

ANA Inspiration

Tuesday, September 8, 2020

Rancho Mirage, California, USA

Mission Hills Country Club

Austin Ernst

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the virtual media center here at the ANA Inspiration. I will start today's press conference lineup with two-time LPGA Tour winner and Rolex Rankings No. 25 Austin Ernst. How are you doing today?

AUSTIN ERNST: I'm good. Just played nine holes. The course is playing a little different than it normally does, but it's nice to get out and see it, and the carts are really nice.

THE MODERATOR: You are the most recent winner on Tour after a stellar performance at the Wal-Mart NWA championship. With this week off were you able to reflect on that win or did you get a lot of congratulations from friends over the past week?

AUSTIN ERNST: I got a lot of congratulations, even the last couple days being here. Pretty much everywhere I go, you're seeing people from last week that probably didn't get to see me. That's nice.

And then last week was just spent with friends and family and getting to celebrate. There wasn't a lot of time for reflection on it, it was more just kind of getting to enjoy the win, which was nice, and then now I feel like I can focus on this week, and it was nice to get that week off to actually get to celebrate the win and not have to feel like, okay, I've got to prepare immediately for an event.

So now that I'm here I can kind of just focus on this week.

THE MODERATOR: What did a win like that do for your confidence? I know you were a little emotional with Karen Stupples after winning on Golf Channel, but what did it do for your confidence going into not only the rest of the season but this major in particular?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think it was huge. You always want to win, and I've won before, but seeing all of the hard work I've done and seeing kind of what I've changed in my game or kind of just gradually tweaked and to see it come to fruition and get a win, I think I'm always going to be able to look back on that and see that I was four behind on an

easy golf course that everybody was going low and I shot the lowest score and I did it that way.

And then once I had the lead, I kept it. So I think just kind of being able to be in that situation, feel the nerves, feel the pressure, and be able to perform and make birdies and hit good quality golf shots, you can always look back on that, and that's one of those things that I can add to my memory bank, and if I get in contention in the next few weeks, this week, whenever, I can always look back on Arkansas and say, hey, I did that, I can do it again.

THE MODERATOR: You said your plan of attack was trying to birdie every single hole because it was doable out there. You just said you've come off the course after playing nine holes. There's definitely some changes out there this year with the ANA Inspiration. What have you thought of some of the changes as you've played the first nine?

AUSTIN ERNST: I thought it was really good. I played the back nine yesterday. They've added a few bunkers, they've lost a few trees, I think. There's a few more chipping areas where there used to be rough, and it's playing longer. I guess with it being so warm, they've kept a lot of water on it, and obviously you have different grass this time of the year.

So a few of the holes you're getting much longer irons in than you typically would, and I think it'll be interesting as the week goes on if they take the water off of it, how much firmer the fairways get, how much firmer the greens get, that kind of thing. But I think what they've done, it's really good, and it's playing tough. You know, you've got -- with the Bermuda rough instead of the normal, I think it's rye normally, it's a little bit harder to judge what the ball is going to do. So I think it's going to be a really good test this week.

THE MODERATOR: One of the big story lines of course is going to be the heat, getting up to the upper hundreds here. For you and your brother on the bag, what are some of the strategies that you guys have to kind of beat out the heat?

AUSTIN ERNST: I'll walk around with a towel around my neck, a wet towel. He's going to take a cart all week. I'll have a sun umbrella and we're going to put a cooler in the



cart, have some great raid, have some snacks in there so you can always manage it as best you can. Being able to take the carts in the fairway is big. I think if you couldn't take them in the fairways then we probably couldn't use it because you can't get some of that dialogue. If I want Drew to talk to me I can just tell him to drive slow down the fairway. That's kind of how we'll do that. But yeah, I think you have to drink a lot of water. You have to drink more than you think you do. With it being a dry heat you don't necessarily sweat nearly as much as you do on the East Coast, so I think that's just something that even when I'm at the hotel I'm trying to drink as much water and kind of just rehydrate as much as possible.

THE MODERATOR: When you heard that caddies were able to take carts, was that an automatic decision for you and Drew, or what kind of went into the decision there?

AUSTIN ERNST: Once it was in the fairways, I think it was pretty automatic. I just thought, there's really no reason not to take advantage of it. I have a small cooler I can pack on there and I can put whatever I want to and keep snacks cold and keep a towel cold and that kind of thing, I thought it was a no-brainer.

THE MODERATOR: You had a fifth-place finish, a solo fifth-place finish after playing extremely well on the links course at the AIG Women's Open, the first major of the 2020 season for us. What do you think you can take away from your performance there? Totally different golf course, but being able to be under that type of situation and that kind of pressure and take that into this week?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think that helped me going into Arkansas. Obviously the course conditions were tougher. Had a lot of wind, course was firmer, scores were much higher. But to be able to kind of -- and then obviously it's a major. It's the Women's Open.

To be able to go into that and hit quality shots and really all week I was kind of in the heat of it. On Saturday I teed off in the last group, was in second, and then obviously Sunday I was I think third to the last group. So just having that much more experience with kind of the pressure at the end of the week, I think that helps just because you know you're hitting good shots. You're under the heat of it all week, it's not necessarily where okay, you're just free wheeling it and trying to go out and throw a score. Every shot you feel a little bit more. You feel a little bit more pressure.

I think going into this week it's going to help, too, because it's going to be more similar to that week where you have longer irons, you really have to pick your spots where you have a good number, and then you can attack a pin a little

bit more. Greens are a little firmer than Arkansas. You're not going to have quite as many wedges, and you just kind of have to pick your spots where when you do have a good number even if it's a mid iron or a long iron, you can be a little bit more aggressive, but you kind of have to reel it back a little bit, too.

Q. You talked about how you had worked so hard on your putting. Obviously putting wins majors. How confident are you on these greens in particular, and what do you think it's going to take from a putting standpoint to come out this week?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think -- I'm very comfortable on the greens. This is my, I think, ninth year playing here. They haven't changed much. The grass is a little different. They're still pretty fast. I think lag putting is going to be really important. You're going to have a lot more in that kind of 30-, 40-foot range than usual weeks, just kind of with how long the course is playing right now. So I think lag putting is going to be huge, and then obviously in majors, putting inside of six to ten feet is huge. If you miss a green, you might have a few more five-, six-footers than a typical week where maybe you can chip it up and have a tap-in.

So I think just kind of keeping it in front of me and hitting as many greens and giving myself more birdie opportunities even if they're longer range is going to be big.

Q. You talked about the confidence coming from Arkansas. A 54-hole event with a lot of birdies, it's really kind of a sprint from the first tee. Majors are a lot different. How do you change your mindset going into this week?

AUSTIN ERNST: I'll just be more aggressive to maybe different targets. You know, I'm still very aggressive, but my target line might be 15 feet right, 15 feet left instead of right at a pin.

Obviously I've played this course a lot so I kind of know those holes where I'm going to have to play away from certain pins, especially with the number you get. If you get a good number with a long iron, you can be a little bit more aggressive, but I kind of know where to leave it, so I think it's kind of picking your spots and knowing where you can attack and knowing where 30 feet is a good golf shot.

Q. The confidence that you have after Arkansas and then the Women's British Open, being able to have that week off, was that a little weird after having almost five months after?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think it was nice to have the week off

after five weeks in a row, too. It was nice timing to be able to celebrate with everybody. It was a little weird not to be playing so much, but it was definitely a much needed break after five weeks and then obviously going to Scotland for two weeks and coming back. I think my body needed a little bit of a rest.

Q. This week if you had the chance to jump into Poppies Pond for the first time, what style of jump would you do?

AUSTIN ERNST: Cannonball.

Q. No hesitation?

AUSTIN ERNST: I've known that since I played here as an amateur.

Q. Really?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yep.

Q. Why cannonball?

AUSTIN ERNST: There's no other jump you can do. I can't dive into it. I can't dive anyways, and I can't think of any other jump I would want to do.

Q. The way you've been playing recently, how much would that do for you to be able to come out of ANA with your first major title?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think it would be huge. Now I'm trying to put myself in the position to have a chance to win every week, and to be able to get it here would be great. This was the first LPGA Tour event I played in, my first major. I think that's the next step is to keep contending in majors and hopefully get a major championship. So it would be awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Austin, for joining us, and thank you, everyone, for joining us, as well.

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