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2019 NCAA Women's Golf Championship

Monday, May 20, 2019

Fayetteville, Arkansas

Maria Fassi

Shauna Taylor

MARIA FASSI: I was feeling very comfortable with the way I was playing the previous two rounds and I knew I had to shoot a round in the 60s if I wanted to have a chance at the title, and like I said, I was just feeling really good with my game. I've been feeling that way for two months or so. It was just like any other final round because I tried to go out there and stay aggressive, and I started off strong, had a birdie on No. 2, and parred No. 3, that I had struggled with the first two rounds. That was nice for me.

And then from there, I tried to stick to my game plan, stay in the present, and then when we came in for the rain delay, I was able to see where I was standing, and after that, I honestly just was playing smarter golf. I was looking for the easiest shot since I knew I had kind of like a cushion, but I was still in the first round to make birdies -- I guess not as aggressive, but I'm really happy with the way today went.

Q. Going into the final round with one shot down, what were you thinking you needed to shoot today to assure yourself of being in this position?

MARIA FASSI: In my head, I thought 7-under was going to be the number I had to shoot to be able to fight for first place. But then when I looked outside and saw the conditions, I knew it wasn't going to be that low. After walking outside, I didn't really know what the number was going to be. I knew Sierra had shot even in the mornings, and even with the morning wave, we were just shooting even par, I kind of was trying to go for that 7-under, but I mean, the conditions, I felt that it could have been a lower number. But I mean, I was just trying to go out there and give myself as many opportunities as I could,

stay patient, and that's what I did.

Q. I'm sure there have been a lot of times where you've envisioned this moment when you're out here practicing. Can you talk about how it lived up to what you imagined it could be?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, I fell short, I don't know how many times; that we were going to be walking down 18 fairway, holding hands, knowing that I was going to be the national champion. I seen it in my head I don't know how many times. I mean, I dream, and it didn't -- it was so much better. I mean, the people that were out here today with us and the team and just -- all that I got to play with were amazing to me and it felt surreal. It was just way better than what I had dreamed.

Q. When did she first tell you that, and when did you start getting motional out there?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Oh, gosh, we have these conversations a lot about what the future might look like. Probably when this was announced, I would say, her and I have had these conversations, and I think sometimes when you can visualize something, it becomes a reality eventually, and we knew that preparation and being present was going to be a big part of that.

It's way better than I envisioned, to walk up 18 with her holding her hand and telling her I love her and I'm so proud of her; but also to see our fans, and our whole entire team behind the green, it was definitely cooler in person?

Q. To build off of that, what were those final holes like for you as you were talking?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: I'm not so worried about Maria. It was the other four I was trying to get in the house more so. She's just fantastic under these conditions. Like I've said all week, she thrives when the spotlight is on, and I think that's what she did today. This golf course played as tough as I've seen it in a very long time, maybe ever, with 30-mile-an-hour winds, and to shoot what she shot was very impressive.

Q. Your team looked to be in the 4 or 5 spot for match play and I know that's important for you. Can you speak about the position you're in?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: You know, obviously our team goal is the first most important goal, and for us, and I know Maria feels the same way, obviously winning individually is just a cherry on top of the take, but we still have a lot of work to do as a group. You know, we'll try to figure out who we're going to play and give ourselves the best matchups and go out there tomorrow and take care of business.

Q. You deferred your LPGA membership earlier this year. Just kind of reflect on these few months and how it's made it all worth it.

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, I mean, coming back for nationals was one of the main things I didn't defer my LPGA status, and I think I had a pretty nice past couple months. I got to play Augusta. We made it to match play for the first time in our program's history and it's just been great.

I think getting to be with the girls, getting to be with all our staff and getting to learn more from Shauna and Mike the last six months have been amazing, and I think I made the best decision. The LPGA isn't going to go anywhere and this was the last time I was going to be able to have a run at a National Championship.

It's been great and I couldn't wait for national tomorrow.

Q. Just walking with her coming in, I don't know how many people were out there, but she seemed to

thank everyone, even well before 18. Just her reaction, and how you saw her handle that scene.

SHAUNA TAYLOR: We talk a lot about giving is getting in our program, and we love to give people thank yous, and thanks for coming out and supporting us. I really do think when you give, you get back in return. I think Maria is a perfect example of kind of that motto that we live by in our locker room, and just a great example of that for all of us.

You know, it takes a village to run a championship like this. It doesn't just pop up overnight. There's a lot of hard work going into it and we are grateful for all of the people that are behind the scenes to help this event and make it possible.

Q. Could you talk about your emotions leading into the NCAAs last year? Obviously didn't have the type of tournament you wanted, and how that kind of fueled you and motivated you to never want to feel that way again?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, definitely, the drive back from Stillwater last year was no fun. I know I didn't want to feel that way again. I knew the team didn't want to feel that way ever again, even though I knew Shauna and Mike weren't super excited about how we did, either. I think we just kind of used that as just extra motivation to work harder, and I mean, we've been working for this week for two years, ever since we found out that we were going to host, we put all the work for this week.

Getting to regionals a couple weeks ago was one of the toughest tournaments I think I've played in my college career, and coming back home and getting to be where we are with our people and getting to have the whole team here and our staff and our friends, has just made it that much better, and I'm just really proud of the way we've handled ourselves. I know there's a lot of golfers still out there, and I'm really excited to see what tomorrow brings.

Q. Growing up in MÃ©xico and deciding to come here to Arkansas, did you think that this would be possible?

MARIA FASSI: You know, I talk about it all the time, it's just so crazy to think that I'm about to graduate or I've graduated from a university in the United States and that I had a scholarship and that I was playing golf and being with amazing people like the people I'm here with. It's just so crazy for us, because in Mexico, we don't have college athletics like you guys have here. It's just everything is new for us, and it's just been an amazing 3 1/2 years. I think that I made -- coming here was the best decision I've made in my life. I've learned so much. I've grown so much. I've made friends that I'm going to have for the rest of my life, and I've learned so many things from Shauna, from all of my teammates, from everyone in our staff, and it's just been -- I mean, I'm very lucky for this opportunity.

Q. Looking ahead to the match play, because the SEC kind of changed its format, do you think that experience helps you guys going forward the rest of the week?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: I do now. I think it's more of, you know, getting comfortable with doing the pairings and that kind of stuff. Obviously, you have to shift mind-set a little bit. You know, it's definitely the SEC format gives us some good information to help our team be ready for that, and looking forward to it.

Q. In 2007 Stacy won. If this happens again with Maria, just the thought that -- to experience it once again, and it's been since 2007?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Oh, yeah, gosh, Stacy Lewis helped put our program on the map and Maria Fassi puts an exclamation on that. It's hard to win in our sport. It's very difficult. It's always changing and you do the best you can to prepare, but this junk lady has worked super hard for this moment. She's been a great teammate and great leader for us, and just really proud to be able to walk down with the fairway

with her.

Q. Is it a weird feeling being out there and your closest competitor is already in the clubhouse and there's not really anyone close to you? Is that something that is different? What's that feeling like?

MARIA FASSI: It is definitely different, but at the same time, I was just trying to just play good golf.

Bianca, I was playing with her and we were tied going off No. 1, and I know she can go low. She hits it far. She has long wedges in and has a lot of opportunities on par 5s. Yeah, maybe she wasn't as close as she would have liked, but I still know that coming down the stretch, she could make a move.

So I knew I had to make as many birdies as I could. I knew I had to just take advantage of the opportunities that I had, and I did, and it was -- yeah, different, for sure, to know that the second place was not going to play -- or wasn't in play anymore. But I think my mind-set was the same.

Q. Can you just compare the magnitude of the Augusta National Women's Amateur in terms of what it meant to you, and this tournament, the pressure that you felt there and here, and maybe what you took from that Saturday round for today?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, I think getting to play with Jennifer Kupcho, she's No. 1 in the world for a reason, and getting to see how she handled pressure at Augusta definitely helped me and I learned a lot from her, and I learned a lot from myself.

I made mistakes that I knew I wasn't going to make again. So I feel like that second place probably taught me a lot more than if I had won the tournament.

So now, I am kind of thankful for that, even though at the moment, of course, that's not what I was thinking. But it definitely got me ready for what I was going to face at SECs and at regionals with the amount of pressure that we were all under for us to make it back home, and of course, out here today, with the conditions that we had, it was tough, and I knew I had to go low if I wanted to have a chance.

So I think it all happens for a reason, and I'm glad it did go that way. This means way more than the Augusta Women's Amateur. Not because of the NCAA or Augusta or whatever. It's just winning at home, because this is home to me, I mean, it doesn't get any better. This is my last tournament as a Razorback and I think it's a pretty nice good-bye for me to go out that way. I'm very excited to see how tomorrow goes and hopefully can come out on top on Wednesday.

Q. Shauna said this is the toughest conditions she's seen you play out here. Do you ever go out and practice in 30-mile-an-hour winds?

MARIA FASSI: We do. Yeah, I mean, I think Shauna prepares us for the worst. Honestly, we've played in hard conditions and cold weather. But I think that, I mean, being in a tournament, it just makes it that much different.

I had not seen this much wind in a very long time and I was telling that to all the players. It was like, this is not how it is all the time down here. We have had really tough conditions out here, and it just makes me bring the best in me, and I kind of like that it makes me stay focused and it makes me stay present.

Yeah, I enjoy those kind of conditions, and like I said, Shauna and I have got to make sure we are prepared.

Q. The last couple months, you've been very visible, and a lot of younger kids are sort of drawn to you. What do you hold that they take for you, or what your platform is with that visibility?

MARIA FASSI: Honestly, my only hope is to get of course more people into it the game but I wanted them to see how much I enjoy golf and how much I love golf. Winning is fun, but that's not why we play. This is not why I play.

I enjoy being out there. I enjoy getting to meet people, getting to travel, getting to play amazing golf courses like the ones I get to play in, and I just want to show them that it's okay to hit a bad shot. I mean, you can always smile. I think that I feel like I have a pretty good time when I play, and I just want people to see how much fun I'm having, and hopefully that will bring more people into the game.

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