

AIG Women's Open

Press Conference

Sunday, 7 August 2022

Ashleigh Buhai



OLIVIA McMILLAN: Ladies and gentlemen, it's my great pleasure to welcome the 2022 AIG Women's Open Champion, Ashleigh Buhai.

Ashleigh, congratulations. Can you explain to us just how you're feeling right now?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: A little overwhelmed to be honest. You know, trying to take a breath, but obviously fantastic to win this championship, the AIG Women's Open, it's a dream come true.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Can you explain to us how you were feeling throughout that playoff?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I was fairly calm to be honest, just tried to focus on what I was doing. I couldn't control anything else but I knew it was going to be tough.

Obviously In Gee is a major champion, and I knew I had to go out and win it. I mean, 18 played so tough the whole week, so it was going to be a grind and then it started to get cold and windier.

But I was just very proud of how I managed to stay focused on myself and try to do what I needed to do.

Q. I think we need to know what you were talking from 15 green to 16 tee.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Not too much to be honest. I was just like, okay, it is what it is. Get back in it. You know, yeah, I mean, it's probably the worst swing I made all week. Was a little quick on the top. But if I had half a lie in that bunker, a plug off the drive, I could have got it out the other way in the fairway. Obviously compounded the mistake.

I didn't panic, which I thought was huge, and just tried to make a good swing on the next and just try to make good swings coming in to give myself a chance.

And then obviously ran my putt past on 18 a little bit but holed a great par to keep myself in the playoff.

Q. Obviously great South African success here in the

past with Gary Player and Ernie Els. How does it feel to follow in their footsteps?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: It's a huge honour. To follow those two greats, two of my idols growing up, and for us to play here for the first time at Muirfield, making history, I'm very, very honoured and very, very proud to be South African right now.

Q. What advice had your husband given you before he went out?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Just do me, be me and stay in the moment.

He's so supportive. He caddied for me for eight years and he's been very successful himself. He now caddies for Jeongeun Lee6. I saw him for the first time when he got there for the back nine, and he obviously just told me to keep doing what I was doing and stay in the moment.

Q. I mean, you say you kept very calm but I don't know whether he did?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: No, I think he was way more nervous than I was. In this championship in 2019 at Woburn, he missed the cut and he was carrying a backpack around full of beers to keep himself calm.

It's always harder for those watching. I think when you're in the moment, you have the control, so you're a lot calmer than they are.

Q. You just said earlier that you stayed very calm after 15. Is that indicative of your mood throughout the whole week and explains your success?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I think so. You know, it was very easy to panic and probably come home in an ambulance. But I was just like, I saw the leaderboard walking up 17 -- no, on 16 I think, and was just like, okay, just hit it. Have a good swing. You can only control this shot. Hit this shot now at the time.

I hit a really good bunker shot on 17. Hit the putt where I wanted to. That's all I could do, just a little bit of a misread.



To play 18 the way I did, but so many times over and to hit that tee shot, it's a tough tee shot. So I was just very happy with how I managed the situation.

Q. Have you any idea where that came from? Is that something recent? Your experience with leads in the past has not ended in victory, so is there a lesson that you learned that was key?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, I mean, like I said, I started working with a sports psychologist, mental coach, someone called Duncan McCarthy in February this year, and if you told me in February this year that I would be sitting here, I would never have believed you with the mental state I was in to be honest.

I had been swinging good for a long time and could no keep myself in the moment. He's given me the tools, we say, to stay in the moment, and all I can control, and stay away from outcome. We get so lost in what can happen, and sure, it's easy to drift and you're going to go there, but as long as you bring yourself back, it's fine.

Q. Your drives down 18, the same shape each time, all perfect, really. Were you surprised that you did that and did you do it during the four rounds of the tournament as well?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, I hit that fairway every day. It favours me. I fade the ball, wind off the right. I call it my little bunch shot, put the ball back in my stance and I just hit it low. I hit that shot so well the whole week except for on 15. That was the only bad drive I really hit all week.

But yeah, I just try to, like I said, my thought this week was 40 per cent to the top because that kept my rhythm and then everything else falls into place. As long as I have soft hands and 40 per cent to the top, then I felt I was in control.

Q. All week you were very consistent and very steady. Did you make any club changes or throughout the week?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: No, no club changes at all. I tried a lower bounce 60-degree, but it didn't quite work. I tried it last week, and stuck with my setup that I have.

Q. Could you talk about just the journey of your career? You turned pro in '08 -- hello, friend, congratulations to you, too (husband David Buhai enters room). You had won professional events as an amateur but now 2022 and you're finally getting this big LPGA and major win. Could you just talk about your journey and the patience?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: It's been a long journey. You know, like you said I turned pro when I was 18. I was kind of expected -- there was a lot of things expected of me. I won straight off the bat on the Ladies European Tour. But this game has a way of giving you a hard time.

I'm just so proud of how I've stuck it out. I have said the last four or five years, I've finally started to find my feet on the LPGA and felt I could compete, and although I'm 33 now, I feel I'm playing the best golf of my career.

It's been a long journey, but man, it's all worth it right now.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: I'd like to wish you congratulations again on winning the AIG Women's Open. Thank you very much for joining us.

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