

Ford Championship presented by KCC

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Gilbert, Arizona, USA

Seville Golf and Country Club

Sarah Schmelzel

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome inside the media center here at the Ford Championship presented by KCC.

Pleased to be joined by a local native here, Sarah Schmelzel. I want to kick things off. We talked a little bit on Sunday and you said, I'm gonna stay in my bed on Monday, but other than that, I'm focused on the tournament. What is it like to be back here in the Phoenix area?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Yeah, nothing like it. Growing up there was a tournament at my home course now, Moon Valley Country Club, and so I feel like I've been around LPGA events in the Phoenix area for as long as I can remember, and it is really what sparked my interest and my love for golf and knew that I wanted to this.

So coming full circle, getting to come back and being a member playing in the LPGA event in Phoenix, there is nothing like it.

It's such an honor.

Q. Just in general, what are some of the earliest memories you have of the LPGA in your area and some things that stand out to you the most?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: So they played at Moon Valley, five minutes from my house. One of my earliest memories was my dad pulling me out of school, getting to go watch practice rounds, that kind of stuff. Just how good the women were back then.

They were so inspiring. They still are. Getting to watch Annika up close. That was really what started to spark my passion for it. I would just follow her along. Getting to see the atmosphere and stuff. There was really nothing like it. Yeah, it was just super inspiring.

Q. I know we talked about that you stayed in your bed on Sunday night.



Championship

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SARAH SCHMELZEL: Uh-huh.

Q. What did that feel like to be back and take in a night at home?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Yeah, for sure. My WHOOP recovery was like 95%, of course. It was so great, such a good night of sleep. It was nice in a way. We're on the road so much you get such little tastes of home.

So Monday I took the day off. I went and got dinner with my brother and one of our best friends; slept in my bed obviously; woke up; did laundry. It was so nice. It's like a nice getaway, a little kind of reset mentally.

So it was perfect.

Q. How many people do you have coming out this week?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: I don't know. I've got my mom, dad, brother, which is great. Then friends. I've got a little bit of family. But friends of my mom's, friends of my dad's. I'm just excited to see everyone. Hopefully I've scrounged up enough tickets to get everyone in.

I'm just really excited to see everyone.

Q. Also want to talk about coming to this event, playing the way you've been playing, three top 10 finishes in your last three starts. How comfortable are you feeling in your game and how good overall do you feel in every aspect?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Yeah, I played Tuesday, nine holes with my caddie. I said to him, wow, this is incredible. I don't have to adjust for a different type of grass. This is what I'm used to. Finally.

So I feel really comfortable.

You know, visually seeing golf courses like this is what I grew up playing, so it's very comfortable from that aspect.

And I feel really good about my process and how I've been



going about getting ready for tournaments and how I've kind of gone through tournaments mentally as well as physically.

Just feel like I've kind of started to get that a little more precise week to week. Just helping add to the comfort level, and then on top of being home it's really nice.

Q. What's been the mentality shift that's really allowed you to play your way in contention and stay in contention? That's a challenge always out here.

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Yeah, definitely. I worked with my mental coach for I think four years now, maybe five years. Worked with him a little bit in college as well. We always work on the same type of stuff.

Not trying to play perfect golf. Trying to play with that kid-like mentality of let's just go for it. I started working with Chris Mason at the end of last year, right after CME and everything wrapped up. He's really helped me hone in on play with what you have. Let's not worry about what you don't have.

That's just made me so much more confident in what I do have. When I go out I'm not searching for something. I'm like, let's figure out how to play with what I have today and this week and right now. It's kept me a lot more present and it's just helped me prepare better I think.

Q. Let's not leave the present too much, but there is that team competition in September that I know every American wants to make that team. How much is that on your radar right now and really just trying to block that out and stay focused on the present?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Yeah, you know, I don't necessarily try to block it out. I think for me, my brain thinking about it is totally normal, so I just try to accept the fact that it's kind of in the back of my mind.

But I've been really focused on those small goals, daily goals, how do I practice well today so I can play well tomorrow, next week, that kind of thing. So I'm really trying to take care of the daily, like the daily things that are going to hopefully put me on this team later in this year.

Q. Just this golf course, I know desert golf tends to be really, really hard or really, really fun going low. What's the golf course like and how are you prepping this week to maybe put together some low rounds and lift yourself to that victory?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Yeah, it's fun. It's kind of out in front of you this week, which is I think it's going to yield

some pretty low scores. The conditions are so good. I think we're going to have great weather all week. The grass, the greens, everything looks perfect.

So I think we're just going to play aggressive, try to make a ton of birdies kind of thing.

Q. When you come back and play here in front of a bunch people you know, do you get nervy, feel any different?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: I think in the past I definitely have. We played here in 2019, my rookie year, and then we played last year at Super obviously.

I was out playing a bunch practice rounds trying to get ready pre-tournament week. For this week I just decided let's treat it like a normal tournament.

So I took Monday off. First time I saw the golf course was yesterday. I think the nerves are normal. Obviously I want to play well for all the people I love coming out watching me, and this tournament would mean the world me to win having grown up and watched the LPGA in Phoenix for so long.

But I think I've just kind of had a little bit of a mindset shift of let's just treat it like a normal week and see what happens.

Q. I remember talking to you guys when you were getting ready to play here right before the pandemic started. How far do you feel like you've come since then?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Wow, a long way. And I think as much if not more mentally than physically. There are so many doubts that can creep into your head. There is so much that goes on of the golf course, on the golf course.

I think I've just changed so much in that mentality shift play with what you have let's not worry about what we don't have kind of thing.

I'm not sure I would've been able to get to that place back then. Just a lot bigger picture type of person. I think that's how I've changed since then.

Q. You mentioned working with a mental coach for four or five years. What's your coach's name?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Bill Nelson.

Q. Might not be the fairest way to phrase it, but you mentioned it's clicking now, you're having fun now.



What has allowed you to have to this process kind of click for you five years into your LPGA career?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Yeah, for sure. So, yeah, I think I started working with him full time again after the 2021 season. Then I had -- I had a solid 2022. Same types of feelings, feeling really comfortable, really confident. Getting a few more Top 10s, some hotter starts on Thursdays and Fridays. Went through some injuries last year and trying to play through it sent me into a pretty big spiral mentally.

When I got healthy and kind of re-shifted focus, at the end of the year once CME wrapped up and I missed CME by one spot, I think it was a little more of a serious mentality of I've been out here for four years, like I want to do this.

I really want to do what it takes to get to the next level. And my mental coach and I had that talk right after Thanksgiving I want to say. Actually the week after CME. We just said let's get down to the nitty-gritty, and so we just opened up a lot of stuff and dove straight in.

I think that's -- maybe took it a little more seriously on my part and that's why it's clicking now. Yeah, we just really got down to some of the nitty-gritty details I think.

Q. What were the injuries you were dealing with?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: I had an ongoing neck/shoulder kind of injury. I hurt my finger a couple weeks before Asia. Should not have been playing with it. I think I got the stitches off my finger maybe a week before I went to Asia.

Just with some nerve damage, just a lot of stuff going on just changed my golf swing. Then once your golf swing changes and physically you don't feel like you can do things anymore it leads to doubt and uncertainty.

Just kind of spiraled and I didn't really find answers until I want to say June, and then started to kind of turn it around from there.

Q. And with that turnaround, I guess I couldn't imagine getting those stitches out of a finger and playing golf a week later. That sounds aggressive. Have you had any conversations with Stacy this year after the solid run of play about potentially making Solheim and what that would look like?

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Yeah, she sent me a message and said, great playing, keep it up. Go team USA. She's been super supportive in the last few years where I've been a little bit more in the conversation, going to some pre-Solheim team dinners and that kind of thing. So she's

always been really supportive, and I appreciate her just thinking of me when I'm playing well right now.

Q. As you were walking over here I saw you hugging Cori, the Girls' Golf site director here. You are one of many Girls' Golf alum that started when you were a little girl playing golf as part of your journey to the LPGA. What does it mean to still see that growing here in the Phoenix area and have Cori and even on the range and putting green I think we have some Girls' Golf currents in the pro-am.

SARAH SCHMELZEL: Yes, absolutely. I've known Cori -- she worked for the Junior Golf Association of Arizona when I was growing up and playing. She went over to LPGA Girls' Golf. What she does is incredible. The opportunity she gives young girls, young women, to learn how to play, give them a platform, help them reach the next level and teach them incredible values at that LPGA girls golf instills in all the girls is amazing.

I know one of the girls, Lena Durette out here, my dad helps her with her golf game a little bit. She goes to my high school and she's about to graduate. Like I said, it's full circle to go from there to be here, and hopefully I can help some of those girls get to where they want to be as well.

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