

Cognizant Classic

Monday, March 4, 2024

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Champion Course

Austin Eckroat

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Austin Eckroat to the media center as the champion of the 2024 Cognizant Classic in the Palm Beaches. Can you share where you are emotionally right now and your excitement to have a win under your belt.

AUSTIN ECKROAT: I'm really not sure how I feel yet. I haven't really settled down. But just super excited and been waiting for this moment my whole life, and I don't really have a whole lot of words for it right now. But super excited.

Q. This win gets you to No. 17 in the FedExCup. It gets you into the remaining Signature Events and the Masters. I know you're excited about some of those upcoming events. Can you share what you're looking forward to next?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, I'm looking forward to this afternoon and evaluating my schedule and seeing what the rest of the season is going to hold. It's just a great opportunity upcoming with what the win does for me. The job security I gain from that, as well. There's a lot that this got for me.

Q. Kind of a unique situation having to finish on a Monday, sit on a lead for two days. What did you spend yesterday evening doing as you prepped for this?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: I ate some dinner and then basically went to bed. There wasn't really a whole lot of time in between the delay and then I had to get up early this morning and come right back out. Luckily there wasn't a whole lot of time to think.

I was just trying to keep myself distracted. I played some Sudoku on my phone, and that was it.

Q. Obviously I'm sure you wanted to birdie 10, you don't get that, and suddenly some guys are right in the mix. How big were the birdies on 12 and 13 to steady you?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, those were definitely the biggest birdies. Missing the one on 10, you're kind of feeling like you lost a shot. I wasn't quite sure what the guys behind me were doing yet. I hadn't really looked at that many scoreboards at that point. But once I saw the leaderboard and made the birdies on 12 and 13, I knew I had a reasonable lead.

Those are just very important for getting a little cushion before getting to the Bear Trap.

Q. Talking to your dad, he was telling me about you guys playing all the way back when you were five, six years old, and he's stayed a big part of your pro career. What has his impact been on getting you to this point?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, he's the one that got me involved in the game. He's been my swing instructor since. I'm the second most excited person in the world right now. He's definitely the first. It's just been our dream, his and mine together, since I was three, playing professional golf and winning on the PGA TOUR. It's just a dream come true for both of us.

Q. I'm sure most professionals envision this most, the first championship. What were those visions like for you, and does this live up to that?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Oh, for sure it lives up to the -- the first win. You can't really visualize what it will be messing around when you're a kid on the putting green having putts to win PGA TOUR events and win the Masters and stuff like that.

But coming into today, I've been in this situation before at the Byron Nelson where I had a lead. I didn't really know what to expect what the feeling would be. I knew finishing second was heartbreaking. I'm not real sure. I still don't think I'm sure how I feel yet. I know I'm excited. That's it.

Q. What was the most nerve-racking shot? I ask because yesterday Erik van Rooyen said if he was within two shots as the leaders were on 15, he'd come



back, knowing what the Bear Trap can do. I know you had a birdie in there, but what was the most nerve-racking shot or moment?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: I think 15 with where the wind direction was and the number I had, it wasn't that uncomfortable for me at that moment to where if I would have been struggling with my ball-striking, I think that would have been really -- but having to hit 3-wood today on 16, I didn't really love the idea of that because I'd been hitting 3-iron all week, and then the wind direction was different this morning, it was into the win, so I felt like I needed to hit 3-wood, and that was just a little uncomfortable.

But definitely the shot on 17. 17 is the scariest tee shot I think of the year. It's a tough one.

Q. 17-under is the best score for a player to win this event on this tournament ever. It has a reputation as a tough challenge for professional golfers. Why do you think you were able to go out and score so well this week?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: I drove the golf ball really well and I hit the irons really well. From tee to green I was able to stay out of trouble, and I think that's the hard part about this golf course is there's so much trouble, you're bound to make a double. You're bound to hit a ball in the water and have a disaster on a hole, but I avoided that all week. Really outside of that, it's not like I was just going out and making six birdies in a row. It was just very simple, birdieing every once in a while. I just kept the game simple. That was really all.

Q. There were a lot of guys at 10-under and better. Were you taking note of that on the leaderboard?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, I look at leaderboards when I'm playing. I'm not afraid to look at them. I noticed there was guys close, and when I was on 15, I saw that Min Woo Lee had gotten it to 14-under, and I think he was at 14 or maybe he was at 15. I saw what he was at, and I knew I wasn't clear then. But there was a lot of guys still in the event, especially with the Bear Trap upcoming. It was great to pull away.

Q. You looked cool and calm throughout that stretch. Is that how you felt on the inside?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: No. No. I was shaking in my boots from the moment I got out here this morning. Just tried to keep a calm demeanor. I think I do pretty well at that in all aspects, whether I'm playing bad or good. But I definitely didn't feel calm on the inside. That's for sure.

Q. Is that something you actively think about, staying calm, staying even keel? Your dad said you definitely don't get that from him. Is that something you're working on on the golf course or is it something about your personality that just comes natural?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: I think that's just something about my personality. It just comes natural. I'm that way in everyday life, not just on the golf course. Just pretty stoic, never too high, never too low. I think it's a blessing in golf, though.

Q. In the fall we featured you on "The Turn." I just wanted to get your thoughts on how far you've come since then and what that journey has been like.

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, I really enjoyed being on "The Turn." It was fun to -- not many people probably knew who I was whenever it came to the PGA TOUR. It was cool to have a spotlight on me for a little bit.

I think it definitely helped with situations like this today. I had cameras on me all day today, and last fall I had them following me around for a whole fall season.

It's a little uncomfortable the first time you do that, so I'm super excited that I was able to have that opportunity.

Q. Just talk about what the journey has been like since then.

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, obviously I was in a situation last fall where I was trying to get into those elevated events and made sure I maintained my PGA TOUR status. Obviously I think I missed all but one cut during that Fall Series, and to be a winner not six months later, it's insane. It's a big jump.

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