

NW Arkansas Championship

Sunday, August 30, 2020

Rogers, Arkansas, USA

Pinnacle Country Club

Austin Ernst

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Okay, welcome to our 2020 Walmart NW Arkansas Championship final press conference with winner Austin Ernst.

Without further ado, Austin, how do you feel after those three days?

AUSTIN ERNST: I feel great. I mean, it hasn't fully sunk in, but to get my second win out here, I always knew that I could win more than one. To actually do it means a lot.

And to shoot 20-under in three days I played unbelievable golf. I'm just so happy that I got the win.

THE MODERATOR: You've played well here before. What was it about this year and the course conditions that made the overall experience different?

AUSTIN ERNST: I've always liked the look of the golf course. I've always felt like I putt well on the greens. I grew up on bentgrass, and that's what they have here.

I think just coming into the week knowing that I was playing so well and then obviously hitting really good iron shots all week. I had a lot of really good looks at birdie and I made a lot of about putts.

But I think just having that confidence from the last four weeks and knowing my game was trending in the right direction, and then shooting 65 the first day just kind of solidified it.

The golf course, I don't think I could like it any more.

THE MODERATOR: You said it: the strategy is to try and get as many birdies or even better out here.

What do you think is the strongest part of your game right now? Would you say it's short game? The long game?

AUSTIN ERNST: I would say right now it's my iron play. I'm hitting my putts right where I'm looking as well, so I would say my putting is up there, too. But I hit a lot of

greens, and I hit it close a lot, which is what you really need to do, especially on a week like this where there are so many birdies. You have to have good looks at birdies.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned this is your second win on the LPGA Tour. First one was in 2014 at the Cambia and it's coming up in a couple weeks. What are you thinking now that you have this win in the bag?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think now my confidence is just going to keep growing. I know that my game is good enough to win again. I've done it multiple times. I've finished second a lot. To kind of play well two weeks in a row where the conditions were so different -- played really well last week at the AIG Women's Open, and then obviously that course was much firmer, much more difficult, kind of completely different than this week.

And then to come into this week and see that I can go really low, I think that's just going to give me a ton of confidence for the rest of year. Obviously when we go to Portland, and then even in two weeks when we go to ANA.

THE MODERATOR: And it's crazy to think we had time off, about six months, before all this. How would you say that you used that time off to really strengthen your game?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think one thing I did, I took time off at the beginning where I basically treated it like it was going to be an off-season. I took about three or four weeks off where I kind of -- I almost lost my desire to go practice a little bit at the beginning of it.

I think it was one of those things where I was a little burnt out, and this gave me a great break to come back rejuvenated and have something that I want to work on. I had kind of lost my confidence last year, and to take that break and to take that time where I got to just kind of decompress away from golf, which I've never really been able to do. We have a few weeks here and there in the off-season that you can take off, but to be able to take off that nice long break and then want to come back, know what I needed to work on, and then also just work on my confidence as I came back.

I played a lot of golf. I had a lot of people that I played golf with and gambled with, and that probably helped a little bit, too. Even though we weren't playing tournament golf, I got



to put a little bit of pressure on myself and I had something -- a putt meant something instead of just going out and playing by myself and not having that five-footer on the last hole mean anything.

THE MODERATOR: And when did you -- you said that your brother, Drew, is on the bag. When did you start getting into that competitive golf mentality?

AUSTIN ERNST: I kind of had it starting in May. I really started playing a lot in May. Played a lot through June. What, we started in July, August? I don't even know now.

THE MODERATOR: Yeah, July. No, August, August.

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, so when we started I kind of knew, Okay, my game is trending in the right direction. I played a lot of golf, which I think helped my confidence, knowing what shots I was comfortable hitting on the course and not just kind of beating balls.

Then with Drew, really we started at Inverness, but that's the easy part. We do such a good job working together that I kind of told him, Hey, I'm going to take a little bit more the reins on stuff. I'll tell you I like this shot more, and we really talked about the shot shape that I was going to hit.

Where in the past I might've got a little lazy and said, Oh, I'll hit this shot and not really commit to the shot shape. I kind of knew, Okay, I'm hitting a little fade now. I'm going to play the fade and kind of figure out early in the week do I have the draw? Do I not? If I don't, just stay away from trying to hit that shot.

THE MODERATOR: This is your seventh LPGA event this year with your last best performance last week at the AIG Women's Open. Like you said, your game is heading in the right direction.

What do you think you're going to do in the next week that we have a break to get ready for ANA?

AUSTIN ERNST: I'll take couple days off. I mean, I've played all five weeks, and obviously going to Scotland and coming back I'm a little bit tired. I'll just keep doing the same stuff.

I know the golf course at ANA. I know what to expect, what clubs I'm going to hit in. I'll just keep working on my putting, keep working on my speed, putts inside ten feet, and driving the ball in the fairway, and more long irons. I know I'll have more long irons than a usual week at ANA.

But it's just really kind of keep building on what I've been doing well.

THE MODERATOR: And just curious, what's the best way for you to relax? Cooking or going out and just spending some time away from social media and all things cell phone related, or is it watching Netflix?

AUSTIN ERNST: Tournament weeks it's more watching TV, Netflix. It's nice this year. My boyfriend is traveling with me a lot, so we've been able to cook a little bit. We've been able to just kind of relax in the hotel and not do a whole lot.

We started playing pickleball a lot, which has been a lot of fun. So that's another thing that's kind of nice to get out of the hotel room when you're kind of stuck for a while. I'm sure we'll do a little bit of that.

We're going to go see my family in South Carolina, so it'll be nice to be able to celebrate the win with them. I haven't seen them since June, maybe end of May.

So everybody -- I was excited to see everybody and I know they were excited to see me. I think everybody is a little bit more excited now.

THE MODERATOR: Yay. Questions.

Q. Congratulations.

AUSTIN ERNST: Thank you.

Q. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what it was like to win so early in your career and if that kind of set up expectations, and kind of how frustrating it must have been to wait that long for the next win.

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, the win came in my second season. I think was 22. It definitely -- I had high expectations for myself to begin with, and I think probably other people's expectations grew a little bit.

But it was very frustrating. I had finished second I think every year from 2015 to 2018. Every single season. So it was frustrating to get so close and not get a win when I knew that I could win.

But at the same time, I always had that experience to go back on and know, Okay, if I just keep putting myself in this situation I can win.

I think definitely every year I'd pretty much gotten better except for last year. That one I made a lot of cuts but I wasn't in contention at all. That was the toughest part, because I knew that my game was so good and that I had

had such a good year in 2018.

To come back, that kind of just mounted the frustrations. But it's a little bit of a weight off my shoulders to get this win, but I also think it's going to be more of a springboard than maybe in '14.

Obviously I played good golf after that, but I never got that second win. I think now having two wins seems so much more solid than just having one. You can almost -- people might say it's a fluke if they won once. Now I've solidified that, and I think my game is trending in the direction.

Hopefully I can put myself in contention a lot more and get more than just two wins.

Q. I have a follow-up if you don't mind. You said that in the off-season you worked a lot on your putting and chipping.

Is your dad still your coach?

AUSTIN ERNST: He is.

Q. Okay.

AUSTIN ERNST: Now he does everything with my game, ball striking and putting.

Q. Okay. Cool. And so what kind of changes did you make? You went from a blade to mallet. Any other -- I mean, that's a pretty big change in itself. Did you make any other changes?

AUSTIN ERNST: I completely change the putter. I changed the grip. Now I have the Super Stroke grip on it. I went to cross-handed.

Q. Okay.

AUSTIN ERNST: I was conventional before. I pretty much completely revamped what I was doing with my putting. And then this week, obviously since last week I was on TV and my dad got to see a little bit more, he noticed that I was a little bit more upright and my hands were a little behind the ball last week.

So the quick adjustment this week was, okay, feel like your hands are just forward of the ball and bend from the waist just slightly more. So that little adjustment seemed like the ball started on line more and the contact was more consistent.

So that's one where it benefited me from playing so well last week, that even though I haven't had a check-in with

my dad in a long time he could notice that.

Q. Yeah, he was able to see. Thank you. Congratulations again.

AUSTIN ERNST: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We have the opportunity to check our scores. Did you at all want to check your scores today and did you utilize the ability to check the leaderboard?

AUSTIN ERNST: I never checked it. Drew said he knew on 13 the Mike guy told him something, but he wasn't sure if it was accurate because my bogey on 13 wasn't posted yet.

I didn't really want to know. I knew that I needed to just keep making birdies, and I kind of thought if I knew where I stood I might kind of subconsciously let off the gas a little bit.

So I just wanted to keep making as many birdies as possible and keep getting -- I was kind of just playing like I was behind the whole time. Even if I had the lead, okay, they have one more hole. If it's Anna or Nelly or Sei Young, and just trying to feel like I could not make enough birdies today.

THE MODERATOR: And my last question: what are you most looking forward to doing in terms of just relaxing and celebrating your win?

AUSTIN ERNST: Man, I don't know. It's going to be nice to have a week off. I have a boat on Lake Kiwi, so maybe we'll go out there the in the next few days. But I'm just looking forward to celebrating this win with my family and friends. I think my last win I didn't celebrate nearly as much as I should have.

THE MODERATOR: Oh, what did you do?

AUSTIN ERNST: I still celebrated with my friends and family, but I think I thought the next win would come so much quicker than it did that I didn't fully celebrate that win and it was more, Okay, we have more events to play.

It's nice having a week off where I can celebrate this win and then feel like when I go to ANA that now it's back to business because I got celebrate, I got to see everyone.

I think I'm just really looking forward to seeing everyone and getting to celebrate with the whole family.

THE MODERATOR: Well we're grateful for your time today. Thank you so much, and congratulations again.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

AUSTIN ERNST: Thank you.

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