

Freed Group Women's Scottish Open

Wednesday, August 2, 2023

Troon, Scotland, UK

Dundonald Links

Ashleigh Buhai

Press Conference

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Very happy to be back and playing in this golf event.

THE MODERATOR: Just being in Europe for you, I know how much you've enjoyed not only playing in LET events but also the LPGA, and now coming back to this part of the world as a major champion, does that give you a sense of confidence? Does it feel any different from last year?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Maybe a little bit. Obviously coming back to a tournament and to a country where you've had great memories, had great memories before last year, too.

But I always love coming to play links golf. There's something about it. You have to be creative. You just have to figure it out, especially when the wind blows, you don't have to strike it. You just have to be very smart.

THE MODERATOR: We talked about the fact that you really embraced being the AIG Women's Open Champion last year and taking the trophy to almost every event. We saw it at ShopRite on the green with you. What's it like, knowing that -- I don't want to say coming into an end -- because you have the chance to successfully defend, of course, but to have the year you've had with the trophy and as the AIG Women's Open Champion, what's that been like for you?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: It's been fun. Every time you take it somewhere and see people that you haven't seen and know your journey and your story, you get to relive that moment.

As I said, you know, when you're in the moment and it's happening, I don't think you really take it in. It only hits you a few days after, and every time I reminisce with people and that you realise what you were able to achieve.

THE MODERATOR: Dundonald is also a special course in Scotland. Being back here, have you been able to play some practise rounds?



ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I played it when we used to play LET events here. It's not a new course to me. I played nine holes on each side. Obviously with the weather and conditions they have had, it's so green. I think it's the softest I've ever played a links course.

So that's taken some adjusting, especially into the greens. You're playing for that downwind and waiting for it to release and it only releases when you -- quarter six (ph) and you're used to it realising it's double that. Mentally, that's some adjusting but hopefully the wind can pick up and dry it out a little bit.

THE MODERATOR: Going into the European swing, you've already become a 2023 champion at the ShopRite LPGA Classic. What's the last couple months been like for you, and what have you been focused on on your work on the golf course?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Actually, the last year, if you said I'd win a few times around the world, I'd say, you'd be lying to me.

But obviously what I learnt at the AIG, that I can do it, first of all, and every time I step up into a tournament that if I have my best, I know I can win. That's a great confidence booster.

And even last week, my ball-striking was my B Game and I even said to my coach and caddie, to still be able to finish top 20 at a major and not feel like I hit it well, I can take confidence in that paragraph par again, it's looking at positives in another way instead of being, oh, I hit the ball badly and didn't have the week I wanted to; well, how can we improve last week's performance.

THE MODERATOR: Including yourself, we've got the last five major champions in this week's field. How impressive is that to know, to come into Scotland and this event, and really represent the Women's Scottish Open?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I think it's fantastic. I think it's so important for me personally to play this tournament the week heading into the AIG, especially playing links golf. I know next week is not completely links but there will be



some firmness to it. To have us all here is fantastic.

Q. What you learned in this year, you also learned that you could play in the dark. You were there until eleven o'clock at night. When you were lining up your bunker shot at the last, were you thinking you wish you could see better?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Honestly the first time it was dark was the third hole, the playoff hole, and when I said to myself, I had a pretty long putt and I said, you used to do this as a kid. It literally took me back to when I was putting in the dark as a kid. This is what we do.

As a kid, we don't care. We used to play out there until the sun actually went down. So don't let it affect you now. Those are the thoughts that came to me.

Yeah, I didn't really think of it on the bunker shot because I felt we could still see relatively well.

Q. You've had an unbelievable year as a major champion. Could you talk about how are you feeling going into a major defending after such a strong year?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, definitely, my goal is for it to be not a first and not a one-off. I wanted it to be the start of something to kick off. To be honest I think a lot of people thought, oh, 33, one hit wonder a little bit. Had a pretty consistent career just didn't really get over line on the LPGA.

But that gave me the confidence to believe, and when I got in that situation, it gave me the belief that when I'm under pressure, I can pull it off.

So every time I've been in that situation, especially in Australia, it came down to the last few holes again. It's like, okay, just stay calm and keep doing the one thing you're trying to do that week.

Again, it comes to sticking to those things and not veering and not thinking of the outcome. Get the job done and then you can think about them.

Q. Has there ever been a time in -- how many years since you started?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I've been pro 16 years now.

Q. Any period in which you thought, I've had enough of golf?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: No. The problem is, I'm a golfaholic. I'm a golf nerd. I don't know if that's a problem or a good

thing. A lot of people would have said, no, after ten years, I've had enough.

But that's never been because I just love doing what I do. Surely there's been times in the game where I've said -- it's who you surround yourself with. My coach, my parents, husband, caddie, everybody else, they always still believed in me when maybe I didn't believe in myself as much. I think it's so important to have a support system around you.

But never did I think, okay, I'm done, and I think it's because I really do love what I do.

Q. Do you think other kids will benefit from having parents that encouraged them?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Oh, of course, it's such a fine line between encouraging and pushing, and my parents have never had to push me. My dad would encourage me, sure and would say, if you want to get better, you need to putt in the work. It was never, go do this, go do that.

It always came from me, and I think that's also why I've had the longevity. I look back now when I started on the LET, not many of my friends that I started with are now playing. They get to a point -- and you do, you get to a point in your career, that I haven't quite achieved and is this when I really want? And especially as a female, there are families and other things that I want to achieve. I'm just so glad that I never had that and I kept pushing.

Q. Do you think some of these friends at least have parents who would say, come along, you need to practise more and get quite harsh?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I don't think so. Most of my friends, no. I think we were all pretty lucky how we grew up and the support we had.

Q. Is that your country?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Maybe. All my friend were pretty much southern hemisphere Australians or English girls. We played amateur golf together and started off in Europe together. I don't know, maybe it's just the background and where we all come from.

Q. Obviously this is a co-sanctioned event, coming back to this sort of kind tour, is that quite nostalgic?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Very much because I do still have some friends from the LET, and particularly a lot of the South African girls, on the LPGA, it's only myself and Paula. All my friends I grew up with, they are all playing an

the LET. For me it's fun coming back to catch up.

**Q. Are you doing anything different for next week?
How are you preparing?**

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Nothing is changing. I always like to play the week before a major. It kind of gets the rust off, and unfortunately with the way the schedule has been, I couldn't do that before U.S. Open and Evian, and it definitely showed.

So I'm glad I've got two weeks going into the AIG Women's Open. I'm not changing a lot next week. A lot of it for me is going to be about managing my time. There's going to be a lot of responsibilities and I need to make sure I can do that but as well put aside the time that needs to be to get my work done.

I'll definitely take it all in and enjoy the fact that I'm defending champion.

Q. Obviously haven't seen you since your win in South Africa. What was it like reflecting on that and how much confidence did that give you going into the LPGA season?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Winning in South Africa was huge for me. It feels almost the hardest because there's so much pressure on me. I wanted to win it so bad. I wanted to win -- I wanted to hold all three trophies at the same time, the Australian and South African Open.

I put a lot of pressure on myself that week, so to get it done in the style that I did and play such good golf, especially coming after two difficult tournaments in Asia that were so hard and challenging.

But I also feel like it's almost anticlimactic, my last two wins, I haven't really been able to enjoy because you have to get straight back into it.

I spoke to my sports psychologist feeling about like you had to just get on to the next week, and sometimes we're not ready; take a step back and realise what you've done.

Q. What's it like having to adjust to the different grasses and courses and why do you think you do it so well?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I think because of my coach to be honest. I've been with him for 13 years. He's given me the tools and all the different shots. It's no secret I have played well -- ShopRite I played like that, Australia I played like that, South Africa. It's because I like to be creative and flight the ball a lot. But it's thanks to him, we've got my golf

swing to be able to suit all styles of courses.

THE MODERATOR: You have a knack for winning geographic Opens, it seems like in the past year. What would it mean for you to be successful on a course like Dundonald and in Scotland?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, kind of the joke was we needed to just put Open this every tournament, but finally winning ShopRite, we broke through that. It would be very special. Any one would be special. We'll just see what happens this week. It's a long way to go.

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