

Tom Cade: Hello, this is Pod for the Course and I am Tom Cade, the senior director of communications for Washington Golf. And today we have with us Bryan Pierce, and Bryan is the director of on-course services at Chambers Bay golf course in University place, Washington. Bryan, thanks so much for being on with us today.

Bryan Pierce: Appreciate you having me on Tom. This is great.

Tom Cade: Yeah, you bet. So Brian, before we get onto other things under the sun, just for yourself, I know that everyone seems to have a story about how they came to be at Chambers Bay. So what's your story? How did you end up there at Chambers?

Bryan Pierce: Well, I grew up in the area from early 1980s and went to school over in Eastern Washington and came back this way and got a job in construction and quickly realized that the golf industry was a little bit more of a happy place for me. And post-college, that seemed to be a good opportunity to do something I loved as well as try to utilize my degree in a way. So I took a job down in Arizona first and got into the golf industry down there. Taught golf down in Arizona for 10 years, and then went to Florida for one year and took care of my grandparents and then moved my way back up here in 2010, the year of the U.S. Amateur.

And I didn't even know this golf course was built. Down in Arizona, we got tons of golf courses, so coming back up here, I wasn't aware of it. But that year I found out about it and called and saw if they had any openings as I was teaching golf as an independent contractor down the road. And they let me come in the next year. And next thing I know I was caddying and learning that that was the best job in this industry. After 15 years of working in the golf industry, I've found that being on the experience with the players for the five hours that you're with them, was probably my favorite at the time and still is today. I really do enjoy being on the experience with the player and trying to create some great memories and keeping those expectations low.

Tom Cade: "Keep the expectations low." I love it. So you are director of on-course services, but the second half of your title is Caddie Master. And for those listeners out there who don't know already, Chambers Bay is a walking-only golf course. There are no carts allowed except for those with a medical certificate or condition. And for those who have played Chambers, of course, it's a bit of a walking challenge. There're some elevation changes and some long distances between greens and the next tee. And so taking a caddie is not such a bad idea there.

And you spoke a little bit about your caddie experience and your enjoyment of it. So let's talk about the caddie program. And first of all, of course, Chambers, for those who don't already know, it's been the site of numerous large-scale championships, such as the 2010 U.S. Amateur, which you've already mentioned, the 2015 U.S. Open and numerous other collegiate and regional championships. Just six weeks ago, it was the site of the Washington Men's

Amateur state championship as well. So, significant resume already for the golf course. And the caddie program itself is an integral part of that experience there at Chambers. Is that correct?

Bryan Pierce: Oh, most definitely. We recommend anybody that hasn't seen the golf course to utilize caddies on the golf course as much as they can. And for those that don't, and they like the adventure on their own, then that's okay, too. We try to give them at least a couple pointers as they tee off, but having our caddies out there truly playing some of the shots out there and seeing the fall lines on the greens, some of the angles coming in from the holes, it makes that golf course play a lot easier. The challenge is definitely real out there with or without a caddie. We're definitely part of the planning process, but execution's always going to be up to the player.

Tom Cade: How many caddies are in your pool of caddies?

Bryan Pierce: Right now with what we've gone through this past year with the pandemic, our caddie crew has dropped about 50% just for the amount of caddie requests that we are not receiving as we have in the past. But right now, we're at about 45 to 50 caddies. I would say a good solid 25 to 30 of them are working regularly over the course of the season. Last year, we were up to 80 caddies with about 50 of them working a lot more often.

Tom Cade: I know you have caddies of different ages. I know some people who have retired from some other career and they decided to work as a caddie at Chambers Bay. But I also know that you've got some young folks there who are high school kids, maybe working towards an Evans Caddie Scholarship. Is that correct?

Bryan Pierce: That is correct. Yeah, we have definitely been partnered with the Evans Scholarship Foundation to try to find young individuals that would be interested in caddying. As being a caddie might be their first job, it's a pretty awesome opportunity for these kids to be able to go through that, put forth the effort to work with the Evans Scholarship Program to see if they can get some help through their college career. And we definitely had a lot of success with that, and we're really happy to be part of the Evans Scholarship Foundation here for all ages, for the kids that have come to us at age 15, all the way up to anybody just getting ready to go into college.

Tom Cade: How does that work out for you? Say you've got someone who wants to be a caddie and they don't know much about golf. Many of them do of course, but many do not. And they just are looking for a job and maybe some opportunity of some kind and they come to... Do they come to you? And do you train them? Do you have staff who train them how to caddie or how to behave on a golf course with basic etiquette, things like that?

Bryan Pierce: Yeah, naturally we're always looking to find individuals that have golf knowledge. It's hard to have a guy come out and be a caddie as we train them.

And if I ask him, "What does this putt do?" And he looks at it and says, "Well, I think it dog-legs a little bit left or right." And that was the first time I heard somebody describe a putt dog-legging on a putting green. So I appreciated it, but I was able to educate that one individual and he became a great caddie as well. But for the most part, we're looking for individuals who have at least a little golf knowledge, definitely the passion for golf. We want them to come out here and be part of an experience for players out here that really is just unmatched to any other golf course or any other experience that you might get playing golf with your friends or in a tournament. Our caddies, most anybody who does apply for a job here, I will vet them, try to ask questions, see what their golf knowledge is.

But again, you don't have to be a great golfer to be a good caddie. But you could be a decent golfer and be a great caddie. And what I ask of our caddies is to come in, give us 18 holes of your time and come out and do a shadow loop. And so what we'll do is we'll put a caddie in a position to go out and observe other senior caddies, more seasoned veterans as they go around the golf course and maintain the experience for the players. And if a perspective caddie finds that it's something that they really do want to do, that gives us the opportunity for them to actually see if that's a job that they want to do.

And then after that, then we take it case by case to find out how much training we actually really do need to give that person. It ranges anywhere from having to teach terminology, etiquette. I mainly have always said to anyone that if you're going to be a caddie here, first and foremost it's about the guest experience. It's about creating good customer service and being like a chameleon to be able to adapt to any person that comes out and any expectations they may have of their caddie.

Tom Cade: Do you have different levels of caddie skills? I know at some courses, in some clubs they have, "Well, this is an A caddy. This is a B caddy. This is a C caddy which means a beginner or something like that." Do you have that? Do you grade them like that?

Bryan Pierce: We don't really put labels on it. I think we mainly have senior caddies that have been here that lead by example. They've been here for some time. We've also had caddies that I would consider a senior caddie that steps in and has worked here for two, three years and has really taken the opportunity to become a better caddie, to hone their craft, and to learn. I really keep away from trying to classify any caddie, but I will be very honest with players if we are going to put a caddie out that doesn't have as much experience. But we also try to make sure that those caddies work with other caddies in the group so that they can learn as they go, because this is a job of trial by fire. You just never know what you're going to get when you get out on the golf course, but as long as you're ready to assist and not direct, we're there to help players. We're not there to tell them what to do.

Tom Cade: So when big tournaments come to the course, is your pool of caddies, are they called upon to be ready or to be available or... Well, for instance, like the 2021 U.S. Amateur Four-Ball going to be held the Chambers in May of 2021. Is the USGA going to come to you for caddie help, or how does all that work out?

Bryan Pierce: I'm not sure how that's going to happen in '21, but I would imagine that we will have some contact either with USGA or with players directly. How it worked in the 2015 U.S. Open, which was really neat, we had agents, players, caddies calling us to basically schedule practice rounds. That's what we saw a lot of, an overabundance of people coming out to try to get kind of an inside scoop from our local caddies. And that worked out great. It was awesome. I actually got to caddie for Adam Scott, got to be in a group with Brooks Koepka and Ryan Palmer. Those guys were amazing. Garth Mulroy was great, got to sing karaoke with Joe LaCava and Steve Sands. So the opportunity was really awesome.

And I think that they do utilize and respect the local caddies for a lot of the green reads, the fall lines, the angles, at least to learn it. One of our caddies, Brandon Salamonson had the pleasure to work with Michael Greller, who works with Jordan Spieth and was the champion of the 2015 U.S. Open. And he, Brandon, and Michael walked the golf course, learned a little bit, shared some stories. And it definitely proved that having a little bit of an inside track on the golf course was very helpful in that championship.

Tom Cade: What an experience. And so you did caddie for Adam Scott in a practice round?

Bryan Pierce: Yes. It was awesome. What a genuine guy. He was just like you would imagine him to be. He was a really sweet and genuine man. And he had a lot of clubs. He was testing a lot of wedges and a couple of putters so that bag was heavy, but that was not on my mind when I was getting to walk next to him down the fairways.

Tom Cade: Well, be a kind of a thrill to see those guys hit the ball. I can imagine, up close like that.

Bryan Pierce: It is definitely different. That's for sure.

Tom Cade: So at the beginning of our talk here just now, you spoke about your own personal experience as a caddie and it sounds like it's kind of a love thing that you have just being able to do that as part of your life.

Bryan Pierce: I do. I've been teaching golf for a long time and seeing the instant gratification and feeling that gratification when someone figures it out on the driving range or as a pro teaching an amateur a lesson. That was always something wonderful that I felt. I really enjoyed that. But when I first started caddying, it was like nothing else. I've checked in people in a golf shop. I've sent them off as a starter. But to be in the experience with the player, to be out there and see the ups and downs, and to try to create smiles and be excited about the good shots,

and definitely give them the Ben Hogan-esque attitude to where, "Hey, your bad shots. Don't let it get you down. Let's go to the next shot and see if we can swing and chase it and do it again."

And it is by far one of the coolest experiences, whether it's at a local club or for your friends in a qualifier, or I had a chance to work for a few weeks on the Web.com Tour back in 2016. And there was the travel and the competition and the hype, there's just no other feeling than being in the mix with other athletes and players and guys that are fighting for their career. And it is something else being a part of that team, a player and caddie relationship, it is really cool being part of that whether you're the player or the caddie, I believe.

Tom Cade: Wow. So we've talked a little bit about the younger caddies. What about the older caddies? The ones who have retired from some other long career and they're in their 60s and they just like to be outside and they want to keep busy and they love the game. And I know I've spoken with a couple of them out there. They just want to keep going. And this is what they love to do.

Bryan Pierce: Yeah. For a second job or something that's a supplemental to a retirement, it is pretty awesome having those guys. I've got gentlemen that are retired airline pilots, retired firefighters. We had a gentleman here, our oldest caddie and rest in peace Gary Allard, he passed away recently and he was our oldest caddie. And he caddied here since we opened. And he wore his U.S. Amateur hat and it was dirty and it was genuine. And his actions out there every day he stepped on this golf course, it was like his second home. He came here to enjoy his life and he knew what to expect when he came out here, because it didn't matter to him whether the player was good, bad, competitive or not. He just wanted to be out here, walking those fairways and reading those greens.

And those gentlemen and the guys that have retired and found this as a second job, I probably have five or six individuals that are school teachers that are ready to make this a gig for the summer and whenever they get done, they work with us in the summer. And maybe when they retire, they'll make this a little bit more of a full-time gig.

Tom Cade: So when a caddie is, let's say you're coming onto spring, do they let you know, "Hey, I'm going to be available three days a week during the summer." You must have a Rolodex or a roster of some kind that you call them when you've got a glut of players coming on who need caddies.

Bryan Pierce: Yeah, it's great. I mean, I think one of the old ways of doing things is let's see how many horses we can get in the stable. Let's get guys coming in as free agents. And that's kind of how we worked when we first started because we just didn't know what the demand was going to be for caddies. So we would have guys come down, hang out. The comradery was great. Having guys hang out and get to know each other. But you have a guy that comes down at six in the morning and he doesn't get out until one o'clock in the afternoon. That's several

hours of riding the pine that he or she could have been doing something else. And also, you'd take five hours out of your day waiting, waiting, waiting. You're not as effective when you go out there and start caddying whenever you end up working a 10, 11 hour day.

But the way we do it now is that it is much easier to get an availability from every caddie. If a guy's available five days a week, then hopefully I can schedule him five days a week. But if I can't, then we're going to do our best to schedule them as much as possible. But with the Rolodex that we do have, the availability of having a caddie tell me when he or she is available, makes it much easier for me to schedule rather than trying to guess if I can get somebody to come in and work. And with COVID and the pandemic here this year, we've eliminated any caddies coming down to be free agents. So I've had to be a little bit more diligent about our reservations, about calling guests to make sure that if they do or don't want caddies. We've just been a little bit more on the ball this year without having the ability to have free agents down here hanging out.

Tom Cade: So other than the Caddie Master, you are the director of on-course services, and what else does that entail, Bryan?

Bryan Pierce: I've always said I'm a jack of all trades, master of none. I love my job. I see things. I walk. If you see a piece of trash, you always know to pick it up because if not you, then who. So I manage our player assistant staff. We call them pace ambassadors, basically a Marshall program. We try to eliminate that name from it because we're really not out there to tell people where to go or what to do, but we are definitely trying to help out the folks that might find themselves challenged or falling behind on pace. So I manage those gentlemen on the course and I help oversee the entire operation of our guest service team and manage our caddies as well. And I'm one of the starters here so I try to get guys going right out of the gate. It's like I said, jack of all, master of none. But I'll do anything you ask me and definitely try to be as efficient as possible while doing it.

Tom Cade: So back to the caddie roster, do you have a limit of number of caddies that you want to keep on the roster? In other words, do you cap it at some number or do you just put everyone on there and just whoever wants to work the most, they get the most loops?

Bryan Pierce: We limited our staff this year because I knew the demand was going to be a little less with the lack of out of state travel, which we've seen a percentage down. But I basically know that if I have a caddie who's available seven days a week and I have a caddie who's available five days a week and caddies that are available three days a week, I'll go through the weekly schedule, find out how many loops that we have, any caddie requests that we have. If I can schedule a guy seven days, I will.

If that person who's available seven days, if it's only going to be 60%, 70% of their availability across the board, then I'll utilize the 30 to 40 guys that we have and try to spread it around to where everybody at least is getting a piece of the pie. All the while, we're always trying to put out the best caddies with the players that are out there. The guys who want to work, I put them to work. Guys who are kind of okay with working two, three days a week, then that's okay, too. So we've got a wide array of a Rolodex there of caddies that have different availabilities and different desires. So we manage that the best we can for sure.

Tom Cade: Well, Brian, again, I appreciate you taking the time today to talk about this. Bryan Pierce is the director of on-course services at Chambers Bay Golf Course in University Place. But more importantly, he is the Caddie Master at Chambers Bay, overseeing a fleet of caddies who service the club. Bryan, thanks again so much.

Bryan Pierce: Well, I appreciate you guys over there at Washington Golf. You've done a wonderful job. The tournaments that you've hosted out here have been amazing. And the partnership we have with you here at Chambers Bay and with all golfers in Washington has been seamless this year and the years that I can remember in the past. So we appreciate you as well. And thank you for letting us be a part of this and any caddies out there that ever want to come down, give me a call. I'd love to hear from you and we can chat about what those opportunities look like.

Tom Cade: And Brian, can I give your email address here? Is that okay?

Bryan Pierce: Yeah, sure. Yeah. You bet.

Tom Cade: Bryan Pierce is BPierce@kempersports.com. Contact Bryan if you have an interest in being a caddie at Chambers Bay. Okay, Bryan, again, I appreciate this and thanks for the words about the championships that our office runs and we've enjoyed the partnership as well, and looking forward to many more to come up in the coming years.

Bryan Pierce: All right, Tom, look forward to having you out here on the links as well.

Tom Cade: You bet. Talk to you soon.

Bryan Pierce: All right. Okay. Thank you.