LPGA Drive On Championship

Wednesday, July 29, 2020

Toledo, Ohio, USA

Albane Valenzuela

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, everyone, welcome to the virtual media center here at the LPGA Drive On Championship.

Just a reminder, we ask that you stay muted until we open up for questioning. If you have a question, please utilize the chat function the call to be able to let us know. We'll be sure to get to you.

With that out of the way, I'm happy to start this week off with 2020 tour rookie, Albane Valenzuela. How are you doing today?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Doing great. Very happy to be here. Excited to get back to competition. Ready for the week.

THE MODERATOR: That's awesome. As a 2020 rookie I can guess that this is not how you expected your first year to go on tour. What have you been up to the last few months, and what has this few months been like for you, and what have you been up to since Australia?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Definitely very unexpected and crazy think it's been six month since we were on the road. It's been crazy, but I got to graduate from Stanford during COVID. Spent a lot of time with my family. Never spent this much time together. Cook a lot. I started yoga.

So I actually took advantage of this period it reset my mind and get my game ready for the upcoming tournaments.

THE MODERATOR: I know you said you were with your family in the Bahamas is where you've been. What was that like and was it as intense of a lockdown as you might've imagined?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: It was definitely a crazy lockdown for the first part, but then I can't really complain. I was stuck on an island. It was pretty nice. I had my family, I had friends there, and we were pretty much COVID free for a long time. That was kind of just nice to be there, practice, and use the facilities, and just be home with my family.

THE MODERATOR: That's awesome. On top of that, you just mentioned that you graduated from Stanford. I know it was a difficult decision to be able to leave Stanford, the college program there, and be able to turn professional.

What did it mean to be able to use this time to graduate and earn your degree?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Yes, definitely crazy, and I thought a lot about my decision even throughout quarantine. Had I not made that decision maybe I would not be able to turn pro even next year.

Just kind of crazy thinking I had this one-time opportunity to turn professional, and I took it. Maybe that's a life-changing career decision I made.

So it's been kind of crazy, but at the same time, so grateful I got to finish my degree, graduate from Stanford. I mean, that was my dream also, is just to complete my studies, and to have that opportunity to be on the LPGA and a Stanford graduate, I mean, I could not ask for more.

THE MODERATOR: You didn't get to walk across the stage, but did you get to celebrate at home?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: We had a 20 minute virtual graduation, which was really short. A bunch of my friends in the Bahamas, we're all seniors, so we kind of celebrated the way we could. We had a fake Monopoly graduation caps and just a Stanford sweatshirt, not a traditional cap and gown.

It was fun. The most important is knowing that I have this diploma and that I get to be a Stanford alumna.

THE MODERATOR: So when did it really become real that you were coming back on the LPGA Tour, to be able to compete here at Inverness? When did you start going back into tournament mode?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Really when I had to go to the U.S. and quarantine and get ready for the tournament. I think when I took my first COVID test, that's when I realized I was getting back to competition.

I think just now being on site, seeing all the players, that's when it really becomes real and start realizing that we're

back to play.

THE MODERATOR: You were talking beforehand that you haven't been able to go out on the course yet, but how excited are you to be able to step on the Inverness and be able to take on this course?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I'm so excited. It's such an amazing golf course. My brother played last year the U.S. juniors, so I knew how special this place was. It's been fun hearing about his experience here at Inverness and me coming back now for this tournament. It's just so special to be back on tour.

I think no matter where we're going I think it's just exciting to be back on tour and just play. This place makes it extra special.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Albane. Now, we do have some people. If you would like to ask a question, we ask that you say so in the group chat function. We'll be sure to unmute you.

I want to also say just as people are looking for a question, how excited are you for the next couple weeks as well? You are going to be traveling on and doing the next couple tournaments.

ALBANE VALENZUELA: So excited. I mean, this is what I was waiting for, and I'm finally getting my rookie season started. Even if it's an extended one we get a year and a half now. Just so excited to be back to competition, play on tour, and just do what I love, which is play golf.

THE MODERATOR: All right.

Q. I wanted to ask you where you quarantined, how you spent that time, and then what the testing process was like.

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Yeah, so I been in the Bahamas for the past five, six month. Just spent time there with my family. Moved there two years ago, so that's really home base for me.

And just practicing there at Albany with my brother, my dad as well. So just been nice to be home for a long period of time and try to do some different things. Like I worked out a lot. I spent a lot of time with friends. Went to the beach and just got my mind a little bit away from golf, and still practiced hard, so took advantage of the long time period.

And then, yeah, testing, saliva test. My mom took the nasal test and she told me I was really lucky to just have the saliva one. So far, so good.

Q. Did you get your results back since you've been here?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I got my results back. I've been negative. I was telling my mom I think it's the only time in my life where negative is so good. It's spread negative, not positive when it comes to COVID.

Q. What was the turnaround time on that?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: So I got tested last week in Florida, and then again I got tested Monday when I arrived and got my results back last night.

Q. So you did spend time in Florida before you came to Toledo?

A. I did. So Bahamas was considered an international destination so I had to fly to Florida. I stayed at one of our close friends house and I got to stay there in Palm Beach and stay there for a while.

Q. You broke up there on that last part. I'll read it in the transcript. Thank you.

ALBANE VALENZUELA: (Laughing.)

Q. Question following up Bethan's line there. Just coming out amid the pandemic, can you speak to what it's like and is there some concerns, was there some concerns, should I go out? Just that feeling you have.

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Well I think you're never too cautious. I think it's a sentiment that's for all players, is you're never too cautious. This pandemic is real and I have a lot of my friends that were effect by it. It's definitely scary. I mean, you can't undermine the extent of this pandemic and we have to be overly cautious. We can't be cautious enough I think being back on tour.

I know Mike Whan and Heather, they all took the necessary measures to protect us players volunteers and all the people here on site, so I'm pretty confident the LPGA really is -- the tour knows what they're doing and I feel pretty safe now being in this bubble.

Q. And then also, what is it like at a tournament now compared to when you were earlier in the year with this new world? New habits? Are you having to check do I have my mask on me? Don't hug somebody. What are those things like?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: It's definitely different. I mean, I've definitely gone back to my room, Oh, I forgot my mask

or I forgot my hand sanitizer. We have new habits now, and we have to really get used to it.

It's definitely weird seeing our your friends on tour and not hugging them. I'm a hugger, so it's definitely a weird. Just you have to catch yourself and say, Well, we have to stay at a safe distance. Otherwise I think it just brings back golf to its core, which is really just playing golf.

We don't have all spectators, which we obviously love as LPGA players having all the fans and support out there, but it's just different experience just to be out there and play golf. You're there with your caddie and it kind of feels like a college tournament at this point.

Q. Great. And just so you know, some parts drop out where we can't hear so, I'm hoping that the ASAP can fill those in. We're getting most of it, so don't worry about that. Thank you.

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Okay.

Q. I'm just curious, did you wear a Whoop band?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I just got one so now I'm wearing it so I'll get to see all my numbers all day long.

Q. Yeah. Just curious, what do you think about that technology?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I think it's great. My brother has been using it. I love technology and I think I've definitely been using like some tools just to see like my oxygen levels and heart rate in the past couple month.

I think it's great. We're so thankful they'll provide us with all those bracelets. I know so many athletes use it and swear by it, so it's just great that everyone has access to them and we're able to use them during such times.

Q. And then going off a little what Randall just asked, obviously so much uncertainty about everything. Has there been a pretty positive impact from people on tour about starting out the first week kind of in the same site for two consecutive weeks?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Yeah, I think everyone was getting ready to get back on tour and I think really the LPGA took the time to set everything ready, took all the right measures, to get back on tour, and I think it was kind of reassuring to see what the PGA Tour has done before us.

I think really gave us confidence to see we could really good back out there and feel safe and be protected on tour. I think all players are very excited to be here and get back to competition.

Q. What are your impressions of the golf course? I assume you've played all 18 holes now. And the best bit of advice your brother gave you?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I haven't played yet. I'm going out there in an hour. Definitely from just practicing it looks amazing. The greens are in amazing shape, and just the rough, roughs are really thick, so it feels like we're back on the LPGA. My brother played last year the U.S. Juniors, and he told me, Stay away from the roughs. They're just the hardest part of the courses.

He just told me to hit fairways and greens, but I think that applies to most courses.

THE MODERATOR: All right, one more if anyone else would like a question. Last chance here. We'll put Randall back on.

Q. I was curious if you saw Christina Kim's Twitter where she took photographs of how she dressed? I'm sure you didn't go that way, but could you relate to her preparation there?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I just briefly saw a tweet about it where she was with her whole HAZMAT suit. You know, I think during these anyone can do anything as long as you try to take precautionary measures, so, yeah, good for her. She's trying to stay safe, yeah.

Q. My next question is just Inverness Club, you guys have all not been playing tournament golf for a while and this is one of the great venues of past major championships. How much of a challenge is this course going to offer restarting with a little rust?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: I think it's definitely going to be a challenge, and I think we can tell on Sunday how players have played and how they managed the course. Definitely going to be a challenge, but the LPGA always sets the courses so it's challenging for players.

I think just exciting to be in such a great venue for the LPGA's restart.

Q. Just one question. Since you are a rookie on tour, what are the feelings going into this tournament compared to the first tournament this year?

ALBANE VALENZUELA: If feels like a restart. Feels like I'm a rookie again. It's been so long since I last competed, so definitely feels -- you get the same nerves and

excitement as when you started the season and kind of what I had in Boca.

But overall just excited. I feel like I've played a lot of golf during quarantine, so definitely feel prepared. We'll see how it goes on Friday.

THE MODERATOR: Is that it from everyone? Let me just check one more time. All right. I think we're good to wrap up. Thank you again, Albane, for joining us here today.

ALBANE VALENZUELA: Thanks to you.

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