

BMW Championship

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St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Bellerive Country Club

Camilo Villegas

Jay Delsing

Media Day Press Conference

JAY DELSING: It's an extreme honor for me to be with you today. It's my pleasure and honor to welcome Camilo Villegas to the dais.

We so appreciate you being here today. Gosh, I have so many things I want to talk to you about. Before we talk about winning here in '08, take us back to what golf had to be like. You grew up in Medellín. What was life like back there, and how did you get involved in the game?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Hi, everybody. Happy to be here. Happy memories of this place. It's been a long time, but it's great to walk in here.

Yes, going back to how I started in Medellín, Colombia, this kid had a chance to start playing golf when he was about seven years old. My dad joined a golf club and I was very fortunate to be able to be curious about the game and just wake up every morning and try to get better.

Who would have thought that that curiosity and that discipline and that love for the game was going to turn into a PGA TOUR career, and then coming here, winning my first PGA TOUR event in 2008, and following on to do the things I've done.

This kid from Colombia had dreams, and with work ethic and opportunities, because at the end of the day you've got to take advantage of those opportunities that arise, but the Colombia Golf Federation was great to me. I had a chance to represent my country and start playing. Then I came up to play golf at the University of Florida. Played four great years there.

JAY DELSING: Four-time all-American.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Yeah, it was good memories. Buddy Alexander, our coach and our team, winning NCAAAs my freshman year, those little things just keep motivating you to keep pushing.



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And then the keep pushing takes us to Bellerive in 2008 after playing two and a half years on TOUR and being close many times and not winning. I remember making that putt on 18 here, and it was just kind of -- I felt relief, like man, finally I get my win. I've been dreaming of this.

Yeah, we look back, and this beautiful game of golf has given me so many opportunities, starting all the way back in Colombia with my dad getting into the game, and here we are.

JAY DELSING: You've won five times on the PGA TOUR, 12 times around the world. Talk a little bit about when you come back to a place like Bellerive; there's never, ever going to be another place where you get your first win. So there's got to be special memories. I can remember the crowds were incredible. What is it like to come back?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Very interesting. You know what? Every year I get one or two or three pictures of my pictures that are hanging around this place, and it brings those memories. That yellow hat you guys see and the long hair and everything, yeah, it's in my heart. This trophy right here, BMW, which is exactly the same as the one I got in 2008. It sits in my office. I get to see it every day when I go there and catch up on my emails and my stuff, and there's that same picture, too, in my office.

Bellerive gave me belief. When I got here, I knew I was good. My track record as an amateur was pretty special. But winning on TOUR is a dream. Even though you think you can do it, you don't know you can do it until you do it.

That's exactly what Bellerive gave me. It was actually so strong that the next week I went and won the TOUR Championship in a playoff against Sergio Garcia. Those little stretches in your career, they don't come very often.

Yes, we've got Tiger Woods and Scottie Scheffler and those guys that are absolute legends, but when you get those little stretches, you remember them. You're thankful. It brings gratitude. It brings a kind of reward.

Man, there's a lot of hours. There's a lot of hard work behind all this that we do in order to accomplish and live memories like that.

To me, seeing myself in that picture with that funky yellow

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hat lifting that trophy is pretty special. It's pretty cool to be here with you guys.

JAY DELSING: Some of the things we used to wear well before you were born, we don't even want to look at those pictures anymore. I know you're heavily involved with the business side of the PGA TOUR. Talk a little bit about, we have our BMW folks here, and to have such an iconic brand associated with our game and the PGA TOUR, it means a great deal to me, and I know it does to you, as well.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Yes, and we are here with BMW at the BMW Championship, but trust me, those guys have put so much money into our game, and they've supported this great game, not only here with this event but with all the stuff they do around the world. We've just got to say thanks. We've just got to say thanks because there's so much more behind a golf tournament. There's so much more behind what we do.

As players, we just show up every Monday, we throw our stuff in the locker. Come Sunday we just pick it up and go to the next week.

But look at this; it's eight weeks before the golf tournament. We drive here, and you see what's going on, the amount of infrastructure, the amount of people behind this, all the media, everything that happens.

Yes, I'm involved in the board on the PGA TOUR, and it's been an honor to serve on that board because this game has given me so many opportunities, it's time for me to give back a little bit, and I think the board is a great place.

But going back to the tournaments, the BMW has meaning. It has meaning beyond golf. It's not only about, once again, us showing up, winning a trophy, being on TV, but it's the Evans Scholars and it's the amount of jobs they can do, what they can create in their local communities and what they can leave after we pack our stuff and go to the next one.

Believe it or not, they might have a week or two just going to regroup and they start all over again to do it for the next year and to keep building those opportunities for the local charities, for the local businesses.

To set up that platform that allows us to have the job we have, which trust me, it's a pretty tough one when you're competing against those young boys out there which are tough to beat, but it's a pretty special one. And once again, we go back to this kid coming from Colombia; it's a dream come true, and it's an honor to be here.

JAY DELSING: I think the association that BMW has created with the Western Golf Association makes it even more special because you're talking about 1,200 young men and women that are going to get an education because of the game and because of their caddying, and it's got to feel good to look back and be associated that way, as well.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Absolutely. I was reading a little bit this morning, and over 12,000 caddies that have graduated, that's pretty impressive. That's why I say the BMW Championship has meaning, and it has meaning beyond the game of golf. The Evans Scholars and what the PGA TOUR and what the BMW and what the Western Golf Association and what everybody does, I mean, don't get me wrong, I have my own foundation, and to be able to give back is so special. It gives me purpose, my wife purpose, and that's what's behind these tournaments is that purpose beyond the game. To be able to just change lives.

The game of golf is so unbelievable. What's behind this great game and what we can -- the amount of people we can touch, we can impact, we can make their lives better, yes, there's a trophy there, but there's a lot more than that.

JAY DELSING: It's hard to look at you and not look at how fit you are. When I played, we kind of just went to the bar after we played and commiserated. You guys go to the gym and some other things. Talk a little bit, did you have a hero growing up, Gary Player maybe? I did a little research. You look great, and you're 44 years old now.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: I am. I am. I'm getting a little older. Those young guys are tough to beat. They come to ready to play.

But yeah, Gary was definitely an influence from the fitness world. I came to the University of Florida and that's where I got into fitness. I came as a freshman, 138 pounds and one of the shortest hitters on the golf team, and yes, I had a great amateur career in South America. I won everything in Colombia.

But my curiosity was okay, what's next. If I want to play golf for a living, if I want to play on the PGA TOUR, what do I need to improve, and it was the fitness side. Four years later, I'm 160 pounds, I'm one of the longest guys on the team. Fast forward to my rookie year, I was top 10 in driving distance, and it made a big difference. It made a big difference.

Now fast forward 20-something years, and I think I have the same ball speed, and I'm below average on TOUR. So this younger generation is even more and more fit. They're

more ready. They're more capable. They're more athletes. They're better prepared. They changed the game.

It's pretty cool to watch how everything has evolved.

JAY DELSING: How do you feel -- there's so much talk about our game, that the ball is going too far. Where do you sit on that topic?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: You know, it's a sensitive topic. I do agree that the ball -- it's not necessarily the ball. The game has become a very powerful game. The question is is there anything to be done out there.

I think there is. I think what the USGA and R&A brought to the table was interesting until we started doing more and more research and more data came out, and it showed that it probably wasn't going to accomplish exactly what they wanted.

We had a meeting with them not long ago, and we're going to start brainstorming and seeing what's a better solution probably. Let's hope all the parties can work together. If there's something that we can do that is going to make this game better, that is going to continue to grow the game and it's going to continue to have -- one thing is the professional game. We are a minority. The game of golf, once again, goes way beyond the professional game.

We need the game to continue to boom. 2020 and COVID was actually great for the game of golf, and we sit in a great position right now. A lot of people seem to be enjoying the game. A lot of kids seem to be getting into this great game.

Again, that's more important than if we can carry that 300-yard bunker or not.

JAY DELSING: The last thing I have for you before we turn it over to questions is you had just about a nine-year gap between your fourth and your fifth win. Talk a little bit about how difficult, because life comes hard, as you know, and some of the things you've experienced off the course. Talk a little bit about the challenges of staying motivated and like hey, I don't really feel like going to the gym and going to hit balls.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Yeah, I have to say motivation has always been on my side, which is good, and I'm very thankful for that. Results, not necessarily. Yes, we see the Tiger Woods and we see the Scottie Schefflers and we see those guys week in and week out are up top. That's rare. That's not the norm on the PGA TOUR.

Jay, you played for a long time, and you've experienced

the ups and downs. That's why I say it's the best job in the world when you're playing good. It's tough when you're not playing good. Emotionally it's tough, the travel, leaving your family.

The game can stab you, but you've got to keep pushing. You've got to keep pushing. Like you said, I had nine years in between my fourth and my fifth win on the PGA TOUR. There was some bad golf in there. There was a shoulder injury in there. There was a family tragedy where we lost our daughter, which puts a dent, and then there was a motivation to come back and keep doing this and keep working.

Then came my win. I look up in the sky, and I honor that one to our little angel Mia. Our Mia's Miracles Foundation pops up after that and gives us purpose to do something new. My wife is 100 percent behind the foundation, and trust me, this country is unbelievable when it comes to charity. The amount of support you get in this country to do good things, once again, we go back to the Western Golf Association, BMW, the Evans Scholars and what this tournament means, and it's a sign of God gives you the strength to keep moving and keep pushing and keep doing what you've got to do.

Life is in motion. Life doesn't stop. You've just got to go with it.

It was a pretty special win. It was a very emotional win. Now I say that the next one I want to have my son, four and a half year old now, be there so he can see Dad win on the PGA TOUR again.

JAY DELSING: I'm not sure if you're aware, but the PGA TOUR raises more money each year for charity than Major League Baseball, the NFL, the NHL and the NBA combined. I wish we talked about that a little more personally because as a young player I didn't really think much of it, but as I get older, it's something I can really appreciate.

I want to turn it over now to the crowd. Does anyone have any questions for Camilo?

Q. This may be a challenging question, and Jay, I'd invite you to respond as well. Both of you in your careers have played in what I call the working-class tournaments, the John Deeres, the Sanderson Farms, the ones that every year struggle to fill their fields with named talent. Now we learn two years from now those tournaments are going to likely going to be relegated to the Challenger Series. They're never going to see any of the players in the top 100 come to their towns. What do you say to them? I haven't seen anybody talk

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or write about them as this new policy has come forward. Nobody has talked about those towns that paid their dues. John Deere has been doing this for four or five decades, and to now not have player in their field.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Okay, so yes, and I'm part of this. I'm part of the future competitions committee, so full disclosure here.

I think we've got to go back to ground zero. You can hear comments here and there, and obviously we're not going to make everybody happy. That's not how the world works.

But I encourage everybody to think of the changes we're doing, what would happen if we didn't do changes because we've been doing a lot of research. We've been doing a lot of stuff with Fan Forward research, with corporate partners, with media partners, with our members. Everybody seems to be asking for change. Brian Rolapp has been unbelievable in everything he's done, the way he's managed this process.

The first thing he did is he called the media partners. He called the media partner and he said, okay, guys, can you present to us. Can you guys tell us how you see the game of golf, how you guys make money in the game of golf and what you would like to see different.

Then he went to the members of the PGA TOUR and he asked the same questions. He's talked with a lot of our members.

Then he went to corporate partners. Then we dug into the Fan Forward research, and we said, well, if we want to continue to grow the game of golf, we need to change soon because in about a \$30 billion industry, which is media rights, which we have our negotiation in 2030, if we don't do anything, we're going to be worse off, and if we're worse off from the media rights, then that's going to be a trickle-down effect, not only to our players but to our corporate partners, to TV and to growing the game of golf.

I fully trust Brian in terms of how he's taking this approach.

With that being said, yes, there's changes, and I think me personally, my goal in this whole process has been if we can make 85, 90 percent of the people happy with the changes, we've accomplished our goal. Once again, we can't make everybody happy. So there are going to be situations where there's going to be certain tournaments that are going to -- they might be affected in the wrong way. But if overall we can continue to enhance our whole ecosystem and grow the game in the right direction, then we're going to accomplish our purpose.

We just approved, call it the bone structure of our 2028 schedule and what's to come, and we've seen a lot of positive feedback from a lot of people.

Yes, you're going to get those smaller events. I'm playing John Deere Classic this week, which by the way, it's a great tournament. It's a great local community that supports --

JAY DELSING: That gave you your first exemption.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: That gave me my first exemption in 2004. I made my first cut there. I've been coming ever since. And we're going to have to -- everybody is going to have to change, and we're going to have to start finding value in different things and different players.

With those changes come some challenges, and that Challenger Series is going to have challenges. But it's also going to be very important for the PGA TOUR. It's going to be very important to feed up our Championship Series, and it's going to be a very important part of the engine.

Again, we can focus on little things, but I encourage everybody to think a little bit different, what would happen if we didn't change, and are we doing the right changes to grow the game as a whole and not focus on the little specific negatives that are going to be out there.

JAY DELSING: Change is always happen, especially as we get older. It's just difficult. You think about you going to John Deere, and shoot, you've been there, what, 18, 20 times, and you've got friends --

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Nowadays I show up to tournaments and they say, yeah, Camilo is the guy that's played this tournament the most, and I don't know if that's good or bad because that makes me old.

JAY DELSING: But it makes it difficult. Yeah, I didn't like the fact that the TOUR condensed, went from 125 to -- because I would have been lopped off a lot of times. I was always in that 100 to 125 spot a lot.

The thing that I like the most about golf, you guys, is play better. If he shoots 70 and I shoot 71, I know exactly what I have to do. I don't have a coach that's keeping me out. It's on me.

From a player standpoint, it is super, super competitive, but it's probably the thing I miss the most and I like the most.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: For sure, and if we want to expand on some of the changes that are being done, everything

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seems a lot cleaner. Come 2020 and 2022 when competition came along, there was some stuff that needed to be done, and we reacted to what was on the table.

That saved us at the moment, and then it also brought other sort of problems right now. Our membership is not very happy with smaller fields and no cuts, and some of TV is not happy with that, and everything starts being shaken and come back. I think what we've created, we've created a schedule that's going to be easier to understand. We're going to create a schedule that's more meritocratic. There's not going to be sponsor invites on the championship tier. It's going to be like, just go play golf. The point system is going to be a lot more simple and easier to understand. We're going to get the top players to compete more often together.

At the end of the year, we're going to crown the season-ending champion. It's going to be oh, so-and-so played 32 events, this guy played 20. These guys are going to be playing under the same point structure. There's not going to be Signature Events, regular season events, opposite field events, majors with different point structures.

I think we're heading in the right direction. Once again, that 90 percent has been my personal goal during the process. We will make mistakes, trust me. Just because when you make changes, there are mistakes there. Hopefully we make small mistakes, and hopefully we can fix them quick and keep moving and growing this beautiful game.

Q. On a little lighter note, what's your prediction on Friday versus Ghana?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: That's an easy one. I don't know about prediction, but you know where my heart is. I was pretty excited to see it was a 7:30 game and I won't be on the golf course. I might have had to call the PGA TOUR and say, okay, man, I don't need a Friday afternoon tee time to miss my game.

Q. Camilo, I have two younger brothers, one pursuing golf in college and one with a goal of play Division I golf. What advice would you give to them going through the junior and amateur game of how they can pursue it?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Yeah, it comes to my mind the University of Florida and what that program did for me. It not only gave me an education, but it gave me a purpose. Coach Buddy Alexander was -- man, what a competitor, that guy.

When I look back at the doors that were being opened at the University of Florida, coming from Colombia, the health

and fitness, the practice facility, the technology, I would tell them to take advantage of the opportunities that pop in front of them just because, like we said, and we saw -- remind me, Logan, right? We saw Logan comes out here and starts caddying and all of a sudden he's an Evans Scholar and he's moving on to new things.

To your brothers, the same thing. Keep your eyes open and take advantage of those opportunities. At the end of the day, this is a great game that opens doors, but it's up to you with just a lot of discipline, dedication and love for what you do, that you're going to accomplish great things.

JAY DELSING: And get used to failing, and don't being afraid to pick yourself up off the floor. I tell young folks that I try to coach in families, they don't want their children to be hurt. I tell them, then you're going to have to move on. You're probably going to have to find a different game because this game will knock you out. How many times do you get up off the floor? That's what the test is, right? The guys that get up the most are the most successful.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: This game has kicked me butt many times. It is kicking my butt right now, but we'll keep grinding.

Q. I'm new to the world of golf. I just wanted to know if you have three words that inspire you through your career and now that you want to share with us, especially for -- the sport of golf is amazing. So just wanted to hear that from you.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Three?

Q. Or one.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Three words that inspire me? Oh, man. I'm going to go body, mind, soul. I think if you -- I guess you can go pretty deep there, and I think you can look at the physical, and the physical, you can say kind of discipline the body and do the right things when it comes to that.

Then the mind, the mind is tricky. The mind is tough. You don't really see it -- at least I didn't feel it as a kid. Then as you grow older, you start realizing that one of your biggest challenges is your mind and how I think and how you approached different things.

I guess if we want to go even more deep and you think about the soul, it's what am will I here for and what do I want to do and what do I want to accomplish and why do I want to accomplish it. Then we start getting pretty philosophical, and life is short, and what are you going to do with it.



Q. We love having the professional golf here so much. I think golf fans here keep asking for more. What is the conversation with guys when you're talking about gearing up for the BMW that professional golf is coming back to St. Louis to play? What is the tone amongst players about wanting to play in St. Louis, and as we see the schedule condense, St. Louis just wants to make sure it has the best odds of continuing to bring you back.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Well, I think you guys are very lucky to be partnered, Bellerive, BMW and Western Golf Association. You put those three together, and they've done magic over the years.

When you go out there on TOUR and you hear the comments about which ones are the best tournaments on TOUR, the BMW always pops up. There's a reason. They've purposely worked hard to have that the case, to go to good venues, to have good fans, to go to good places.

So again, I think St. Louis is in a good spot partnering with them because the players love it, and now that there's some changes on TOUR, I'm sure management and Brian and everybody really appreciates the effort and what they've created, and they will highly consider that to continue to push forward and do business with those partners.

JAY DELSING: Camilo, thank you so much on behalf of everybody in the room. Appreciate you.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Thanks, guys.

(Camilo presented with a gift of \$5,000 to Mia's Miracles Foundation).

CAMILO VILLEGAS: I never thought I was going to lose my daughter the way I lost my daughter, and here we are. I never thought I was going to have Mia's Miracles, and here we are. We were doing an opening at a hospital in Colombia, and my wife is talking to the room, and she goes and she says, you know what, everybody thinks you guys are lucky that we're here, this hospital, changing the whole oncology floor and doing all of this. But what you guys don't realize is that we're the lucky ones that have this opportunity to do it.

That stayed with me because when you have a charity, those that you can touch feel grateful, but if you look deeper, deeper, you are the one that's receiving that gift of being able to have the platform to give back and to just have more purpose in life. So thank you for that, guys.

