

The LPGA Drive On Championship presented by Volvik

Friday, March 5, 2021

Ocala, Florida, USA

Golden Ocala

Austin Ernst

Quick Quotes

Q. 67 yesterday morning; 67 today. Seems like you're staying a little more aggressive out there off the tee than some of other players. Is that paying dividends?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, I think so. Fairways were a little allege bouncy this afternoon so got a few more wedges. You get quite a few wedge opportunities, so you have to take advantage of it with how firm the greens are, especially some the par-3s where it's kind of hard to get it close or even hold the green like on 11.

But I feel like I've driven it well. The only drive that I kind of missed the fairway today was on 8 and put myself behind a tree and then made a good up and down from the bunker to save par.

Q. There has been a tournament here two previous times before you actually notched your first win. You had two really good showings, 9th and 13th. Is this a course you feel suits your game pretty well?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, I like it. I have good memories from when we played before. It just seems to set up well for me, whether it's a lot of the tee shots kind of can naturally pick out a good line and going into the greens I kind of have a good idea of how they break. They redid them. And where I can be aggressive ask where I can take a good putt from.

Q. We might have some tough weather coming in on the weekend. Wet perhaps, colder and windier. Will that change your strategy?

AUSTIN ERNST: Not really. I might be able to hit drive on a couple holes where I had to hit 3-wood today. I'll see where they set it up and kind of how they set it up and I'll still try to be aggressive when I can.

I want to it make as many birdies as possible, so I'll it pick it apart when I can.



AT GOLDEN OCALA

Q. Round two of the LPGA Drive On Championship presented by Volvik. We're here with our second round leader Austin Ernst. Austin, great round today, 67. Take us through the round.

AUSTIN ERNST: Thank you. I think it was a little more solid ball striking-wise than yesterday. Started off I hit to two feet on 10 for birdie; then on 12 I actually hit a good enough drive to be able to go for it today. Hit a 5-wood just left of the green and chipped up to four feet and made birdie.

Another birdie on 18, ten-footer just short of the hole, and then turned to the front nine and made about a 12-footer on 3 for birdie.

Let's see where I made the other birdie, 7. Then on 7 made about an 18-footer, a slider, so that was nice. Then made a good up and down on 8 to keep the momentum going.

Any time you get in bogey-free it's nice.

Q. I'm sensing a theme here, because nothing you mentioned was outside 20 feet. Looks like you're stuffing a lot iron shots.

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, it was a little different than yesterday because I actually made quite a few long putts yesterday. Probably made two putts over 25 feet yesterday and today couldn't quite get the putter working early. Had a lot really good looks inside 15 feet, but I hit good putts and my speed was good all day.

Hit a lot of easy pars and it's nice when you get yourself a lot of good looks and come away making a few of them.

Q. We're hearing from players the greens are really firm and it's difficult to get it close because of that. How are you able to do so?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, I think pretty much every hole I hit it close I hit a wedge of some sort. So you really kind of need to be aggressive off the tee to be able to get those numbers. Then you kind of know there are some holes

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that it's just so hard to hold the green. Some of the par-3s, 11 with the pin in the middle was almost impossible to get it to stay on the green.

I think when I knew I didn't have as good of a number or good of a full number or as much green to work with, I kind of placed it in a good spot just over the green or on the right side of the green to where I still had a look at birdie and I didn't have to work very hard.

My distance control has been good, so I've kind of been able to attack it where I've had those good numbers, and where I've had wedge opportunities I've been able to make a few birdies.

Q. Is that something that a 29-year old Austin knows that maybe a 24 year old Austin didn't, when to attack, when not to?

AUSTIN ERNST: Absolutely. That's been something what I've learned overtime. It's just one of those things now I kind of know, especially here with the greens firm, I kind of know how much the ball is going to release typically. I kind of know if I've got a pin that's tucked and I don't have a good number that I maybe should hit it 15 feet right of the hole instead of trying to go right at it and end up pinning it in a bunker or somewhere. That's not a great place.

I think now I know when to pick apart -- where to pick apart a golf course, and I think that's something that now I'm in my eighth year on tour, so that's kind of something I've learned over time.

Q. You're about to enter some area you've never been before, you've never lead going into the weekend after the second round.

AUSTIN ERNST: Actually I didn't know that.

Q. Yeah. So what is the mindset that you take as a leader going into the weekend?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think it's the same thing that I took yesterday going into today. Obviously started today with a lead and I knew -- saw Carlota shot 7-under, so you know there are birdies out there. Obviously getting off to a good start, but I think it's the same thing. The weather will be a little tougher today, but when I have good numbers, when I have opportunities, I'm going to attack the golf course, and when I need to dial it back a little bit then I'll just kind of pick my spots.

Q. And speaking of the maturity you've had through your eight years here, it is going to be miserable tomorrow. How do you keep from becoming frustrated

with that and stay patient throughout the bad weather?

AUSTIN ERNST: You just know what you're getting into. I went and got myself an Under Armour yesterday because I didn't pack one. I think it's just one of those things. I've played in a lot of bad weather. I played one of my best rounds last year at the British Open in miserable weather, so there is no way it's worse than that. If it's worse than that I will be shocked.

But I kind of know. I just keep one foot in front of the other. It's not going to be as easy as today. The ball won't go quite as far. It's going to be like 60 degrees and raining, so hopefully we get lucky.

I think it's just one of those things. Everybody is dealing with it, so if you can just deal with it better than everybody else you're good to go.

Q. Were you more miserable then than you were playing with Beth Ann and me in the Bahamas?

AUSTIN ERNST: That was actually pretty fun.

Q. Hey, it was the Bahamas, right? (Laughter.) What's the best part of your game right now?

AUSTIN ERNST: My putter is good right now, but I think my irons, my irons and my wedges. I've got a good feel for my distance control. You get some iffy lies. I hit it in a divot on 9. So just being able to control it off those kind of lies I think has been the best part my game this week.

Q. And when you get into pressure situations, what is it about your brother on the bag that you think helps the most?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think, I mean, he talks to me, kind of knows what to kind of say to me. And I think the fact that he played I think is big. He kind of knows what's going through my head without me telling him. Part brother part competitive golfer. I think that is what's so nice.

I know if I have a question on a shot or putt, whatever, I can bounce it off him. He's going to be able to help me a lot.

Q. How long did he play professionally?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think a year and a half. So he started caddying for me midway through my rookie year.

Q. And is there a part of your game that he has helped you with?



AUSTIN ERNST: I think he's helped on greens and then I think what he helps me with, especially practice rounds and kind of before, kind of the beginning of the week, chipping. If I have a question on kind of a lie or how I think it's going to come out, he can tell me how to hit the shot or he can say, I think it's going to do this, where -- that's kind of where if you don't have a caddie that plays golf they don't know.

Reading lies is one of those of things I've gotten way better at, and part of that is because of Drew. If a ball is sitting down I kind of know what it's going to do, if it's different situations.

Q. I remember in your winner's circle interview at Walmart that you said that win just made you feel so confident in your game and your ability to know you can win out here. Has that thought changed at all since then?

AUSTIN ERNST: No, it's the same.

Q. And do you feel that every tournament you play every shot, every maybe round?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think it varies sometimes. There are weeks where you're struggling a little bit more and it's harder to get that feeling, but I think last year contending a lot, finishing the year on the Money List, top 6, you know, that kind of stuff, all of those little things kind of translated into me being more confident and knowing that week to week, no matter what the conditions are, I can still contend.

Q. Last question. You mentioned that your an aggressive player and we know how aggressive you are. We have an Aon Risk-Reward Challenge hole this week. How do you enjoy those holes and do you plan on being risky this week?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think they're fun. I got to be today because I hit a good tee shot from the back tee. I got to go for it in two.

I think it just kind of depends on what the number is, whether I'll -- and conditions. If it's miserable and the ball is not going very far probably wouldn't be able to go for it tomorrow. We'll wait and see after the tee shot.

I think they're fun. You get a little variation and sometimes you get to move the tee up on a hole they normally wouldn't move the tee up on, so that's fun.

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