

Tom Cade: Hello, this is Pod for the Course, and I am Tom Cade, the senior director of communications for Washington Golf. Joining us today is Victoria Fallgren. Victoria is a three-time winner of the Washington Women's Mid-Amateur Championship. She won it in 2017, 2018, and a few months ago, this summer in 2020. She has also been twice named the Washington Golf Women's Mid-Amateur Player of the Year in 2017 and 2018.

And she is for several years now, has been the assistant coach for the women's golf team at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. Victoria, thanks so much for being with us today.

Victoria: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for having me.

Tom: You bet. So an interesting year, I would think for everybody in golf in particular, but to everybody in general. Just too, what I'd like to do is just to start with you personally, first. Where are you from originally?

Victoria: I'm originally from the Long Beach area down in California, and I came up to Spokane to play golf at Gonzaga.

Tom: And so, you got into the game down in the Long Beach area?

Victoria: Yes. I think I started when I was around four-ish, or so.

Tom: Oh, really?

Victoria: And I think my first tournament was probably around nine.

Tom: How did it happen that you got introduced to the game? Was it someone in your family, some friends, or school, or how did that come about?

Victoria: Both my parents played, not competitively, just recreationally. And the story goes that they took me to the golf course with them one day, and I kind of was just dinking around, having fun while they were hitting on the range. And my dad saw me and thought, "Oh, there might be something there". And so, he asked if I was interested in taking lessons, and it just kind of snowballed from there.

Tom: Must've played in high school, yes?

Victoria: I did. Yes.

Tom: So you made your way up to Gonzaga – did you pursue them, did they pursue you, or how did that come about, come all the way from Long Beach up to Spokane, Washington?

Victoria: It was kind of serendipitous. My dad's actually from Spokane. And so, I was midway through the recruiting process, and I got an email reaching out to me from the current head coach, my now boss.

And my family and I thought, "Well, dad's from Spokane, my aunt and uncle had gone to Gonzaga. My uncle played basketball with Stockton," so we were definitely familiar with the institution.

And so, I thought, "I've heard good things about the school, let's talk to the coach." And a few months later, we happened to be in Spokane for a family reunion, so I visited campus and met the coach in person, and just instantly knew that it was a place where I was really comfortable and where I wanted to be.

Tom: Oh, nice. Did you play golf at Gonzaga all four years you were there?

Victoria: I did, yes. I graduated on a Sunday, and then I believe I started coaching on like the following Tuesday, so there wasn't much of a turnaround.

Tom: So somewhere along the line, during your playing years there at Gonzaga, something must have clicked inside you saying, "Hey, I might want to get into the coaching side of this," or how did that come about?

Victoria: You know, my coach and I had always gotten on really well from a player that has perspective.

Tom: Who is that?

Victoria: Brad Rickel.

Tom: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Victoria: And like I said, he's still the current head coach. And so, my senior year when I was supposed to be kind of checking jobs out and figuring out what I wanted to do, he was trying to decide how he wanted to kind of move forward with the program, and it was time.

He felt like it was time to have an assistant. I was his first recruit when he came back to Gonzaga. And so, he asked me if that was something that I was interested in, and he obviously must've seen something in me that he thought would make an effective assistant. And I was more than happy to stay at Gonzaga, because I absolutely loved my experience there.

Tom: So what year was that, Victoria, that you best first started as this assistant coach?

Victoria: 2013. So between coaching and playing, Brad and I have been together for 12 years.

Tom: Okay. A good combination.

Victoria: Yeah.

Tom: When you first began as an assistant coach, did they have a position there before? Was it a new position that was created, or what?

Victoria: There was no assistant coach prior to me. So I actually was a grad assistant for two years when I got my masters at Gonzaga. And then after I graduated, I transitioned to being full time.

Tom: I see. Is Brad a coach of the men's program as well, or?

Victoria: No, because the university split the programs in '07, and so that was his first year back to Gonzaga. He had been at Gonzaga, like in the 1990s, and then he had gone to the University of Idaho. And then when they split the program, he came back.

Tom: I see. So assistant coach since 2013. For yourself, obviously you've been playing a little bit, and have won some events. How is that working out? Did you realize that you could keep playing, or did you think that you had to hang up the clubs yourself after you left school?

Victoria: You know, basically since I graduated, I had been looking forward to turning 25 to being able to play in the Mid-Amateur division. Because I had known for a long time about myself that I didn't want to go pro.

I have some injuries and just general body aches, but I knew that I didn't want to go pro. And I knew playing in the Amateur division, I think I played in the Washington Women's Am when I was 24. And I remembered, I think I finished, I want to say fourth.

And I remember saying, "Well, I'm the highest finisher with a full time job." And so, the level of amateur golf is just so good. It's all these young women that are headed off to college that already know they're going to go pro.

And so, I was really looking forward to turning 25, and being able to play in the Mid-Am division with people who love golf, but don't necessarily do it professionally, you know, play amateur golf professionally, as they say.

Tom: Yeah, sure. Here, I know you've played Amateur tournaments throughout the state. Have you done anything nationally, like the U.S. Mid-Amateur, or what?

Victoria: I've only actually been able to attempt to qualify for the U.S. Mid-Am one time, because of work scheduling. And I was able to qualify. I played in Houston. And it was originally supposed to be in Florida, but it had been delayed because of a hurricane.

Tom: Neat.

Victoria: And so, I was able to play. And I made it to match play. I was like the, I want to say, I was like maybe the 15 or 16 seed, and then absolutely stumped by the eventual winner. So, at least she went on to win, but she kicked my butt.

Tom: So your experience as an assistant coach: how has that journey been from being a player yourself to now encouraging other players to play their best?

Victoria: You know, it was really interesting when I first started coaching. I had no idea what I didn't know. And looking back, I kind of cringe at some of the decisions I had made as a fresh coach. And then, I tried to listen to my boss as best I could, because he would talk to me a lot about typical mistakes that young coaches make.

But I was in a unique position because, having played at Gonzaga, I was coaching players that I had played with, that were my teammates months ago. And that was definitely unique because I was friends with a lot of them.

There was one of my teammates who I ended up coaching for two years that I had known. She and I had been friends since we were like eight and 10. So that was definitely a unique experience.

Tom: Yeah, it is.

Victoria: And as much as I enjoyed having my friends and my teammates around, it was definitely different when the last of those players graduated. And I kind of was like, "Okay."

Every player now does not know me as a player, they only know me as a coach. And so, that was definitely a bit of a milestone for me in terms of coaching. But I've really enjoyed it. Our current group, I like them all individually, not just as golfers, but as people, and we've been having a lot of fun.

Tom: So how involved are you with the recruitment process for incoming players?

Victoria: I do the majority of the recruiting, primarily because our head coach has a family that he wants to be with. And I always joke that it's a lot easier for me to squeeze myself onto an airplane to go recruiting than it is for a 6'2" man. So I do the bulk of the travel for the recruiting, yeah.

Tom: How do you find recruits? Do you just follow the scoreboards? Do you look at the news clippings, look on the internet?

Victoria: Yeah, there's a lot of time just kind of spent perusing the internet. As you get into the cycle of recruiting every year, as you go to more and more tournaments, you just kind of become familiar with certain names and certain people, and you know who you're watching, who you're looking out for, and you know which events would be good ones to be at, to recruit.

- Tom: So with this last year, the last six, eight months with the COVID-19 pandemic, the schedule must have been canceled. Was it, or not?
- Victoria: Yeah, we were able to play two events in the spring before everything shut down.
- Tom: How do you maintain contact with the players, keep them motivated, keep them sharp, keep their games going? How does all that work? Do you do it remotely? Are you able to spend any time at all with them on the golf course?
- Victoria: Yeah, we were almost entirely remote this summer. We had one player that was still in town. And she asked me to play golf with her a couple of times, so I saw her then. And then, I saw a few of my players at the Washington Women's Amateur this year when they were playing, while I played in the Mid-Am division.
- But for the most part, it was a lot of Zoom calls, a lot of group-thread texts. Like, "Hey, what's up? Look at this. This is what's going on with me. What's up with you guys?" And we definitely, we try. Brad and I took the approach of trying not to panic.
- I know I've talked to some people that there were coaches that were having weekly meetings saying, "What's up?" And Coach Brad and I tried to avoid that because there was just so much change that from one week to another, any information that we could have given them one week, would have been completely different the next week. And so, we tried to let everything shake out before we would gather them all on a Zoom meeting and be like, "Okay, this is what's up."
- Tom: So, now that we're getting into the fall, have classes begun at Gonzaga?
- Victoria: They are. We are in our third week of classes, I believe.
- Tom: And the program for the golf team, how's that going?
- Victoria: All but one of our players is back. The other, our last player, is still in Italy. She wasn't able to get a flight back to the U.S. for travel reasons. And so, she is still in Italy doing all her classes remotely, but she'll be back with us in the spring. But the rest of our players are here, and they're all taking a mix of either remote or hybrid classes. And we're just practicing and trying to keep things fun.
- Tom: Is there a schedule of tournaments for the team or is that not up yet?
- Victoria: College golf is played in the fall and spring. And our fall schedule has been canceled or postponed, however you want to word it, but we're not playing in the fall. I know a couple of our players are signed up for some outside individual events at their own discretion, but Gonzaga golf will not be competing this fall.
- Tom: What's the home course for the Gonzaga teams?

Victoria: We play primarily at Manito Golf and Country Club, but we'll play all over, especially when we're in tournament season, depending on where we're going. You know, if we're headed to Tacoma Country and Golf Club, Manito is a perfect spot to be practicing because of their narrow fairways and fast greens. But if we're going to someplace maybe a little more wide open, we'll try to play a course that's more similar to that. So we try to gear practice based on wherever we're headed.

Tom: Now that most of the players are back at school, it's a lot easier to keep them motivated, keep their game sharp, keep your eye on them, or? How are you finding that?

Victoria: You know, me personally, I don't think that I do anything to keep them motivated. All motivation is self-motivation. So our players are motivating themselves, and spirits seem high. So I mean, so far, like I said, we're only in week three, but spirits seem high. Nobody seems terribly bummed out. They kind of understand what's happening and are just keeping smiles on their faces for the most part.

Tom: Did you give them some sort of goals to set to accomplish during the summertime? To play as much as they can, or what?

Victoria: A lot of our players played over the summer and were very successful. We had Jessica Mangrobang on our team, she took third at the Washington Women's State Am. Mary Scott, one of our freshmen from Portland – she played really well in the Oregon Am, lost in 30 holes in her semi-final match. And then, her and her partner won the Oregon Four-Ball.

And then, Quynn Duong, one of our juniors, she was the low Am at the California Women's Open. So we had a lot of good golf being played this summer, yeah.

Tom: Very good. So, it sounds like the players pretty much understand the situation and looking forward to the spring, I'm sure?

Victoria: Yes, absolutely.

Tom: Well, Victoria, I appreciate you taking the time to talk with us today. And good luck with the team, and good luck with your own game. How about yourself? Are you putting your clubs away for the summer, or what's your plans?

Victoria: I am headed to the West side at the end of the month to play in the Champion of Champions at The Home Course.

Tom: Oh, there you go. It's in the first couple days of October, October 1-2.

Victoria: Yeah. I'm defending, so it should be a good event.

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Tom: Very good. Okay, Victoria Fallgren, the assistant coach for the women's golf team at Gonzaga University. I appreciate you again for taking the time to talk with us today. Thanks again.

Victoria: Absolutely. Thanks for having me.