

ShopRite LPGA Classic

Presented by Acer

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Galloway, New Jersey, USA

Seaview, A Dolce Hotel

Gianna Clemente

Maisie Filler

Ashleigh Buhai

Rachel Kuehn

Press Conference



then you also were with us at The ANNIKA. So same question: As you conclude your NCAA career with hopefully defending your national title and looking ahead to the LPGA Tour, how much do these opportunities mean to you as well?

RACHEL KUEHN: Yeah, I think they are invaluable. Every golfer dreams of getting to test your game against the world's best. I've been really fortunate to have a couple opportunities to do.

So I think kind of you've hit the nail on the head. As I kind of get ready, as amateur golf starts to come to an end, and I'm going to go to Q-School this fall and have goals of competing on the LPGA. It's really important for me to figure out where my game stands and what needs to improve in order to be able to compete week-in and week-out.

It's not very often that you get a chance to play against the best players in the world as an amateur. I really, really valued each of my opportunities to do so, and I'm really excited for the chance to do it again.

THE MODERATOR: Ashleigh, let's talk about last year's win and looking ahead to this year. So one of your goals was -- so you won on the LPGA Tour, you won the AIG Women's Open. One of your big goals was to win in the U.S. and you accomplished that last year.

Take us back to last year on winning that event last year and then looking ahead to kind of where your game is and looking forward to defending your title.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, like I said, obviously, the AIG was kind of my big breakthrough, but I say winning the ShopRite was almost the monkey off my back. Winning an event in the U.S. was my next goal and to do that last year was a huge accomplishment for me.

I've had really good results in the past at ShopRite. Seaview is a course I've always felt comfortable playing. It kind of has that linky feel. The wind picks up. It's on the water there. You have to be creative, so it's somewhere

THE MODERATOR: Summarize what you were talking about with Grant Boone about returning here for your third ShopRite LPGA Classic. How much does it mean to you guys as you're kick-starting your LPGA Tour career later this year to get these opportunities to play against the world's best.

MAISIE FILLER: Yeah, it's really special to have a third opportunity to play here. I'm really excited. I love coming here. It's such a nice environment and everyone is so welcoming. So I'm just really excited to have the opportunity again and see how well I can do and learn more about my game as I prepare to turn pro.

THE MODERATOR: Ashleigh, I will ask you this because you're week-in, week-out on the LPGA Tour, and you've seen these and been a part of these for sponsor exemption. For an LPGA Tour that has been out here for a lot of years and received these, what does it mean to receive these sponsor exemptions and opportunities to compete on the LPGA Tour.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Obviously it's huge for any player. Any time you get a chance to have a foot in the door at any LPGA event or any event to be honest. That's how I got started, an invite on the LET and won an event and that got me my card and then the LPGA.

Every time you tee it up, it gives you a little more experience and confidence. You never know what you can do. It only takes one week to change your life out here, and that's what these sponsor invites can do for those players, too.

Q. Rachel, you've had a sponsor exemption and you've played at the Meier LPGA Classic last year, and



where I've always enjoyed playing and going year-in and year-out.

I always have good feelings when I go back there, and it's shown in my results. Looking forward to this year obviously to try and defend. That's always difficult to do. But hopefully leading up to the week, we would have played U.S. Open the week before and then coming into that week, I'm starting to feel like my game is getting to a good place.

It's been a little up and down but there are definitely glimpses of really good stuff. So I know when I put it all together, soon, hopefully, I'm going to be ready to compete again.

Q. How with you analyze your year so far and what's been good, what's been bad about it? How have you played so far this year?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: The year's been a little different. I also decided this year to take some time off in the beginning of the year because I played so late in the season and went down to Australia. I've only played six events I think. I played well in Saudi and I played well L.A. Like I said, there's been glimpses but I definitely feel like I'm starting to trend in the right direction again.

Putter has let me down a little bit. Ball-striking, I feel we are in a good place. So I know that once I start to get the putts rolling, and like I said, I'm definitely going to be able to be in contention for a tournament hopefully soon.

Q. What can coming to a place where you've won before and had a lot of success, how can that help even jump-start what you're feeling now or get you going even more?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Any time you go back to a course where you play well, I think it brings in comfort. Like I said, I've always played well at Seaview. I like the way the course plays, being creative. That's the way I like to play, being able to flight the ball, and obviously bringing back those good memories and you try to feed off the past and the good memories you've had at certain courses always helps.

Q. When you think back to the win last year. Is there something about the week that sticks out now or pops in your head immediately, a shot or hole or experience, something that automatically pops in your head when you think about ShopRite last year?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, I was kind of trending going into the week, I was close. Played well the few weeks before

that.

To be honest, just all I remember was the first nine holes. I didn't play well. I think I remember I only hit two greens but I hung in there. I just said to my caddie: I know I'm playing good. It needs to click.

I just hung in there those first nine holes, and I grinded out even or 1-under and then it started to click in. I think I ended up shooting 3-under the first day, and obviously second day I played well.

But the start I got off to on Sunday, I was 4-under through five, and then because I was three back going into the last day, obviously that start on Sunday is what really got everything going.

And then I also say the finish, I remember I didn't really know where I was until maybe the 16th hole and I thought, If I par my way in, I'll be good. But obviously Hyo Joo had other ideas. I looking at the leaderboard on 18 knowing I had to get up-and-down to make sure I gave myself a chance to win the tournament.

Q. How would you compare how you feel now about your game to maybe how you felt last year about your game as the Classic approaches? Is there anything in common there or is it a completely different feeling?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: No, I feel pretty much the same to be honest. I like the way I'm starting to play. Season's been a little stop/start. So we're starting to really get into it now and I always play better when I get into a run of tournaments. You kind of tend to see what your tendencies are so you can work on them.

So I'm really hoping by the time we get to ShopRite, it's kind of peak, middle of the season. Will have played quite a bit by then and I'll really know where my game is, and like I said, going back to a place where I've always played well will give me comfort.

Q. How many times have you played in the ShopRite LPGA Classic?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Trying to think, maybe, minimum ten because my rookie year was '08, '09 and I kind of only came back to, since 2014. So this will be my 10th straight year, and before that I would have played two other years. So maybe ten or 12 times by now.

Q. And what attracts you most about the golf course and just the whole general atmosphere around the ShopRite LPGA Classic?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Well as you know, it's one of our longest-running tournaments. ShopRite have been behind the LPGA for so long. The community always really gets behind it. They love having us in town. Always get good crowds that come out to watch us, which is enjoyable for us players to play in front of.

And it's not one of the longest courses we play every year but you have to be smart about where you place the ball on the green. It's more a second-shot golf course, and just -- it's also about patience because we all know the greens can get a little bumpy in the afternoons with the poa.

So I think those that are also patient with the wind and the greens are often those that come out on top at the end of that week.

Q. And my last question is: What does the charitable element of the ShopRite LPGA Classic mean to you, especially, and I heard you mention something about getting to know volunteers every year you've been here.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, obviously it's huge. Any time there's a charitable side to a tournament, we know the LPGA, it's a huge priority for them, and the way that ShopRite supports the communities, it's very much about the community. That's what you want, and hopefully, as I said, it's been one of our long-running sponsor, and hopefully they continue to support for many more years.

Q. What do you learn from playing in LPGA events, not just being on the golf course with them but seeing how they go about their business on the range and on the putting green and those kind of things?

RACHEL KUEHN: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think any time I get to play in an LPGA event, it's always an opportunity to learn, and like you said, it's not just about the golf course and the golf game but how you do manage yourself.

I think I've been really fortunate every time I've played, I've picked up on little tips and tricks. Because the first time I was out there, I was almost so overwhelmed by what was going on, specifically those practice rounds days on the range. There's so many people there and everyone wants a little bit of your time or your attention and all this stuff.

I think what's so impressive about these girls that play week-in and week-out is how they are able to block out all of this noise and get their preparation in and get their work done and just go compete. I do think that it's hard because, you know, you're almost uncomfortable the first time.

So I think the big learning curve for me is learning how to get comfortable and how to have a really quick conversation and then just go back to getting my work done.

I think I still have work left to learn in that aspect but I do think the ability to block out everything else that's going on around and you only focus on golf is something that's really impressive, seeing these elite players do every week and every time I'm out there.

Q. How do you feel like your own game has improved through your five years of college?

RACHEL KUEHN: My game has improved exponentially. As I came in as a freshman at Wake Forest, I had no idea what I was doing. I had never really been taught the proper way to practice and play practice rounds and all of these things.

When I got to school and had incredible coaches and teammates and obviously an unbelievable facility, kind of learned, you know, what works best for me. And you know, as a result of my golf, obviously, the results have gotten better, and I just feel like my game has matured. It's the reason I came back for a fifth year is because I feel like my four years, I learned so much. I improved, not only as a player, but I grew as a person as well.

So I think this extra year has been along the same kind of road of really using it as year of preparation getting everything in order to turn pro later this fall.

So I do feel that, you know, the maturity of my golf game is starting to get there, and hopefully it's going to be trending at just the right time.

Q. One of the young women that I cover and have interviewed a few times is Sarah Lydic, and she's going to be joining the Wake Forest golf team. Are there a few things you'd like me to pass along to her when I see her at the conference championships next week, how to prepare herself for Wake Forest?

RACHEL KUEHN: For sure. Sarah is such a sweet girl and obviously a great player. I'm just really excited for her to get here and to follow her career.

It's going to be hard and sad watching the Wake Forest women's golf program from the sidelines next year but I'm excited for her to kind of, you know, get into college and settle here and be surrounded by great players because Wake Forest, I tell everyone that it sets you up for success. You know, you're surrounded by people that want to get

better every day and that push you to get better every day. So I'm just excited to follow her journey because she's competitive and fiery and her work ethic is through the rough so I have no doubt she's going to succeed here. I'm excited that I get to be a cheerleader along the way.

Q. Just as a quick aside, Ernie Els is a buddy of mine and he was on a plane when you were winning your British Open. I was his play-by-play guy by text, and that got very exciting. I said to him, "How many shots does he have to give Dave?" And he said, "Oh, not that many. Maybe three or four a side." Anyway, Jeremy knows I have a special interest in Pro-Ams and their role in professional golf and of course the ShopRite is famous for having the largest Pro-Am in all of golf. I'm wondering what, if anything, you remember about your Pro-Am experience last year at ShopRite and how it got you in the mood to do what you did?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Actually last year I didn't end up playing with the Pro-Am. I was dealing with a little bit of an niggle injury so I actually had to withdraw to give me that extra day's rest and I guess that also saved me.

Yeah, I've played it in many times over the years. We have the on-sites and the off-sites and everybody loves it. I've obviously met many people around it over the years, too. It's part of what we do and part of our jobs; and as long as we walk away and everybody has had a great experience.

I did play a couple years ago with a few ladies who it was their dream to play in an LPGA Pro-Am. So one of the friends bought it for one of their birthdays, and since then we have remained friends. They live in the Houston area. So they have come out to the Chevron the last two years, and they are just huge LPGA golf fans. So that was pretty cool. We created a friendship out of that Pro-Am for sure.

Q. When you think about -- let's just think about three very different kind of wins, cat loan I can't earlier in why you are year and winning The Open, one of the big events in golf and winning a big national event and very big regional event at ShopRite, I'm wondering, when you think about those three very different wins, what is the nervous system like for you? Does it feel similar? Does each feel different from the other? Can you describe that at all?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Well, to be honest, when you're in the moment and you are trying to win, it's the same. I say whether you're trying to win a major or your club championship. You're trying to get the job done and get over the line. The process is the same and I think that's what makes good champions. You don't think about the outcome. You think about the process and sticking to the

process, and only afterwards you think when you've accomplished and you look back on it.

So I do say unfortunately I don't think we actually get to enjoy it in the moment often because you're just so in the moment and focused on step by step what you need to do to get over line, and to be honest, the minute you think about the outcome, that's often when things go wrong.

I always say the difference between when you're winning is often people think you're so nervous inside but I find it the opposite. There's this calmness that comes over you and I often say I'm way more versus when I'm playing on a cut line because I've often got my B or C game but when I'm playing to win, everything is often falling into place. You know you've got your A Game and you don't have to think as much.

When I'm in the heat of battle, it's amazing how calm I feel inside, and often say I wish I could just bottle that up. We know golf doesn't work that way.

Q. I want to take you back to a time when you were nervous, playing the ShopRite and trying to make the cut, and I walked with you for your 18 on the second round. On the 8th hole, you got very upset with yourself. There was a club swinging episode, and then you ran off birdies on 9, 10, 11 and 12 and you made a great par save on 13. When we talked after the round, I said, it looked like you pick your game up after you lost your temper and you said, "I'm not that kind of girl." It's like, okay. Certainly it seemed to spur you on to play much better, whatever was setting you off about the eighth hole. It did sort of set you on a path toward improvement that later turned into the British Open. How many times can you say that a particular hole or incident does seem to spur you on to play even better?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, I don't know, actually, because I don't often think back to things like that to be honest.

Yeah, I will admit that I very seldom lose my temper but every now and then we all need to get it out in order to get on with it and that's obviously what I needed to do at the time, and sometimes that's what needs to happen to spur us on.

But I can't really, to be honest, think of a time. You know, nowadays if I have a bad hole I just kind of go, okay, it's happened. Get on the next hole and just do your job well, which is whatever I'm focused on that week within my swing and that's what I try to focus on, and not what's just happened. That's the only way to really get past it I think.

Q. One last question, about the Olympics. Any plans? Are you going to play?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Oh I'm playing for sure. It will be myself and Paula Reto for South Africa.

Q. Any others?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: That will be the two females. The men's I think is up for grabs. There's quite a few men in the World Ranking. I'm not sure who will be representing South Africa in the men right now.

Q. You probably heard it at the top, just a quickie question on your playing Missouri hoe this week for the second straight year on behalf of the AJGA and then you are going to be an sponsor exemption for ShopRite. My first question to Rachel and Maisie were about these opportunities, right, because you guys are the future of the LPGA. How much do these opportunities mean to you that you're able to test your skills and abilities tee it up against the best players in the world?

GIANNA CLEMENTE: Yeah, every single opportunity we get to play with the best players in the world is such an amazing experience. Even this week, being able to play with the pros, even though it's still considered an AJGA for us, this week is so special in itself.

But obviously I'm very excited for next week as well. Again, any time I get to play with the best is amazing, and I'll take every opportunity I can get. So I'm very excited to get back out there for sure.

Q. And Maisie, I'm going to do a Bamberger follow-up question. So you have played, this is your third year playing in this event. You've played in the world's largest Pro-Am. You've participated in it. Michael, I'm going to do the follow-up on the Pro-Am question. Tell us about your experience playing in this Pro-Am?

MAISIE FILLER: It was a really great opportunity. I still keep in touch with all the groups I played with, and I have become actually good friends and made great connections. It's just a really great time. It's fun and you get to know the people you're playing well, but yeah, I have met great people, and I saw one of them today, actually, and it was awesome.

Q. Maze, as far as looking ahead to the U.S. Women's Open, war your thoughts as you're getting ready for that, and have you ever been to Lancaster Country Club before?

MAISIE FILLER: I've never been to Lancaster Country Club. I'm excited to go there, and it will be a true test of golf. I'm just trying to get a good plan with my coach and work on a lot of short game. I'm excited.

Q. Almost on the Pro-Am portion of it, you may not have necessarily played in the Pro-Ams before, but this tournament, you will this year. So this features the world's largest Pro-Am, and it allows players to get really inside the ropes on kind of what player is practicing. So as somebody who is 16 years old who is still kind of up-and-coming, but you're going to be the pro, right. How does that -- take us through that mindset on playing in this tournament as a part of the Pro-Am, and then also playing in this tournament as a sponsor exemption itself.

GIANNA CLEMENTE: Yeah, as I said before, any experience that I can get, obviously being 16, any experience that I can get playing on the LPGA Tour is amazing, and something that I really cherish. This will be my fifth LPGA event, and I'm equally excited for -- just as much as I was for them before.

And I did actually play in the Pro-Ams last year. So obviously getting that experience, and being able to play in Monday qualifiers, as well, I'm very excited, and yeah, we'll see how it goes.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody.

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