

# KPMG Women's PGA Championship

Wednesday, June 21, 2023

Springfield, New Jersey, USA

Baltusrol Golf Club

## Lydia Ko

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back inside the KPMG Women's PGA Championship online media center and also media center here. Pleased to be joined by Lydia Ko. Now that you've seen Baltusrol, some upcoming thoughts on what it's like to be back at this major.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I actually came here and did like an advance practice round after our Founders Cup. The good thing about playing a lot in New Jersey this past couple months, it's given us, I think, all the players, opportunities if they wanted to come out and look, and the golf course were very generous to open up their golf course for us.

It's always different, I think a little bit, coming in advance as opposed to the week of and the course is more championship ready. It's firm, fast, long rough, and all that, and the golf course is in really good shape.

I think Gil Hanse redid the course a few years ago, and I got to see him yesterday, which was really cool.

Yeah, it's a very KPMG-esque, very major-like golf course, and I'm excited for all the golf that's ahead the next few days.

#### **Q. As you look at this as a thorough test. What's the most important thing it asks of you?**

LYDIA KO: I think the approach shots going into the green needs a lot of precision. There are some holes where the greens are really big, so necessarily you being on the green doesn't guarantee you an easy birdie, two-putt, et cetera.

There are some greens where it falls off straight from back to front, and there's only a small area where they can have the pin locations. That just means that your numbers need to be very precise.

There's no, okay, this is a better miss on those kind of



holes. I think your second shots are obviously going to be key.

The rough is getting juicy, and I think with the weather forecast, it's not going to be easy when you do hit it in there. But the good thing about this golf course is that the front of the greens are pretty flat, so at least if you do have a long club in, you're able to hopefully chase it up to the front edge of the green.

Any majors, putting is very important. Some of those par saves are just as important as birdies.

I think it's an all around, you need to have precision throughout the bag, and the person that's going to be hoisting the trophy at the end of the week is definitely going to tick all those boxes.

#### **Q. As you look at the week and get ready for this golf course, what in your game would you like to maybe dial up a notch?**

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I haven't been playing the best golf leading up to this event. But in saying that, I feel like my scores haven't been the exact reflection of how I've been playing.

Last week I didn't feel like I played that bad but just a few putts here and there, maybe a few shots, and those are the big differences at the end of the week.

Hopefully being able to bring all that together, that's the weird thing and fun thing and frustrating thing about golf is that every day it's different. Everything is clicking for you one day or that week, and then it may not be the case the week after.

Hopefully it's not too far away, and I'm just trying to be positive, especially on a golf course when you know it's going to be tricky. You just have to be really patient.

A lot of people are saying it's tough, but it's tough for everyone. It's not just tough for one certain player. It's going to be fair, and I'm hoping to have a fun week out here at a beautiful golf course.



**Q. What can people take away from watching you play these elite golf courses?**

LYDIA KO: I think it's super exciting that KPMG has taken us to some great golf courses like Congressional last year and so many -- for the USGA to take us to Pebble Beach where I think the Women's Open has never been played there before, but it has held many other USGA championships and other big events, as well.

I think for us as players, it's very exciting to go and be part of the history that's left there. It doesn't matter how well you do. You talk to some of the players, and they're like, okay, because the Women's Open is at Pebble Beach, I want to make sure I'm there playing that week, and I think Baltusrol is also another place where I've always kind of heard about it and didn't think -- wasn't sure if I'd ever go play there competitively.

But to be here at a championship golf course where you see all the past champions there in the clubhouse, Lee Janzen's stuff, it's really cool. To hear some of the final shots coming in into 18. Yeah, hopefully a lot of people that maybe not necessarily know a lot about the LPGA but they're familiar to the golf course and they're locals know that every time there's a championship out in those kind of locations come out and watch.

I think it'll be exciting, and I think it is different when you do come out here and watch. It is very impressive to see the level of play of these female golfers.

I play alongside them almost every week, and sometimes I feel like I should get a seat myself and like watch because there's just so much talent and there's so much power. I think you have some of the best, not female athletes but athletes here.

I think for people that aren't necessarily familiar, hopefully they'll be able to come and watch it and then become fans. I don't think it takes much for them to become fans because I'm fans of so many players out on Tour.

**Q. With all the tournaments out here in New Jersey, how many times have you actually been able to play here just to practice, and has Gil Hanse talked to you a little bit about maybe giving you some tips about where the trouble is and what to do here?**

LYDIA KO: I only played it once. I played it the Monday after Founders. Good, bad -- I played bad last week, so I was able to come and see the golf course on Sunday prior and play nine holes.

I didn't talk too much about the golf course with Gil Hanse. I feel like every other person is going to be like, so, how do you play this golf course, what was your thoughts behind it. It's kind of like when we go and people are like, how do you hit this punch 7-iron. That's the last thing you want to talk about when you're having a conversation.

I thought it was really cool to meet him, and I was talking about some of the other golf courses that he's redesigned like Lake Merced, and he's doing the Olympic course, the Lake course, and I won the silver medal at the Rio Olympic course that he did, as well.

Hopefully there's a lot of good juju, good energy from I think probably one of the most popular and trendy golf architect. It's just really cool. I think every architect has their own kind of flair, like character and personality on the golf course.

It's nice as players to go and say, hey, this kind of golf course has that type of green or this type of grass or whatever, and it's obviously got his personality to it. You're just hoping that that characteristics and your play ends up being in a good combination for the week.

**Q. Obviously you kind of struggled last week, but do you think it kind of helps you a little bit? Major championships have so many expectations around them, especially when you're where you are in the world right now. Do you think it helps to have few expectations of yourself when you show up to a golf course that's this challenging at a championship that's this prestigious?**

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I'm just trying to play the best golf I can. I think I've only played well at the KPMG Women's PGA Championship like a couple times, so I would love to be able to put myself more in contention. Obviously that's the goal at the end of any event we go to, to be in contention, and obviously peaking at our highest at the majors.

I feel like after missing the cut, you can't really go below that, when I decided to disqualify myself for some reason, and touch wood, I don't do that.

I just try to keep being positive, and I think that's sometimes been a struggle. I think if people say, oh, no, like it's just rainbows and sunny days after missing a cut, I feel like that wouldn't be the most honest answer. I think it's been frustrating the last couple months, but my team and my family have been trying to keep me grounded and say, hey, we're still moving in the right direction.

I think I'm very grateful to have those kind of support system that believes in you when you necessarily might not

believe in yourself.

Yeah, I'm just trying to play the best golf I can, and sometimes your "B" game is still good, and sometimes your "A" game is not good enough.

You're just trying to play the best you can and have fun, and at such a venue where there's been so much history, it would be pretty cool to be part of that.

**Q. This golf course ends with two par-5s which is not normal for most venues. Can you walk us through the strategy of 17 and 18 and how you might try to attack those two par-5s in the closing stretch?**

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think obviously very dependant on the weather forecast and the wind direction. 18 is meant to be the reachable par-5, and then 17 is I think for most cases going to be a three-shot hole just with the bunkers guarding the front of the green.

I think it goes both ways. I think if you hit a good tee shot, then your second shot is obviously going to be a lot stress-free, just hitting it to that 70-yard-ish mark and hit it on the green for three on the 17th, but then if you do miss your tee shot, there's bunkers you have to carry, and that's I think going to be pretty difficult unless you do get a good lie out of the rough for the bunkers.

I think the tee shot is going to be key for both. Even 18, if you're in the rough I would doubt it that you would be able to reach the greens, so hitting two quality drives are going to be the big key, and I think that's going to dictate the strategy for the rest of the holes.

**Q. With the recent news with the PGA and the merging with LIV, what would your thoughts be on if that were to make its way to LPGA?**

LYDIA KO: Honestly, I feel like everything that's gone on is so up in the air. We don't know what's happening. I'm sure there's a lot of information that I don't know. All I know is what I've seen on Golf Channel or things that I've scrolled through on Instagram. Everything is up in the air.

I think right now we're at a championship venue, playing our second major of the year, with such big supporters like KPMG, and they have I think the women's leadership Summit today, and there's a lot of great things to talk about. I don't have enough information to talk about the other kind of stuff.

I'm here, and I think all of us players are here to talk about this event, and we're excited to be here. What happens is going to happen. We can't worry about what's not

happened yet.

**Q. What have your impressions been playing in New Jersey? I know you're coming to New Jersey a lot this year. What have those experiences been like?**

LYDIA KO: Newark Airport is getting very familiar. I think I landed on Saturday afternoon, I was like, I ate at that restaurant at the airport, and I was like, why is it so familiar.

I was like, I literally ate there less than two weeks ago. It's a very nice airport, so very easy for us.

Three very different style of golf courses. Playing at Liberty National was really cool, taking the ferry, staying in Manhattan. The Founders, I think Upper Montclair Golf Club had the tournament on for two years now. That golf course itself is like another major championship venue, very tight fairways, course is in great shape, and we're here at Baltusrol where really no explanation is needed.

I'd say my New York/New Jersey accent is not catching on me. I think it's a very distinct accent, and it's definitely not getting stronger, but enjoying my time here. I missed ShopRite, which we play in Atlantic City. I didn't play there this year, but the LPGA has played there for a really long time. Four times in New Jersey, no complaints, and it's all been pretty dense together, which has made the travel logistically a little bit easier.

But yeah, not leaving with any New York/New Jersey accent unfortunately.

**Q. Obviously quite a bit of anticipation for this being Rose Zhang's first major as a professional. What do you think her impact on the women's game could be?**

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think everybody -- I think you guys like to talk about first this, last this, this-this. There's always titles. This is not the first major championship Rose has played in. She's played in much more that she's qualified into and she's playing the rest this year.

I think it was super impressive that with so much hype and attention around her at Mizuho and with the amateur career she had, I bet there was a lot of weight on her shoulders, but for her to finish in that style, go into a playoff and win, I think she pretty much proved any doubters that hey, like don't need to be worrying about me, I'm casually doing my own business and doing it pretty well.

She's been playing so well, and I'm sure she's going to have another good week. I haven't really played a lot alongside her. I've seen her play and obviously her results speak for itself. I think she's going to have another good

week, and she seems like she doesn't get fazed too much about all the attention that's surrounding her. She's a very special player, and I don't think you need me to say she's special. She's already -- her accolades and everything speak for itself.

**Q. As someone who had a lot of success at a very young age, what's the key for her or what will be the key for her to dealing with all that attention that comes with the success that she's having.**

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think every player goes down their own journey. I think that's the great thing about golf. We can play for a really long time, as long as you want, as long as there's no injuries or other things involved.

I think she's just got to keep being herself, just be the Rose Zhang she is. She can't be like somebody else because she's never going to be. She's been doing so well.

I don't know if anyone can give her advice just because we've walked in similar roads and pathways. I think she's going to do awesome, and I think it's exciting for golf and women's golf to have a player like her.

I'm sure a lot of kids and players are going to -- juniors are going to grow up and say, hey, I want to be like Rose. I want to go to Stanford, I want to come and be an LPGA Tour winner.

Yeah, I think it's exciting for women's golf, and I'm excited to see where she goes. We're not that age difference wise, not that different. I think people think I'm like 35 by now, but we're like not that different.

People have asked me what advice would I give her, and I'm like, I don't know, she's playing better than me, so what advice would she give me.

**Q. You mentioned you have walked that path. You had early success and handled it. What was the best thing you learned from that early period out here?**

LYDIA KO: I think I was very lucky enough that obviously that would have been very similar to Rose before she had won Mizuho that a lot of lot of opportunities to play on the LPGA before my rookie year.

That way just when I was a rookie, it was girls that I had seen on magazine and TV weren't just there and it would be nerve-racking. I felt like a lot of people were very welcoming, telling me where to get my yardage book, where the locker room is.

I think sometimes it's the little things that kind of makes you

a little frustrated and lost because you've just never been in that environment before, and for me I think that was the biggest key.

I think I've played around 10, 11 tournaments as an amateur before being on Tour, and that way it just kind of made that transition a lot easier, whereas if you play nothing and you come out, like you're just trying to get adjusted to a lot of things, and I think that was the biggest thing that made that transition easier where my rookie year didn't feel like a complete rookie.

I had got to play a few golf courses, and I think that's why you see a lot of rookies end up playing a lot of these events, because you don't know these golf courses, so you can't really pick and choose. You're trying to know and get familiar so that next year you're like, okay, in this schedule this works out better for me and this doesn't. For me, that was something that I didn't necessarily have to go through, which is something that I'm very fortunate about.

I think the cool thing about our Tour is that everyone is very welcoming, and I think if you just go and ask a question, no one is going to be like, no, and just walk away. They're going to say, hey, it's this way or this is where you get it.

I think the LPGA is a lot more family orientated, and that's why when somebody wins, most of the time there's always a player or a couple players there's always there to support each other. I think that's why being on Tour is a lot more fun and engaging than maybe some other environments.

**Q. What's the biggest difference between last year on the course and this year?**

LYDIA KO: If only I knew, then I would do it.

I think golf is a lot about momentum. I think it doesn't take much. Like golf is one of those weird sports you could miss seven cuts in a row and then win the next week, and you're like, what was the difference? You could obviously list a few things, but then you're like, it wasn't that different.

It's a head scratcher. I think even in my 19 wins, I think I've had amazing final rounds like I did at Evian or had days where -- like I had the week where I had one really low round but the rest of the week was good, but it wasn't like the best four rounds of my life, and I was still able to win.

I think it depends on the week. I think I haven't really got off into a good like momentum of things, and I feel like if I do catch that, have a good week, hopefully that will build the confidence and kind of build that momentum into the week after and the week after.



I started the year with a bang, winning my first event of my season, and it couldn't have been a better start than I could have wished for. A lot of expectations.

But from CME until where I played the Aramco event, it's three months. A lot of things can happen in three days, let alone three hours, and for three months, a lot of things happened.

I think just because you had a great year last year, that doesn't necessarily mean you're going to have that amazing year the following season.

I'm going to still continue to work hard and keep working with my team just so that I can be more consistent, and hopefully put myself more and more in contention. I had a spell where I didn't win for two, three years a couple times, so it's not like I've never been there before. It hasn't been that long, and I've still got, I think, over half the season left.

Yeah, a lot of golf to be played, and I'm just trying to be positive. I think I definitely have a tendency to get down and frustrated and disappointed in myself, but I think my family and team have helped me to keep my head high.

No matter if I shoot a high or low score, I come back home and I call my husband and I'm still the same me. It's always great to feel that love outside of what happens out on the golf course for us.

**Q. You spoke a little bit about those struggles in the past where you've had years where you had dry spells. What was the key for you when you dug yourself out of those?**

LYDIA KO: I think it was literally my family and team. Like I said, my personality, I'm not like the most confident, like cocky, like oh, yeah, I'm the greatest player, like whatever. That's just not who I am. I sometimes wish I was more like that.

I saw some of the interviews from the guys last week, and I was like, damn, I wish I had that mentality. I think that's such a great place to be at when you're on the golf course.

I think my family and team have just been there to support me and listen to some of my frustrations, and when I'm on the golf course, try and work it out and be consistent. Sometimes you're going to have your ups and downs, but you're just trying to make those ups and downs a lot less, I guess less discrepancy between the two.

I think they've always helped me, and obviously my team have changed a little bit over the years, but no matter

who's been there, I feel like no matter who it is, they've always been there to support me, and I'm very grateful for that.

**Q. Along those same lines, can you pinpoint one lesson from golf that you use in your day-to-day life?**

LYDIA KO: One lesson from golf for my day-to-day life. I know there are many, but nothing is as frustrating as a bad day at golf. Sometimes it's only brighter on the other side.

I would just say patience. They say patience is a virtue, and sometimes I feel like that's just something that everybody says, but literally when you're out there golfing and you're out there and it doesn't go your way but you keep waiting and waiting and you keep knocking on the door and that door is going to open at one point, sometimes you wish it was an automatic door where you just stand there and it opens itself.

But I think if you put in the right work and believe in your process and you're patient, then everything is going to sort itself out. Even if it doesn't, hey, golf is not me. Golf is something that I do, and it's something that I love doing, and I'm very grateful for. It's given me a lot of opportunities, but golf doesn't equal Lydia. That's what I'm trying to get a better idea at. But that's the biggest key.

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