

# The LPGA Drive On Championship presented by Volvik

Sunday, March 7, 2021

Ocala, Florida, USA

Golden Ocala

## Austin Ernst

### Press Conference



AT GOLDEN OCALA

THE MODERATOR: Austin, congratulations.

AUSTIN ERNST: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: LPGA Drive On Championship presented by Volvik at champion, Austin Ernst. You were getting a little emotional on the green. How does this win feel compared to the first two?

AUSTIN ERNST: It's different. You know, the first win was in the playoff and then obviously Arkansas, coming from behind and winning. Going wire to wire is really cool. I told Jason last night it would be really cool to win wire to wire, and glad I didn't jinx myself.

Yeah, I think it's just really cool to be in the heat of it all week and to be able to perform the way I did. To hit the shots I hit, and to shoot the scores I shot, I think it's just kind of testament to me, that I can do this week in and week out and just if I have a little belief myself kind of what I can do.

THE MODERATOR: Absolutely. You had a two-shot swing there on the par-3 4th. Really got the round started for you; first of four straight birdies and really a nice momentum swing. How big was that hole for you?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, I think, I mean, I hit a good 50 degree wedge in and then made a good putt. Obviously Jennifer made a bogey there. I was trying not to really focus on what she was doing. I was aware all day of where we stood. I kind of knew in my head, okay, this is where she is, this is where I am.

But I kind of just wanted to keep the pedal down. After the birdie on 5 I turned to Drew and I said, I just got to stay aggressive, keep making birdies, keep being confident, and then hit a really good shot into 6 and then hit a good shot into 7 and then made both those birdies.

Then stalled out a little bit on the birdies. Had a few tough pins to get to and I hit my tee shot a little too far on 10. I kind of knew I could bring that bunker in if I hit a good one and if I hit it on the right side, so that just kind of made it a little tougher to tack.

11, you can't do that pin.

And 12 just not hitting a great wedge shot and 13 was tough today.

13 I hit 6-iron in and still hit it short.

I think I just stayed -- I did what I wanted to do all day. The conditions just got a little tougher at the end of the round.

THE MODERATOR: With the conditions they had some nice typical Augusta Sunday pins on some of those tribute holes. What was going through your mind when you were making that birdie barrage to keep you grounded, especially with the challenging back nine?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think when I was making all the birdies I was hitting a lot of shots right where I was looking and executing really well. I think obviously hitting it close and then I hit some good putts. I didn't really have to work too hard. I had my speed dialed in really well. Even on 9, 8 and 9, when 8 I had a good look and hit a good putt. Just broke a little bit more.

But for me I was trying to do my own thing and stay aggressive. I knew anything can kind of happen on any hole. You can have those swings and if she got hot and I stalled out I knew she could still kind of catch me. I was just trying to separate myself by as many as possible and just ended up making a couple bogeys on the back nine.

She got a little closer to me than I would've liked.

#### Q. Is this the best golf of your life right now?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think I so. I think in the last year I've played better than I ever have. I think when I do play well I manage it much better, when I'm not quite firing on all cylinders. But I think the control I have with my putter; always been a pretty good chipper; feel like I'm a very good



chipper now. Feel like I have a really good feel for my swing. I feel the most in control of my game I ever have.

Ball striking-wise, driving the ball; I drove the ball fantastic today. And that's kind of been the thing that if anything holds me back, that holds me back sometimes. I don't hit fairways all the time, but I hit a lot of really good tee shots and good iron shots today.

**Q. When did you start thinking about the Olympics, trying to qualify?**

AUSTIN ERNST: I feel like last year. You know, you kind of '19, '20. I kind of know -- I don't really know how the Rolex Rankings work, but I know they're like a two-year thing. So I think in '19 you're kind of like, All right, this is kind of important. Then didn't have a good year in '19 and I had a great year last year.

Then I kind of check it every now and then kind of know where I am, but I feel like that's one of those goals that is a higher goal for me and it's very beginning of the season oriented. But I think it's a good goal for me. It kind of keeps me striving to try to get in contention more and more. If I can do that, then maybe that happens.

I don't know how it works. I don't know exactly what I have to do, but I think it's a big goal for me to have and I like that.

**Q. What would it mean to you?**

AUSTIN ERNST: I think it would be unbelievable. I mean, if you talk to any athlete and if you're talking to somebody and they said, I'm an Olympian, that's really cool. So, I mean, as a golfer it was never a thing that -- when I was a little kid I never dreamed of it. Never could do it. But I think it would be really cool to do it.

**Q. Americans have now won the first three tournaments. Obviously your close to the Korda sisters, an adopted sister or something.**

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah.

**Q. It's the first time since 2007 that Americans have won the first three. Is this an American resurgence, do you feel like?**

AUSTIN ERNST: I feel like we've got a lot of really good young Americans. I don't know if I'm still a young American or not. I'm 29.

**Q. Yes.**

AUSTIN ERNST: I think there are a lot of good American players now. I mean, Danielle is my age, maybe a little bit younger; Jess is year younger than me. And then Nelly, Nelly is unbelievable now.

I think we have a lot of good American players and I think we all want to play really well and I think we're all pushing each other to play better.

I practice is good bit with Jess, play a good bit with Jess; play a bit with Nelly out here. We always want to beat each other, so I think it's kind of one of those things that it just kind of pushes you. When you see your friends win, you want to win. So you kind of want it one-up them as much as you can.

**Q. Have you talked to your dad yet?**

AUSTIN ERNST: I talked to him walking down the stairs for a second.

**Q. What did he say?**

AUSTIN ERNST: He said, Good playing, Austin. I talk to him for literally two seconds.

**Q. There is more to be said, I guess.**

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, it was in the midst of the chaos.

**Q. Got you.**

THE MODERATOR: You win at the LPGA Drive On Championship presented by Volvik. What does Drive On mean to you?

AUSTIN ERNST: I think it just means do the best you can in everything you do. I think you just strive to be the best version of yourself. I think that's what Drive On means to me.

**Q. Two weeks off and head out to the west coast. You're the most recent champion on the LPGA Tour. You'll have a target on your back I would imagine just ahead of the year's first major. What are your plans leading up to the west coast swing?**

AUSTIN ERNST: Take couple days off and then just get back to practicing and kind of preparing for Kia and ANA. Yeah, I played both those courses a lot so I know what to expect, I know what to work on.

Hopefully I can do what I did this week. The game felt pretty easy to me this week. I know it's not always going to feel that way. If I can kind of just keep doing the same

thing ball-striking-wise and then I really dialed my speed in all week, and I think that's kind of what helps, especially today when I couldn't hit it quite as close. I still had pretty easy par putts.

**Q. What will you focus on looking specifically to ANA?**

AUSTIN ERNST: I'll have to sit back and think about it, but ANA in particular I would say you have a few more mid to long irons, and then wedges in the par-5s. I can get to a couple of them. Normally get to a few kind of depending where tees are, that kind of thing.

But it's the same stuff. I mean, drive the ball well there and keep it in the fairway and then you can kind of attack it a little bit. If you miss fairways there you get in trouble. They have the rough up pretty high normally. I think it'll be the same thing as this week. Greens will be bouncy. Won't have quite as many wedges. Just dial in those mid to long irons.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks Austin, congratulations. Enjoy this.

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