

# JM Eagle LA Championship Media Conference

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Los Angeles, California, USA

## Natalie Gulbis

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome inside the media center here at the JM Eagle LA Championship presented by Plastpro. We're joined by Natalie Gulbis playing as a sponsor invite this week. How happy are you to be back out here on the LPGA Tour?

NATALIE GULBIS: I love golf. I love the LPGA. It's no secret that when I joined the Tour in 2001 that I wouldn't continue to play or to request an invite if I didn't absolutely love the game and love the Tour.

It's one of those things that there's nothing I can compare to it in my life, and I've had a lot of incredible things I've gotten to do away from the golf course and opportunities, but nothing gets me that like anxious, excitement, frustration, the way that playing professional golf does. I absolutely love it.

I'm just so grateful to JM Eagle and to Outlyr for even having this event and having me be part of it. I can't wait to play, especially here in Southern California.

**Q. We last saw you at Dell last year with Liz Nagle as your partner. What have you been up to since Dell?**

NATALIE GULBIS: How much time do you have? You know I wasn't doing nothing and being idle.

I had back surgery at the beginning of last year, so I feel like the first quarter I was recovering from back surgery. I have a women's owned company called NR1 that works with DEI, which is a great conversation piece for JM Eagle, who really believes in supporting the LPGA and supporting female athletes and pay equity by doubling the purse this week to \$3 million, which is just remarkable.

I have a Boys and Girls Club in Nevada, so a lot of time with the kids there and the events and fundraising, so that takes up tons of time with those. I still did a lot of corporate days.

I did play Dow. I had expectations of playing more events. I played some of the Aramco Team Series events, one in

Saudi, one in New York. Those were great events.

But it did take longer than I thought. This was my fourth back surgery. Anyone that's ever had a back issue or back surgery knows it does take longer to come back than you expect.

I did play at Dow. I had so much fun playing in that event, and I just wasn't ready to really play any other events, but I am going to play more events this year, and yeah, the Tour is just doing so good. It's hard to not want to play some of these events that are close to home. I think we have five events in California this year. Maybe more.

**Q. Just got out of your pro-am. How is the golf course looking and the game feeling for you here at Wilshire?**

NATALIE GULBIS: Wilshire Country Club is one of my favorite golf courses. It's one of those golf courses that you never get bored on. There's so many different shots that you have to hit. It's a really fun, cool club, right by West Hollywood/LA and a couple miles from Beverly Hills, but the golf course has the fastest greens, and they're really fun because there's a ton of break.

I have the same caddie that I've had anytime I've played here when it was the LA Open and now the LA Championship. The course is in really good shape, especially since California has -- it was really cold January and February and there's always water challenges here, but the LPGA, when we come in, they seem to pull it all together, and the course looks incredible.

My game is okay. I'd like to say that it's great. Not that I didn't work on it, but it's not the same as when I was 20, right? Like it's different. I love the game so much more, and I love working on it, but I don't hit all the same spots and hit high cut 4-irons and low cut 4-irons the way that I used to.

**Q. What are the keys, I guess, for this golf course? Obviously very familiar with it being an LA resident, know Wilshire very well. What's the key for you or the key for the field when it comes to this golf course?**



NATALIE GULBIS: Keeping the ball below the hole. The greens are really, really fast, and whoever watches this event is going to see it this week. If they say they're an 11 or a 12, they're probably a 15 if you're above the hole. Like you have to barely tap it and hope you don't have a four-footer coming back.

But it's a great shot maker's golf course. You've got to be on the right side of the fairway to get to certain pin placements, so there is that aspect. It's just a really fun golf course.

It's fun for me even in these first couple days to be around the players because the players love this golf course, they love the conditions of the greens, and it's fun to be right here in West Hollywood.

JM Eagle has been an incredible partner. To have an inaugural event like this and to roll it out to the level that they have is really remarkable.

**Q. Talking about your fellow players out there, a lot of these girls probably looked up to you when they were a little bit younger. How cool is it for you to be here and see some of these players that were obviously fans of yours back in your really height of your career?**

NATALIE GULBIS: Well, it's amazing. Like to see players come up and say, oh, I watched this and this. There's no greater compliment. I am so grateful for the 20 plus years that I've had on the LPGA Tour and the number of tournaments that I've gotten to play.

But to be around even Nelly Korda, like Jess was a young player, I think I'd already been on Tour seven, eight years when Jess came out, and I remember Nelly coming out to events when she was 11 or 12 and going and playing at like a sister golf course and having aspirations, and to see where she is now.

One thing I didn't mention is one of the coolest things that happened last year was Stacy Lewis asked me to be the captain of the U.S. Solheim Cup which will be in Spain later this year, and that has taken up a good amount of time, and also just an excitement. Now I'm starting to follow players that I normally wouldn't follow. If I saw one of my friends that was maybe in the mix, I would see how they're doing, but it's really fun to follow these young rookies and to see all the dynamics.

I remember what it's like to be right on the cusp of trying to make the team or hoping you can make the team, so that's been really cool.

**Q. Just curious with the back surgery you mentioned**

**you went through, what's your preparation been like to get back out there competing this week?**

NATALIE GULBIS: Well, preparation is pretty similar to any sort of a start to a season. I did play one event, a European event in Portugal, but leading up to it, it's pretty similar. I have to get to the golf course maybe another 45 minutes before, and luckily we have amazing physios and everything here, but my back feels amazing. But it's really that there's a lot of courses that I can't play anymore. I would have loved to play Palos Verdes. That would be a tougher golf course for me to play, or some courses that have really tall rough I have to be careful with, but here in late April in Southern California, the weather is pretty perfect, so this is a great spot.

When it's cold, my back gets really tight, and it's definitely more challenging for me.

**Q. What an honor to be asked to be an assistant captain under Stacy Lewis, obviously a colleague and a good friend I would imagine. How excited are you? That's a really cool opportunity, especially this year at Cortesin, I think we're going to have a really solid team on the States side. How excited are you to get started in all that?**

NATALIE GULBIS: Solheim, so I think I've played 660 something professional events. If I could go back like what amongst my top five favorite events in my career, they were three Solheim Cups, representing your country, representing your captain, representing your teammates and your peers that you respect so much, and then getting to play against Europe, it's just one of the most incredible weeks.

Now to get to see it from another side, I didn't know what it was actually going to be like, whether it would be kind of those mixed feelings of like gosh, I wish I was still playing, versus -- I mean, I think I'm even more excited, and Stacy has been incredible.

Last night I got the pro-am party. I think we spent at least an hour just talking about all the things that you would expect the captains would be talking about, pairings and players and players that won last week. It's just so cool to be part of it, and I can't wait to go to Spain in the fall.

**Q. Have there been any surprises to you? Obviously having been a player, you don't really know what goes into the side of the captaincy, but were there any surprises so far in the whole process?**

NATALIE GULBIS: Well, I mean, I knew there was a lot of work to it, but I just didn't know how much involvement you



would know about. I think I know more about these different players' games than they do, and probably even more so about my own golf game from the stats, and Stacy has got so many incredible things that she's doing.

But just now I'm following these players to see what their games are like, how they would match up, spending a little bit of extra time with them during tournament weeks, it's just been a really cool process, and I've always loved the process of anything that I've been involved in, whether it was starting a company or opening a Boys and Girls Club or seeing how an LPGA event is run. There's so much more to what you originally see, and I think that the biggest surprise has been just really getting to know these players and knowing more about their games than I would have expected to.

**Q. Obviously playing in front of kind of the hometown crowd this week. Do you have any fans, friends, family coming out to support you, and what are some of your goals for the week?**

NATALIE GULBIS: I have played a lot of events throughout my career, so some of my family and friends are like, we'll see how you play. We'll watch it on TV. But usually the good ones they usually come out and trek around the golf course to watch.

This is a great spectating golf course because you can see so much from the clubhouse, so anybody that can come and watch -- it's a great way to see women's golf and to bring your family members because it's just a fun, cool vibe out here, but it's a really easy event to watch.

My goals are always to compete, to be in the mix. That's my favorite thing. I wouldn't do it if it wasn't that I just love the competitive side of golf. I love every part of having to compete.

THE MODERATOR: Good luck this week. Really excited to see you out there.

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