

Black Desert Championship

Tuesday, October 8, 2024

Ivins, Utah, USA

Zac Blair

Patrick Fishburn

Press Conference



BLACK DESERT

CHAMPIONSHIP

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome everyone to the Black Desert Championship, and we have two Utah natives with us today Zac Blair and Patrick Fishburn.

Zac, just talk a little bit about how exciting this is for this area and for the PGA TOUR to have this tournament again this year?

ZAC BLAIR: Yeah, first time in a long time, right? Not exactly for sure when the last time they were in Utah for a PGA TOUR event is.

It's cool. I think everybody is excited to be here. Just glad to be able to travel a couple hours from my house.

THE MODERATOR: Patrick, your thoughts on being here this week.

PATRICK FISHBURN: It's exciting. Utah is kind of the state of sport, so another big event coming to Utah is awesome. Utah fans, people get behind the Jazz and we got a new hockey team, you know, and BYU and Utah and all the colleges.

This is just another big event that I think we'll get a lot of people coming out to. It's exciting to have something in your home state. Growing up you dream of playing on the PGA TOUR and stuff like that, but never really thought we would have a PGA event here in our home state. Going to be a cool opportunity.

Q. Zac you love golf architecture. Talk about this golf course and what we can expect to see this week.

ZAC BLAIR: Yeah, first time around it yesterday, so looking to go get a couple more rounds in today and tomorrow afternoon.

But obviously really pretty. The scenery out here is pretty insane. I think it'll look amazing on TV and everything like that. Pretty interested to kind of see what the scores are like and what it plays like in tournament conditions.

But, yeah, super excited.

Q. A lot on the line for both of you guys. Patrick, 85 in the FedExCup fall standings. Talk about the state of your game coming into this week and the goals coming down the stretch of the season.

PATRICK FISHBURN: It's been a lot better than where I started. Started off really rough. I was not playing good. Of course there is no net to flight out here on the PGA TOUR.

Yeah, it's better now. I've been playing a lot better. Made some equipment changes with the driver, putter; just kind of progressively got a little more comfortable. Rookie year you're trying to get your footing. You're trying figure things out courses are a little bit different, a little more challenging. Obviously firmer, faster, you know, less room for error and things like that.

So just been a process throughout the year. Lately I've been playing pretty consistent and I like playing in the state of Utah. Got a lot of experience playing at altitude obviously. The dry desert air, a lot of factors I just I feel comfortable with. Bent greens and things like that.

Hopefully it turns out.

Q. Zac, 110th in the rankings. Talk about your goals for this week and the rest of the season.

ZAC BLAIR: Yeah, been playing good. Kind of just keep doing the same thing. You know, hopefully go have another good event or two in the fall and be nice to do it here at home.

Q. Tell me, knowing your game and this golf course, what's the most important club in your bag this week?

ZAC BLAIR: Honestly, I don't know yet. I think I need a couple more rounds the next day or two and really feel it out. I don't hit it very far so a lot of people have talked about not being able to hit a lot of drivers.

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I kind of felt like could hit a lot of drivers. I'm the shortest player on the tour, so...

PATRICK FISHBURN: Just, yeah, off the tee there is so many options with every hole depending on how you feel and what the circumstances are, kind of where the pin is. Couple drivable holes you kind of want to see where the pin is. That will determine the decision you make off the tee.

Yeah, lot of time when I stand on a tee I try to have a plan, but I don't really have a plan. Just the way I'm feeling. If I want to be aggressive I'll go for it.

Yeah, I think the key with any type of desert course is put the ball in play, keep it out of the rocks, and make sure you're not hitting provisionals.

Yeah, getting the ball in play. If you good the ball in play you can attack and use the different slopes they have to funnel it to the different pins.

It's just get the ball in the fairway, just like any other week.

Q. For players what's the energy surrounding a location with a very first time PGA event?

ZAC BLAIR: I think last year in Mexico was the first our time they had had it at the new place they were playing down there. That was maybe one of the first times I've ever been somewhere where it was a first time.

I think there is always like a learning curve just from everything. How the setup is, just everything that goes on behind the scenes.

So I think everyone is excited. But also kind of learning what to do and where to go and how to direct people the right way and everything. So it's gone well so far. Hopefully we continue and have a good week and everything goes carding to plan I guess.

Q. Do you think Utah players have an advantage?

PATRICK FISHBURN: Yeah, you never know.

ZAC BLAIR: Yeah, yeah. (Laughter.)

PATRICK FISHBURN: Of course. No, playing at altitude is definitely different for sure. I grew up in Ogden, playing Ogden Country Club, which is probably 4,000 feet elevation and we're probably 3,000 here. The ball just does different things.

With the heat this week, there is just a lot of different

factors. If you're maybe not used to that it'll cause a few more calculations going on in the brain, which for me personally, less calculation is better.

So, I don't know.

Q. Will having an early tee times have an advantage since you mentioned the heat?

PATRICK FISHBURN: I guess you'll have to play one round in the morning, so I guess the ball will just go different. The ball will go a lot shorter in the morning tee times. And then when you play the afternoon, it's obviously going to go a little bit farther.

You'll just have to make some adjustments on the fly and hopefully Saturday, Sunday you're the very last.

Q. Can you draw any parallels from any other landscape courses? This is unique with the lava rock and the way you'll have to -- that will come into play. What is your viewpoint on that. Patrick first and then Zac.

PATRICK FISHBURN: Yeah, Zac has played a lot more golf than me. Are you talking other locations on the PGA TOUR?

Q. Period.

PATRICK FISHBURN: This is such a unique look and I'm not sure I've played another course with black rock all around it and the desert in the background.

I can't can think of anything. Zac?

ZAC BLAIR: I think just the way all the lava rock is and it's not hazard, just kind of lost ball, it's not really like anything else. So it's kind of some places you might go and might be hazard or you might go to Arizona and hit it in the desert and you can still find it and chip it out.

Here, you're not going to find it most of the time. Especially in the rocks. So I think it's very unique, very different. People are all kind of seeing it and learning it for the first time.

But there is plenty of room to play out there. It's not like it's super tight all over the place. They have given us plenty of space to hit driver or anything off the tee. Just got to keep it out of the rocks.

Q. Zac, we all know you're a golf design nerd. Not afraid to say that. What do you love about this golf course from a design perspective?



ZAC BLAIR: I think like Patrick said, there is definitely some options on a lot of holes. You're able to kind of decide how much you want to bite off on certain holes or how much you want to push it up the fairway and like we kind of mentioned, with the lava rock, it's pretty kind of do or die hazard throughout the whole golf course.

So that aspect is I think pretty cool.

Again, I've only played it yesterday for the first time. Usually takes a few rounds to really kind of understand all the little nuances and everything.

There is definitely a lot to kind of see out there. You know, I think it'll take a few rounds to really start understanding the places where you do want to take that risk. You got par-5s, like No. 9, that the second shot is virtually like you have to hit the green or maybe the bunker and you could get lucky.

But if you're going for that green in two and you miss it, it's like re-hit the shot from 250 yards.

It's going to be interesting to see how people kind of take on those certain situations in a tournament situation. If I'm out there playing last week just like with some friends, it's like, oh, yeah I'll go for this green in two. When it's like I could make a 12 if I hit it in the rocks, you're like, I'll probably just chip it out and hit a wedge on the green.

Q. Patrick, on your rookie season, a lot of times these courses, seeing them for the first time, how comforting is it to come here and you've played in course before?

PATRICK FISHBURN: Yeah, that's a big deal, especially early in the season when we were playing Torrey Pines and the American press, multiple courses you're trying to learn and see for the first time.

So it's a fun challenge, but definitely a challenge. Playing against guys that have been around these things for ten, 15 plus years. You know, you try to make up what you can in a few days.

Yeah, so this week coming, haven't seen the course, played it a few times, feel like it will be a level playing field with that at least. Then playing in Utah, having the experience I do playing in Utah, just hopefully something that that helps me.

Yeah, looking forward to next year, lock up the card and things like that. It'll feel like a lot easier having seen the courses.

Q. For both of you, being Utah residents, when did you first remember knowing each other or meeting?

PATRICK FISHBURN: I feel like probably when you came down from Park City.

ZAC BLAIR: Yeah, I moved to Ogden when I was in sixth or seventh grade. Patrick's brother was the basketball coach. We probably met before then golfing.

But I don't know, you're five years younger or four years. He's a little younger than me.

PATRICK FISHBURN: Just two.

ZAC BLAIR: Two. Two years younger than me. Yeah, my math was off. That was altitude. Didn't do the right adjustment there.

Yeah, we played junior golf together. Maybe saw him down here playing the Dixie Red Hills.

PATRICK FISHBURN: Yeah, Zac's dad had a driving range. Zac's house is right on the range and mine was just a mile away. Used to be Mulligans and now it's toads. We used to spend a lot of time there. I mean, his dad would let us do anything.

There was an upper deck playing mat so you could hit down and we would hit that on the putting green while people were putting. Zac would get a buckets of balls and used to have a par-3 course there and Zac would put a bucket of balls trying to make a hole one.

ZAC BLAIR: That's how I made my first one. A lot of people don't count that one. I do.

PATRICK FISHBURN: Yeah, we ended up going to junior high, high school, and played a year of college together. So it's -- he's been stuck with me. Been around him for a little bit.

Q. What family and friends can we expect to be following along this week?

ZAC BLAIR: I got my wife and my three kids down here and my dad actually lives in St. George. He moved down here when I was I think a freshman in college. So he kind of got away from the snow and been down here ever since.

I don't know really who is going to be down. Hopefully we see a lot of the familiar faces and, you know, we're playing good.

Q. I'm sure yesterday you saw where the grandstands

are set up, around which hole. How do you two both play differently or the same when it comes to the fans? How do they affect your game out there?

PATRICK FISHBURN: I enjoy it. I think it brings such a fun energy. I feel like it -- I don't know, just makes me -- gives me a good nervousness. Not that I'm scared of hitting a bad shot but creates -- probably adrenaline probably. When you have those feelings, I feel like to just kind of dial in your focus and your touch and feel.

I feel like I played some of my best golf when we've had people around. Hopefully that -- like Zac said we have some family and friends coming down and should be a fun its.

Q. How do you feel about the fans?

ZAC BLAIR: Yeah, I think I everyone always dreams of playing in front of people, right? When you're a little kid you're hitting those putts to win the U.S. Open and stuff like that. That's usually in front of a lot of people in your imagination.

So everything is more fun in front of people I think.

Q. Did you have that beard at BYU?

ZAC BLAIR: No, no. Not allowed.

Q. It looks good now.

ZAC BLAIR: Thanks.

Q. Talk to us about the greens complexes. Over the next two days, what will you be looking for around the greens, you know, 100 yards in? And Patrick, you've been around a few times. What challenges do you see on this new golf course?

ZAC BLAIR: So the greens are pretty big I would say for the most part. A lot of the holes kind of have pretty distinctive like quadrants of where it's pretty easy to see where they're going to put the pins, right?

There is not a whole lot of greens where you got to wonder where it's going to go. Going to have your front left, front right, back left, back right. And so it's really just going to be about kind of learning those and where the places to miss potentially to certain spots.

And then, yeah, sometimes that can make kind of like approaches and chipping and putting like a little challenging, but then certain times if the greens are kind of big enough, it almost makes it pretty easy.

You kind of know exactly like where you got to get it to. Yeah, to kind of help get balls into those little quadrants and just kind of like heightened your focus a little bit.

Again, first look around to yesterday. That was kind of the immediate impression, was get it in the right quadrant on some of greens. There are certain ones where if you get it in the wrong spot it can be pretty hard, almost impossible to get it close.

Yesterday in the pro-am on I think it was 13, long par-4. I think it's usually a par-5 but playing as a par-4 this week. The pin was in this super accessible spot front, left in this lower little bowl. Everyone in our group didn't hit it in the bowl or in that lower section on the green.

It was basically the best you could do was hit to 11 feet on the next putt. Got to stay away from stuff like that. Just finding out where to miss to spots like that.

Q. I noticed on the scorecard, three par-5s on this court. Any or all of them reachable in two? What would to take it help you do that in terms of seeing eagles for the week?

PATRICK FISHBURN: Yeah, they're all reachable.

ZAC BLAIR: For some people.

PATRICK FISHBURN: Like Zac said, hole No. 9 you need to hit a really good drive there to even have a chance to want to take that on. Like I said if you miss your spot, you're going to be re-hitting.

So, you know, then the other -- just kind of for me, if I can just get the ball in the fairway, should go the -- have a good at all of them. It's key to put the ball in the fairway and then manage the risk. Is it worth going for No. 9? Are you going to gain that much or rely on your wedge game?

The other two won't be any problem going for those. Yeah, just so many ways to play every single hole, whether a par-4, a par-3, using the funnel, the par-5, just a lot of different options you need to be prepared to adjust your game plan or just really kind of see what the wind is doing.

Yeah, it's a lot of fun. It's fun that there are so many options every single hole.

ZAC BLAIR: I think 7 is kind of like a blind tee shot that there is plenty of room but still always a little uncomfortable hitting tee shots like that.

The second shot almost feels like you have to go for it.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Kind of an awkward-ish layup that is pretty far back from what you would really want.

Like he said, No. 9 is just such a do-or-die shot. 18 I think will be super exciting. That's honestly I think one the cooler tee shots out here. Just one of my favorite holes I think. Kind of hit off as much as you can for people that hit it far enough. I can't unfortunately you have unfortunately cover the bunker. I have to go out to the right.

You'll definitely see a high, high percentage of the people kind of going for a lot of the par-5s in two. Then it really just kind of depends on how firm it gets. It's a little soft right now. Ball's around really chasing that far.

It'll be interesting to see kind of where that gets to or the next three, four days.

Q. You mentioned blind shots on 7. (No microphone.)

ZAC BLAIR: There is just kind of some rocks and stuff that are in your way. There is a handful -- I think three or four shots at least out there that are kind of like that, that just you got to pick your target and know where you're hitting to it and commit and hit good shots.

All those get a little harder kind of during game time and if the wind picks up and everything like that. But overall, there is plenty of room to golf out there. It's just can you actually execute it.

Q. Patrick, which would you rather have, your length on the tee or his accuracy this week?

PATRICK FISHBURN: Accuracy always.

ZAC BLAIR: Fish hits it just as straight.

PATRICK FISHBURN: I would want Zac's game always.

ZAC BLAIR: I want his game.

Q. As Utah natives, how have you seen this area of the state change and evolve and grow into a place that can support an event of this size?

ZAC BLAIR: Yeah, St. George is one of the biggest growing places in the United States per capita. Like I said, my dad moved down here when I was a freshman in college. Even then it kind of started to boom a little bit and has gotten a lot bigger.

It's pretty wild to see how much it's kind of changed over the last ten or fifteen years. I think when me and Fish were coming down here to play the Dixie Red Hills Junior.

Shoutout to Utah Junior Golf Association. I mean, it was kind of just this sleepy little town that was a hidden gem that a lot of people came and spent some wintertime down here to escape the snow.

Now you see people living here all year and coming in influencing the place. It's definitely a lot different.

Q. So it's early in the week still. Back to the greens. How would you describe the firmness of them right now? Receptive? Also, ease of read? Is it easy to see the lines out there? Do you find it subtle and difficult to pick up?

PATRICK FISHBURN: Actually I haven't been on the golf course yet this week. Plan on going to play 18 this afternoon. But the first -- times I've been around it, I think it's a little bit tricky trying to read the greens. You can have a couple putts that can double breakers and things like that.

But as far as firmness, it's probably pretty similar. I think they probably have them -- usually how the week goes on they get a little bit firmer especially on the weekend.

They have them probably right where they want them and the heat is obviously a little bit different this week than normally. 15 degrees warmer probably.

So I think they have to be careful of that.

I think everything is probably in a good spot. Zac will probably know a little more.

ZAC BLAIR: Yeah, I think they're a little soft. I don't know exactly how they want them. But like Fish said, it's really hot. I think they have to be somewhat conscious of not stressing them out too much. Obviously don't want to get them in a spot where they're kind of too far gone before the week even starts.

The PGA TOUR is always pretty good about dialing them and having them where they want them by Sunday afternoon. That's kind of the whole point and the whole goal. Like I kind of talked about the quadrants of the greens, if you get in the right quadrant, I think you'll have pretty good idea what the putts are going to do.

Again, like the TOUR usually sets them up in places that are on -- I don't know the exact slopes percentage-wise -- but they're not anything like silly or unfair, things you would see on a pro-am or something like that.

If you get it in the wrong quadrant and start having to putt over some of the big undulations in the greens, I think you'll

have people kind of struggling with that because the speed, they were pretty fast even yesterday. I thought they were pretty quick and could kind of get away from you if you got putts downhill running away.

So we'll see.

Q. Final number is nine players with Utah ties, strong Utah ties in the field. Talk to us a little bit about having Weir and Jay Don and then Kihei and Bowen. We got ages all across the board with you guys in the middle.

ZAC BLAIR: Yeah, I think it's Jay Don's 500th start. Pretty awesome. I played with him actually maybe my rookie year on TOUR at -- or one of my first few years on tour at Barbasol one year. Obviously like a out the legend.

It's cool to see him.

Weir is great. Spent a lot of time kind of, I don't know if you call it mentoring, hanging around the BYU team from time to time when we were at school, and he's always been very generous with his time and trying to help kind of that next wave of people get better.

Very interested in kind of sharing anything that somebody asked you know what I mean? He's helped me and everybody that I know on the BYU team try and get better and get to that next level and be out here. Like you said, it's pretty cool to see -- I've played a lot of golf and Zac Jones and the Jones family. Awesome to see him out here.

And Kihei, going to BYU, another BYU product hopefully that makes it out here.

Pretty awesome.

PATRICK FISHBURN: It's been great for me, especially growing up having Zac and Tony and Daniel, guys that I looked up to that kind of paved the way for guys like me to get to the TOUR. You can make it to the PGA TOUR coming from Utah. I look to these guys my whole life and they've always been so good with me. Willing to share information, whatever I need.

It's been great. I think because guys like Zac and Tony and Daniel, they've created a wave of young players that are cropping up. And Jay Don and Mike Weir hanging around and Mike Reid. You know, I've had a lot of guys that I can look up to and look and see how they do things.

I've learned a lot growing up playing in Utah, being around all these good players. It's a healthy crop of good talent

that's coming. It's really excite to go see. I think they can -- who knows. Never know. They may compete this week and get in the hunt and win. You never know.

So it's exciting to have like I said nine players from the state playing in the first-every tournament here at Black Desert. Cool opportunity.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports