

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
March 30, 2021



SAM BENNETT

JACK RYAN: We would like to welcome Sam Bennett into the interview room at the 2021 Valero Texas Open. Sam got into the event via winning at the Cabo Collegiate here at TPC San Antonio.

Sam, making your PGA TOUR debut, how did it feel to win that college tournament knowing you'd get a spot here at the Valero Texas Open?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, it felt good to get my first win in college and obviously that came with this PGA TOUR exemption, which is pretty cool. Just freshman year and sophomore year, just never could get the job done. Had a lot of top-5s and top-20s and couldn't really find myself winning. For a long time there, I would question myself and I never really thought that I had it in me possibly to win. Then it felt really good to get the job done in Cabo and get this Tour exemption.

JACK RYAN: Have you had any opportunity to speak with any Tour players, any advice you've received from any of them, whether that was in the weeks leading up to this week or just over the last couple days?

SAM BENNETT: No. I spoke with Ryan Palmer, former Aggie, and Cam, and got a little insight here and there, but I played in the pro-am on Monday, played nine today. I played with Cam. But as far as like insight and advice, I haven't gotten too much of that.

JACK RYAN: Last question for me before we open it up to media on the line, I understand you've got a very special tattoo on your arm. If you could explain to us what that tattoo is and what it means to you.

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, this tattoo means everything on my arm. My dad got diagnosed with Alzheimer's probably seven years ago and he was one of the reasons why I started playing golf and wanted to play good golf, because I wanted to impress him.

Then once outside with my mom one morning and just doing yardwork, hanging out and I was -- it was probably like a year ago when my dad could still speak a little bit and make conversation and I was struggling mentally with some things. He told me, he said, "Don't wait to do something." Then like after that, that was the last thing, advice he's given me before like everything went south. I was like, I'm going to get this tattoo that says "Don't wait to do something" on my arm. I got it, and then it took him like 15 minutes to write it out. He actually wrote it out in his handwriting. It was probably the hardest thing he ever had to do. Now with that on my arm, the tattoo, I got a new pre-shot routine that I do before every shot, I just look at it and I say, "Don't wait to do something," and like step in and hit the shot.

This is dad, someone I've always looked up to. It just sucks not being able -- him not knowing, you know, win my first college event, getting into a Tour event and then like my second college event last week and like it just like sucks that like he can't be here for that and like he has no clue that like what I've accomplished.

JACK RYAN: That's a very nice story. With that, we're going to open it up to questions from media that we have on the line.

Q. Sam, congratulations. Hope you have a great week.

SAM BENNETT: Thank you.

Q. Just curious on your dad, where is he now? Are you able to at least go sit with him or see him?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, we got healthcare coming every day to our house 24/7. I mean, yeah, I see him once a week, usually on Sundays. I'll give him a hug. It's weird, he still knows a little bit. Right when I walk in the house, he'll kind of look and smile and then we'll hug, but there's no conversation at all. He can't put together a sentence or just kind of babbles and does stuff. Yeah, I'm still able to see him pretty much every week end.

Q. You had something on your Twitter account, I feel like it was back in February, kind of a vague reference to trying to accomplish things and going through what you're going through. Was that your father related?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, I've been struggling pretty good mentally with some, you know, forms of depression and anxiety just with that. Luckily, I got some pretty good help at A&M, talk to a psychologist every week. Just, you know, just depressing thoughts just running through my head all day. Yeah, partially because my dad and partially some other stuff. Say the majority of my dad, but it's been a rough eight months for me, it really has.

Q. Hey, there, Sam. Just curious, I think your brother's going to be on the bag this week; am I right on that?

SAM BENNETT: Yes, sir.

Q. How much has he and your other brother and your mom and everybody kind of helped each other deal with stuff with your dad and his fight with Alzheimer's?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, it's tough. My brother, he's awesome. You know, both my brothers, I mean, I'm so proud of what they've been able to do, too. They both had to go to rehab in high school for drug problems and stuff like that. You know, they're strong. They helped me through a lot, man. We text every day and, you know, we'll cry together and laugh together. You know, it's really tough on my mom, too, so we have to be there and be strong for her.

But Jake and Marcus, my two brothers, we all tell each other we don't have a father figure, so we try to be each other's father figure in our lives.

Q. Who's all going to be out there Thursday, Friday and the weekend with you, mom, dad?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, I wish -- I was telling my mom, I was like I really wish there's a way dad, that he could make it out there, but there's just no way. It would be kind of cool just to glance over and see my dad out there. But my mom's coming, my brother Marcus is on the bag, and a lot of family friends. So it will be a pretty big crowd out there.

Q. Hey, Sam. Yeah, let's see. First, I wonder if there's anything that, you know, people that aren't from a small town in Texas might not understand about where you learned to play the game and what golf meant to you growing up.

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, yeah, it's crazy. Growing up, you know, where I grew up playing golf on the nine hole golf in Madisonville Texas, pretty cool place. Honestly, like me and my buddies, we'd go out there and go to the pool and go out there, you know, in swim trunks and like T-shirt and flip flops and just like drink a 30-rack and always have a good time. It was like always fun.

It's a lot different, I'll tell you that. Coming here and all the courses we play at in college, like I never played on something like that growing up. But without that place, I mean, I'd have to drive 50 minutes every day to play golf when I was growing up and I could just walk there. Honestly, love that place so much.

Q. And now, having been through what you've been through the last, you know, eight-plus months, is there any advice that you would give to someone else who's going through something similar, whether it be with a family member or someone close to them?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, I just -- I have a buddy, you know, struggling kind of with the same stuff. I just tell everybody that, you know, it's going to get better. Like I was afraid that I was -- I mean, it was -- some of the stuff I was going through was pretty scary and I felt like there was no hope. I even told my coach that. I mean, I've told him multiple times that I think I might have to take this semester off, no school, no golf, and just get help.

The advice I'd give to somebody going through some of this stuff, you kind of have to know and have faith that it's going to get better, that you're not going to be stuck like that forever.

Q. Hey, Sam, I wanted to know, first of all, is that course in Madisonville, because I've driven down 21, is it still operational out there by the airport?

SAM BENNETT: Yes, it's still right there, yes, sir.

Q. I don't want to offend you, but it's pretty rough, isn't it?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, it's a little rough.

Q. Hey, can you talk about just the excitement for you to be in PGA TOUR event? I mean, I know that you might be a little wide-eyed, but I do know that, you know, you're a competitor and, man, you're not going just to play, you're going to win.

SAM BENNETT: Exactly. Yeah, people have been asking me, you know, what my expectations are for this week. You know, how I'm going to approach it. I just told everybody that I'm going to treat it like a normal tournament. You know, why we play the game, to tee it up and hopefully have a good shot coming down Sunday.

Obviously it would be sweet to make the cut, too. That's the first goal. Yeah, I'm excited playing in my first Tour event. You know, walking around and seeing the guys you see on TV like week in, week out, just being able to, you know, see the Tour van set up with all the clubs and equipment. I don't know, it seems pretty surreal. Sometimes I'm out here hitting balls and practicing putting and I have to question myself, like am I really in this situation like at this very moment? And then I'm like yeah, I am. It's kind of crazy to think, like I catch myself thinking like, dude, like you're actually like here, like this is it, like this is what you dreamed of doing your whole life, like what you always wanted to do is play in a Tour event. I don't know I'm still soaking it in, honestly. I mean, it doesn't feel real to me, honestly, but I'm really excited, Darryl.

Q. Obviously you're doing so good right now for A&M, so I guess the obvious question is, you laid out saying you can make the cut and go to compete, but you've got to feel good about where your game is, don't you?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, I'm pretty confident. Honestly, on a little heater and hopefully I can keep it going this week and then straight into our home tournament and SECs. Yeah, I'm pretty confident where my game is right now, to be honest.

Q. I mean, with that mindset, feel like you can go out there and shoot a low number?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, I feel like depends on the wind, I think it's going to blow 10 to 15 out of the north pretty much every day. I think the north wind's a little harder out here, scores might be a little higher. If it doesn't blow, if you get an early morning tee time, you'll be able to take it pretty deep out here. When this course gets a little wind on it, it's pretty tough.

Q. I'm curious on Madisonville. It looks like equidistant Houston, Austin, Dallas might be too far. Have you gone to a PGA TOUR event and if so, which one, and if not, why not?

SAM BENNETT: I actually haven't been to a PGA TOUR event. Just honestly like I play golf all the time, I see a lot of golf, I see a lot of good golf and I don't really, you know, care to

pay any money to watch golf, honestly.

Q. Note to Jack, we need free tickets on the Tour. Is there any disadvantages from coming from a small town?

SAM BENNETT: No, I don't think so. You know, other than I'd say not being able to play different courses and stuff like that. But I mean, honestly, the only disadvantage I'd say I had growing up until I was like 16 was I never really got to putt on any good greens and, you know, it kind of showed. Putting's my weakness, but growing up, I was putting -- it's like fairways and just hitting bumps, so you couldn't really practice. Other than that, I don't think there's really any disadvantage at all.

Q. I'm just curious what makes you stick with it. What is it about golf that you like enough to keep playing without having kind of --

SAM BENNETT: I get that question a lot, too. I like it a lot. I like winning. Unfortunately, in this sport you don't get too many opportunities to win because you're playing with 150 guys. Yeah, I like it a lot. We're going to see where it goes, but I tell everybody I'm not going to -- once I graduate college in hopefully two and a half more years, I'm going to try obviously to keep on playing the game, but I'm not going to be out here until I'm 28 grinding mini tours. I'm going to get my job going and a family started. Yeah, I especially now it's the winning that keeps me coming back.

Q. When did you get good? When did you know you were good?

SAM BENNETT: Honestly, probably -- my grandpa said he knew I was going to be a stick ever since I was like 2, but it's probably like eighth grade when I started getting some Division 1 letters from some schools and that kind of set in, like dang, this is what I'm going to do, I'm going to go to college to play golf and it's going to hopefully prepare me for the Tour.

Q. I guess where I'm confused, you would have to have left Madisonville for other courses to get better though, right?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, I think when I was 12, 12 or 13 years old, my dad -- my dad was a good golfer, too and he loved to play, so he got us a membership at Traditions where we play, the Aggies, and I would go over there every once in a while, like two times a month. Once when I started driving when I was 16, I'd go there pretty much like anytime I could to practice. But that was a big-time move for my dad and I really appreciate that because it kind of helped playing out there and being around some of the guys. He probably -- he was an Aggie and he probably knew I was going to end up playing golf there, so it was nice to get a membership there when I was younger.

Q. And lastly, just what kind of -- what are you looking forward to out of the week, what kind of expectations do you have, that kind of stuff?

SAM BENNETT: Yeah, first and foremost, I just want to go out there and I hope me and my brother have an absolute blast. I know we will once we get out there and inside the ropes. I'm going to try to win this week. I mean, that's why I tee it up. Sucks I can't take any money from it, but maybe next time.

Q. And free golf balls for the week. How old's your brother, Marcus?

SAM BENNETT: He's 25. No, he's 26, he's 26. Married and got a little kid.

Q. Where's he work?

SAM BENNETT: Mid South, it's an energy company, lineman.

JACK RYAN: Sam, those are all the questions we have. Thank you for sharing as much as you did with us, very inspirational story, and good luck this week.

SAM BENNETT: Thank you.