

Women's Olympic Golf Competition

Tuesday, 6 August 2024

Paris, France

Le Golf National

Rose Zhang

Lilia Vu

Press Conference

MEGAN MCGUIRE: Welcome back inside the Media Centre here at the Women's Olympic Golf Competition. I'm pleased to be joined by Team USA's Rose Zhang and Lilia Vu. Both first-time Olympians.

Rose what has the moment been like now being on site here at your first Olympics?

ROSE ZHANG: It's so cool. Lilia and I and the entire team, we all went to see a couple of events. We went to watch swimming on Saturday night and just in general, I'm just feeling really good vibes when I'm out here. We got to watch the men's a little bit and it's been a cool experience so far.

MEGAN MCGUIRE: For you, Lilia, you seem to be soaking up the last couple of days. When did it become real, being an Olympic representing the U.S.?

LILIA VU: It hit me when we went to go watch swimming the other night. The crowds were super passionate and we got to see Katie Ledecky get another Gold. It was emotional hearing our National Anthem, and can't wait to do the same.

MEGAN MCGUIRE: Before I open it up, were either you following Scottie when Scottie was able to bring home the Gold?

ROSE ZHANG: There were too many people but we were super proud of him and was able to see it on TV inside the clubhouse.

LILIA VU: I was inside and we were all just glued to the screen trying to cheer him on.

ROSE ZHANG: Amazing stuff.

Q. The pins. Any really cool pins or cool people



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you've swapped pins with?

LILIA VU: Yeah, my most favourite, I got one from Wei-Ling, it's from Taiwan, so it's a little bo a with French colours and the Eiffel Tower. It's really cute. I think it's really sought after at The Open Village.

ROSE ZHANG: I got a little French macaroon little pin. It was at the Team USA house that we went to yesterday where I got to just meet one of -- I guess he was a donor for the entire team, and he was like, "I got pins." So I ended up doing that and it was really cool.

Q. I think both of you played at the Grant Thornton last year. What were the takeaways from that that maybe you could apply to mixed golf in the Olympics? It's something that's being considered. Is there anything that you could connect the two?

LILIA VU: I think it would be really cool to do that. I played with Joel last year and was able to pick his brain. They play the same sport but a different way. It's cool to see his perspective. And I think we were also watching Xander warm up on Sunday which is really cool. He's so pure.

It's super cool. I would love to add a mixed event to this.

ROSE ZHANG: I agree. With the Olympics, it's one in every four years. It would be really special to have a different type of format that includes both the mixed guys and girls so just be able to play together and represent your country together, and a lot of Olympic sports do that. So it would be cool to see golf be able to do that, too.

Q. Where were you guys when Nelly won Gold in Tokyo?

LILIA VU: I think that was during COVID, right? I think I was still trying to make my way back on the LPGA. I was on Epson Tour. So that's where I remember where I was at.

ROSE ZHANG: I was in quarantine doing online school in high school. I was actually watching it on my laptop while I was taking classes.



Q. I imagine it feels like we're a long way from that; right? Three years goes by, I guess in golf, feels like a ton can change. Does it feel like that to you?

LILIA VU: Absolutely. I mean, in my personal experience, I remember the beginning of COVID is when I wanted to quit golf. I was not even sniffing the cut on Epson Tour.

So to kind of be here, it's unreal to me. I'm glad that I never quit and I'm very honoured to represent the United States in the Olympics.

Q. And you're still taking classes; right?

LILIA VU: Yes. It sucks. I'm not in high school but in college.

Q. Are you still watching Netflix while you're such supposedly doing your online homework?

ROSE ZHANG: I was actually watching Nelly -- for the passion of the game. Yeah, I think it was a fun time to really see that and I mean, she took the world by storm. It's an honour for us to be her teammates. She has a lot going on in everything she's doing and her momentum is insane. It's really cool to just be a part of her team.

Q. I had a couple of Olympic questions but I want to go back to Lilia, when you go back to when Nelly was kinking the Gold and you're struggling on Epson, when you look back at that time, what flipped it for you?

LILIA VU: I think COVID game me a lot of downtime to grow as a person. I read a lot of books and I was able to change my mindset and figure out how to recreate the team I had in college. Because college -- I had fun all the time. So I figured, how do I create the team as a professional golfer.

Basically created a team, tried to grow as a person, and the golf kind of came together. Learned how to have fun on the golf course and kind of went from there. Just little steps?

Q. Did you have more joy at this point than you ever did at UCLA? Did you see how the fun factor increased?

LILIA VU: I think so. I think the best thing about it is I learned how to have fun on the Epson Tour. We are playing for n really small cities for a really small purse, but I was able to enjoy golf and that's something I lost when I turned pro because I put so much pressure on myself.

Once I got to loving the game again and it's not life or death, it became fun after that and I just never looked back?

Q. Even though you've had a completely different path, can you appreciate what Lilia is saying about the transition?

ROSE ZHANG: A hundred percent. I was talking to Lilia and her mom a little bit yesterday and the day before. It's just everything that she's gone through made her the person she is today. But you know, I was -- sometimes you forget that because when you see the people who are at the top of the leaderboard or people who are playing really well week-in, week-out, it seems like they are staying afloat and they are just looking like they just have everything together.

But I think even this year, last year, I've realized how much hardship there is out here. It takes a lot to grind it out every single week, and the travel is insane, especially for our schedule and the LPGA Tour. You just have to perform.

I think anyone can appreciate that story and it's really inspiring. We kind of grew up in the same area and I just remember like back when I was a junior golfer, I like saw her when she was at UCLA and she would practise out on the creek and then it turns out we are.

Q. General Olympic question for both since it's your first. If you were to come to Le Golf National, in other words, get to Paris, get to your rooms and just come to the golf course for six days and compete, do you think you'd feel as much as an Olympian than being able to get out a little bit and feel part of Team USA, by seeing other athletes and seeing other events? Does that almost make you feel even more part of the whole experience than if you just came to golf?

ROSE ZHANG: Yeah, I think it depends on the person and I guess how much energy they feel like investing when they go out.

The Olympics is a special time, and you're a part of something that's not just yourself but your country. And also not just your sport but other sports as well. It's nice to get out a little bit. I think there's always moderation that's key. You always want to be competitive and have a competitive edge.

But I guess it's up to whoever. I think it is cool to experience a little bit of everything, though.

LILIA VU: Yeah, basically we are on the same wavelength.

Glad that we were able to go see swimming the other night and visit Team USA house but I'm pretty low energy during the week. I try to conserve my energy. Not a lot of practise. I like to play a lot; so I conserve energy, and then obviously we are here to try to win a medal.

Q. I'm assuming you haven't played the course before. I was wondering, I know 18 has been told is playing as a par 5 this week for you. So to both of you, what do you make of the course and how do you see yourself and the field playing that final hole?

LILIA VU: To me I think the course is a little difficult. The rough is really healthy and the greens are firm. The wind can be pretty up there, too, and you kind of have to place yourself in the right spots.

Yeah, I think it will be difficult but it will be great fun for everybody. It will be a great test.

ROSE ZHANG: I played the world's amateur two years ago, and I just remember this course playing very difficult, and it stands the same. The rough is pretty thick. Like Lilia said, it's very healthy.

There's basically three, four cuts in this rough. So I think just really precision and having fun and being creative on this golf course will be essential.

Q. How are you going to play the 18th?

LILIA VU: I think there's two different ways we can play it, right. You can either lay up or you can grow for the green but that's based on your drive. So either you can hit driver off the tee if it no wind or into the wind for me or if it's downwind, then I'll take my 3-wood and go from there.

But it's based on if you hit the fairway or not. If not, take your medicine and lay up and you'll still be fine.

Q. Do you think you'll see a lot of players going for it if you hit the fairway?

LILIA VU: What do you think, 50/50? It really depend what the wind is doing when you get to that hole because it can change in a matter of seconds. It's different for everyone.

ROSE ZHANG: It also depends on everyone's comfort level with aggressiveness and also how they are playing in their round because we have got three holes prior to that that plays very difficult already.

So going down 18, you just want to make sure that you are capitalising on the par 5. It may be a little bit shorter but at the same time it's still playing tricky. You have to ensure

your lay-up is in the fairway and from there, the water is still very much in play. So you have to figure that, absolutely.

Q. While this is your first Olympics, it's not your first time playing for Team USA. Can you speak to the emotion of what it feels like putting on the red, white and blue?

LILIA VU: I'm always so proud to wear red, white and blue. There's nothing that tops representing the United States for me and I get really emotional thinking about it too much. So I try not to think too much about that. I take a lot of pride and I can't wait to go out there and play tomorrow.

ROSE ZHANG: I totally agree. You know, just back in junior golf, you play Junior Solheim Cup and then you play the Curtis Cup in amateur golf and then you play for USA on a couple other levels. But the Olympics is such a different level in terms of representing your country. Everyone is tuning in to watch and supporting. So it's always a real great honour for us athletes and I think it's the highest regard or standard for us to be able to represent the United States, our countries.

Q. Hypothetical questions are the worst but I'm doing it anyway, so bear with me. This question has come up for a couple of Olympics now. How do you think you would measure the value of a Gold Medal at the Olympics compared with a major?

LILIA VU: That's a good one I haven't thought about.

Q. Hypothetical.

LILIA VU: Hypothetical. To me, it would rank a little higher than a major, I think in the sense that you're playing for your country and it's more than just golf. It's the Olympics which is the best athletes all over the world. So a little higher for me.

MEGAN MCGUIRE: One more before we wrap. Lilia, I want to get this to know the end result but I believe there is a bet placed with nail color about the Olympics. If you would like to divulge?

LILIA VU: Yes, I have a bet with -- actually forgot about it. I have a bet with Ashleigh's caddie. Whoever finishes higher gets to pick the other person's nail colour for whenever the next time we do our nails and Tonya is the opposite of me. I like mine pink and blue and pastel colours and she all gets black or grown, which is something you'll never see me in. We'll see who ends up getting the other nail colour. I'm going to do like a baby pink for her. She'll probably want to vomit but it's okay.

This is new. Tonya, when we were eating out at Evian, she passed by and was looking at my left hand which was blue and my right hand was pink nail polish. She looked at my hand, and I said "Do you hate the colour pink?" And she said yes. We made a bet that we could pick the other's colour at the Olympics; it was just a random bet.

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