

AIG Women's Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 8 August 2023

Ashleigh Buhai



OLIVIA McMILLAN: Welcome to the AIG Women's Open, I'm delighted to be joined by our defending champion, Ashleigh Buhai for the first press conference of the year.

Obviously a slightly different setup this year, but same goes, if you would like to ask a question, please raise your hand and we'll get a microphone to you.

How does it feel to come back to the championship as the defending champion? Lots of good memories, I'm sure.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Of course, it's fantastic to be back. Just a whirlwind of a year, all the memories come flooding back from this past year and obviously truly honoured to be back as defending champion.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: You joined us yesterday with some junior golfers in the fantastic Fan Festival Village. How was that to be able to join the juniors on the first day?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: It was so much fun. Obviously what they have done at the Festival Village, it's what we need to do to bring the new generation into the game, make it fun and enjoyable, and with everything else that they have got set up, food and big screens, that if people want to take a break from watching the golf, they can go over there and get to see it while getting a drink and something to eat.

Q. Could you go back to how your parents reacted to your win?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: So I've managed -- they were back home in South Africa. And we live in like a gated community in South Africa and they wanted to watch by themselves originally. My mom's brother said, "No, I'm coming to watch with you."

By the time the playoff came, there was like 20 people from the community in the house who were watching together. Obviously when it all went down, they were just very emotional and obviously very happy.

But I only got to speak to them about 12 o'clock that night because we finished so late, and by the time I got back to everything, I got to speak to them, which obviously just

elated and it's great they are here this week to watch me defend.

Q. When you had time to talk to them, what did they recall from your childhood? They are bound to say, We knew all along that you were going to do this.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: My dad said something along those lines. Obviously they have always believed in me and supported me. I think still at that point, it was a bit chaotic. We had a lot of people around us in the players clubhouse, so I only got to chat to them for about five minutes. It wasn't until the next day where it really sunk in what had happened and we got to have a celebration.

Q. Can you pick out a moment from your childhood that he said he knew that's how good you were going to be?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: There's a story goes, my grade two teacher called my parents in because I wasn't quite keeping up-to-date with my schoolwork. And we were sitting there and my dad is going, "Well, Ash" -- I just loved every sport growing up and I played everything, hockey, cricket, soccer, tennis.

My dad is like, "Why are you good at this sport? Why are you good at that sport?"

I said, "Well, because I practise."

He said, "Well, same thing with school, you've got to do it."

I said, "Well, I can get everything get everything out of my head but golf. I just want to be a professional golfer," and that was I guess in grade two.

So that was the point my dad was like, okay, we can either choose to support it or think that this is just going to be a phase in their life but lucky for me they chose to support me, about seven, eight years old.

Q. How much confidence do you take from last year coming into this week?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Huge amount. I feel any time I step into a tournament, if my game is there, it's what happened



last year has given me the confidence to believe that I can win if I'm playing well, and that's proven over the last year what I've been able to do. Since obviously it's very difficult to defend, we all know this, there's a lot of pressure but I'm trying not to put pressure on myself.

I'm trying to just enjoy being back here, being defending champion, and once I get out there on Thursday, not think about the outcome as we spoke about and just try and control what I can in my golf swing once I'm out on the course.

Q. Just to that point, what have you been working on in preparation in the buildup to this week and in the early part of this week as well?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: My coach in South Africa made a few little touches yesterday. The good thing is because we have been working together so long, nothing is ever major. I just kind of need a feel and once I feel -- once I have that feel, I've been going.

So I'm hoping that we found it yesterday. We'll go out there today and see if it's stayed overnight. If I can take that feel into the week, then hopefully I will be able to compete.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Can I just ask you, what were your first thoughts of Walton Heath when you played yesterday?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: So I played nine yesterday. I played the back nine. Very demanding off the tee. The fairways are generous but if you do miss them, obviously you're in the heather.

And I don't know what those little purple flowers are for but you don't want to be in those. I said to my coach, "If you're a weekly member here and you don't hit it straight, I think you lose a lot of golf balls."

So it's going to be demanding. It played quite long yesterday. I hit some 7-woods in. Greens are a lot bigger than that I thought. We can have a lot of pin placements, and especially if they are at the back, you've got to just make sure that you are diligent and hit it into the right spots on the greens.

Q. Can I just take you back to the playoff last year? What was going through your mind as you had to keep going first hole, second hole, third hole, what was going through your mind at that point?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: The same thing that I just try to do every day to be honest. I got up over every shot, and last year, my feel was to keep my temper, especially with the

wind 40 per cent, and again that's all I tried to control and whatever happened after that, I just let it happen.

And I think that's why, you know, after what happened at 15, like I said, I looked at the leaderboard and it was like, well, I had not lost the lead. I think that's why I was able to stand up over every shot and just commit to that one thought and not get ahead of myself.

Q. Sorry for all the questions. But you seem so much more confident than you were in an interview situation. It may have been that you were so excited last year, but now you could keep talking for hours, couldn't you.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: If you say so, I don't know. With winning, confidence comes with everything. No matter what situation you're in, and the more you're in it, the better you get at it. Maybe that's it.

Q. Do you enjoy the conferences now?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, of course. I always have when I'm been in a winning situation or in contention because it means you're doing something well and there's a reason why you're here.

Q. How old were you when you made your first winner's speech?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: 11.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: You alluded to earlier about how hard it is to defend a title. Obviously we have just watched Celine win back-to-back weeks, which is incredible. I guess can you reflect from a player's point of view just how remarkable that achievement is?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: It really is remarkable. You know, because the energy that it takes out of you to win a golf tournament is a lot. When I won at ShopRite this year, I played well the next week, and I was second last group I think going into my -- you know, I was within touching distance and had a chance to maybe go two weeks in a row but mentally, physically, it drains you.

So it's always very impressive when somebody can go back-to-back weeks to win.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Thank you so much for your time, and we wish you the best of luck this week.

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