

Tom Cade: Hello, this is Pod for the Course, and I am Tom Cade, the Senior Director of Communications for Washington Golf. Today we have with us Gabby Lemieux originally from Caldwell, Idaho. And Gabby is a three-time Idaho Women's State Amateur Champion. A former player of the year for Texas Tech University, who is now making her way as a professional golfer. Gabby, thanks so much for coming on today.

Gabby Lemieux: Thanks so much for having me.

Tom Cade: So let's just start from where we are. Where are you right now? Where are you based out of now? I know you're originally from Caldwell.

Gabby Lemieux: So it's a mix between Idaho and Arizona. Right now I'm in Arizona because of the winter months in Idaho. I'm just getting ready for the Symetra Tour to start up.

Tom Cade: Is there any particular place in Arizona where you're keeping in shape, training and keeping your game going?

Gabby Lemieux: Yeah, so I'm basically living out of Chandler, Arizona and practicing out at Whirlwind Golf Club.

Tom Cade: So, let's backtrack a little bit and start from the beginning. Were you born in Idaho? Are you a native of Idaho? Did you move there as a child? Or how did that come about?

Gabby Lemieux: I was born and raised in Caldwell, Idaho, and basically my entire family is from there. I'm also Native American from the Duck Valley Indian reservation, which is on the border of Idaho and Nevada.

Tom Cade: You are Shoshone-Paiute Tribe. Is that correct?

Gabby Lemieux: Yes, that is correct.

Tom Cade: You have a large family?

Gabby Lemieux: I have two older sisters and so I'm the youngest. And then my parents and that's basically all of us.

Tom Cade: So for you, how did you get started in the game of golf? How did that happen for you that someone first put a club in your hand or you first walked onto a golf course?

Gabby Lemieux: I was six years old when I started. Basically my dad, he picked up the game as sort of a hobby, to go out and play with his friends and as soon as we got older, a little bit older, I went to the golf course with him, hit some range balls, and then it became a daily thing for us to go and do together as a family. And then it

turned into basically a family sport that we all contributed to. My sister and I would play in tournaments and my dad would be the swing coach and everything on top of that. And then my mom actually ran a little junior league that we were a part of. So it was like a golf family.

Tom Cade: Very nice. When did you first play your first competition? How old were you?

Gabby Lemieux: I was nine years old. So it started pretty early.

Tom Cade: Was this in an organized event by the Golf Association there? Or was it some junior tour that was going through? Or what was it?

Gabby Lemieux: Yeah, that was a part of the Idaho Junior Golf Association.

Tom Cade: Okay. All right. And your sisters play golf as well?

Gabby Lemieux: My middle sister, she ended up playing golf. She went to Wyoming. She played a year there and then she pursued professional golf a little bit, but then figured out it wasn't her thing. So she showed me the ropes on that a little bit. And now that's where I'm headed.

Tom Cade: So you must have played golf in high school, on for your high school team. Is that correct?

Gabby Lemieux: Yes, I did. I actually had the opportunity to play varsity all four years. And with my sister only being a few years older than me, I got to play alongside her for two of those years.

Tom Cade: You mentioned that your dad was your swing coach. Is that true for the whole time?

Gabby Lemieux: That's true. So I'd actually just changed over to a guy out of San Antonio, Bryan Gathright. But yeah, my dad was my coach up until about a year ago.

Tom Cade: So for you, other than your dad, did you have other mentors when you were a young amateur player, someone you looked up to or somebody you went to for advice sometimes?

Gabby Lemieux: Not really. We were really been big into athletics, being in Idaho, you get the chance to play multiple sports because of all the seasons that we have. So I mainly stuck with three sports, which is basketball, volleyball, and golf. And so whenever golf came around, it was just family. So my dad or my mom or my sister basically pushed me to play better golf.

Tom Cade: What point during your high school years, did you think "Well, okay maybe I've got some future in the game." When did it start sinking in that you knew how to play it pretty well?

Gabby Lemieux: I would say I was 14, I think that's really when that mindset for me playing golf either in college or even pursuing it past that is when I won the Women's Am in Idaho. And it was a huge accomplishment back then. And so basically it grew from there. And then my junior year in high school, I made a decision to go play at Texas Tech. And basically I forego every other sport my senior year. And that was a decision that I made. And I'm really glad that I did because there are those chances to get hurt and not be able to play golf past high school. So, it was a really good decision to do that. And it gave me the opportunity to play at Texas Tech.

Tom Cade: Why Texas Tech? What prompted you to choose that school?

Gabby Lemieux: I'm not really sure. I took a visit there and it really ultimately felt like home. When I got there, I knew that it would be a really good fit for me and the coaches. It was a really good match and the practice facilities that they have there. And just the degree that I wanted to go in, they had it all. And that was really my main decision to go there.

Tom Cade: Did they recruit you? Did they come up to Idaho and watch you play?

Gabby Lemieux: They did. So me and my coach, actually, we talked about this quite a bit. So I played in what was called the Arizona Silver Belle in high school and it's during December. That's when I was playing basketball and I wasn't really able to practice golf very much because it was cold or it was snowing or things like that. And so I was like, "Well, I got to go and play in the tournament." So I ended up going to the tournament in Arizona and I think I shot like 77, 75, 72. So I progressively got better over the course of the tournament. And the coach knew that I was from Idaho and she said, "Yeah, I knew that you were probably going to be rusty. But since you got better over those three days, I knew that was the sign that I wanted to start recruiting you."

Tom Cade: It looks like a pretty good college career. You had four individual titles, I think, is that correct?

Gabby Lemieux: Yes, that is correct.

Tom Cade: And then named 2016 Player of the Year for the Big 12 Conference, that's pretty impressive. So, that was a good year.

Gabby Lemieux: Yeah. It was an eye-opening experience, I guess, for me to win four times and to be Big 12 Player of the Year and to be No. 1 in the country for a few months. That was another eye-opener just from high school to college and I was thinking, "Wow, there's actually another step beyond college that I could pursue golf as a career." So those accomplishments definitely led to that.

Tom Cade: So what year in school was that for you? Senior, junior?

Gabby Lemieux: That was my sophomore year when things really started to fall into place.

Tom Cade: So that's when you started thinking about, "Maybe I could do this to the next level." Is that right?

Gabby Lemieux: Yeah. Because, I think I've always had dreams growing up, watching golf or playing on the LPGA or playing professionally, but I know I never really knew what that looked like. And then I think sophomore year is when all this stuff started to fall together, that's when I was like, "Wow, the LPGA is possible."

Tom Cade: And so then what was your last year at Texas Tech?

Gabby Lemieux: I graduated in 2018.

Tom Cade: And did you turn professional right away or did you take some time off to think about it? How did that all play out?

Gabby Lemieux: So it's a funny story as well. In 2018, I ended up going to Q-School my senior year and gained Symetra Tour status. That was a deciding factor to play my last semester of college or not. I ended up playing my last semester in college, which then led into Symetra Tour. I only had half the season on the tour, which definitely wasn't enough time. But before I started the Symetra Tour, it was kind of go home, get married, buy a camper, buy a pickup, and then take off on this Symetra Tour. So it was a lot of things happening. Yeah, it was very busy. But, that was super, super fun and the learning opportunity to play at least half of the season on Symetra Tour.

Tom Cade: And just a reminder that the Symetra Tour is the developmental feeder tour that feeds into the LPGA Tour, for the listeners out there. So, this was the summer of 2018, right?

Gabby Lemieux: Yeah, the summer of 2018.

Tom Cade: So, half the season on the Symetra Tour in 2018 and then the winter of 2018, 2019, what did you do? Practice somewhere?

Gabby Lemieux: So I ended up coming to Arizona and living with my sister for that month or those few months there. Unfortunately I didn't play too well in Q School, in let's see, that would have been in 2018. So my 2019 status, wasn't very good. So I ended up trying to play on many tours and worked my way up, which I did. And I ended up playing in three Symetra Tour events, which I played really, really well in. And then I ended up qualifying on a Monday qualifier for the LPGA and making the cut in an LPGA event. So, I didn't have any status anywhere, but that whole year, built up to some really good accomplishments as well.

Tom Cade: Yeah. It sounds like it. So, in 2020 COVID hits and things get shut down a little bit and schedules are canceled. Tournaments are canceled. For you, how has it

been dealing with that situation? And not being able to play in tournaments? And not really sure when the next tournament might be? For your mindset, for morale, how did you keep going? And where were you during this time all last year?

Gabby Lemieux: So before COVID really went into full effect, we had one event in March that was in Florida and they incorporated some steps to prevent people from getting COVID, but it wasn't widely known yet. So we weren't able to shake hands or give people hugs, we're keeping our distance. But so, after that first event, I came back to Arizona and that's when everything started to go crazy. And I was like, "I need to get back to Idaho." Because I didn't know if borders were going to be shut down or if we couldn't fly or anything like that. So I drove back home and then I was home for a few months up until they started coming up with some tournament ideas. And they ended up having 10 tournaments which was a lot better than having none.

So I got to play in seven of those, no, six of those events up until about October when unfortunately Jared and I, we both tested positive for COVID, which kind of shot ourselves in the foot because I needed to play in the last four, at least two of the four events to be able to get into the last two events. So, I needed to at least make one cut. I was right on the line. So unfortunately contracting COVID, I wasn't allowed to play in those events. But basically I started an early off-season and went home and now I basically moved my way back up to Arizona in November of last year.

Tom Cade: So any after-effects of contracting COVID, you sound like you've come through fine and everything's okay, or how are you doing?

Gabby Lemieux: My husband and I, he had the shivers, the chills, the fever, the body aches, he got it all where I, my nose burned for a few days and then I lost my taste and then that was basically it for me. So both of our experiences were completely different, but on the positive side, we both don't feel any side effects from it. So, that's always good.

Tom Cade: So for 2021, and here we are in early February and you must be starting to think about the schedule and your plans for the year and the season. How's it going to look for you going forward here in this year?

Gabby Lemieux: I have full Symetra Tour status, which I did have in 2020, and I will have it again in 2021 since it's basically a roll-over year. So I will be able to get to play in the 19 events that they have scheduled, which is really good. It could be anywhere upwards to, I think, 24 events. So there's a middle ground. They haven't really determined if they're going to add anymore, but 19 events for 2021 is still really good. But most importantly, I feel like I'm looking forward to playing in a professional event in my home state. I think that's the one thing that I'm really looking forward to because I never got the opportunity to play college golf anywhere close to Idaho, just going to school in Texas. So all the tournaments

were more South and East coast side. So, I'm really looking forward to people coming out that I know, family friends to be able to come out and watch professional events.

Tom Cade: So the tournament you're referring to is a Circling Raven Championship, is that correct?

Gabby Lemieux: I am. Yes.

Tom Cade: That's going to be held at Circling Raven and Worley, Idaho, which is about maybe 45 minutes south of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. And the dates are August 23rd through the 29th. Again, it's the Circling Raven Championship. Last year they were supposed to have this tournament and it was canceled because of COVID. So they're starting up again this year. It's a three-year commitment to have that tournament at Circling Raven. And last year I think, and maybe correct me on this, but you had received an exemption to play in that event, but now it sounds like you have full status on the tour anyway, correct?

Gabby Lemieux: Yeah. It was because we weren't sure. I still had to go to Q School in 2019, which I played really well. But if I didn't play well enough to get Symetra Tour status or LPGA status, Circling Raven gave me an exemption to be able to play if I did not get those things, but I did. So now it's on the plus side of I still get to play in it.

Tom Cade: Circling Raven is a tribal-owned course. It is owned by the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, and they own the resort and the casino there as well. And it must be special for you being of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe to play on a tribal-owned course in front of those folks. Very supportive, I would think.

Gabby Lemieux: Yeah. That's always so comforting because I've definitely grown some relationships with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe and some of the tribes that are close to nearby, like the Lewis from Lewiston. So I'm hoping that there's going to be a lot of people out there supporting me that week, especially from Indian country.

Tom Cade: Do you still keep in touch with your college coach?

Gabby Lemieux: I haven't talked to her in a little while, but, but we had such a great relationship in college and she's definitely always there for me.

Tom Cade: I would think that would be a nice thing to have in your background.

Gabby Lemieux: Yeah. It's been nice to have her in my back pocket if I ever needed some advice.

Tom Cade: For you, what's your daily routine like? You practice every day? You play every day? Or you compete with other good players just to keep your game sharp?

Gabby Lemieux: I have a really good gig out here at Whirlwind and I have a group of guys that I basically go out and play with every single day and practice after. So to be able

to just to be out there and playing with some really nice guys has given me the opportunity to have some fun.

Tom Cade: When does the first tournament on the Symetra Tour? What are the dates?

Gabby Lemieux: The first tournament is actually in Arizona, March 15th through the 18th.

Tom Cade: And for those here in the Northwest who want to watch Gabby play, you'll have a chance to at the Circling Raven Championship. Again, those dates are August 23rd through the 29th in Worley, Idaho.

And Gabby, I spoke a few weeks ago with Notah Begay III, who is also affiliated with the Circling Raven Championship. He runs a National Junior Championship, and the winner of that earns exemption into the Circling Raven Championship. He's been very supportive of what's happening with the tribal courses, and in particular the Circling Raven Championship because of it being owned by the Coeur d'Alene Tribe. So that's been a nice connection there. Do you have that connection as well with Notah Begay?

Gabby Lemieux: Yeah, it's been a really good opportunity for us both. We've actually had a really, really funny story as he knows my college coach. They grew up in the same area. And he asked me to play in an event while I was in college. But unfortunately I couldn't. So from there we kept building on a relationship and now he's my mentor and friend and somebody I can go to for advice. And to be able to have him in my pocket to be able to ask him about professional golf questions has been great.

Tom Cade: Very nice. For yourself, are you going to try Q School again, this next year?

Gabby Lemieux: Well, hopefully I don't need to go. Hopefully placing in the top 10 on the money list this year will be able to give me my LPGA card. If not, I'll have to go back to Q School. Anybody who's not in the top 10 always has to go back to Q School. And there's also another way to get your LPGA card going through Q School. So you get two chances at it and hopefully I'll be able to say I am an LPGA member for 2022.

Tom Cade: So that's the criteria, that's the next goal, to be in the top 10 on the money list of the Symetra Tour, correct?

Gabby Lemieux: Yes. That's the goal.

Tom Cade: Very good. Again, Gabby Lemieux, thanks so much for joining us today. Gabby is a three-time Idaho Women's State Amateur Champion, and a player of the year at Texas Tech University and now making her way on the Symetra Tour on her way to the LPGA Tour. Gabby, thanks so much for joining us today.

Gabby Lemieux: Thank you for having me.

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Tom Cade: Okay. Good luck. And maybe we'll see you out at Circling Raven later this summer.

Gabby Lemieux: All right. Sounds great.

Tom Cade: All right. Bye bye.