

ShopRite LPGA Classic

Presented by Acer

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Galloway, New Jersey, USA

Seaview, A Dolce Hotel

Ashleigh Buhai

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, I'm here with Ashleigh Buhai, 2023 ShopRite LPGA Classic presented by Acer. Congratulations on your win, first of all.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Thank you so much.

THE MODERATOR: Coming down the stretch you had to have been feeling some of that pressure. You had that chip shot on the last, on 18, the three-, four-footer there. Talk us through what you were thinking about in those moments.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I kind of looked up at the leaderboard after my second shot and I saw Hyo Joo had birdied, so I said to myself, well, got to get up and down obviously to give myself a chance to win it outright and would make her have to eagle and put some pressure on her.

Again, I just kind of stuck to my processes and steps that we have worked on and tried to focus more on the moment and that shot and not the result and the outcome, which is something that has got me to this position and something that has paid off since I would really say like May last year is when we really started to think that way and work that way.

You know, you're always going to be anxious and nervous, but at least it's something you can control. You can't control the outcome.

THE MODERATOR: In the scoring tent after you signed your scorecard and hearing you were the official winner, saw a few tears there. What were you feeling?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, obviously I think at first it's always relief because you're at such a high intensity the whole day and you're nervous and trying to control that and not let the emotions get the best of you. Then it's like relief and you can just enjoy it.

So, yeah, I'm an emotional person, so to have my husband there and Tanya there and few friends. Lee-Anne Pace is

here from South Africa this week, so nice of her to spray me with some champagne.

It was a cool feeling.

THE MODERATOR: This is your first LPGA Tour victory since the AIG Women's Open. What does that mean as well?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, it's huge. My goal this year was to win in the U.S. I hadn't won here yet. After the AIG Women's Open I won in Australia, South Africa, and my goal this year was to get the monkey off my back and finally win here on U.S. soil.

So to do it, I'm very proud of myself for ticking it off. I've been playing some really solid golf, and knew that if I continued that form, one of these weeks I would be coming in close with a chance to get the job done.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. This is three wins in ten months worldwide. Has it been one big thing or a lot of little things the way your processes come together?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: It's actually four now, so, yeah, even better. It's been a process. You know, like I said, I've got a team that I work with from my physio, Anne-Lise Bidou, who keeps my body in check every week out here. Without her I couldn't do this, especially I say being on the older side of tour nowadays.

Swing coach, Doug Wood, what we've done over 13 years.

I started working with Gareth Raflewski on my putting; that's been a huge turnaround.

I've been a really good feel putter but I went through ebbs and flows, and with what we put in place I just do every week. That's created consistency.

And then from the mental side, Duncan McCarthy, what we've done, again, in focusing more on the process and



not the outcome and what I can control, stick to my steps.

I really only have one thought with everything. I one thought with the swing, one thought with the chipping, one thought with the putting, and I just tried and do that over and over.

I know it sounds boring and I know he says, I know this is getting boring, but this is what creates good results. So when I put it all together, this is what can happen.

But without those people in my team I wouldn't be sitting here today for sure.

Q. Today's great start, four birdies in the first five holes, what sort of got you out of the gate so well today basically?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I think what helped me is the wind was a different direction, so for me playing the first few holes the wind was in off the right. I like to fade the ball so I was a bit more comfortable.

Again, I have a game plan. I stuck to it. I just tried to commit to every shot I hit. I hit some really good shots. I hit them really close, which definitely helps. We all know these greens can get bumpy from further way, so the closer you are the better chance you have of holing the putt.

Q. Then you make the putt at 5 I guess off the back of the green. At that point do you say, maybe I've got something going here good today or...

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I mean, that's, again, like if you let yourself think too far ahead, then that's when you start to like I think get over-nervous and overcompensate for things.

Yeah, sure it crossed my mind. I was like, hey, sort of those things need to happen happy when you win, so maybe this is going to be my day.

Again, I had to just stay in the moment. Had a little laugh, and then I got on the next tee and I just tried to do my job well, which at that point the wind was off the right and I just tried to hold the drive off the tee box against that wind.

Every shot I got over I said to myself, do your job well, which means commit to the shot you want to hit.

Q. Is it hard to stay in the moment and not get carried away when you're climbing the leaderboard and you have the four quick birdies out of the gate?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, can be. I think the work that I've done over the last year has put me to the point where it's not hard and I'm able to bring myself back.

We always say it's fine to let yourself go there, but as long as you can bring yourself back to the moment at the time before you hit that next shot, then that's all that matters.

Q. On 18, you were over by the scorers' tent. Did you hear the crowd when she hit the eagle shot and what was kind of going through your mind?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, Dave, my husband, could see it, and I was just waiting for it obviously. If you hear a big cheer, okay, we're going into a playoff. I heard that. It was very close. Hats off to Hyo Joo. She knew she had... (Video glitch.)

Q. Early in your career when you didn't have the results that you're having now, was it difficult to sort of handle that, or how do you mentally get through that and basically I guess kind of turn your career around the last ten months or 18 months?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, of course. This is my 16th year as a professional. I had wins early on. I was touted to be -- I had a really good amateur career and was going to be the next best thing out of South Africa, but that's -- golf is just not like that all the time.

I kept plugging away. I have a good support system around me, which I think is the most important thing. They're the ones that kept me up when I was down and told me, you can still do this, and keep getting at it.

Yeah, the last 18 months has just been a factor of putting it all together and surrounding myself with all the right people. Yeah, it's definitely paying off.

Q. You hit 14 out of 14 fairways today, especially after hitting 7 out of 14 in the first round. What was working for you today and how were you able to stay so consistent with that?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I mean, I normally drive the ball really well. It's one of my strong points. The first nine holes on Friday was uncharacteristic of me, but I did so well to hang in there. I could have been easily 4-over, and instead I turned under par.

And I said to my caddie, all right, we're doing good. We're hanging in here. Just keep doing it. My putting saved me on the first day, and then I kind of figured it out. I was kind of losing the face a little bit, shutting it down a little bit.

I juts went and hit a few balls and said to myself, all right, keep the face through that a little bit better throughout the golf swing, and that's what I did the last two days, which improved my driving and gave me birdie opportunities from the fairway.

Q. How important is that to your success to be able to pull something together when you don't have everything in your game working at once?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: It's huge. Like I said, I think a lot of players after the first round would've been over par. Mentally I backed myself. I know I've been playing good golf and I just had to hang in there.

Especially on this golf course, being out in the afternoon on the first day. Always afternoons play the toughest.

I said to myself I could get in under par on the first day. I've done a good job. And then going out the next morning, that's when the birdies were available, and I took advantage of that.

Q. You talked about all the changes you made over the last 18 months that have resulted in your success. What led you to realize you needed to make such overhauls to your game to find success?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I don't think it was really too many overhauls, to be honest. I've been with my swing coach for 13 years. It was not last October, the October before he was out with me at Founders. He just said, something is not right here. You're playing too good. You're swinging too good to not get results. It's something else.

He put the me in touch with Duncan McCarthy. Like I said, I was touted to be the next best thing out of South Africa and come on the LPGA and win straightaway. I won straightaway in Europe.

I think I've also got to a point where I'm older in my career. Felt I should have achieved more by then and the pressure I was putting on myself.

Again, I'm 34, so wanting to have a family. These things sit in the back of our minds that nobody really knows about and you don't realize what havoc is plays back there. COVID, not being able to go back to South Africa, see my friends and family was also really tough.

So we kind of tapped into all that, really got Ashleigh, the person, feeling better again. That started to translate onto the golf course really April last year was when we only really started working on golf course stuff.

Then it was a case of this is what we need to do, stick to the process, stick to the steps. It sounded boring, but he said, if you do this every week, try to do the same thing, eventually it'll start to click.

Q. Given you number of years out here on tour, is that harder that you've been out here 16 years to implement the changes or maybe easier?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, I don't think it was difficult. I think it was a choice because I wanted to be better. I still felt I hadn't achieved what I wanted to achieve. You know, there had to be some changes made.

They weren't as drastic as I think people make because my swing had been really good for so long and just needed a little nudge here and there. Didn't need too much for it to all come together.

Again, you find the right people and you stick with them and don't chop and change. Same with the caddie. It creates a good grounding point, and, yeah, I'm just very glad they have them all around me.

Q. You are the first player in South Africa to win this tournament, and now the second player from South Africa to win multiple LPGA Tour events. What does that mean to you?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, it's a huge honor. We're a small country. Unfortunately not many female professionals have come out of South Africa; obviously some great men. I'm just glad that I've finally been able to do it and, like I say, get the monkey off my back.

Obviously Muirfield was huge, winning a major as your first one. That's the thing only dreams are made of.

Again, after last year everybody is like, oh, it's great. I didn't want it to be a one-hit wonder. I wanted it to be the start of something.

Luckily I've been able to continue it and keep up that trend.

THE MODERATOR: Last question from me. What does this do for your confidence heading into the next summer swing of events?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, it's a huge confidence boost and shows that what I'm doing works, so I just need to keep doing it.

Even my coach was here with me beginning of the week. I played so well at the end of last week. Again, the mental energy that gets drained from you when you're playing and

competing under the gun all the time gets a bit much.

I am going to pick and chose my schedule a little bit better now that I have that luxury. It's a big summer and I do love to play. I feel I play better when I play more and play my way into tournaments.

It's going to -- it's an exciting few months with all the majors coming up, and hopefully I can keep doing what I'm doing.

THE MODERATOR: You take the time to relax and thank you so much. Congratulations.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Thank you. Thanks.

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