

U.S. Women's Open Championship 2016

Tuesday, July 5, 2016

Lydia Ko

Press Conference

MODERATOR: It's my pleasure to welcome the No. 1 player in the world, Lydia Ko, into the media center. Lydia is playing in her 5th U.S. Open this year. She's made the cut in all four of her previous appearances, highlighted by a tie for 12th last year at Lancashire Country Club.

You said last week that you don't necessarily expect to win each week, but that you've really worked hard at being consistent week in and week out. This year already three victories, three runner-up finishes. How do you feel your game is heading into CordeValle?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, the last three weeks before the week off I had, I played really consistent. Even heading into the first major of the year, I finished second and then won in Carlsbad. So I feel like I am coming into good form. But the crazy and fun thing about this game is that day-to-day, it's different. So week to week is going to be very different.

I had a good rest last week. And this year has been a lot of fun playing. And I'm just going to enjoy it. It's so beautiful here. There's so much to enjoy than think about, hey, I would love to be holding the trophy at the end of Sunday.

MODERATOR: You mentioned the other day that CordeValle looked a little bit like New Zealand when you were playing it. What were your first views of the course having been out a couple of weeks ago and here the first couple of days?

LYDIA KO: The course is playing a little differently than when I was here at the end of April. It's a lot warmer right now. I think, as the week goes on, it's going to play different to what it was on Monday. Progressively I feel like the greens and the fairways and everything is going to get a little bit drier.

But it does remind me a bit of New Zealand. In New Zealand, the weather doesn't fluctuate much. It's not like it snows a lot or it gets super hot. It's always in that same range. I feel like it's the same here. The nature part of it is you see and you get it. And I love California and I love coming to play here. The fans are great. The courses are great. So I think it's going to be a great week.



MODERATOR: After this week, it's the end of qualifying for the Olympics. You're obviously in very good shape as No. 1. Are you excited to represent New Zealand in the Olympics this summer in Rio?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I'm super excited. Since they announced that golf would be in the Olympics, in the 2016 Rio Olympics, I said I want to get myself to Rio. That's been a huge goal of mine. For it to be within 35 days or something until the start, it's amazing. And to even think that I could possibly be an Olympian is just a dream come true. My PE teacher always told me thank goodness I'm good at golf because I wasn't very good at any other sport. So he said, thank goodness you play golf.

Just to have this opportunity to represent my country amongst those many other talented athletes is going to be a really cool thing. And I think this is a great step forward for the game of golf. I think juniors or fans or people outside of the golfing industry could turn on the TV and learn so much about our players and about the game.

MODERATOR: Great. And it's already a busy summer. You have the Olympics, and you're also getting an online degree in psychology this summer. Talk about some of the challenges to balancing playing a full-time golf schedule and getting a degree, as well.

LYDIA KO: I took up psychology because I was really fascinated about the human mind, learning how people behave because of these things. And I didn't realize how big and how broad of a topic psychology was. I'm only in my second year right now, so I'm still learning how to -- learning more about psychology. And I think it's an endless thing. There's so many things and so many perspectives you can learn about.

But it's tough. I know there's a lot of reading involved in psychology. So for me to read and write assignments in that amount of time is tough. But it's the choice I took. So I have to deal with it.

But I enjoy it. I get to learn a few things. And with psychology it's huge in sports and in golf. So sometimes I'm able to put my perspective in it, sports psychology. So I think it's been really cool for me to

learn about it and actually put my experience to use.

MODERATOR: Doesn't seem to be hurting the golf game this year.

Q. Were you to win this week, you would be eight months younger than Inbee when she won, which would make you the youngest champion of this event?

LYDIA KO: Oh, thanks.

Q. Do you wish you had more birthdays so that we would stop asking you about these things?

LYDIA KO: Well, I mean most of the time, the person that asks is you, Steve (laughter).

I've been very fortunate to have this opportunity to come and play on the Tour that I've always dreamt of playing at a younger age. And I feel like -- I always say things have gone so much faster than I would have ever dreamt or imagined it to. But for me to even have a chance to be the youngest winner of this championship or these records, I think, just to be able to have the chance, and even if I don't get it done, I think it's such a cool feeling just to experience that.

To me, even though I go, oh, how come you told me that stat, it's really cool at the end of the day. But when I'm out there, I'm not thinking about, hey, I could possibly be the youngest U.S. Open champion. I'm more about, hey, hit solid shots and give myself a good run for it.

Q. What have you learned sort of about the distinctive challenges of this tournament? It would seem like your game matches up pretty well with the U.S. Open in terms of accuracy and all that. And you've obviously had a couple of strong finishes, what have you sort of learned and do you expect yourself to play better than you have in past Opens?

LYDIA KO: I think the key thing around not only this championship, but especially around the majors. It's not about 7-under -- it's not a huge score, a very low number that wins at the end of the week. That's why it's really important to stay patient and be in that little range and be consistent.

To me, when I see the scores, they're not like crazy low. And that means that you're never out of it. You could possibly have a really good final round, like what Brooke Henderson did last year, and put yourself in the top-10.

There's other situations, at the end of the day I think you need to stay really patient, even if you're four, five, six shots behind. Anything can happen. Someone will

make a bogey, someone will make a birdie at one hole that sets a two-shot swing straightaway.

In these majors you have to stay more patient. If you do make a bogey, you have to just forget about it, go to the next hole and play smart. And also, if you have that birdie opportunity, try and grab it.

Q. Patience in past U.S. Opens, is there any things that come to mind?

LYDIA KO: I hope I've been patient. Last year was the best finish I had at the Open, but I played really consistent the first day and the last two days on the weekend. And I think that was the key.

On the second day I kind of put myself out of position and I was scrambling. And I think you almost need to forget about the bad shots and just kind of move on. If you try and fight it out, grind it out and say, hey, I need to make another birdie to compensate for that mistake I made, I think there's too much. So it's almost like every hole is a new event. You have to take it and go from it and start new by the next tee box.

Q. Your record clearly speaks loudly in terms of your winning. When you look at your skills as a golfer, how would you appraise yourself now versus when you were 17 or, say, 15 when you won your first LPGA event?

LYDIA KO: I guess a lot has changed since Canada. I think the big difference is obviously I have changed coaches between then. And there are all these technical things.

But I think experience has been a huge learning curve for me. And even now I'm still learning about different situations or about having balance in all these different things. And I think that's the big thing. When you get into these different situations -- and that situation even though it might not have ended the way I wanted it to, I can definitely learn from it. It doesn't matter if I win or come top-10 or end up missing the cut, I think there's always something you can learn from and I think that's a big thing, experience.

When we're out here, we're not thinking about who's 18 or who's in their 40s, we're all golfers at the end of the day. But experience, I think you can't take that away from any player. That's what can really help you through these pressure situations. And I think that is the big thing, I think, that has changed since three, four years ago.

Q. Brooke Henderson was here before, earlier, and she said you are quite an inspiration for her and other golfers on the Tour right now. How does it make you feel, especially, not to bring up age

again, but that she's just a few months younger than you?

LYDIA KO: I mean, Brooke has been playing great. She put herself into a lot of top-10 positions earlier in the year. I said, we all kind of knew a win was coming. And for her to win her first major of the year and then win to defend the Portland Classic last week is really cool.

For her to say something like that about me is very sweet of her, but to me she's a really great player. We all know how amazing talent she has. But the thing is that she has such great personality and she's super nice. That's why we always love watching somebody like her play well.

And our age gap -- we're both, at the end of the day, born in 1997, so it's not like I'm miles older than her. I do kind of feel older than her, I don't know why.

But it's been really cool to watch. She's an aggressive player, but at the same time she's smart. And I think she's one of the most confident putters out there, too. So it's been really cool to watch her play as kind of a fan perspective, too.

Q. You both are coming off victories, you and Brooke. Obviously paired together this week. How much do you think a budding rivalry between the two of you will elevate the Tour? What do you think it means for the LPGA?

LYDIA KO: I'm super excited with our pairing. Lexi has pretty much been my -- we've been paired up together a lot or she's in the group behind or she's in the group in front. I think this is a great pairing. I think a lot of people come out to watch Brooke, Lexi and I. And especially with, I think, the top ranked players together like that, it's going to be really cool. But hopefully, if we can do something to inspire one junior out there, coming out to watch and say, hey, I want to be like them, and I want to play alongside them in ten years, I think it's a job well done, outside of the fact that we're trying to play some good golf.

It's been really cool to be able to play and compete against Lexi, against Stacy, and Brooke. I think we all learn from each other, we all feed off each other. From the fan's perspective, I think it's been really cool to just be able to watch on the sidelines and see this great talent and great golf.

Q. When you're at home on a week off practicing, do you think about a player like Brooke, who is hot on your heels and moving up the rankings? Do you work a little harder? You already work hard, but does she come into your mind at all?

LYDIA KO: Not when I'm practicing. I love to watch the

coverage, if the time works out and I turn on the TV and we're on. I love to watch the coverage and support and see the girls. But I don't think -- I don't necessarily think about it when I'm out there practicing thinking, hey, I need to hit one more ball to beat Brooke. At the end of the day, all I can do is try my best, work on my own golf. And I think that's all you can do.

And like I said at KPMG, all you can do is try your best and then it is out of your hands. If somebody like Brooke or some other player plays better than me, then I can't do much about it. To me I like to just concentrate on the things I need to work on, that means I don't have to focus on everything else that goes on.

Q. You are so gracious in defeat. I'm just curious, when it was all over, you handled it so well and you played really well, but when it was all over in a private moment, did it sting at all? Did that hurt?

LYDIA KO: To say that I wasn't disappointed after KPMG, I think that would be a lie. Of course, I would have loved to have maybe holed that putt on 17 or holed one more putt or hit a better shot to put myself and be holding the trophy. But at the end of the day, I know that I played solid golf. And to me, I can't blame -- I think a lot of people said, hey, what happened on the putt on 17? I think that's the biggest question I got. But the thing is, I putted so well the last four days and the last four rounds, I can't blame my putter on that exact moment for that being the reason that I didn't end up winning.

And when I saw some of the highlights from Brooke, it was amazing. For her to hole that long putt on 11, for her to make up and down on 18, make a great putt on 17, it was kind of out of my hands. And to say that, yes, I was a little disappointed that I was so close to holding up my third Major Championship. But I know that I played great and I played solid, but Brooke played even better. I think I was able to work off feeling proud with the way the week went and just kind of move on. I think sometimes you can get carried away with all the negatives and the things that I wish I did better. But there are still so many positives you can take from each week.

Q. Do you remember like the last time you actually cried over a defeat?

LYDIA KO: I cry a lot (laughter).

I cry a lot, and the next thing I go, oh, is my eye liner okay? That's my big question that I say right afterwards.

But I think sometimes crying or showing emotion I think is not a bad thing. It's in that moment. As long as it

doesn't carry until the week after or the week after, knowing that at the back of your mind, hey, I should have done this better. Showing sometimes a little bit of frustration or excitement or tears, we're all human, you know? And I think we all have these emotions. So you have to take it, and I think all these are learning curves and to me that was a learning curve of how to handle the final round going into the final round in the final group in all those situations.

I feel like -- I won't lie, I have cried after a tournament, but it's not -- I feel like if you get over it, it's not the end of the world. And there's still so many things you can learn. And it's not like this is my last ever event. There's still so many great tournaments. I'm sure that I will probably be in that kind of situation later. It might happen soon or it might happen in a few years, who knows. But I've just got to say, hey, it's part of the learning things. And I think that's the great thing about family and your support team. They're always there by your side to help you go through all that.

Q. You talk about feeding off of each other, Lexi and Brooke, and the competition. Is it tempting at all, is it tough to resist the temptation to try to match their style? You play a very different style than they do. You talked before about trying to get longer off the tee. Do you feel more urgency in that regard given their success?

LYDIA KO: I mean if you're long and straight, that's great. Oh, that rhymed.

But I think every player has different strengths. You see like Ai Miyazato who is not long like Lexi or Brooke, but she was still a former world No. 1, and with so many multiple wins.

So I don't think that it's just one game should fit everyone. Everyone is different. Sometimes you hit the ball great but your putter is not as hot. Or you hit the ball great but your putter is not. I think that's the difference.

I know that Brooke and Lexi are both longer than me. So I'm probably going to be first to hit for the second shots most of the time, when I'm out there. But I'm just going to think about my game and we're going to have fun, no matter what. We know it's a big event. It's a major championship, but we're still going to have a good time and have a laugh.

Q. Along these lines, does your game fit this course well? You talked about Merced, and how your game fits that course. From what you've seen of CordeValle, how does your game match up with the course?

LYDIA KO: I'll let you know Sunday. I hope so, but I feel

like this is a different style of golf course to the previous U.S. Opens I've played. It's not like right after the fairway there is dirt kind of like Pinehurst, or very long rough like Sebonic. It's a very different U.S. Open course to what I've played. But I think this course opens up to a lot of players. It's not only for a long hitter. It's not only for somebody that's going to hit it dead straight off the tee, like what was required at Sahalee. So I think this opens up for a lot of the players here, and that's why it's going to be hard to choose who the winner is, even before going into the championship and even until the last ball drops on the last hole.

MODERATOR: Lydia Ko, 2:03 off the 10th tee on Thursday. Best of luck.