

U.S. Senior Open Championship

Tuesday, July 6, 2021

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Omaha Country Club

Mike Ketcham

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: It's my pleasure to welcome Mike Ketcham here into the interview room. Mike is an amateur who qualified at Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the qualifier. Mike, your University of Arizona's senior associate athletic director. You supervise basketball and a number of other functions there. What are some of the challenges that you faced in the past year given what happened with COVID? Obviously, we in the golf industry faced some shutdown to the competition, but you had a lot of that and dealing with a lot of that at a major college program. What was the last year like?

MIKE KETCHAM: Very difficult in a lot of ways. When you service and have over 500 student-athletes -- and I think the thing that was the most difficult was it seemed like every week things were changing, the rules and the guidelines. When we thought we had a plan for the next week, following week, in terms of testing protocols, the CDC and state and local health department would come and change, but we got through it. 18- to 22-year-old kids are extremely resilient. They just wanted an opportunity to play, practice, and compete.

As a department and the Pac-12 conference, the NCAA, we got through it, and hopefully the most difficult part is behind us moving forward.

THE MODERATOR: You've coached college golf at a few different places in your career. What have you learned from coaching some really talented amateur players you were able to bring over to your own game in playing competitive golf?

MIKE KETCHAM: I played college golf myself back in the early to mid-'80s, played at the University of Arkansas. Played for 2-1/2, 3 years, played the Asian Tour, and always knew I wanted to get into coaching. Had an opportunity at a junior college in '93 and '94 and started at Scottsdale Community College. Left there, went to San Jose State, was there a few years, went to Oregon State, was there five years, went back to my alma mater, the



University of Arkansas, for five years.

Certainly to your question, having the opportunity to be around some fantastic young men and some kids that could play at the elite level, even though I wasn't playing and practicing as much as one would want when I was playing full-time, I was still around it. I was minimally engaged. I was watching. It became obviously less about me and more about our student-athletes, being able to compete on a high level. Mentally, that was stimulating.

There were times I was able to hit golf balls and play with them at times, and it certainly kept my golf game fresh.

THE MODERATOR: We hear a lot about golf's longest day, the U.S. Open, 36-hole qualifier sectional after getting through local, but it can be pretty grueling at other USGA championships as well. What was the qualifying process like for you knowing that it's just a lot of players for a few spots to try to get into the U.S. Senior Open?

MIKE KETCHAM: The thing you try to do in a situation like that is you try to prepare yourself the best going in. Certainly at my age now at 56 years old, it's just as much physical as it is mental, and actually practicing and preparing for the game. You have to -- nutrition, eat correctly. You have to work out if you're really serious about it.

About three, four years ago, I made a commitment that this is what I wanted to do. I wanted to become competitive again in this game, and going to Santa Fe, I felt like I was in good shape, good mental frame of mind. I felt like my golf game was in good shape. And Santa Fe, like this golf course, might not be quite as hilly, but it's a desert golf course, and long distances between greens and tees with a little bit of hills as well.

THE MODERATOR: You had a pretty good finish, if I recollect, to get in.

MIKE KETCHAM: Thank you. I was probably -- not probably. I was probably two-thirds of the way back. My wife and a couple friends were following. Obviously, today with technology you can kind of see where you are in terms of the scoreboard and leaderboard through Genesys. About hole 14 or 15, I was even par and playing well and asked my wife, what does it look like? She says, do you



want to know? I said, honey, I wouldn't ask you if I didn't want to know.

So she looked at the board on the phone, and I was two back. There were two guys in at 2-under, and I knew I had to basically play the last three or four holes at 2-under to have the opportunity to go into a playoff.

17 was a downwind par-5 uphill. Luckily hit it up there five feet from about 230 out, made the putt. Then your mind changes: Okay, I didn't have the mind frame let's get par to try to make the playoff; let's try to make birdie. Hit a good drive down the middle of the fairway, only had about 135 in, but if you remember correctly, the wind and the weather that particular day in Santa Fe was not conducive to playing great golf or low scoring, I should say. I hit this wedge shot in there. It was in a little bit of a bowl area. When it left the club, I thought, this is pretty good. It landed on the downslope on the front of the bowl about 15 feet, and it shot straight up the hill on the back of the green.

Now I'm standing here going, am I going to chip this thing? Am I going to putt this thing? Dead downhill. Saving grace was I had about a 25-mile-an-hour wind back in my face. Somehow got it down there about three feet and made the putt and went into the playoff.

THE MODERATOR: Great to have you back in the championship. Now that you're here, what are some of the goals and expectations you have this week, and how would you quantify success?

MIKE KETCHAM: Well, obviously the primary goal with someone in my situation is to make the cut. I want to play well. I have secondary goals on top of that that I'll keep to myself, but right now you want to put yourself in position, keep it around par the first two days hopefully, and be in a good position going into the weekend.

The U.S. Open -- this is my first Open. I've played in one U.S. Junior growing up. I played in two U.S. Amateurs. Played in one in '85 and played in one in '97. '85 was out in Montclair, New Jersey. '97 was at Cog Hill. I was fortunate enough to make it into match play in both of those events. This is very similar in terms of setup, especially to Cog Hill in '97.

Two things you have to do well in an Open. You have to drive the ball in the fairway, and you have to putt and chip well. You have to chip it well out of the cabbage. A U.S. Open, a U.S. Amateur, a U.S. Junior, if you're not prepared, it will expose any weakness you have.

THE MODERATOR: You live in Arizona but have some

family from Iowa just across the border. Who's out here this week following you, supporting you, family and friends?

MIKE KETCHAM: Sure. Obviously, my wife, who is my rock star. You talk about a coach's wife, she's been around it. We started dating at 16 years old, and she's seen a lot of great shots. She's seen a lot of mediocre shots, and she's seen a lot of bad shots. When I started coaching, I mentioned it before, she's a coach's wife. She'll be out here forefront.

She's really doing a good job -- and I'll get to your question here in a second -- because it's easy, when you grew up across the river in Iowa and you have so many family and friends that are going to be here, there's a lot of distractions. She has really taken that burden and said, Mike, you go play golf. You focus on it. I'll take care of everything else.

In terms of family, my mother and father who reside in Arizona, they're both 80 years old, they're here. My two children, our daughter, 27, will be here tomorrow flying in from Cleveland. My son Michael came with my mom and dad and my wife today, as well as some really good friends from Tucson. And then my mother -- I should say my wife's mother, my mother-in-law, still lives in Ottumwa, and her extended family lives throughout Iowa and will be here on Thursday morning.

Q. Today you got to play with some USGA champions, I believe Roger Chapman and Retief Goosen. I don't know who else you played with yesterday, but can you tell us about that experience.

MIKE KETCHAM: Sure. Yesterday I had the opportunity to play with Bernhard Langer. Obviously, what I wanted to do going into this championship, I wanted to play with guys who have won not only at this level, but maybe have won majors. It's unique, and it's really a neat experience for us amateurs that don't have a chance to play with those guys very often, when you show up, to be able to put your name in a practice round or an open spot.

I wanted to spend the time with these guys watching how they prepare, maybe picking their brain a little bit. Bernhard Langer yesterday, Retief Goosen today, Rich Beem today, who won the PGA. They were so cordial and so nice. They could have, an amateur from Arizona who hasn't had a lot of success on the professional level, kind of do their thing, but they were incredibly inviting, phenomenal men. I thank all three of them for spending the time with me.

Q. Could this experience also lead to possibly playing

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**in more not only USGA events, but other events?
Especially since you're eligible at your age. Not that
you're old, but golf is forever it seems like.**

MIKE KETCHAM: Yeah, so when I turned 50 six years ago, I was not playing a lot of golf. I had just started this new role and new position at University of Arizona, and it requires a lot of travel in my job. I'd say in the last four years I've really kind of figured out how and the time of the year that I really can focus on my golf game.

I knew 55 was also a big number in amateur golf, too, because of the U.S. Senior Amateur. When I really got started four years ago, getting back into the competitive spirit, the competitive mode, taking care of my body, that was really my number one goal. I tried to qualify for the U.S. Open two years ago at Las Campanas in Santa Fe. I was really close to making it. I had a train wreck on the 6th hole, a par-3, no water, no hazard, and ended up missing by two shots, and I thought, I can do this, and I will make it at some point in the near future.

The pandemic hits, so we didn't have the qualifying last year in 2020, and back to my point, the U.S. Senior Amateur, they didn't have the qualifying. I don't think they even had the event last year. Hopefully, I can play well enough the next few days that I won't have to go through the qualifying coming up in a few weeks. Those are really the two motivating factors that has put me in the position of wanting to get back, practice, and be competitive again.

Q. When you say your title at the University of Arizona, most folks really don't know what that means. Can you give us maybe two or three things that you do the most every day. And people don't realize it's probably a seven-day-a-week job.

MIKE KETCHAM: Yeah, it can be. With overseeing basketball, I'm on the road. I travel 100 percent with them, have done it for the last six, seven years. So the wintertime, which is actually ideal in Arizona to play golf, I'm not touching a golf club. The rest of the year, I can get out on the weekends. I can get out after work. But to your point, what do I do? I'm a senior associate athletics director. I oversee our men's basketball, our men's and women's golf team. I oversee our equipment room and have a huge role in our fundraising aspect in the development office as well.

So it is a busy job. I'm basically one of four or five lieutenants underneath our athletics director.

Q. Then you talked about being around competitive athletes all the time. Is there one or two experiences in your work life that kind of ignited that flame where you

wanted to be a competitive golfer again?

MIKE KETCHAM: I don't know if it was one particular instance or one particular person, but coaching college golf, being in the athletic administration, if you look at the schools I've been at, I've been around some pretty phenomenal people, everybody from Dennis Erickson, the football coach at Oregon State, Miami Hurricanes, to Rich Rodriguez at Arizona, to Sean Miller, the basketball coach, to now Jedd Fisch at Arizona, to Tommy Lloyd, and just the opportunity to be around these people and watch them coach and expecting to get the most out of these student-athletes. You take that and apply it to yourself.

Basically, it was the same thing I did when I coached too, trying to be able to make these kids elite and getting them to perform at the best of their ability.

Q. You probably have mentioned how many coaches you've worked with, but have you seen a common thread with the ones that are successful?

MIKE KETCHAM: Yeah, they're workaholics. They don't sleep. It's amazing. I don't know when they have downtime. They make a lot of money, but they never spend it because they're never going anywhere. They're never going on vacations with families. It's amazing what they put into it, and I know a lot of people that aren't in college athletics thinks these guys are overpaid, but the impact that they can have on a school, an economy, in your town, your community, your state, it's astronomical.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

