need to think about that as you are going through your bra round.

There's another hole that I hit that I want to say it was 15 yesterday. Along a pretty long par-4 into the wind. It's either 14 or 15. I might be getting that mixed up. You hit your shot up there, and if you don't come up on to the green and you're short, being short left is extremely different than being short right. It just opens up the green being on the left side. You can have much simpler up and down.

If you are on the right, you contend with a bigger slope in the green. It may not seem like that much because when you have 190 yards and you are, like, okay, on the green is great right or left, whatever, but in reality you need to figure out where the better margin of error is.

**Q. I want to ask you a little bit about last night. We had another event for Jane Parker and Pete Godfrey's daughter Grace. The second year we've done it, and it was tremendously well-attended. How did all of this start, and can you speak about how the emotions of seeing that many people there?**

MARINA ALEX: We were blown away in October when we initially started this, Christina Thompson and I. Christina is founder and operator of Golf4Her, which is an online

women's clothing retailer, and she sponsors myself and Jane. She now sponsors Mariajo Uribe. She's sponsored Tiff Joh and Mo Martin for a long time. She helps outfit us with all of our clothing.

Her heart was broken, as many of ours was, when this whole thing happened with Grace last July. Right away she was, like, I want to figure out what we can do it. I want to help Jane and her family any way that we can. It was her idea to come up with this, and I just tried to help any way I could from the golf side.

That was getting some of our players in attendance, working with some of the -- Ping and Callaway to get donations and just working with anyone on the golf industry to kind of bring in whatever we could because the main bulk of what we are making as far as what we're giving back to Jane is coming from the auction that we had last night. Auction and ticket sales. Any way that we can kind of make it all come together to give them something is our ultimate goal.

THE MODERATOR: A couple more from me. Just with the hometown feel of this event, being back in this area, what are some of the favorite things to do now that you are home. I know you have a golf tournament on the horizon, but what are some of your favorite things and favorite spots that you have planned out this week?

MARINA ALEX: It's been tough because of just -- well, last night the event and then I'm going to have a long day today, so I don't think I'll be going anywhere.

There are some really good pizza places nearby depending on where everyone is staying. I would love to get back to Vinnie's Pizza in Wayne where I grew up because that's still my favorite place to grab pizza. But the place actually next to Mountain Ridge, I think it was Tap House, they had amazing pizza. Then one of my great friends from high school, his wife, her father owns a restaurant called Luigi's in East Hanover, and it's the best Italian food. I was there Sunday. As soon as I landed, I made sure I got there before the week got started.

I'm not sure what the rest of the week has planned. I'm just going to probably lay low until the weekend.

THE MODERATOR: What is nice is if I need a pizza recommendation, I know to go your way.

MARINA ALEX: There are so many in the area. I actually got a Taylor ham, egg, and cheese breakfast sandwich yesterday because that's a go-to here. If you from Jersey or in Jersey, it's a weird thing we only do here apparently, but it is awesome. The bagels here are better than

anywhere in the world.

**Q. I want to say congrats on a big win a couple of Sundays ago, and I just want to ask you about your back injury, and you were battling back from that big back injury. For you to be able to come back, what's that been like for you just to overcome that injury and being back golfing and getting ready for this big tournament and going back home in New Jersey must be extra special to you. I just want to ask you about your back injury.**

MARINA ALEX: Yeah. Kind of came a little bit out of nowhere I would say. I kind of battled a little bit with bouts with my back throughout my career intermittently where it kind of would flare up, but I would be fine within a couple of days. Maybe a week tops.

It's funny. Going into the restart in 2020, I felt like I was in the best shape of my life, but it was definitely not golf shape at all. In lockdown I was working out twice a day because I just didn't really know what else to do, so I felt like I was in great shape, but I think I put myself in a very vulnerable place because once I restarted walking, playing a lot of golf, my body was just like, whoa, what are you doing?

I think I actually was more at risk for injury than I ever realized. Yeah, it just kind of all fell on top of its head really quick. I thought that I would be back soon because it's kind of all that I have ever really known. A week or two, you kind of feel better, and that's kind of what I thought that was the same thing that was going to happen, and it ended up taking a lot longer than I wanted.

I think I tried to push myself to come back for U.S. Open and CME that year, which was a mistake, but I didn't know any better. Finally, another doctor was, like, you really just need to take another seven weeks off of not swinging, and I was, like, already? I've already taken almost three months off.

So, yeah, it ended up really -- it was a long process, but I think in the end I'm hoping that it's allowed me to properly heal a bit and rebuild strength, and I'm hoping that that's not something I'm going to have to deal with in the immediate future, but I think if I take care of myself the right way, which I have learned over time now, it's just changing my routine and changing my habits a bit.

**Q. Also just a follow-up, I want to ask you about the growth of the LPGA, and what do you like about it? Obviously, I'm a big advocate of women in sports, and I'm helping out to grow women in sports also, and obviously, you have Stacy Lewis and Anna Davis,**



**16-year-old phenome, and yourself and other amazing women golfers out there. What do you like about the growth of the LPGA now?**

MARINA ALEX: I think that it's in an unbelievable place. We have some women playing the best golf in the world by anyone. Especially looking at the roll that Jin Young Ko has been on the last year, some of the streaks that she has broken and records that she's set over the course of the years.

I think the most incredible thing right now is the diversity and representation that we have of top players from all across the globe. We have South Koreans, girls from Thailand, Japan, America, every different European country. You see a presence Leona McGuire from Ireland and Celine Boutier from France.

The diversity and strength is something to be really admired, and in our sport I think we do an amazing job of seeing how much golf is a cool sport and how we represent it so well.

**Q. You mentioned a few times not being able to practice as much or as long or as hard as you may have wanted to. Just curious specifically how your routine has changed knowing that, and then what challenges that presents when you are working through a swing change.**

MARINA ALEX: I think it presented a huge challenge in 2021 because I couldn't really work through a lot of any changes. I was just trying to maintain the swing that I had and put in enough reps to feel like I could at least have some sort of command of that swing.

It didn't afford me an opportunity to improve on anything. Up until about a year ago, May of last year, I didn't really have a ton of structure and guidance on where he was going with my swing because my previous coach was from Australia. After 2020 it just became impossible for us to really make any changes without being together.

You can do stuff on FaceTime, but at that point you are really just in maintenance. After my injury I felt like I really needed to reassess how I'm swinging from a mechanics standpoint to improve the health of my back. If there are things that I was doing wrong, I needed to work on fixing them.

It's tricky. It's just a really slow process. You do what you can when I was feeling good. When I wasn't feeling good, I would do whatever I could. Now as I've been able to strengthen with the help of my trainer and physical therapist, I feel like my endurance was greater, so I could

put in a few more hours. Not really hours. Just reps.

Instead of being on a ball count of, let's say, 30 swings on the range a day, I could maybe up that to 50 and really be disciplined in those extra shots, like, what am I trying to accomplish here? When you are limited to 30 balls a day to start, you can't do a whole lot. You're basically just trying to get through the bag. Let me hit a couple of pitching wedges, a couple 7-irons, a couple of 5s, a wood, and a driver. The next thing you know you're at 30.

Then if you want to go out and play golf, you have to balance that too. How many hours are you going to be out there? Do you have to do rehab work? It's a fine line, and for everyone it's very different.

It's really easy to jump back full throttle, and then that's kind of when things start going haywire, which is what happened for me. I kind of was trying to ramp up to come back to play, and I was totally not ready for it.

**Q. It's kind of like making those fewer hours like a little smarter.**

MARINA ALEX: Absolutely. You definitely have to manage how you practice more efficiently.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, just kidding aside, are you passing bagels on to other people on in the field so they know and understand what you --**

MARINA ALEX: I've given some recommendations this year and especially last year when we got back here. Everyone is, like, where to eat, and there was a couple of bagel spots near Mountain Ridge. I'm a little less familiar with this area, so I'm not sure what the closest good spot is.

**Q. We'll pass on a spot --**

MARINA ALEX: Perfect. Actually, I will say the bagels that were at Mountain Ridge last year were unbelievably good. I think everyone got their fixes in player dining.

**Q. Two questions to you: When did the relationship with Claude Harmon start?**

MARINA ALEX: It's been approximately a year. It was May of 2021. I don't exactly remember when. That's was -- I remember getting my first lesson was before --

**Q. How was that introduced?**

MARINA ALEX: Through another player, Mel Reid, who at the time was living -- well, not -- she had just maybe moved



from the Jupiter area, but she had practiced up at the Floridian where Claude works for years, and they developed a friendship. From there she helped connect me with him.

**Q. What are you working through with him specifically right now at this point?**

MARINA ALEX: A lot of this was done in offseason. Just changing a little bit of how I begin my golf swing and my take-away in the first one-third of my swing. That position there, which ultimately lends to a different position at the top of my swing, and then that allows me to take a little bit of a load off of my back and get through the ball with a little bit less torque and torsion on my spine. It's basically what we worked on. Now just a little bit of maintenance for the rest of the season.

**Q. Last question, the configuration this time is not the same. There's going to be a finish on the short par-4 as opposed to the par-5 on the south, which would be the ninth hole or the 18th hole. Tell me how that factors in, in your mind, in terms of the configuration, game plan, strategy, anything along those lines?**

MARINA ALEX: I'm not sure yet because I've only played the back nine yesterday, so I have to go through the front today, but I don't think it will change a ton as far as with the outcomes or anyone's game plans. It can afford a player that needs to make a birdie on 18 the opportunity to do so because it's a shorter hole, and you are going to have a little bit less club in your hand, but a couple of those finishing holes leading into that are pretty challenging, so I just think overall it will be a good back nine.

**Q. One last follow-up: The wind direction we're playing is not the normal wind. Out of the north-northeast, obviously, but we could switch. How much of a factor do you think from what you played the other day does wind direction play in any of this?**

MARINA ALEX: Yesterday it allowed the par-5, 12 maybe, the risk-reward hole, to be drivable in two. Sorry, not drivable in one, but yes, it was reachable. If that's into the wind, then that's not going to be a reachable hole for probably anyone in the field just because it's a forced carry over the water.

Yeah, that may change the scoring element a little but. That hole might not play as easy, but on the reverse element of that, you get to the next hole with a par-4 into the wind, that plays downwind, so it all ends up balancing out.

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