

Cambia Portland Classic

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Portland, Oregon, USA

The Oregon Golf Club

Austin Ernst

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, here with Austin Ernst. You have great memories of the Cambia Portland Classic. Earned your first LPGA Tour win in 2014. What are your biggest memories of that week and that first breakthrough win?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, I played well all week, and then I think I was probably four or five groups ahead of the leaders and I got off to a great start. Birdied -- I think probably 4-under through six holes, 4-under through seven holes, and just played really solid front nine and kind of took the lead into the back and played well.

Ended up making a couple bogeys on the last two holes and beat I.K. in the playoff on the first playoff hole. Yeah, that win was so special to me. It took me a little longer than I thought to get the second one, but it was always one I could look back on, and just have memories of good shots and good putts coming down the stretch.

It's always special to come back here. It's a little because first time I haven't played Columbia Edgewater for it. This golf course is a little different. Not nearly as tree-lined, a little bit wider off the tee, and way hillier, a way different walk for sure.

Q. You mentioned it took you longer than you expected to get the next win. It was, what, five years? But then you've had two wins in the last year. I know every win is special in its own way, but did the last two wins become more special given how hard you know you've worked for them?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, I think I appreciated it a little bit more than I probably did back in 2014. When I won in Arkansas in '20 I was like, All right, I'm going to celebrate the crap out of this one. And obviously I won in Ocala at the Drive ON at the beginning of this year.

I think you definitely, after there being that long of a stretch, I think I just enjoyed the wins a little bit more than maybe at 22. I kind of thought I would rack up a lot in a hurry and I was in contention a lot, but never really got the job done

until Arkansas last year.

Q. What is the challenge of working through that, knowing you have it in you, but just not quite seeing it, but keeping yourself at it and knowing that victory, that success is out there?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think for me, I got better every year. I was a much better player in 2017 than 2014. Just kind of spoke to how much deeper the talent level got out here. So every year I felt like I was progressing and up until last year I thought my best year on tour, even though I didn't win was 2018. I had my most consistent year. Finished second I think twice that year, little things like that.

I think that's kind of what gets me going. I want to get better every year, every week. I obviously want to win and I want to have a lot of success, but I think if I can look back and say I'm a better player than I was last year, that also gives me confidence that I will be in contention and that I can get the job done when I am in that position.

Q. I would think mentally that has to help, because you set the levels of goals so that even though we all want to win, we all want to get the gold medal, you know where you're making progress.

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, exactly.

Q. Oregon Golf Club. You've been out here. You say it's different. We absolutely know it's different out here. The views are spectacular. Going to be a heck of a beast, heck of a walk. What do you think some of the challenges will be out there for you and Drew this week to get through the week?

AUSTIN ERNST: I mean, weather could definitely be a thing. Just if it's going to be cooler the wind is going to blow a little bit. Golf course is pretty long with where some the tees are, so, you know, like the first hole is a par-5 and it plays 600 yards with the uphill. It's into the wind today, too, so I hit a 6-iron for my third shot.

You get a little bit of that.

Then I think the greens have a lot speed to them, a lot of pace. The greens are relatively soft and receptive, but the fairways are also soft. I think as the week goes on you're



going to have some longer clubs in the colder and the wetter it gets.

I think the golf course is good. It's definitely got a few holes where you really need to pay attention where you hit your tee shot. Trees come into play in that way.

But I think with how fast the greens are you really need to watch your pace on the greens. I think that's really the key to the golf course, and it's definitely a second-shot golf course as far as hitting it in the right spot, so maybe you could be a little bit more aggressive with putts.

Q. This leads me into the next question perfectly. So just this week we rolled out our new KPMG Performance Insights. I know we've been gather this data over the season. If you look at the tour since LPGA MEDIHEAL, you're second in strokes gained on approach, just over two strokes. Does that sound about right to you? Do you feel like your approach game is a strength of your game?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, I've always felt that my iron play is where -- that's my strongest part of my game. Obviously being able to see that statistically and saying, okay, I'm second on tour in that since we started the stats, that reiterates that. That's one of those things I always know that's a strength of my game.

Typically when I drive and putt well that's when I'm at the top of leaderboard. But out here I definitely think that it is a ball-strikers' course just with how severe some of the greens and some of the -- even some of the fairways you're hitting off some awkward lies.

So I think ball-striking is definitely going to be a premium, especially with the weather.

Q. One hole I want to highlight is the final hole, 18, playing as a par-5, which is at Aon Risk Reward Challenge hole. What do you think we might see there this week knowing we could see a lot of swing if we have a tee moved up that puts it in a place where you could make eagle on the closing hole?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, I think a hazard goes on the left side of it and you've got a bunker that guards the front of the green. Yeah, if I can get the ball on the green you can definitely get a good look, but the green is not? That big.

Definitely need to kind of attack it. It's all going to depend where the pin is, how easy around the green is. You have a little bit of a bail-out to the right. There is a big slope over there. I don't think it'll come on the green, but you'll definitely have an easier chip kind of to the left side of the

green where you have a little bit more green to work with.

Yeah, you can definitely see an eagle if it doesn't pour.

Q. Overall we're coming to the end of the season on the Aon Risk Reward Challenge. I would think it's got to be pretty cool to have an opportunity like that where you're on equal footing for the guys. You're both playing for the same prize money and trying to do the same thing. What are your thoughts on getting some of that equality, seeing more of the stats come through, to really be able to put examples of why we do what we do out there for people?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think's awesome what Aon has done just stepping up and saying, We're gone do something for both but we're going to do something that's equal.

I think those holes, I would love to play those holes great and win \$1 million at the end of the year. It's not something you think about during the tournament, but I know they post that stuff around and you kind of look at it and say, Oh, okay.

No, I think it's really cool more that companies step up and give us equal footing with the guys.

Q. Last question from me: You've had week or 10 days now to reflect back on the week in Toledo. Overall another week that was the LPGA, good for women's golf, maybe certainly not the way Team USA wanted it to finish. What are your big takeaways from the week as you've had time to look back on the whole week there?

AUSTIN ERNST: I thought it was great for women's golf. I think Europe played great golf, and it really came down putting, and they made the putts they needed to and we didn't make as many unfortunately.

But I thought the fans, the crowds, were unbelievable. It was such a cool experience, and I got play in '17 and obviously getting to play this year on home soil again was unbelievable. I think the amount of support we got at Inverness was just so cool to see.

We were talking about it would be fun if every week we got this many people. I thought it was a great week to see so many young kids out, young girls, even in practice rounds getting to watch us, and hopefully want to do the same thing one day.

It was a great showcase of women's golf for the week.

Q. Welcome back to town.



AUSTIN ERNST: Thank you.

Q. Good to have you here. So adjusting to a new golf course this year, Oregon Golf Club. Obviously ya'll on tour playing new golf courses all the time. It's sort of the nature of being on tour. Can you speak a little bit about what the process is like for you to come here to a city that you won in and have to adjust to a new golf course? Do you enjoy that process of figuring out the nooks and crannies of a new golf course and mapping it all out?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, I think it's probably one of those things that for the younger girls, they're on a little bit more equal footing with us. Columbia Edgewater, I could play that place without playing a practice round and I would be fine. I know exactly where I want to hit the ball.

This week is a little harder on Drew because he had to go walk it and figure out some stuff. But I think it's still a good golf course. Definitely a little bit different. You know, I don't have those memories of good shots into these greens and that kind of stuff. I don't have the memories of those putts.

At the end of the day, it's still a good track and you can get around it, but it's definitely a little bit different. I prepare a little bit differently than I would for Columbia Edgewater.

Q. Totally. 1-0 in playoffs in your career professionally. Pretty good record. Can you take us back to Portland Classic 2014 when you won in a playoff, especially after coming off a couple bogeys like you said earlier? Can you speak to what your mindset was like going into that playoff? Did anything change for sure you going into that one hole? Do you get fired up or do you sort calm down in those sort of environments?

AUSTIN ERNST: I would say a little bit of both. I get fired up but I know how to calm myself down.

No, my mindset didn't change really all day. All day I had the goal of going low and winning the tournament. I would say it was a little different because I knew I was going to play 18 as many times as it took, so I had a little bit of time and I could good over and I could hit driver.

I knew I had hit 7-iron during the round, okay, I'm probably going to hit a 7-iron in when we play the playoff hole. I knew where they had the pin and how the golf course was playing that week. It was really firm and that pin was nearly impossible to get it right next to. I knew I would probably have about a 30-footer, and I remember I hit a

great tee shot, hit a great second shot to about 25 feet and I thought I made the putt, but I hit it foot and a half by; went and tapped it in and I came about a 10-footer for par.

But no, my mindset doesn't really change. I'm going to be aggressive. I'm an aggressive player kind of by nature. That's when I play my best.

So I kind of knew what I needed to do and it didn't really matter what she did. I was going to stick to what I knew would help me in the end.

Q. Like you said earlier, it's a second-shot golf course, shot makers's golf course. With your aggressive tendencies, do you have rein it in a little bit or are you still going full steam ahead knowing a miss is penal out here?

AUSTIN ERNST: Oh, depending on what clubs I have in my hand is how aggressive I get. I'm aggressive to targets. If I can't be aggressive to a flag then I'll be aggressive to a target that might be a little bit away from the flag.

But you can definitely use some slopes out here as well. So you definitely have couple of backboards on some greens and some side slopes where you can work it in that way.

Q. Is there a stretch of holes in particular you're looking forward to or really think you can get after?

AUSTIN ERNST: Not really. That kind of depends on pins a lot of times, but off the top of my head I don't have a stretch where I'm circling and thinking, Oh, I have to make three birdies in these next four holes.

It's one of those places where if you hit quality shots you're going to have birdie looks the whole way around.

It's just you're going to have a couple holes where you're having longer clubs in.

Q. Now having played two different courses competitively in Portland, what would you say defines golf for you in this region and what do you enjoy about it?

AUSTIN ERNST: Well, before this golf course I had always played tree-lined courses in Oregon. I think you still get tall trees out here and you just get really pretty golf courses. This one is a little bit different. You get more mountain views, and Columbia Edgewater was pretty old school. You didn't have a ton of water. Didn't have a ton of walks between greens and tees. Everything was kind of right on top of it.

You had a lot of holes where they just kind of run parallel to each other. But I think you get really good greens out here. I think we play probably some of our purest and fastest greens out here, which I really enjoy. And then you just get just good solid golf courses.

Q. This is two big weeks for you. You're a past champ here, defending champ next week in Arkansas. What's the game plan this week and next week to make sure you're playing well but not wearing yourself out?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think it's just kind of setting aside time to kind of relax and decompress. This week I didn't come in until Monday night, so a shorter week for me, and then next week is a pretty easy week as far as on the golf course kind of knowing that golf course and having played it for my ninth year now.

Yeah, just setting aside time to relax and not get too exhausted and too I guess thrown around everywhere.

Q. Can you believe you've been out here for nine years?

AUSTIN ERNST: No. That makes me feel really old.

Q. You're not that old. Is this kind of the nine years you thought you might have had out here, or has it been a bit of a crazy ride?

AUSTIN ERNST: I don't know. They all fly by and you look back on the year -- I mean, even this year, it's gone so quick. Yeah, I've done it some of the things I wanted to do. I've not done some things I still would like to do.

So I still have that drive to keep getting better, and people ask me all the time if I have a number of years that I want to be out here, and age that I want to stop.

I don't. We'll just see how it goes.

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