

Tom Cade: Welcome to Pod for the Course. My name is Tom Cade. I'm the Senior Director of Communications for Washington Golf. And today, we have with us Dustin White. And Dustin is the head coach for the men's golf team at Washington State University. Dustin, thanks for joining us today.

Dustin White: Of course. Thanks for having me on.

Tom Cade: You bet. Dustin, these are interesting times for everybody, but I think in particular, these are interesting times for anyone involved with athletics and especially collegiate athletics. And can you just maybe walk us through what you've been going through for the last maybe six months? Not even six months, maybe four or five months. I believe the spring calendar for your team was canceled. Is that correct?

Dustin White: Correct. Yeah. We came back from Bandon Dunes. That was actually our last event that we played during our spring season. We came back, and then later on that week is-

Tom Cade: That was in March?

Dustin White: Correct. Yes, it was. Yep.

Tom Cade: And what happened?

Dustin White: Well, when we were traveling back, that was when all the news was starting to kind of circulate and different things were being said. And we came back, and we got in the office the next day. And it just seemed like one thing after another with this announcement and then that announcement and then no Pac-12 Championship. And then it turns into absolutely no more competition at all. And so it happened really quickly. One thing that, I don't know, either it could help us or hurt us, but is that these kids being on social media these days and information being so readily available, they knew pretty much the same time that we did. So we really didn't get a chance to deliver the message or at least maybe the way we wanted to tell them. And they were really caught off guard. Obviously, the seniors were really bummed out because they had no idea if they were going to get a chance to play another year. It happened quickly. And obviously, it cut our season short. But it's amazing how much time, like you said, has gone by. We haven't really left Pullman since March, but it's amazing how much time has already gone by without a whole lot really happening during what would be a busy time of the year for us.

Tom Cade: I can imagine a bit of a heartbreaker for the seniors. That's for sure. Did you do any send off for them or any final get together of some kind?

Dustin White: We weren't allowed to do that. That was the other part of it was we weren't allowed to have any other organized team activity, really, aside from anything virtual. So we did do some team stuff via Zoom and got the guys together just

to... Oddly enough, we had some podcasts that we had the guys listen to. Came in, shared some ideas and just got together and really tried to get through the interesting time together and laugh and joke and really just focus on the opportunities that we had had this year and things that we were thankful for and then even the opportunities that we still have ahead. And so it was nice just to have everybody in there at one time. And I think it was helpful for all of us.

Tom Cade: As a coach, how do you stay connected with your players? You obviously can't gather together. School wasn't even in session, so you couldn't even meet on campus. How do you stay connected with them, and how do you keep them motivated to keep their games in shape?

Dustin White: Yeah, like I said, we did some of the group Zoom meetings while we could through the end of the school year, basically. And then most of the guys went off on their own and went back home. Obviously with the distance learning, they could do that. We've kept in touch with the guys. First and foremost, we just want to check in on how they're doing because I think with all the uncertainty and being taken out of a routine and an environment in which they thrive and they do well and they love to be in, that was taken away so quickly, so we just wanted to see that they were okay, first and foremost, and that they were able to finish their schoolwork and that things were okay.

And then we got into the golf piece of what are some of the things that you feel like you wanted to do better or you could have done better this year that we can work on over the summer, whether it's over the phone. A couple of the guys did stay here over the summer, so we've had a chance once they've gone through all of the testing and the guidelines and things like that. We've had a chance to actually spend some time with those guys. And so really it's just we would rather over-communicate, I guess, than not. And so we've just been trying to check in with each guy, see how they're doing, what they're doing, what they're thinking about the fall, any questions that they have. Anything that we know, we try to pass along to them as quickly as we can.

Tom Cade: I think I read a headline last week or just a few days ago about WSU going online classes only in the fall for the fall semester. In a normal year for your team, when would their fall season begin?

Dustin White: Generally what happens is that first week of school, we will have a team meeting, go through all of the meetings and things like that and go through their physicals and paperwork and get cleared. And then we'll generally start something that first weekend, whether it's a team retreat. In golf, we've got a mental consultant we work with and get together with him and kind of get the guys to know him and share some ideas. But this year, obviously with things being all virtual, it could give us more flexibility. I'm trying to look at things as to how they provide us an opportunity and not necessarily what's being taken away.

And I think with a normal schedule, our afternoons are just crazy. The guys get out of class at 12:00 to 1:00, they grab some lunch on the fly, they make it out to the golf course or to our practice area, and then we're out there getting some work in or competitive work, qualifying, whatever it is. Two days a week, we'd head into the gym and get in some team workouts. And so you fit a lot of things in to a short amount of time. But I think with the virtual learning, that might give us the flexibility to space things out and have some more time and maybe have some more one-on-one time, which I think we really like and the guys really liked as well. So it might not be a bad thing I'm trying to see, like I said, the opportunity in rather than something else that's been taken away, so to speak.

Tom Cade: Sure. Your team members, will they be coming back to Pullman at all in the fall, or are they just going to be online learning from wherever they are living?

Dustin White: Yeah. Good question. It kind of depends on what we find out, when we find out, about false sports. Are we going to be able to have tournaments? Is it going to be only one day things? Is it going to be conference only schedule like some of the other sports have already announced? We just don't know yet. And so I think they're weighing their options as to what they want to do. Given the choice, I really think they would come back. Like I said, they want to be around their teammates. They want to have a routine. They want to have the facilities and the support staff that's here. It's going to look different, but that's all of the things they have at their disposal here. And I think that they miss that, and we miss having the guys here. And so I'm really hopeful that we'll have everybody come back next month.

Tom Cade: For yourself as a coach and a recruiter, what kind of challenges has this presented? I can imagine it has presented a few.

Dustin White: It's certainly has. Like I said, normally this time of year we're gone each week at least for two or three days going to see a junior golf tournament somewhere. And we hadn't been able to do that, so we've just been trying to gather the schedules of all the kids we're talking to and follow any and everything we can online. We've done some virtual visits with these kids just to try to get in front of them and say, "Hey, this is better than just seeing some pictures or hearing what we have to say about Pullman. Let me take you around campus. Let us take you around the golf course because things are so close together here." We thought, well, let's use that to our advantage and put together a virtual tour. And we took some kids along for the ride there, and it seemed to be pretty well received. And so we've just had to get creative and really stay on top of talking to these kids each week or sending a congratulatory text or a good luck text, things like that. It is much quieter than any normal summer. That's for sure.

Tom Cade: Yeah. You yourself play golf for WSU. Yes?

Dustin White: I did. Yes. I was here from '99 and graduated the end of 2003.

Tom Cade: This was before, obviously, Palouse Ridge was built. Correct?

Dustin White: It was much before Palouse Ridge was even thought of. Yeah, it was finished in 2008, so I was removed for quite some time before Palouse Ridge was finished. But when I came back and interviewed for the assistant coaching job at the time, I was just blown away by the facilities that had gone up, and obviously Palouse Ridge being one of those. And then there were pieces of Pullman that were just how I had them pictured in my mind from 1999 and 2000. And so I think that it was neat for me to come back here and to give back and share my experiences. And it's just hard to believe it's already been six and a half years since that's happened.

Tom Cade: And I would think, and speaking of recruiting again, just having them, the prospective players, see visuals of Palouse Ridge I think would help your cause a little bit.

Dustin White: It does. And again, it's not just the golf course at the facility itself. It's just how close it is. It's five minutes from the dorms. And really, that's everything in Pullman. It's so close together. There's there is no traffic. There aren't as many distractions, but you have all of the big amenities of a Pac-12 institution. And so we really feel like we have a lot to offer. People say, "Well, why would you go to Washington State?" And our response is, "Well, why wouldn't you?" We really feel like we have a lot to offer, not only from a coaching perspective, but our support staff and our facilities and the entire community. Everyone gets behind you. They get to know your story. And it's just a really neat place to be.

Tom Cade: Yeah. So you have been a Cougar pretty much your entire adult life almost. It looks like you graduated in 2003. Is that right?

Dustin White: Yes. Yes it is. Yep.

Tom Cade: And then went off to play professionally for a little bit. Is that correct?

Dustin White: I did. I turned professional the beginning of 2004 and started out playing some of the mini tours out in California and was fortunate enough to have... I had some success early and made it to the final stage of q-school that first year and gained some status on what at the time was the Nationwide Tour in 2005. And went out there and had some starts out there and then qualified for the US Open in 2006 and played at the International later that year. And then got my card back on the Nationwide Tour for a couple of years after that. But it was a great way to make a living and meet a lot of great people, travel the world. And like I said, I've been very fortunate to have that opportunity. And I know some of these guys want to do that same thing. That was my main reason for coming back, was to share all those experiences that I had here and afterward, whether it was good or bad, with these guys to try and accelerate that learning curve and have them achieve golf at whatever level that might be.

Tom Cade: You came back to WSU as an assistant coach in 2014. How did that opportunity present itself to you?

Dustin White: Oddly enough, I had been thinking about maybe getting into coaching. I was still playing at the time, but I thought I really... I don't know what it was, to be honest. I just felt like it was time for me to start giving back. And I noticed that they didn't have an assistant coach here at the time, but I did reach out to Garrett Clegg, who was the head coach here at the time, now at Utah. He's done a really good job there. But I just said, "Hey, I don't know if this is by design you guys don't have an assistant, but I'd really like to learn more about it and how you guys are going to go through the hiring process." And a few months later, I found myself up here on an interview. And a little while after that, he called and said, "We'd love to have you come up and be a part of the program."

And so I really put all my eggs in one basket because I didn't want to interview for a coaching job anywhere else because I love this place. And it's really not a job in my mind. Like you said, I am a Cougar. I went to school here. I love this place. I love the people. I love everything about it. And so it was just a huge opportunity for me to give back.

Tom Cade: And I'm sorry, I'm looking at your bio right now, but you are married to a former WSU women's golfer who is now the women's golf assistant coach. Is that correct?

Dustin White: Yeah. I guess I kept it in the family.

Tom Cade: You did. You are indeed a Cougar through and through. That's pretty awesome. Do you share experiences with her as far as some frustrations and some highlights of the season and the past few months, the challenges that both teams have been facing?

Dustin White: I do. I think we have. And really, on a bigger scale, we really understand just the time demands in general of what being a coach means. It's not really that 9:00 to 5:00 kind of gig. Your phone's always on. You have a late night here. You have a lot of early mornings when you travel and things like that. And so I just think understanding the schedule, first of all, was really beneficial for both of us. And yeah, I think now at a time like this where as fortunate as we have been to spend some more time at home and be together, it has presented a lot of challenges from a competitive standpoint for our players and what our fall season might look like and how to best prepare. So I think we've shared a lot of ideas and frustrations and all of that stuff along the way.

Tom Cade: So just want to touch briefly on the players for your team as well again. And maybe this is an obvious answer to this, but I don't know it. So the seniors who lost half the season this last spring, they're not red-shirted over? They're just done. They're graduated.

Dustin White: Actually, so the NCAA, it was maybe a few weeks after everything happened in March, they came out and made an announcement saying that anyone who had competed in the spring sports and their season was cut short, they were going to grant them an extended year of eligibility, which meant that they could come back for another season. But it was going to be up to the institution to figure out the scholarship piece or the roster spots and things like that. And so we are going to have one, possibly two of our seniors, one definitely, maybe one more. And then we have a grad transfer that's going to come in. He's actually originally from Aberdeen, but he went to Denver for four years. And he's going to come here for his extended year. So yeah, we'll have some new faces. We'll have some returners. But no matter what this fall brings or what's in store for us, we're going to be ready. And we're excited about who we have.

Tom Cade: And periodically, I think the regionals of the NCAA, they're held at Palouse Ridge. Is that correct?

Dustin White: Yes. The NCAA, they do their bidding three and four years out, really. And so we hosted an NCAA regional. It would have been the year before I came back and got into coaching, so that would have been 2013. And then we hosted the Pac-12 Championship in 2015. I think the women hosted a Pac-12 Championship a little bit before that. We've since hosted another NCAA regional last year. We've hosted the men's PNGA. We've hosted the State Am, some US amateur qualifiers. So really, Palouse Ridge, it's held its own and people, they want to come experience it. And it provides a good test.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Yeah. In fact, just last year you held the Washington State Amateur there if I remember right.

Dustin White: Was that August of 2019.

Tom Cade: Just looking at the schedule again, was there something scheduled there NCAA-wise that was canceled this past spring? Was that the women's regional? Is that what it was? Or am I thinking of something else?

Dustin White: No, you've got it right. Yeah. The men's hosted the regional in May of 2019, and the women's were supposed to have it this year. And had a really good season going, were really looking forward to hosting and probably playing, and then everything obviously didn't go as planned. And we were supposed to have an AJGA event, a Junior Golf event, here in June that we had been working on for two or three years. And that didn't work out, so that'll be on the schedule for next year. But yeah, a lot of neat things happening around here.

Tom Cade: Well, I can only say to you good luck this fall. And hopefully, the players will have a chance to play. And you said earlier that it looks like you might find out soon, within a week or two, about what a schedule might be as far as playing opportunities for the team?

Dustin White: We sure hope so. I think there's still a lot more questions than answers, but I know the kids are getting anxious. And their parents want to know what they can plan for and when to get in town and things like that. So we hope that we can give them some answers. But one thing through all of this that we've realized is that everybody's on a level playing field. No one has ever experienced a pandemic and had to figure things out, whether it was on a university level, an athletics level, a team level. And so we're all trying to do our best and really put our best foot forward no matter what it is.

Tom Cade: Dustin White, head golf coach for the men's team at Washington State University, thanks again for joining us this afternoon. And if you want to find out some more information or keep up to date what's happening with the athletic program there, just go to wsucougars.com. Dustin, thanks again for joining us today. Appreciate it.

Dustin White: Happy to have done it. Thank you. Go Cougs.

Tom Cade: Yeah, there you go. Thanks, again.

Dustin White: Bye.