

The LPGA Drive On Championship presented by Volvik

Saturday, March 6, 2021

Ocala, Florida, USA

Golden Ocala

Albane Valenzuela

Quick Quotes

Q. Albane, do you mind just taking us through your amazing round today, and when the momentum started kicking in for you?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Yeah, it was a great round, 66, bogey-free, and that's really all I can ask for. I really just clicked on my putting routine for the first time. My game has been really solid for the past two weeks but I think I finally really start to understand how I have to approach putts.

Just rolled them great all day. I had tons of opportunities and just very pleased with my round.

Q. 66, I know you have a story there with your brother and a little bit of family rivalry. Do you mind just walking us through how this began and the story there.

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Yeah, so this is a pretty special place for me. I caddied for my brother here when he qualified for U.S. Juniors and he shot 68 and won in a playoff with a birdie. This entire week he was like, You just you have to beat my score. So we had this family competition going. I'm kind of happy I beat him, to be honest.

Q. Did you see his reaction already?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Yeah, he was like, You beat me by two. All right. He owes me a coffee I think.

Q. What year was that?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: It was probably 2018 or something.

Q. And we just heard in your interview with Karen Stupples about all the health challenges. I didn't know you had your appendix out for example. Walk us



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through what all has happened.

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Yeah, definitely 2020 was pretty challenging. I had a very bad nerve injury in my neck. I couldn't feel pretty much from my neck down to my fingers, just constantly playing in pain.

The end of 2020 was very challenging for me, and then I had a stomach problem that led that think appendix being flared and then I had to get it removed, and then I got COVID.

So I spent a lot of time in bed for the past five months, so I'm just really appreciative to be out on the course now. I think I just don't take for granted because I know how hard it can get. Just happy to be playing again.

Q. So when did the nerve situation start?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: The never situation started late August with a bad shoulder and just pain from the neck down, and I just after KPMG I was like, I can't play anymore. That's why I stopped the season there. I could barely finish my rounds. It got to a point where I was just not comfortable on the golf course. I was just playing through pain and I think it was mentally tough, not only physically.

So took a lot of time off and then just the appendix followed and then COVID, so it's been a challenging couple months.

Q. Was there a diagnosis that went with the nerve?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Probably like a brachial plexus injury, nerve damage. They weren't quite sure what it was, but it pretty much felt like a pinched nerve. I thought I had a herniated disc. I had so many MRIs and tests, but I'm just glad I'm able to hit a golf club again. It feels good.

Q. When did you have the appendix out?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I had the appendix out in November, so my brother got it while I was at ShopRite and I got it a month after.

Q. Wow. Crazy. And when did you get COVID?



ALBANE VALENZUELA: I got COVID a month ago, so over a month ago, so two weeks in bed.

Q. What were you symptoms with COVID?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I have every single symptom from the fever, shortness of breath, body aches, loss of smell, taste.

Q. Wow.

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Everything.

Q. Were you worried you wouldn't be able to play these two events?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Yeah, I was not -- you know, definitely in November I hit a pretty bottom low. I think mentally was tough just being in constant pain. My shoulder was not getting better and just my stomach was in so much pain just recovering from the appendix. It took me a month out where I couldn't exercise.

Then I think my mom said, You know what, go back home. Stop seeing doctors. Just go see friends, reset your mind. I think if you're stronger mentally your body will follow. I was in a very bad state and it was definitely a grind, but I'm happy with the way it's coming out and just happy to be on a golf course right now.

Q. How soon were you able to hit balls again after that?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I didn't hit balls for a solid -- I really started hitting in December, so I stopped in October and mid-December, that's when I start hitting shots - and I was basically chipping and the putting for a very long time.

I think in 2020 I was really rushing my swing, and with my dad we really worked on just slowing down. I think it's just helped my entire body, my state of mind, and I just feel calmer when I'm on the golf course.

Q. I have a question: You're a huge family person it sounds like and your dad is caddying for you this week. How amazing of support do you feel from your family? How important is that to you?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: It's huge. I wouldn't be the person or where I am today without my family. It's so special to have my dad, and I think really going into this season we said we're going to keep to a very simple family business. My dad is my coach. He's my mentor. My mom does everything for me too, and my brother is also my

coach from home.

So we're just trying to keep it simple and just to have fun. I think that way I enjoy golf more because I keep it simple and just the way I learned is with my family.

Q. And you and your brother practice together and learn from each other?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Yeah, we always practice together. So now he's a freshman at SMU. I don't get to see him that often. He is really enjoying his college experience. But I play with my dad pretty much every day, or at least after work he always comes and watches me play, so it's fun to have them.

Q. What is the humming bird?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: That's Andrew Harper. It's a luxury travel agency and I just started with them this season.

Q. Out of the Bahamas?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: No, U.S., it's a U.S. company.

Q. Is your dad going to be on the bag most of the year?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: No, dad has to work. Dad has been having conferences at like 4:00 in the morning. I think he's up having some phone calls right now. He's just always working. We just said it would be fun for the first two weeks to get back into the season, just a bit of an easier transition for me.

Q. It sounds like there is probably no one that is happier to have a second rookie season than you?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Oh, hell yeah, because the first one was not good. But I think just having -- my expectations were a bit all over the place and definitely a huge disappointment. Overall there were so many things that I couldn't control, being injured and having so many health injuries.

For me 2021, even if we're not out on of COVID, it's a huge reset button for me. Just happy with where I am right now.

Q. Speaking of reset, not only do you get to reset the season, you get to reset the priorities. What are your goals for 2021 now?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I just really to take it tournament by tournament. I know that my game is there. I know I can

compete on this tour. I just feel more comfortable than last year just because I'm really in my own bubble. I focus on what I know to do and so just playing tournament by tournament at this point.

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