

Tom Cade: Hello. This is Pod for the Course and I'm Tom Cade, the director of communications for Washington Golf, and 2022, this year, is the centennial year for Washington Golf, which is formally known as the Washington State Golf Association. It was founded in 1922, with the first holding of the Washington State Amateur, which was held at the Yakima Country Club, which at the time was a nine-holer, and today we have with us Austin Hurt, who among other things was the 2009 champion of the Washington State Amateur, and we're going to get to some of his other accomplishments later on here in just a minute. But Austin, just want to say thanks for coming on with us today.

Austin Hurt: Absolutely. Glad to be here. Thanks for having me.

Tom Cade: Yeah, you bet. So let's just maybe start out at kind of the beginning. You attended... Actually, where did you grow up, Austin?

Austin Hurt: So I grew up on Bainbridge Island and been here for a while. I moved away for a little bit after college, went to Arizona. But the mountains and the water kept bringing me back.

Tom Cade: There you go.

Austin Hurt: So born and bred Bainbridge Island, Seattle area. Yep.

Tom Cade: Austin is now the PGA assistant pro at Wing Point Golf & Country Club on Bainbridge Island. Is that correct?

Austin Hurt: I am the head golf professional actually. So yeah.

Tom Cade: The head golf professional, okay.

Austin Hurt: Yeah. Recent title.

Tom Cade: Okay.

Austin Hurt: But yeah, I've been here for a little while. But previously the assistant. So it's been a full circle kind of deal. Grew up playing golf here and I've enjoyed every second, and the golf course gets better with age.

Tom Cade: Well, I know that the Wing Point is known for its fast greens.

Austin Hurt: They're quick. They can get up there in the summertime. They have a great superintendent in Mike Goldsberry, and he takes a lot of pride in his work and does a great job with the golf course.

Tom Cade: He's been there a while if I remember right.

Austin Hurt: He has. I think it's been about 17 years or so.

Tom Cade: So you attended Washington State University and played on the men's golf team there. Were you there on scholarship, Austin?

Austin Hurt: Yes, sir. I was. Previous to that I was at Arizona State where I attempted to walk on to the golf team down there, and that wasn't working. I went down for the PGM program, which is professional golf management, to try to get into the PGA, and ended up winning a couple events down there in the program amongst all the other kids that were there to get the PGM certificate, and I said, "I need to be playing golf somewhere else. I need to be competing. This just doesn't feel right." So before I'd left to go to Arizona State that summer, Walt Williams, the coach at Wazzu at the time approached me and offered me a spot on the team, and I kind of turned him down not understanding the gravity of the situation, and I said, "I'm going to go try to walk onto Arizona State," and he said, "Well, you give that a try and if it doesn't work out, give me a call and we can figure something out."

So about halfway through the semester I gave him a call and wound up in Wazzu, and he picked up the phone and was like, "Yep, we'll set you up with NCAA Clearinghouse and we'll get your paperwork going," and next thing I know, December I was back home and driving out to Pullman in January, and it was absolutely pouring and sleeting rain and snowing half the time when we were getting out there, and I kind of looked at my dad who was driving with me and said, "What did I do? Where am I going?" We had never been to Pullman. We had never seen it. But it was the best decision I'd ever made. It all worked out.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: Got there and made a lot of good friends.

Tom Cade: So that was January of what year, Austin?

Austin Hurt: I believe it was 2007. I graduated high school in 2006. So it must have been 2007.

Tom Cade: So I'm trying to think of the timeline here. Palouse Ridge Golf Club, what year did that open? Was that up and running when you first got there?

Austin Hurt: Not quite. They were kind of in the stages of getting it built and it was done after I believe a year or two of us being there. We were traveling down to Lewiston and Clarkston every day.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: And to Moscow, Idaho to play golf and practice, and all those facilities were very open for us to head down there. But yeah, those were our options, and then

Palouse opened and we still traveled around just to get some variety. But we loved playing Palouse and it was just a really fantastic place to be, to practice.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: So Palouse had a lot of that at the beginning, especially when all the rough wasn't mowed. It was a challenge.

Tom Cade: For the listeners out there, Palouse Ridge is the home course at WSU, for Washington State University players, both men and women, and they also use it as kind of a classroom for several of their programs there as I understand it.

Austin Hurt: That is correct. Yep.

Tom Cade: So, in 2009, you win the Washington State Amateur, which was held at Palouse Ridge, your home club. Was that a bit of an advantage for you? Actually, I was there on site. On the final round there, you came from way behind if I remember it right.

Austin Hurt: That is correct. So, I mean there's more to the story than that.

Tom Cade: Okay.

Austin Hurt: Basically it started off I shot 81 in the first round with an 11 on I believe my 14th hole of the day. It was a par-5 and I made an 11. I dumped a couple balls in the hazard and I had some weird allergic outbreak in my eye or something like that, and it kept shutting and I made an 11. Ended up shooting 81, and I was like, "Oh man, you just threw away your home course advantage right there."

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: I ended up going to the hospital the next morning to try to get some allergy medication and they wanted to give me some shots, and I said, "I'm not taking any shots. I'm not doing any of that." So I ended up going back out, playing the next day. It was a windy day, maybe the windiest of the week, and I ended up shooting 69. It was either the second or the third round, but 69 and one of the lowest rounds of the day. So it was second or third round, and all I was trying to do was, I kept telling my brother I was just going to try to get it back to even par, just try to offset that 81, try to keep going, try to etch a little off each day, and after that 69 I was inside the cut line.

On the final round, it was seven shots back of, I believe it was my buddy, Derek Berg at the time, and I played really well. Came out and I shot four under on the front, or three under on the back, and ended up shooting 65, which was the course record at the time, and pretty special. I had one of my teammates dad's on the bag, who was a fantastic guy for lugging me around for the last two days. It was just a super, super fun time to experience that with him.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: And my mom was there and brother was out there and yeah, all my teammates were there for the most part, and coach was there. And we were holding that trophy on our home course so it was great to experience that together. A fond memory.

Tom Cade: So let's move forward a little bit. After graduation from college, did you try to make it on tour anywhere? Or what did you do from then on?

Austin Hurt: I graduated in 2010, and what did I do? In 2011 I qualified for the U.S. Amateur at Erin Hills, and believe I was working out at White Horse at the time, and after I'd done that and experienced that, I came back home and kind of figured I think I need to make up my mind what I want to do, and ended up heading down to Arizona, Scottsdale area, and started working at a place called Pinnacle Peak Country Club where I'd work a little bit, and on the three off days that I had I would play in mini-tour events, and that proved to be pretty stressful and pretty tough and difficult to try to grind it out in between the work.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: And I would only practice after work, after a long day in the heat and doing things that you weren't necessarily thrilled about doing instead of hitting range balls like you see all these guys doing all day, and that wasn't what we were doing. We were washing clubs and cleaning carts and filling sand bottles, and then maybe chipping or putting after we got done working, and then after we got done working for the four days, go out and play. So that was kind of my routine for a couple years when I was down there working at Pinnacle Peak and working at Desert Highlands Country Club. Made some great friends down there. We did play a lot of golf, but it was difficult to get into a routine that would warrant competition.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: So it was difficult, and that kind of wore on me a little bit. But I pursued it up until Canadian Tour Q-School, which was a couple years after that, I want to say 2012 or 2013 area, somewhere in there, and got there and kind of a similar scenario. First round shoot 80, somewhere in the 80s, and pretty down on myself. That was my plan, to get going, and I think at the end of the week, well that 80 yeah, the 80 was the hard part. I had played really well on the front nine. I think I was 200, and again, moving into the back nine, I just, I kind of had a really rough time. I ended up shooting 47 on the back nine or something like that.

Tom Cade: Oh, yeah.

Austin Hurt: It was all in my head. I was thinking about way too many things and just did not have the mental capacity to understand what it took to play four rounds of golf and to get through something that was really important. So ended up missing it by a few shots and got in my car in Beaumont, California, and I drove straight home back to the Northwest and tried to figure out what I was going to do next, and the next step was I thought I was going to quit golf. So tried to start interviewing for some jobs and went through some job interviews, and after a few of the interviews I kind of sat down with myself and was like, "You really want to be a welding material salesman?" No, I don't think that's what you want to want to be doing.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: Nothing against those guys, but it was just like this isn't what you're meant to be doing. So I put that down and went and got another golf job over at Glendale Country Club in Bellevue, and worked there for about six months and then I gave my now boss Jeff D'Amico a call here at Wing Point and asked him for a gig, and he said, "Come on over. We'll start you up and see what we can do." That's how that all worked out, and I haven't been happier.

Tom Cade: So let's fast forward to this summer, and in particular I know a couple of weeks ago you played in the PGA Championship, one of the four majors on the PGA Tour, and to get into that event is not a simple thing. You don't fill out an entry form and you're in. I mean, you've got to go through some steps to get there, right?

Austin Hurt: Well, first and foremost you have to be a PGA professional to attempt to qualify. So that's step number one, getting through all three levels of the PGA and holding a current job. I think it's 40 hours a week or something to qualify you, and you have to be eligible PGA, and it takes a while. It takes a while to get there. I know some people that can do it really fast. I know people who have completed the program in two years or a year and a half, but they give you eight years to complete the program. I think I was somewhere in the four or five year range to finish it. So to become eligible, to then try to compete, you then play in this event at the end of the season, our season here in the Northwest, which is called the Pacific Northwest Section Championship, and that was held at Arrowhead Golf Club in Molalla, Oregon, and it's a three-round event I believe.

They take the top seven players I believe out of 150 or something like that. They're competing against all of Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Washington, all compete, all the head pros, and whoever holds status will sign up and try to run their dream at making it to nationals.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Yeah.

Austin Hurt: So I had a great week there. Qualified, ended up finishing second to my buddy who also played in the PGA Championship with me this year, Colin Inglis, and we

battled it out on the last day there, but he just edged me out by a few, and we all said congratulations to the seven of us, we'll see you down in Austin, and that was at Barton Creek Golf Club in Austin, Texas, which is where nationals was, and that is the next step. So we all head down there, seven of us, and there's 312 people in the field and they take the top 20 PGA professionals, who then head to the PGA Championship. So we get there, we start playing practice.

Tom Cade: So you're at the nationals now, and they take the top 20 out of the full field. So just to get into that full field, all those folks, all those players, they had to qualify from various Sections around the country, correct?

Austin Hurt: Yes, 312, and there's a lot of competition in each Section. I mean there's good players everywhere. So that's what you notice when you get there. It's like, "Okay, everybody's here to do the same thing. Everybody has the same goal," and that's kind of our goal at the beginning of the season, at least as golfers, is we're going to try to make its nationals, and we put that on our radar. Section championships, all of our Pro-Ams, all of our majors in our Section that kind of builds that Section championship to where we then attempt to qualify, and if that's a goal, then great. But when you don't qualify, you kind of feel like, "Man, I didn't do enough this year. It didn't feel like I did enough," and that was me the previous year. I was an alternate going in to the previous year where I was the first year eligible to qualify, and I was like, "I don't want to be that first alternate or second alternate ever again," because I was on the outside looking in.

So got to Austin and had a really good first two rounds. I shot 66, 68, and I think I was in second place out of the 312 at the time, and I was happy about it. I mean, I wasn't celebrating. But I was like, "I'm in a really good spot here. My swing's feeling good. My game's feeling great," and I remember sitting at dinner with my girlfriend Christina and she looks and says, "Well, you've made the cut." They do two cuts. They cut the field after two days to 90 people, and then they cut the field after three days to 70 people.

So I've made the cut of 90 and she looks at me and says, "Well, you made the cut. What's the next goal?" And I was like, "Well, I think I can win this thing," and she just kind of looks at me and starts laughing, and I'm like, "Well, I mean I don't know what else to say. That's what I'm here to do. That's what I'm here for," and that's why we all play this game. That's why 312 of us are here, is we all think that we can do that.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: So that kind of floored her, but I was laughing because I wasn't joking at the time. I was serious, and we woke up the next day and that main golf course there, the Fazio golf course, is a tough one. It's tricky, and the wind started kicking up pretty good there in the afternoon and it started getting cold and I had a pretty poor finish. I played great all day until about the, I believe it was the last few honestly, and what did I do? I made a double bogey on 16 with a

great putt. I was about to make a triple and I made a six footer down the hill there, and then another seven or eight footer on 17 to make a bogey, and then parred 18 for 73, and I was a little bummed. I was in a pretty dark spot because now I think I was five under or something like that. Right in the middle of that 20 number, maybe 13th or something like that, and I didn't feel as good as second place, I can tell you that.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: So I'm just like, "Okay, I need to bear down tomorrow and try to figure something out." Woke up in the morning of the final round and the flag's going sideways and I just said, "You need to lock it up and let's have a good day." So it was all fine and dandy through six holes. I was one under and again a struggle ensued a little bit. Seven, eight, nine, and 10 were all bogeys. So I'm sitting there again outside looking in and I get to the 11th fairway and my brother looks at me, who's on the back with me, and he just says, "You need a gut check time here. We need to lock it up. We need to hit a good shot here and we need to make a par. We need to stop the bleeding," and I look at him and I'm like, "All right," and he's like, "You got 160," and I think I hit an eight iron pretty smooth but it airmails the green and goes over into the rough into this grate, and I'm just like, "Oh, not another one."

Tom Cade: Oh, boy.

Austin Hurt: So I get a free drop off the grate, and I end up lipping out the chip for a birdie and making par and it kind of settled me down a little bit and I was kind looking around like, "Okay, you still can do this. There's leaderboards everywhere too." So you're trying to be relaxed and you're trying to not look at them too much. I think I made a birdie on the next hole, 12, and then I'm back inside that cut line and there's boards everywhere saying the top 20 is at even par or something like that, top 20's in at even par, and I'm two under. So I'm like, "All right, you got a little bit of a cushion to play with," but then I make another bogey on 14. A par-3 that gave me trouble, it was the easiest hole all week. But I just couldn't seem to figure out why I couldn't hit it in the middle of the green.

I made a par on 15. Coming down, 16's a really good par-4. I hit it left at the green and it's across the green putt. I think it was a 40 footer. Lipped that out for a birdie, which was a great putt, and then 17 and 18 were my saviors. I pull one left on 17 and put it in the bunker, chip it up, and make a 15 footer off the right side of the green to save par, and I'm wondering at this time, just oh my goodness, that was a gutsy putt. You needed that so bad, and I'm like, "You're inside the cut line if you make par on 18. You parred it every day. You birdied it the first day. So you're basically counting, you're in," and that's what I'm telling myself, is just make some good swings.

You need five good shots, or four good shots, or three good shots, whatever it is, to just get you on the green and make a five. So I hit a great drive. Kind of

hammer it through it up left of the green, and I'm sitting there and the lie was pretty tight and I don't know if I rushed it or maybe I was thinking about it too much, but I ended up doing what most amateur golfers do, is decelerate through the ball and kind of chunk the chip about five feet in front of me, and I couldn't believe it but I had to gather myself and tell myself, "Okay, you've been here before, and in other situations you might not have succeeded, but this is it, you're not going to let this one slip away." So I chipped it up, the fourth shot, chipped it up to about eight feet and just kind of took a deep breath and rolled that one in to make it inside the cut line by one shot.

Tom Cade: You made two saving pars on 17 and 18 to make it in, yeah?

Austin Hurt: Yes, indeed.

Tom Cade: So you're in the PGA Championship. That was your first professional major of the PGA Tour I'm assuming, is that right?

Austin Hurt: That is correct. Yeah. I'd been trying for years, but yeah.

Tom Cade: The PGA Championship was held at Southern Hills there in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Did you have any support system go with you, your caddie, friends, family, or anything, Wing Point members?

Austin Hurt: A bunch of Wing Point members. My brother caddied for me. My girlfriend went. My brother's fiancée was there, a couple of my best friends, a bunch of them traveled down. I think there were about eight of them, and then I want to say in total probably about 35 people that traveled to get out there, members, family. It was a fantastic contingent. They were there every step of the way cheering me on, rooting me on, and it was just a fantastic feeling to look over inside the ropes and them being outside just to have their support cheering me on all the way through it, and what a cool experience for myself.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: Just to feel what it feels like in the first one. Now that it's over and done, we had some pretty cool experiences. Monday, we played with Victor Hovland and Matt Fitzpatrick, who were great guys.

Tom Cade: Oh, boy. Yeah.

Austin Hurt: Tuesday we played with my Pacific Northwest buddies, Tim Feenstra and Colin Inglis, the other two who had made it to the PGA Championship, and then that final Wednesday we played with Dustin Johnson, Jordan Spieth, and Carlos Ortiz for our last practice round.

Tom Cade: Wow. Yeah.



Austin Hurt: So we kind of had a great experience in that way of just really kind of soaking it all in.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: And we knew the golf course was hard. We knew it going in. We didn't know what the weather was going to do, but I mean we can't blame it all in the weather. We did get kind of a brutal draw with the wind kicking up both days and blowing 35, gusts of 40. It was challenging, and the rough was up and the fairways were fast and the greens were fast. So we didn't play as well as we had hoped. But those experiences and that experience, it's left me hungry for more, wanting more, wanting to do it again, want to get better. You notice things too. When you play with these guys, it's their job and they treat it like a job and every shot, every swing, it's calculated, it's concentrated, it's not rushed. It's thought about, and I think that's really what I notice, is how seriously they take it, and you don't really get that until you're standing right next to the guy that has three majors or two majors under their belt and you're like, "Okay."

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: It's different. It makes sense. Yeah. It all makes sense. Just a really cool experience, it was fantastic. The support was incredible.

Tom Cade: Speaking of hungry for more, I do see that your name is on the list of players playing in the Final qualifier for the U.S. Open this next Monday down at Pronghorn in central Oregon. Is that right?

Austin Hurt: Yes, sir. We'll be there.

Tom Cade: How did you get into that? Were you exempted into that? You qualify past Local, or how'd that work?

Austin Hurt: So the top 20 get exempted into final qualifying from Austin, Texas.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: And the top 20 also get exempt back into nationals next year. So we won't have to go through that process again of playing in our Section championship.

Tom Cade: Yep.

Austin Hurt: Feenstra, Inglis and myself will be exempt. We can still play in the Section championship, but it just opens up more spots for people to qualify from our Section.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: The three of us will be going, and then they'll still have those open seven spots. So there'll be 10 of us at nationals next year, which is fantastic for our Section in the Pacific Northwest and everybody that's involved.

Tom Cade: Do you play in other Section majors, like the Washington Open, Oregon Open, things like that, Northwest Open?

Austin Hurt: Yeah, absolutely. I would've been playing in the Northwest Open, but the PGA Championship got in the way. But I usually play in them every year. The other goal of mine every year is to try to qualify for the Hudson Cup, and being on the team the last two years, it's a great experience. 10 best Pacific Northwest professionals against the 10 best Pacific Northwest amateurs. It's a really cool tradition.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Austin Hurt: So as much as I can I like to play in the majors. I play in a few Pro-Ams, but the majors are kind of where you test yourself every year and that's where I like to find my level of competition and see if what I've been doing is right or wrong.

Tom Cade: So life has been pretty good back at Wing Point for you then, yeah?

Austin Hurt: Life's been great. No complaints. A lot of supporting members and the membership's fantastic. Everybody keeping me pretty grounded, so it's fantastic. It's a great place to be, a great place to live.

Tom Cade: Well again, we're speaking today with Austin Hurt, the 2009 Washington State Amateur champion, who is now the head PGA professional at Wing Point Golf & Country Club on Bainbridge Island. Two weeks ago, he had qualified to play in the PGA Championship, and looking forward for more. I know he's going to try to qualify next week in the Final stage for the U.S. Open. Austin, thanks so much for taking the time. Again, we just wanted to touch base with some past champions of our state amateur, and it's great to see you still involved with the game in a big way.

Austin Hurt: Tom, pleasure. Thanks for having me on. I really appreciate it.