Hudsonville Girl Shares Special Connection with Meijer LPGA Classic Winner Nelly Korda

On Sunday afternoon, as Nelly Korda approached the 18th green of the Meijer LPGA Classic for *Simply Give*, 14-year-old Sophia Howard was running across the fairways of the other holes in the hopes of making it to the green in time to see Nelly's final putt.

Hudsonville, Mich.-native, Sophia, was born without a right hand, but hasn't let that stop her from being a passionate athlete, having golfed the last 4 years and idolizing LPGA players Nelly and Jessica Korda. Sophia initially became interested in the Korda sisters for their impressive golf skills. But upon researching them more, what really got her hooked was seeing their personalities online and on TV.

"They're just the kind of players that you tune in for," Sophia said. "You keep following the sport for them."

Sophia even got to play a round with the sisters in Florida last month through a non-profit program, Dream on 3, where the sisters invited her to join them for their practice round at the Meijer LPGA Classic in Sophia's own backyard.

"Walking with them on Tuesday was surreal," Sophia said. "It's one of the nicest courses I've ever been on. Being able to walk the course with them and see how they were preparing was incredible."

Unfortunately, Sophia had a softball tournament last weekend that meant she had to follow the tournament from afar as Nelly took the lead. But on Sunday afternoon, Sophia's team lost in the semi-finals and she knew exactly where she wanted to be, sprinting to the car with her parents as soon as the game ended.

Sophia tracked play on her phone as her family drove to Blythefield Country Club and knew she would be cutting it close, texting Jessica Korda updates along the way. When they finally got to the course, Sophia didn't even wait for her parents to park. She leapt out of the car and sprinted across the course, and made it just in time to be ushered in front of the ropes to witness Nelly chip out of the bunker and putt for birdie, clinching the title of champion.

"It was really cool," Nelly said, reflecting upon the lengths Sophia went to just to witness her final strokes. "She was at a softball tournament and she texted my sister when I was on at 18, and she said she ran through the third fairway just to get to the green to watch me win, so that was really cool to see her and for her to be there."

For Sophia, it was a dream come true.

"It's a no-words moment," she said. "Not only for her to win, but for me to be there... I'm still processing the fact that she just won and I was standing there in the middle of all of it. If you had told me this would happen even a couple weeks ago, I wouldn't have believed it."

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