

Cognizant Classic

Tuesday, February 25, 2025

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Champion Course

Austin Eckroat

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everybody. We'd like to welcome Austin Eckroat to the interview room here at the 2025 Cognizant Classic in the Palm Beaches. Obviously coming back to defend your title. The first question is what was it like walking on site this week?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, it's really special. The closest memory I have to this would be whenever we won the National Championship in 2018 and then going back out to Karsten Creek the following year, going back to school and just taking it all in and trying to relive those moments. It's pretty special.

That's really my only similar experience since high school because my two wins in college I never got to go back to the course that I won at. It's just cool. It's really special.

Q. I guess you've probably got a lot of good memories about the week last year, but when you recall the week, what stands out the most to you?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, I think I've learned that, especially on this golf course, for me it just kind of -- the importance of how well I hit the driver last year really set me up for a week of success. Obviously trying to do the same thing this year, and that's easier said than done.

Like you said, just looking back on some of the shots I hit -- I've been lucky enough, I got some good advice when I was a kid, or in college, that if there's a shot that you really liked or make the putt to win, never watch it. You only want to see it from your eye, not from the TV's perspective, because once you watch it you'll forget what you saw. I've done a pretty good job of that this year. I didn't watch the final round or anything.

Like I said, I have it from my point of view, and I'm really happy about that.

Q. When we spoke, you mentioned you were looking forward to coming in and just seeing your image. Did you get to see those coming in on the banners --

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah.

Q. When you got here, did the memories just flood back?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah. Like I was saying, just the walk in -- yeah, I did see a couple posters. It's cool to come out to an event and you're being recognized.

But then whenever I walked on property, I was just doing an interview upstairs, and I could see the 18th green. I haven't been out on the golf course yet, but the memory of me sitting there on the 18th green doing a little post-round interview and then walking up and feeling such relief, it was just such a cool moment to look back on.

I'm sure there's going to be tons this week, especially on the back nine. Just remembering the shots I hit and really taking in the stress I was feeling but then the relief towards the end, I'm really looking forward to it.

Q. I remember last year I think you had mentioned that you really felt coming in that this course suited your game. I know you play a lot of venues, but are there specific holes, specific things, strategies out here that were really successful for you that you're looking forward to taking advantage of again or experiencing?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, I mean, when I think of this golf course, like I said, in my opinion it suits me very well. I think I'm able to hit driver where guys can't just because I feel like I'm very accurate and stuff like that.

I think of hole 6 out here, you see a lot of guys bail out right and just try to grind for their par; if they make bogey, no big deal. I think I made a couple birdies on 6 last year just because I felt confident that I could hit the fairway, take an aggressive line, and then I'm able to attack from that spot.

I think there's parts of this golf course throughout where I think that's something that suits my game. Especially the way I was hitting it last year was the confidence to hit the fairways, so I was able to attack.

I'm hoping to do the same thing this year. Yeah, that's probably the main piece.



Q. We know the obvious big stuff that comes with your first win: The Signature Events, you got into Augusta, job security, all those wonderful things. What else came with it? What, if anything, changed in real terms for you?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: I think probably outside the job security, the biggest thing for me was the ability to take risks earlier in the week at future events. Especially my first year I got off to a slow start, and making the cut was so important, getting those points, trying to retain my card for the following season, with the job security.

But the biggest thing for me was I feel like on Friday afternoon if I'm near the lead, I can take on more risk. I don't have to worry so much about making the cut. I can try to win this golf tournament rather than just finishing well.

I think that's something that's kind of interesting on the PGA TOUR is you've got one -- if two guys are battling out for the win, maybe one of those guys that second place means everything to him, and the other guy, it's win or bust. There's nothing else.

I feel like with having now two wins under my belt, if I'm coming down the stretch trying to battle for a win, in my opinion it's win or bust now. I think that's something that isn't really that well-known as a spectator.

Q. So by risks, playing more aggressive, things like that?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah.

Q. How would you characterize your season so far? You've had two top-15s in the right events, and then two missed cuts. How would you characterize how you've played so far this year?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, it's been an interesting start to the year. FedEx wise it's my best start of the season. But I've had better starts where I feel like my game is in a better position.

It's been, honestly, a weird start. I've felt very confident at times and then I've felt like I have to rebuild my whole golf game at times. But golf is a funny sport.

In all honesty, I think everything is close. I think it's there. It's just putting all the pieces together, and I think honestly going home last week was huge for me. I was able to kind of settle myself and realize that I wasn't struggling. It was just some mistimed bad shots and stuff like that.

Q. Did you do anything putting-wise because I think you're probably at least statistically putting the best you have since you've been on TOUR. Did you make any changes putting-wise, equipment, setup, things like that in the off-season?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Honestly, towards the end of the last season I think I was putting it really well, more so than at the beginning of the year. Made some adjustments toward that time of the year, and I've been continuing to do the same things.

I've always switched putters. That's just what I do. I've had probably 15 putters at home that I will just go into my -- I have a little bedroom that has a little golf setup, and I'll walk in there and, this putter looks good, I'll try this one out. That's kind of how I look at putting. I think this week is my third putter of the season, so...

Q. Where is the putter that you won this with?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: It is the one I'm using this week. It was my wife's advice. She said, you should use that one.

Q. Did you use that one in Cabo, too?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: No, I used a similar but a PLD version, but basically the same putter, yeah.

Q. You mentioned the two victories, validating this one with the one in Cabo. How did those victories compare? It's hard to compare children if you have children, but this one finished on a Monday, that one was -- how was it different?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: They were very different. This one, I remember I was coming down the stretch and I was so stressed. I wanted to win the golf tournament so bad. There were so many things that came with it. Honestly, all I felt after the round was relief. It was just relief. I had finally done it. There was so much to it.

Then I drove straight to Orlando. I had a beer, I think, and then went to Orlando.

Then at the Worldwide Technology in Mexico, I was coming from behind. I had a great Sunday. I know the Worldwide Technology guys very well, so after the round it was much more of a celebration, a party. It was more just fun rather than this one was just relief. Two totally different reactions to a win. It was pretty funny.

Q. I'm curious, what is it about your game that could have you win here at very much of a ball striker's reward course, and then in a total birdie fest out there

in Cabo? Those are two very different wins and I'm sure very validating for you, but what's the common thread there in your characteristics?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Yeah, I always joke that there's golf courses out here that suit certain players' games, but you either have it or don't have it that week. Obviously there's courses that are an advantage towards someone, but I think you look back at last week at Vidanta and you've got probably the shortest hitter on the PGA TOUR and the longest hitter on the PGA TOUR battling it out on Sunday, going into a playoff on a golf course that's suited for a bomber.

That golf course was probably the worst golf course on TOUR for Brian Campbell, and he ends up winning the golf tournament. You never know. In my opinion, it's just you're either going to have it or you're not.

Golf is a funny game; you never know.

Q. How did you process Augusta last year?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Last year with Augusta, my game was not in a good spot going into it, so I was very, I would say, not on edge, but I was anxious about playing Augusta, and I think I had some issues in the golf swing that I was managing that weren't coming out whenever I was playing in other tournaments, but then I get there, all the emotions and everything, and I was a little exposed, honestly.

As a first-timer, I think it's honestly -- I don't know if it's a little bit of a hazing thing, but you don't know anything until you get there, and the yardage book sucks (laughing). There's so many things that you have to figure out through experience.

I think going into this year having been there before, I hope there will be a comfort level. There will be some prior knowledge.

I won this event last year and I didn't have much time to go out there and do those practice rounds. So it kind of just happened quickly, and my game was just not ready for Augusta National, and the weather made it much more difficult on top of that.

Q. Now that you've been there once, what do you look forward to when you get there?

AUSTIN ECKROAT: Exactly. I really look forward to getting another chance at the beast. I honestly was a little -- it was a funny week. I was embarrassed, honestly, with everything that went on and played poorly. It was a weird feeling. I had high expectations. I did not want to play

Saturday. I was watching the cut line fall, and I was like, oh, gosh, I'm about to make this cut. Oh, my gosh, I'm going to shoot 80 tomorrow. So I'm really looking forward to having a good game going into Augusta National and getting another chance at it.

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