

Epson Tour

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Kelly Whaley

Press Conference

EPSON TOUR

Q. Here with Kelly Whaley. We know the Whaley name. Just tell me a little bit about yourself, background, where you came from, and where you're going?

KELLY WHALEY: Yeah, I started golf at a young age. Both my parents being pros it was kind of a requirement for my sister and I to at least learn the game and hopefully love it, and that's what happened with both of us.

I really got started playing competitively at 12. Growing up in Connecticut we can't play year-round, so I found some girls to play with and loved it.

Immediately visited North Carolina. That's where my mom played. Graduated in '89, and a little biased towards that. I think my first time I went was eighth grade, and ended up committing my junior year and played there for four years.

Graduated 2019 and I had the best time, the best team. I have a couple teammates out here on the Epson Tour who I'm still so close with.

I decided to turn pro in 2019. I actually got four -- three or four -- I think four exemptions that summer to play in the Epson. It was Symetra Tour but now Epson Tour.

That was just such a good start for me. I think getting a feel for what it's like out here and getting my game right, you kind of -- I feel like everyone puts a lot of pressure on professional golf. I'm this professional athlete, it's different, but it's not. The golf ball doesn't know where you are; it's just on another hole.

So it's been a learning process and this is my second year on the Epson Tour, so I'm super excited about that and to get it going and to get into the first event. I'm already excited. So I'm just trying to approach this year as more of a have fun aspect instead of you need to do this right now, you know.

So I'm excited.

Q. What's it like -- I mean, then again, I'm sure people ask you this all the time. What's it like growing up with

Suzy as a mom, like one of the most recognizable women in golf as your mother?

KELLY WHALEY: I know. To me she's just mom. When I really think about it it's incredible what she's done and I don't need to explain that to anyone. She's a trailblazer for females.

It's so great not only for me to see how she did out here on tour but what she's done past that. I think that is really important, and it's kept me kind of present.

There is more to do in the golf world than just playing out here. She's one of my biggest role models out here. But just to see what she's done in the golf business as well is incredible.

I do want to live up to her name, but I try to keep myself to be Kelly Whaley at all times. I'm so proud to have her as a mom and hopefully to live up. I'm trying to surpass her in a couple things, but it is cool, and I just -- I'm so thankful to have her as a mom as well.

Q. Do you ever pick her brain, especially being a new pro? Hey, I need help doing this.

KELLY WHALEY: Yeah, it was a hard year last year. My rookie year was not easy. I had struggles out here and she's the first person I went to. She knows. She's been through it.

She says, I didn't play when these girls hit it as far as they do now, but she knows it. She knows how hard it is to travel and be by yourself and to play six days a week in a row.

So she has such great advice and I'm so lucky to have a parent in that sport. I think you don't find that that often, so I take what I can get every single time. I'll go to her every time for advice. It's been really helpful.

Q. I know she was on the bag in Q-II.

KELLY WHALEY: Uh-huh.

Q. Does she serve as your instructor or do you keep

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those things very separate?

KELLY WHALEY: So growing up both my parents were my instructors, and now I do have a separate instructor. I'll always go to them. I mean, I'll call her right now and ask her for help.

So I wouldn't say she's not my coach. Both my mom and my dad help me, but I do have a separate swing coach just to -- can get a little testy sometimes.

Q. It's a high-stress situation.

KELLY WHALEY: Yes. But, no, they're still my coaches and I would go to them any day.

Q. How do you keep things as a family? Your sister plays, correct?

KELLY WHALEY: Yes.

Q. How do you keep things as a family not always golf?

KELLY WHALEY: I know. So my sister played in if college. She's done with competitive golf now. She's actually getting her MBA.

Whenever we are taking vacations or anything, we always -- it gets really competitive really fast.

Q. Of course.

KELLY WHALEY: But, we try to keep it separate, especially at the dinner table. It's no golf talk because both of our parents are in the golf business and all of us, and I think we're all, please don't say that word. Just don't say that word.

But we keep it fun. When we play together we always try to keep it fun. It gets tense but we keep it light, and that's the important thing.

Q. For sure.

KELLY WHALEY: Because it's tense enough out here.

Q. Let's be honest, Kelly Whaley is a pretty common name. I image you fly under the radar a fair amount, which helps.

KELLY WHALEY: Uh-huh, yeah.

Q. Tell me about you got this gig, right?

KELLY WHALEY: Yeah.

Q. Seminole Golf Club.

KELLY WHALEY: Oh, it's amazing.

Q. One of the more elite prestigious courses in Florida and probably the country.

KELLY WHALEY: Yeah.

Q. Are you caddieing out there?

KELLY WHALEY: I do. It's my third season.

Q. What's that like? I know we can't talk about members.

KELLY WHALEY: Right.

Q. What's that experience been like for you as a caddie?

KELLY WHALEY: It has not only helped my game tremendously, but it's helped me kind of just get out of my own little world and get experience in what other people are doing.

I've learned so many things caddieing there, not only with golf, outside of the golf, through other people's experiences.

So many life lessons, and it's such -- I know I can't mention any members, but it's such a special membership there that I've been lucky enough to meet. Being a caddie is different than being a player.

It's very -- you almost pay more attention to being a caddie than a player. You look at things that I would never look at playing by myself, which is crazy. You're like, wouldn't you expect yourself to go through all the things but you really don't.

You're more worried about messing up for other people than yourself.

Q. I love that.

KELLY WHALEY: So it's been great. It's helped me tremendously on the greens. That golf course is spectacular and we actually get to play as caddies, so that's been a treat, and helped my game a lot.

So just between the membership and the other caddies I've met, my caddie this week is from there.

Q. That's cool.

KELLY WHALEY: So it's just been all around the best experience. I don't regret it at all. A lot of people think oh, you're caddieing; how do you have time to train and get better?

I am getting better not only with networking and socially, but also my game as well because I'm learning what to look at more as well.

So it's been great.

Q. How did you land that gig?

KELLY WHALEY: So my mom is -- Bob Ford was the head pro there. He's now not; he stepped down.

But my mom and him have known each other for years, and luckily I got connected with him. That's how I landed that.

Yeah.

Q. Again, I know membership, no names, but do you have any stories about first starting out you pulled the wrong club or read a putt and somebody was like, dude, what are you doing?

KELLY WHALEY: Oh, I have stories from this year. You mess up more than you think.

I forgot a range finder one time, and that makes it very difficult when you're out there, because you do double back there. There is a lot going on. You're kind of running around the place.

But I kind of had to finagle my way around the golf course without knowing all the yardages, which was not the best. There was some slip ups. You'll give the player the number and they'll accidentally grab the wrong club, but you're not paying attention. That's your job, to pay attention, and they hit a 4-iron and they're like, what the heck? And I'm like, oh, well, sorry.

But overall it's been so much fun and I can't -- the Pro Member was on Monday, which is, as everyone knows, a really cool experience. Actually, Nelly and Jessica played this year. Which was so cool for me to see. They're idols of mine. Jessica actually won, so that was really cool to have a female win.

It's not only cool to see, but you learn a lot from their games and you think, oh, they're Top 10 in the world.

What's up with their games? And it's not -- it's like centimeters. When you're at these levels it's like the smallest little things.

If I can get those little things from them, that's worth it, every penny. Just getting to meet them and kind of pick their brain was really fun.

Q. I mean, you talk about the caddieing helps you. You think about things differently.

KELLY WHALEY: Uh-huh.

Q. Does having the opportunity to brush elbow with some of those big-time players help you as well?

KELLY WHALEY: Yeah, I mean, just watching how they play helps and how -- it's really around the greens for me; maybe not for others. But maybe some of the shots they hit I'll pick their brain, like, oh, why did you do that?

And they also just think differently. Like they'll think - in trouble let's say they'll think of different ways to get it to where it needs to go that I wouldn't even dream of.

So getting to just learn from them or just learn from their past experiences. I talked to Nelly about her time on what was Symetra Tour, which has -- hopefully will help me here, and I imagine it will.

That was just fun to talk to her, because they have been through it and they know what it's like, and it's just been great at Seminole. I'm really thankful.

Q. Do you have more appreciation for your caddies now?

KELLY WHALEY: Oh, definitely. No, for sure. I see -- I've seen it all, so I know what it's like to be a caddie. I know the high-pressure situations, so I know what they're feeling and I know what I'm feeling, so it definitely -- I wouldn't say I'm an easy person to caddie for, but I know -- no one is -- but I know what they're going through and I have appreciation for them for sure.

Q. Is there a decent amount of females on the Seminole staff?

KELLY WHALEY: So I'm the only I would say full-time female, and then there is also a high school program they have that's a scholarship program. There is two females in, that so that's been great because I get to talk to the high school girls a little bit and they're both good players.

We've played a couple times. It's the three of us, so, yeah.

the same as I would today, so...

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Q. Do you just keep beating up on those boys?

KELLY WHALEY: Try to as much as I can. Yeah, keep them humble.

Q. Looking ahead to the season, looking ahead to this week, I mean we talked about what used to be Symetra, now Epson. As a player that's played on both, seen the differences, I mean, Epson has kind of shown up for this tour in a way that's never been seen before.

KELLY WHALEY: Yeah.

Q. What does that mean to you as a player?

KELLY WHALEY: So much. I don't even know how to put it in words. As I said, my rookie year was fantastic. I had a lot of fun meeting people and getting to travel.

But the things that Epson has accomplished already and been able to give us is just on like -- it helps players so much.

It's a hard life. As glamorous and fun as it is, it's hard as everyone knows to travel to a new city. It's expensive, and I'm so thankful for them to come in and help out with that.

Because we all have the same dream out here, and getting to that is not easy. They're just making a bit easier for us.

It's incredible. I'm so thankful and excited.

Q. Last question: Some of your goals this season, coming off a rough 2021, what are you looking forward to and hoping to do in 2022?

KELLY WHALEY: Yeah, so I'm trying to keep my goals small. As I said, last year was a struggle and I don't want to get too far ahead of myself.

I'm trying to approach each event with trying to enjoy something on every hole I play, whether that's enjoying a sandwich I have or enjoying the scenery or just the shots.

And I think staying super present is important. I think last year I got very ahead of myself, but I think long-term I want to get Top 10. I want two wins this year.

I can go on and on about long-term goals, but more importantly I really need to focus on just staying here and present in this moment.

So every day is different, so just got to try to approach to

