

U.S. Women's Open

Thursday, July 6, 2023

Pebble Beach, California, USA

Pebble Beach Golf Links

Aine Donegan

Flash Interview

Q. Aine Donegan, 3-under 69, and here it is your first professional major and you have an eagle early on in the round. Tell us about that.

AINE DONEGAN: Yeah, I started off a little bit nervy. I was actually doing well to be 2-over through four holes. Made two good up and downs on my third and fourth hole.

Then, you know, hit a driver down 15 and I had about 96 to the pin and my coach said, just play it a little bit right of the pin. It all kind of feeds down and it's an easy putt up the hill then.

I hit the shot and I knew it was going to be good. Then it bounced, bounced, and kind of spins back and it just drops in. I have my family here and a few other Irish over here who live in the United States, and big scream from all the Irish people.

Yeah, it was kind of just one of those things that I'm back to even and we just start again really. That kind of made me a bit more comfortable and I was really, really pleased with it.

Q. You also picked up a birdie on the iconic 17th hole. I don't know how much history you know about that hole. To birdie there is pretty special.

AINE DONEGAN: Yeah, it was a little against the wind, and I knew I'm about 172 I think it was to carry the bunker, so I just said to my coach and my caddie, I said oh, I'll hit 4-iron, and I couldn't have hit it better just right of the pin. We actually thought at one stage it might go in as well.

Tapped that in for a birdie, so that was nice to then kind of close out my front nine under par.

Q. And then when you made the turn, you got on a run there where you birdied three holes in a row. Tell us about that.

AINE DONEGAN: Yeah, so I bogeyed the first hole, my 10th hole. Missed a short five-foot putt and coach said,



just regroup. We have a par-5 coming up, and I made about 15-footer down the hill for birdie there.

The third hole here has -- since the first time I played it, I kind of like it. It kind of suits my eye. So I kind of smashed my driver down over the tree on the left and then ended up in the fairway and I only had about 110 to the flag then and made about another 15-footer.

And then after that, actually funny, because on the three holes that I birdied in a row I had the exact same yardage to the flag on all three pretty much, within one or two yards.

So I said that to my caddie afterwards, well, that is my new favorite yardage. Yeah, so the three in a row. Then I was really comfortable. I had a good feeling where my ball was going to go all day. It's a great feeling. It's not one you get a lot of in golf.

The hole-out helped because it made me very comfortable. You know, at the end of the day it's just another tournament. You know, it's on an iconic place, and that's my main thing was to come out here and enjoy it. Luckily for me today everything seemed to fall the right way.

Q. Where would you rank this round in all the golf you played so far in your life?

AINE DONEGAN: Definitely the top. No doubt about it. Especially wouldn't -- let's just say it wouldn't be the first time I started bogey-bogey. For me to come back then and finish how I finish and play the rest of round, I'm really proud of myself for that.

Yeah, really looking forward to tomorrow.

Q. I've been here for the past few days and I've seen everyone having so much fun. As things get more serious, how will you continue to have fun and focus on playing your best?

AINE DONEGAN: That's a great question. Just enjoy it. You know, look at the view. Look at all the people out here watching, supporting women's golf.



For such a big tournament to be played at such a big place, it's difficult not to enjoy it out here. It's important to not take things too seriously around here, and luckily I didn't today. Kind of goes the right way when you're making sure you enjoy it and having fun at the same time.

Q. I know you had some club issues coming into the week. Could you walk me through what happened with that?

AINE DONEGAN: Yeah, so I had a team event last week in Scotland for Great Britain and Ireland, so I flew from Scotland on Sunday morning at about 4:00 a.m. from Scotland to Dublin and Dublin to Newark, and then Newark to San Francisco. When I arrived in San Francisco the clubs hadn't arrived.

We were traveling at least 30 hours by then. So they told us at the airport they're going to come the next day and they didn't end up coming, so I send a tweet out and made a few headlines. Eventually they have arrived, but I played my first practice round with Ping clubs. Scott from Ping helped me out.

So full Ping set. I play Ping irons, and so that helped anyway. That particular practice round I started to hit the driver really well and I said it to my caddie, who's also my coach, Gary, I said, I might change to this driver for the week.

He said, you know, we're going to have a bit of a dilemma when your clubs do arrive. Anyway, the clubs arrive the next day, I think on Tuesday, and my driver is smashed, completely smashed.

At least it stopped us thinking oh, which driver we'll use. We had only one choice then.

So I put that in. Honestly I am delighted I did. It's like everything happens for a reason, that the clubs were late and then the driver came and it was broken and all of a sudden I have no choice but to put this Ping driver in.

I added the new 3-wood and hybrid as well, and fortunately for me, they were the perfect fit. Out here you need to drive the ball well, hit the fairway. The rough is really thick. If you're not hitting the fairways you're going to be struggling, and luckily for me it all worked out.

Q. How did going through that episode before your first start at a professional tournament maybe add to the nerves you were facing throughout the week?

AINE DONEGAN: It was a little bit frustrating, but Gary, my coach, my caddie, said this is just -- don't let this be

another distraction. At the end of the day there is nothing you can do about it. There is nothing you could do about it, so there is no point stressing because it's not going to change anything.

So that was how we looked at it. I think it's the rate way to look it because there was nothing we could do about it. The clubs were late. They weren't going to be there. The driver was broken. We couldn't change it. No point in worrying about something you have no control over.

Q. Very similar position to your teammate Ingrid Lindblad from last year. Did you talk to her at all for any advice?

AINE DONEGAN: I did, yeah. Just asked her how things work, how many tickets we get and all that. Yeah, no, I love her. Ingrid, she's just got world number one. No, yeah, I'm delighted. Go Tigers and all that.

Q. Could you talk about how it is taking everything in your first pro event, and let alone a major? Your coach said you've been star struck here and there.

AINE DONEGAN: Yeah, the whole thing has been a bit surreal to be honest. Nearly ever five minutes it's like a pink-me movement. Even just walking to the putting green and young girls asking for autographs and stuff.

It's like, that was me. And to do it at a place like Pebble Beach is something I'll never forget.

On Tuesday I played 18 holes with Annika, and honestly, one of the best days of my life. You learn a lot from her, and at the end of the day she's the icon of the game, the GOAT.

That was really -- like even just to play 18 holes with her and then at the U.S. Open in a practice round for the U.S. Women's Open at Pebble Beach, the whole thing has been a pinch-me moment.

I can't thank my coach, Gary, enough, my college coaches, my parents. I wouldn't be here without a lot of them. Teammates at LSU. I hope they're watching. Yeah, all the people who helped me get here. I wouldn't be here without them.

Q. Anything Annika said in the practice round that stuck with you?

AINE DONEGAN: Yeah, actually. This one really stuck with me. I asked her on one of the holes, I said, how many U.S. Opens have you won? She said three. I go to her husband, very casual, just three. That would be the one

thing. She's so down to earth, one of the most down to earth people.

You know, just her way of even just speaking to people. And she was just as nice to me as my parents atmosphere she is to probably every other professional on the tour. It's like nobody is above anybody else.

You know, just that, even just how she socializes with people I learned a lot from.

Q. You talked about having so much support. How much did that mean to you to have to that out here today, to have family and coaches?

AINE DONEGAN: Yeah, incredible. And the crowd kind of kept getting bigger as I kept going. But even just when I holed out there was a huge cheer. There wasn't that many of my fans, family and friends here. And then I was walking on the seventh, my third last hole, and all I hear, well done Aine, and look over and guys wearing big Irish Jersey. There is a lot of Irish in San Francisco and a lot of them came out today, and I'll be hoping to see a lot more tomorrow. It really does help. Kind of the cheers kind of just spur you on a little bit. No, it's great.

Q. Was there any feeling of like playing back home in Ireland out here with the layout of Pebble?

AINE DONEGAN: Yeah, it is. It's a little -- a little bit like links. Not exactly like it. But just in terms of even wind, I love playing in the wind. I would like if the wind picks up a little bit. Like the qualifier I played to get into this was extremely windy.

I kind of tend to play better in the wind. Yeah, it's a little bit like it in terms of as well it's just for example on the seventh hole today, about 110 and kind of against the wind and you kind of had to flight it down, which I think is a great thing for me, that I'm able to do that in the wind.

I've heard it's going to be the wind is going to pick up again throughout the week. So in that sense, growing up in Ireland and playing courses in Ireland has really helped.

Q. Any conversation you had after your bogey-bogey start it settle into the day?

AINE DONEGAN: Not really to be honest. Just keep plotting away. The second hole -- the first hole just missed a short putt and then the second hole, if I was a yard farther, it would've been really closes. Just went into the bunker.

I made two really good ups and downs on my third and

fourth hole which made me a bit more comfortable. To hole-out was -- kind of made me really enjoy it after that, because I was a little bit kind of scared I was going to go really high there after my start. But wouldn't be the first time I've gone bogey-bogey and won't be the last to start, so...

Q. Last question: What did you know about Pebble Beach before you came here? What was your greatest challenge out there today?

AINE DONEGAN: I've been here before. Just I was in the San Francisco area and I came down with one of my friends from back home and her uncle. We went for lunch here and stuff. It was kind of dark at Pebble. Just walking around when it was dark was amazing.

I got a Wally hat from the shop, Pebble Beach. Of course that was nearly two and a half years ago now. I mean, everyone knows what Pebble Beach is like. You play it on simulators all the time. So many iconic shots from the pros out here.

That's what my thoughts were. I knew it was going to be difficult. U.S. Women's Open. They're not going to set it up that easy. Most difficult thing out there was just staying focused. Keeping with it. Not getting ahead of myself.

You know, playing until the very end. You know, just even when I went 1-under through nine, my plan was to keep going. Don't be happy at 1-under. Okeep trying to make more birdies. Yeah, keep with it. Luckily for me today kind of all fell into place.

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