

NW Arkansas Championship

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

Rogers, Arkansas, USA

Pinnacle Country Club

Austin Ernst

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome inside the Walmart NW Arkansas Championship virtual interview room. I'm pleased to be here with defending champion, Austin Ernst. Austin, I know you've got some plans coming up, but what's it been like the last couple weeks gearing up for the Walmart?

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, it's been great. Obviously played last week so didn't really think much to this week. Yeah, excited to be back. I love the golf course.

I have a great host family here so the week is just really relaxing and really just a fun week on and off the golf course.

Yeah, just looking forward to Friday and getting started.

THE MODERATOR: Let's take it back to the COVID year and what was this tournament. You came out of the gate rocking. You were playing lights out the entire week going head-to-head with Anna Nordqvist. Just take me through what was going through your mind and what that tournament was like for you last year.

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, the greens were pretty soft last year so I kind of knew starting the week you're going to have to make a lot of birdies.

I think starting the last round I was four back and I knew I needed to have a low round. I got off to a great start. Birdied the first three holes, and I think I shot 31 on the front and just kind of knew all day I needed to keep the pedal down.

Even if I got a lead, I knew I had to keep making birdies, because she could keep making birdies and other people that were kind of chasing could keep doing the same thing. Yeah, it was definitely a shootout last year between the two of us.

Even though she was in the group behind me I didn't realize how close we were the entire back nine going back and forth with birdies. Yeah, luckily I pulled it out in the

end.

THE MODERATOR: How satisfying was that for you? I know you talked about going into your own sports statistics and how much figuring out your game helped your confidence and helped you tune into your game for especially that week.

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, I think the COVID break kind of helped me. I kind of got to take a break for the first time in a while and get away from a golf and really want to kind of come back, and almost rejuvenated to come back and compete.

Yeah, that week obviously I hit the ball great and I made a ton of putts that week. You can't shoot 20-under and not make a lot of putts. That's key to my game. When I putt well then I typically play my best.

My iron game is typically pretty consistent, so I kind of know the key for me is I need to make a lot of putts. Yeah, I had a ton of confidence coming off the AIG Women's Open finishing fifth last year and then coming straight to this week and winning this week. Those weeks give you a lot of confidence that obviously in different conditions I could play and I could contend.

THE MODERATOR: I know there was quite a bit of emotions when you were able to win. It was your first win in quite a while. What did it do for your game and how do you think it helped you prepare for the next win you had as well?

AUSTIN ERNST: It just gives -- winning breeds confidence, so I think being able to look back on it and get that first win since 2014, I contended a lot but hadn't won, so I think getting the job done and getting that win, doing it in -- you know, chasing and it being a little bit different golf course than when I won in '14, but I knew I had become a better player; I just hadn't had another win.

I think that gave me a ton of confidence, and then obviously all of last year I had my best year on tour and then obviously winning the beginning of the year in Ocala and winning that one wire to wire, I think I've won a lot of different ways now, and that just gives me a ton of confidence in my game. I've won on a lot of different types of golf courses in different conditions.



THE MODERATOR: You were at Oregon Golf Club last week; Pinnacle is a little bit different. Differently more hilly over there maybe. What have you been working on specifically in your game that you think will shine this week?

AUSTIN ERNST: The main thing I been working on is putting. I hit the ball well last week. I just didn't putt very well, so I kind of knew what I needed to work on coming into this week.

And then obviously I'm very familiar with this golf course. I played it nine years, so you kind of know what to expect off the tee. They've change -- the tees are the same as last year, but they changes a couple tees last year. You just kind of know what clubs you're going to hit into the greens and just really know how to attack this golf course, which is nice.

Luckily it's a much easier walk than last week.

THE MODERATOR: Very much easier walk. Before we open up to questions here, I just got to ask, you talk a little bit about the community here and what it means to you, your host family that you've had. What is it like returning to a place like Rogers, Arkansas that really gathers themselves around this tournament and really embraces the LPGA every time we're here?

AUSTIN ERNST: It's awesome. Last year was really weird not seeing a lot of fans. You see people in their back yard, but you don't have the grandstand which we normally have, like 17. They truly embrace us for the week. They have a lot of different events. I know they have BITE actually here instead of it being downtown.

But it's just so cool to see how almost everybody stays with a host family. You get a lot of community and really reminds me of where I grew up. The area reminds me a lot of it. But I think it's just really cool to see how Rogers and Bentonville and Walmart and P&G really kind of rally around this event and they try it make it better each year.

With what I've seen, there is even more grandstands this year and I think crowds will be awesome. It's so fun to come here and see how many people come out with kids and their families. Just seems like the whole community really enjoys having us here.

Q. (No microphone.)

AUSTIN ERNST: I think this week it's just such a relaxing week and it's literally like being at home. I go back every day and I go hang out with my host. Gives us something

else to do to kind of get away from golf a little bit.

But it's just such a nice week to -- they're invited to my wedding. They're coming to my wedding. I've got a close friendship with them, and it's so cool to see that being built from just randomly staying with them one year.

It's just fun that we've become that close. I've stayed there for seven years. You know, to be able to kind of go back and hang out with them, have dinner with them every week, it's so much nicer than going back to a hotel room where it gets pretty lonely whenever you're just kind of going back and having dinner. Might have dinner with a couple friends, but we've got seven of us that have dinner because there is another player that stays there. We just have a great time.

Q. (No microphone.)

AUSTIN ERNST: Yeah, it's great, and especially weeks like this where you know you're going have a lot of fans. Last year it was great that we got to play, but the -- there wasn't as much electricity around the events, so you still went and played but you didn't have as much excitement. You couldn't really tell what was going on around you.

Obviously this week you get some roars out here, especially on the back nine. Kind of 14 on, especially on Sunday. If they move that tee up on 14 you kind of have an a lot of opportunities for birdies or eagles, and you hear what's going on. You hear all the chants, you hear everything. Unfortunately hear that Woo Pig Soobie chant, but, yeah, it's great.

I think this is one of our favorite stops because you have so many people that come out and want to watch and cheer us on. I think that's what makes this event so special and makes it so big. It's one of our biggest non-majors, and I think that's because you see the atmosphere is so much better than a week where you might not get as many people out.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you. One last question from me before I wrap it up with you. There is another event happening over in Wisconsin, the Ryder Cup. Just coming off your Solheim Cup experience, I know we have competition ahead of us and you'll be getting down and dirty with the golf course out here, but what are your thoughts of Team USA's chances? We're hoping or guessing that you'll be rooting for Team USA.

AUSTIN ERNST: Absolutely. (Laughter.) No, I think it's going to be a good contest. Hopefully be able to catch a little bit of it.

You can never really pick. They always say, Solheim, oh, somebody is stronger on paper. I think it's going to be really exciting. I think that golf course is really going to test them.

But, yeah, I hope USA redeems us and they get the Ryder Cup back.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for joining us.

AUSTIN ERNST: Thanks.

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