

PGA Championship

Monday, May 13, 2024

Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Valhalla Golf Club

Ben Polland

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon and welcome to the 106th PGA Championship at Valhalla Golf Club.

2024 Professional Champion and Corebridge Financial team member, Ben Polland, is joining us.

Welcome to Valhalla. How does it feel to be back for your fourth PGA Championship?

BEN POLLAND: It feels great. It's all happening really fast. Just got in this morning and there's a lot to do. Trying to sneak out for a practice round before some weather moves in the next couple days it looks like.

THE MODERATOR: What do you remember most from your three previous PGAs.

BEN POLLAND: I remember having fun. I remember being very nervous for my first one at Whistling Straits, and I think Baltusrol the following year was a little more fun being kind of in the Met area where I had a lot of friends and family, and then Kiawah was just really hard. I remember grinding and my game not feeling great and just really struggling.

Q. Taking you back to the PGA Championship in Frisco and the conditions there and how tough it was --

BEN POLLAND: Yeah, Frisco played very difficult. The practice rounds that we had before the event, the wind was blowing 30, 40 miles an hour, and all the players were looking at each other like, How are we going to do this on the East Course? It was so difficult. Firm, tough pins, tough greens, and I knew right then that it was just going to be who could grind it out and get those tough pars whenever you needed them, and you didn't really have to chase much.

Yeah, came out on top doing that.

Q. Compared to your three previous PGA Championships, do you think the conditions in Frisco were harder, and what did you expect from Frisco as a

site for the PGA Championship?

BEN POLLAND: Yeah, they're tough to compare. The wind at Kiawah and the wind at Frisco were pretty similar, but the PGA Championship is such an awesome test, having to hit your fairways and hit your greens.

Kerry does such a great job. The PGA does an amazing job of setting it up with long rough and everything. Frisco, I think the rough wasn't very long for us, but there was a lot of trouble elsewhere, and just with the wind, that's what made it so difficult.

Q. A lot of folks would figure the biggest perk of winning what you won in Frisco would be getting here. But is there a bigger one?

BEN POLLAND: I mean, the six starts on the PGA TOUR next year, I know that was the thing that maybe hungover me the most when I lost that tournament in 2015, thinking about that.

The PGA Cup is another one. I've been fortunate to play on two of those so far and will have my third this fall. That is, by far, one of my favorite weeks I've had playing golf. It's incredible.

Q. You won a decade earlier; you had a close call and an unfortunate finish. As a learning moment as a pro, what did that do for you?

BEN POLLAND: I was just very inexperienced playing in that tournament. I think what I learned from it was just to take one shot at a time and not think too far ahead. I often remind myself about my mindset, where I was that day or that hole, really, and I kind of protect myself from getting ahead of things. Just like diagnosing a lie or the conditions or the shot, whatever it is. That's kind of been ingrained in me as part of my process right now.

Q. I'm wondering what your history is with this course. Do you remember watching the broadcast at all back a decade ago?

BEN POLLAND: Well, this course here, Valhalla, I've



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never played. It's my first time here on property today. I'm looking forward to seeing it. I've heard a lot of great things.

The highlights that you see on TV about this place, whether it was Tiger, Rory or the Ryder Cup, like I remember watching all of those. I'm excited to hit some of those shots those guys were hitting.

Q. Did you watch any specifically coming up to this week?

BEN POLLAND: I watched Tiger's round a little bit. I know the course has changed. I'm not sure exactly how, but it's changed a little bit. But I just wanted to see some guys hitting shots and just kind of getting pumped up to be out here.

Q. Fourth PGA Championship; have you been able to develop some relationships with the Tour pros? Do people recognize you when you come?

BEN POLLAND: Maybe not from playing in this tournament before, but just from the world of golf. I would say that the world is small, but golf makes it smaller.

And working in the golf business in the New York -- see other people from that region out here, whether it's like other players or fans.

And then the tours that I've played on, like the Web.com and the Korn Ferry and the Latin Tour. I just bumped into a buddy of mine who's caddying for Camilo Villegas; he caddies for Nico Echevarria who plays on the Tour. It's fun to bump into those guys out here.

Q. Anyone that impresses you the most out here?

BEN POLLAND: Everybody here is impressive. Even like watching, like, some of -- a club pro like Wyatt Worthington hit an iron. Like I kind of look over the other way, it's like, that was pretty good. You have the world's best out here with hitting, putting, chipping. Just looking forward to trying to take some of that in through osmosis this week.

Q. What's your role at Shooting Star? Tell us a little bit about the facility. Sounds like a wonderful place.

BEN POLLAND: Yeah, Shooting Star is in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. I'm the director of golf there. It's my third season in that role, my fourth year working at the club, and I think it's the best place on earth. It's incredible. It's a beautiful Tom Fazio course that's built in 2009. It's right at the base of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort the Teton range. It's a beautiful place. It's breathtaking every time of year, and I can't wait to go back, honestly.

Q. You mentioned some of the developmental tours you played. What was the fork in the road that led you to this as a career?

BEN POLLAND: So that was when I was working at Deepdale in New York, and I started to play well in some of the Met section, the Met area tournaments. It around that same time I played well in the PPC, and then won the Met Open earlier that year, as well.

And then I was kind of getting advice from everybody around me saying, This is your chance to go do it if you want to play full time and chase the dream. That's when I decided to step away from working in the industry and I decided to go do Q-schools, and it started with the Mackenzie Tour, the Canadian Tour at the time.

And from there conditional status on Web to Latin Tour, and finished well down that tour to earn status for the Korn Ferry Tour in 2019.

After that season, I didn't play very well and was looking to see what I would do after that, and got back into the industry, and all my roads led to Shooting Star.

Q. All that experience must serve you pretty well on a week like this.

BEN POLLAND: Yeah, for sure. I think the first major I played in at Whistling Straits, I only had one four-round tournament under my belt, and it was the tournament to get me into that tournament.

So I've got a few hundred under my belt now, and definitely feel more comfortable with how to play a 72-hole golf tournament.

And then just like the nerves and pressure and all that stuff, you learn how to deal with.

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