

ShopRite LPGA Classic

Presented by Acer

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Galloway, New Jersey, USA

Seaview, A Dolce Hotel

Ashleigh Buhai

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, joined in the media center with Ashleigh Buhai, 2023 champion of the ShopRite LPGA Classic. First I'll just start it up. What's it been like being the defending champion this year?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, honestly it's a great feeling coming back to somewhere you have really good memories. I said to my husband the other day when we arrived on site, it doesn't really feel like it was a year ago already.

To be honest, it all happened so quickly last year. Kind of knocked in the winning putt, wait a little bit, and then you get swept off kind of thing, and went straight to the airport and flew out. I don't think I really got to take it in and enjoy the win to be honest.

There is a lot of that round that I don't remember. So, yeah, like obviously the memories -- I played 18 now and I always just enjoy playing this golf course and the memories start to come back a little bit.

Q. What are the things you do remember from last year? I remember sitting there watching you realize you had won. Talk about some of those emotions at the end.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, it was funny. Last night I was scrolling through Facebook and the LPGA had the rerun on so I ended up watching the last five holes, which was pretty cool, because then I could relive it a little bit and really get those good feelings back.

And then I watched my reactions of what happened. I didn't actually ever see how close -- I knew Hyo Joo's chip was close, but didn't realize how far out she was. She maybe holed it from 30 yards out. I thought she was just short of the green.

So it was cool to see that and then kind of relive the moment last night. Any time you've had those special feelings and can you get to watch it back, it's a great

feeling.

Q. Might be a good strategy to watch it back. So you just touched on it a little bit, but coming back here, when you returned here as defending champion for your first U.S. win, because that was a big goal, what was the first initial reaction or thoughts and feelings when you got back here?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, kind of driving in and just taking it in and trying to remember what happened last year to be honest.

But I've always had really good memories of this golf course. I played a lot of good tournaments throughout the years here. It's somewhere that suits me. It's not the longest golf course. The winds blows. I think it's common knowledge I like to play in the wind.

And especially when I got out there today, I started to recreate those shots and see them. Yeah, it's just always good feelings that keep coming back to me.

Q. How was the course conditions today?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I think it's in better condition than last year. We always know that the greens can be tricky here and get very bumpy in the afternoon. They were receptive and I feel the courses are always in much better conditions than previous years. The rough is up, and especially the fescue which we all know we do not want to go near any of that.

Q. She chatted about it a little bit this morning, had Karrie Webb in here this morning, 2013 champion. She talked about the history of this tournament and how just there are legends of the game that are past champions. How does it feel to have your name on this trophy with some of the legends of the game here?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: It's a great feeling. This is one of our longest running tournaments, so there has a lot of, as you say, greats that have won this tournament. So I feel very



lucky and privileged to have my name alongside on two trophies out here against some of the greats that have played the game.

Q. Just curious, I guess there is a certain uniformity to ever LPGA event, but what kind of makes the ShopRite Classic distinct or different? What kind of -- what's a personality quirk of the tournament that makes this week kind of different?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: I think the history of the tournament. Like we said, it's one of our longest running. We always get good crowds out here that come out to support us. The community gets really behind this tournament.

And, yeah the fact that we've been coming back to the same venue for so long. It's familiar to a lot of us. A lot of us are comfortable. It's a pretty easy week. I'm staying on site. I'm able to walk to the driving range.

I just love how easy this week is and convenient for everything.

Q. Why do you think this tournament -- this tournament started in '86 and I looked at the schedule, and not a lot of events left still in 2024 that were on the '86. Why do you think this event has managed to survive I guess almost 40 years now?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Like I said, we're lucky to have good partners and sponsors that have always come on board. Like we say, the community. We come back and the community embraces it and always gets behind the LPGA, and I think that's why we keep coming back. Luckily we keep having the sponsors that want to tap into it.

We have the pro-am format behind it. All the pro-ams that go on and get to play it int with players on multiple days, and I think it's just overall a great experience for everybody.

Q. Over the years, you mentioned the fans and stuff like that. They kind of adopted the winners of the tournament, made them like they're playing for the home team now in South Jersey. Do you get a sense of that a little bit as you walk around this week? Like people are patting you on the back or more friendly or you're playing for the locals this week a little bit?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, most definitely, because that was my first time out there and all the volunteers were like, hey, champ, good to have you back. One of the volunteers that stands on 14, he's like, I'm taking credit for your win last year. I remember him. He's here every year.

So it is good to see familiar faces. And, yeah, it has been -- I think today that was the first time I really felt that I was defending, having all those people come up to me and say congrats on last year and good luck this year.

Q. What was your weekend like at the U.S. Women's Open? What did you take away from the tournament?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Exhausting. (Laughter.)

I think a lot of us are scarred from last week. I took Monday, Tuesday off. I've also been battling a back injury which hasn't been easy. I was only able to start hitting balls last Tuesday and not able to do the amount of prep I would've liked.

I think exhausting is going to be a very good word many of us will use. Lancaster was an unbelievable test. Yeah, I'm very glad to get on a green this week and be able to hit it at that point and not feel like I have to play another five feet of break.

I think a lot of us this week are going to be able to feel like we can breathe a little bit more for sure.

Q. You said when you -- at media day you said when you get to ShopRite you'll hope you'll really know where your game is. Considering the back issues, where do you think it is as you enter the tournament on Friday?

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, still believe it's close. I had a video call with my swing coach this morning, and I am swinging it well. My body is just not allowing me to 100% do what I want to do. I'm still swinging it good enough. Putting is trending, which is something you need to do well here and be very patient.

If I can just, yeah -- I mean it's improving, but every day is basically a case to see how I wake up and we're just dealing with it one day at a time. It is a bit of a hindrance at the moment. My game is still in good enough shape I feel.

Q. Just talk a little bit about being a defending champion. Sometimes people come places and see their face all over everything. Anna Nordqvist has been the only one to do it here and you have the opportunity to do it, too. Talk about the excitement and opportunity being defending champion.

ASHLEIGH BUHAI: Yeah, I mean, it's tough. Obviously there is that expectation and pressure that you might put on yourself. Like first time experience that was going back to the AIG last year, and that was obviously very difficult.

There a lot of hype around. I feel at least this week, because I wasn't on the course Monday, Tuesday, I've kind of flown under the radar a little bit.

That's how I'm trying to just keep it. It's a new year. Last year has come and gone. All I can do is try my best this year.

Went back to Australia end of last year as defending and managed to tick that one off luckily.

Like I say, you just try to pull back on those good memories and feelings and hopefully they can just help you out when you are coming down the stretch in a pressure situation.

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