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GOLF CHANNEL

An Interview With:

**BRANDT PACKER
DONNIE WAGNER
ERIC SEXTON
SCOTT NELSON
MAX HOMA
STEVE BURKOWSKI
BILLY RAY BROWN
CHARLIE RYMER
ERIK COMPTON
JAY SEAWELL
ALAN BRATTON
CONRAD RAY
BRUCE HEPPLER
MIKE SMALL**

BRANDT PACKER: It is an absolute honor to be here. I can't tell you how excited we are from the Golf Channel to be covering the NCAAs again.

I want to turn it over real quick, Donnie Wagner from the NCAA, the NCAA Division men's golf committee chair; Mike Carter, who I know you've had a lot going on, a lot of work that goes into this, Wichita State's director of Athletics Eric Sexton and from Prairie Dunes, Scott Nelson. We cover golf tournaments all over the world, and your hospitality is second to none. Rusty, your crew,

everybody, it just gets us that much more excited to get here and get started. But the hospitality and the golf course, second to none, and turn it over to your guys to make some opening remarks.

DONNIE WAGNER: On behalf of the NCAA Division One Men's Golf Committee, we just want to welcome you to the 76th NCAA men's golf chip.

First, we want to thank our host, Wichita State University and Director of athletics, Eric Sexton, and all of the wonderful volunteers from that organization and Prairie Dunes Country Club; Scott Nelson, the general manager and the membership.

It takes a lot to do this, and I remember at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa and I know the drain that it is and the work that's required of the membership to host these type championships.

We very much appreciate the membership of Prairie Dunes. Want to thank Rusty Hills, long-time friend and I asked what his title was with respect to this tournament, and I think it's just Grand (ph). He knows the course, he knows the club, and we thank him for his work.

The City of Hutchinson and its residence and certainly the CVB and Lynette Cox, we thank you very much for your hard work and we know it's going to be a terrific event.

This will be an unbelievable experience for these young men to compete in the National Championship on a golf course like this. This is a Top-15 golf course in the country, Top-25 in the world, and it's not every day that you get that opportunity. So these young men that we are going are going to have the time of their life.

We are very excited to add the Golf Channel and televising the championships live as we crown an individual champion on Monday, and then determine the team champion through match play in the final 18 on Tuesday and Wednesday.

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over the world will be able to see what makes this championship so special and to see what great players and outstanding young men we have participating in this game. These young men are the epitome of the student athletes that we have in our great universities today.

We are looking forward to a wonderful week, great hospitality and has already been mentioned, we love the people at Prairie Dunes Country Club and the people of Hutchinson, Kansas and our great friends at Wichita State University.

During this championship, we also want to remember a close friend, Ron Balicki, passionately covered college golf. That was his game, not national championships. It was college golf, and he did that for over 30 years. He was loved by everyone. He dedicated his life to it, and for his coverage as a senior writer with *Golf Week*, he was so appreciated that he was inducted into the Golf Coaches Association of America Hall of Fame. Ron passed away last month at the age of 66 after a hard-fought battle with cancer. He will be sorely missed by all of us and our thoughts and prayers are with his family.

I'll turn it over now to Eric.

ERIC SEXTON: My name Eric Sexton, Director of Athletics at Wichita State. First of all, want to welcome you with us here and all of you that are going to be with us on the phone and across the country. Wichita State University, partnering with our great friends at Prairie Dunes and the community of Hutchinson, we are so proud and pleased to be the host for this great National Championship.

The golf is going to be superb. The young men are unbelievable young men, that the epitome of inner collegiate athletics and what I do to serve athletics and what we're all about.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank my staff who make me look way better than I deserve: Mike Samba, who is the tournament director, he has worked yeoman's work since last year to make this championship a first-class experience.

Also want to thank the Golf Channel, because Golf Channel is going to highlight these young men and this unbelievable venue that we have here to the national stage that we know is of great importance. Thanks to Scott and John Lanham, the golf pro here and all the members for giving up their course for this great service to inner collegiate golf.

We, Wichita State, are proud to be part of the NCAA golf championships and we encourage everyone to come out and watch what we hope to believe and what I know will come to fruition, a great championship, and you'll see unbelievable talent.

We are so appreciative to be part that have and Brandt, thank you for selecting as a championship to highlight for us. Thanks to everyone here, and I'd like to turn it over to Scott Nelson.

SCOTT NELSON: On behalf of the members at Prairie Dunes Country Club and Hutchinson, I'd like to welcome everybody to our facility here.

We are really, really excited to have this championship here. We've worked long and hard over it over the last couple years. Like to thank the CVB for everything they have done, the City of Hutchinson, Reno County, the global sponsors who have helped us with endeavors of putting on this great championship; getting to know the gentlemen from NCAA, our great partners in Wichita State, who have been absolutely wonderful to work with getting everything set up for this tournament.

And then also, the Golf Channel coming on here is really what sets this tournament apart from any that we have hosted in the past. We hope to put on a great show here, and I think that you'll enjoy it if you come to see us here and make great memories, and we appreciate the attention it's drawing to not only us, but the City of Hutchinson, on behalf of Prairie Dunes, thank you very much.

DONNIE WAGNER: Before we go back to Brandt, I want to share a few things with you. NCAA golf has played a vital role in the careers of many of the greatest players of the game. I wanted to share a few of those with you.

It doesn't get mentioned as much on the PGA TOUR coverage, but Hall of Fame members: Arnold Palmer, Wake Forest; Jack Nicklaus, Ohio State; Ben Crenshaw, Texas; Payne Stewart, SMU; Tom Watson, Stanford; Johnny Miller, BYU and Golf Channel's own Lanny Watkins from Wake Forest.

Today's TOUR stars: Tiger Woods, Stanford; Bubba Watson, Georgia; Matt Kuchar, Georgia Tech; Jordan Spieth, Texas; Phil Mickelson, Arizona State; Luke Donald, Northwestern; Rickie Fowler, Oklahoma State.

Even the Golf Channel personalities have

participated in the NCAA Championships: Charlie Rymer, Georgia Tech; Curt Byrum, New Mexico; Notah Begay, Stanford; Billy Ray Brown, Houston; Brandel Chamblee and Phil Blackmar, University of Texas.

So college golf was not just a training ground and proving ground but it was the core of many of these wonderful golf stars that we know today and we think that this opportunity we have at Prairie Dunes is an opportunity through the Golf Channel for the world to see the stars of tomorrow.

Thank you very much, Brandt.

BRANDT PACKER: We all have a great relationship with each other and we can't wait to get here. Our team that's going to be covering this, Bob Papa will be our host. Bob has probably hit more golf ball in 18 months than Vijay Singh and Ben Hogan in his career.

Lanny Watkins played on three NCAA tournament teams with Wake Forest, World Golf Hall of Fame member, and on the Champions Tour, he lost to John Mahaffey in 1970 NCAA by one shot and I think every -- that I have attended in the last year and a half, that gets mentioned over and over and over.

Curt Byrum who played with New Mexico, particularly in the 1979 NCAA Tournament at the course I grew up on, Beaver Run -- inaudible -- I was born in '74 and a five-year-old watching Curt -- drive that home, that helps.

Billy Ray Brown, University of Houston, teamed with Steve Elkington has won three NCAA Tournament titles -- inaudible -- at Pinehurst. And then Steve Burkowski who we'll hear from, known as the college golf insider, but that's not necessarily fair. Given all the work he's done on the PGA TOUR and even last year at Merion, he is one of our true blue from the Golf Channel, and he does know the college game about as well as anybody here, it's so exciting to get him on this show.

Mike McCarley, our who is our president, and Molly Solomon our executive producer, we talked about focusing on college golf and how we can incorporate that, whether Champions Tour, LPGA, and I think as we look back we realize, we failed the viewer when it comes to college golf. We have not done a good enough job and we really wanted to make that part of our core values when we do a PGA TOUR event.

Last year in Puerto Rico, we had a chance -- inaudible -- Peter Uihlein and Jordan Spieth and we decided to make that a focus and to get to know these guys. Scott Brown ended up

winning so everybody thought Scott -- indiscernible. So you go back and look at his record -- Fry's.com, so everyone thought Scott was an unknown and you look at his record at -- unbelievable career at -- inaudible -- the year before, we really tried to incorporate college golf into our shows. Shark Shootout this past year, Jeffrey Leonard paired with Charles Howell, normally we talk about careers, but two individual NCAA champions paired together. That was our focus together.

We changed our focus when we get to the Champions Tour, we do a college golf focus and by that you have Billy Ray Brown, John Mahaffey, Lanny Wadkins, three players who talk about college golf; Ben Crenshaw, two-time Masters winner, World Golf Hall of Fame winner, he won three NCAA titles and one of them was with Tom Kite as his teammate and that has become a huge focus of how we do our shows.

With that said there are four objectives we'll have. No. 1, we get to crown the individual champion on Monday and then No. 2 we get to crown the team champion. My father covered NCAA Tournaments at CBS for so many years and it's been driven home in my family over and over -- inaudible -- 34 Final Fours and played in one as a player at Wake Forest and I saw him hand out the trophy, I saw him interview the winner, interview the coaches, he know what is it took to win those tournaments. He knew about the sacrifices and that's very important in our family. This is not about a tournament we show up and we are out of here. This is a tournament where we want to capture the essence of this championship.

That leads me to my third one; the 1955 most outstanding player in a tournament -- this is essence of what the NCAA is so great and so we really need to celebrate the history of collegiate golf. If you really talk about the core of the PGA TOUR, not just golf but the PGA TOUR, let me review some names, individual champions -- not team champions, individual champions: 1961 Jack Nicklaus, 1967 Hale Irwin, and 1970 John Mahaffey; 1971-1973 Ben Crenshaw; 1974 Curtis Strange, 1975 Jay Haas; 1976, 1977, Scott Simpson 1986, Billy Ray Brown, Scott Verplank -- inaudible. '89, '90, '92, Mickelson; Woods -- if you really want to talk about the core and foundation of the PGA TOUR -- inaudible -- and the last thing is to get to know the players better and to get to know the rivalries.

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We were talking this morning, if you really -- let's just say we were focusing -- when Patrick Reed makes the comments he made after Doral, they don't seem that crazy, because everybody would have known what he did at Augusta State. Jordan Spieth would not have been this unknown. As a golf fan and media in the golf community, we would have known that; Harris English, Russell Henley -- (inaudible) -- I can't wait to so if we take the four core fundamentals and drill them into our coverage, we will be in a good spot and we are all excited to get that going.

Let me turn it over to Steve Burkowski who is known for his college golf expertise but there is so much more there.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Brandt, appreciate the kind words, echo your sentiments, the same of Mike and Scott and Eric, and we are absolutely thrilled at our new partnership and relationship with the NCAA to have the championships on our air in a couple week's time.

I've been fortunate to be around the college game for nearly two decades and all the young men and women we have seen come through the pipeline on their way to professional golf, it's been a whole lot of fun watching the progress and watching the success.

Mike hit on a key point rattling off all the old names, and Brandt, you did the same thing, this is where they begin. This is the starting point, this is our job at Golf Channel to introduce people to the stars of the future before they get there.

And I think it really all kicked off last night on Golf Central when we dedicated most of our show for the women in the regional selections, we will be doing the same next Monday on Morning Drive announcing the six regional sites and which individuals will be traveling where with a chance with the goal, everyone's goal to get to Prairie Dunes at the end of May.

So we have just scratched the surface of what we are going to be coming to do here in the following weeks, months and years ahead. So could not be more thrilled.

And going back to Mike's statements of former standouts now playing professional golf on the TOUR, happy to bring in Erik Compton and Max Homa, Eric back on the Georgia team in the late 90s and 2000, Max Homa, champion from Cal a year ago.

Max, what are the memories you had at Cal and the run you had individually; what was your time like in Berkeley, and how jealous are you of Brandon and Joel and Michael knowing they

have a chance to win it on national television this season?

MAX HOMA: I'm really jealous, because I think college, being a student athlete is a heck of an experience, and you get to bond why your teammates and your coaches and be a big part of the school because it's on a bigger platform. And the fact that it's going to be televised this year makes it an even bigger platform and kind of propels our feel for, at least at Cal a Berkeley student athlete and puts us on a different pedestal and it's a pretty special thing.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: What did it mean last year to be part of an amazing run, fell a little short in the semifinals; but I was there watching that deciding match, and you Thomas Pieters, what was it like to play for a team, for a school, for yourself with so much on the line?

MAX HOMA: It meant a lot. I thought it was fitting that I got to be last match out there just because I was the oldest guy and I don't really get to experience what they are going through this year.

But to be a part of that team and win as much as we did, and win some close matches and some more dominating ones, it was special and it's stuff I still think quite a bit about how fun it was and how testing it was, and I take a lot that have with me, even though I'm playing individually now, I've learned a lot from that. It sure was a blast.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Following just short in the quest for a team national title, you will always be an NCAA individual champion, it's only been a year, saw you at New Orleans a few days ago at the Zurich Classic, what's it like when you walk out there on the PGA TOUR and it's a different animal but you know that they know that you're a national champion.

MAX HOMA: I think it gives me a little credibility, which is nice because when you're playing with some of the big boys, you want a little bit in their back pocket so they know you belong out there and you feel like you fit in with them, because they have won their fair share of monster golf tournaments, so it's nice to have one of them just to kind of hold your head on.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: What has it done for you confidence-wise as you've made the jump to professional golf.

MAX HOMA: It's done a ton because there's a lot of All-Americans obviously out here, but there's just as many national champions

because there can't be as many.

I'm honored to be a national champion and it was just a big tournament to win as far as it's a big field, the 156 players, we don't really do that too much in college, and now there's more fields like that that I'm playing in in professional golf out on the PGA TOUR, but you know that you can get it done against a lot of great college golfers, it means a lot and it gives me quite a bit of confidence when I tee it up out here.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: As you go to the next level in professional golf, what does it say about the college game that you still stay in touch with the guys and sort of keep your eye, even though you're not in school anymore?

MAX HOMA: Yeah, I think it says a lot because I know my team was very close and I think we'll remain close. Just the program in general has always been great.

We have James Hahn and Peter Tomasulo and Charlie Wi out on Tour, and I see him and it's like a little family. I'm sure we'll make sure that it keeps that trend going when Brandon and Joel and Michael and all them end up getting out here in the next few months, it will say that little family.

For me it's a blast and watching and really care about how they are doing this year because hopefully we bring home that National Championship and I'm still hanging on Golf Stat all the time watching, making sure we are staying on pace.

BRANDT PACKER: What's it like for a college freshman to play in the NCAA, and then next thing you have TV cameras and walking announcer and microphone? Will that make a difference in your game?

MAX HOMA: I think it depends on the person. I think it will be out of their comfort zone. I don't know if I would have been ready for that freshman year. I was already nervous enough just playing in the tournament so it's definitely going to be different.

But I mean, so many freshmen are so darned good, I just can't imagine them really shaking. It's just going to take maybe a hole or two to get used to it.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Max, thanks for the time.

Mike Carter hit on it earlier, Charlie Rymer, Billy Ray Brown, a couple of our Golf Channel analysts that have played in the NCAA Championships, good to have you both aboard.

Charlie, great memories, great times, great teams at Georgia Tech. What are some of the standout things you recall from your days in Atlanta?

Talking about memories of what college golf was all about. Charlie, what are some of the things you'll still remember years later from your time in college?

CHARLIE RYMER: Well, I would say one of the regrets I have, and all of us that are in golf and made a career of it certainly have regrets but one of the biggest regrets I have is in the four NCAA Championships I was fortunate enough to play in, I never did play very well, my team never did make a big run, and really only one year did we have a chance. That's one of the things that I look back on is this championship that has roots back to 1897 which was about the year I think Billy Ray won the individual, by the way (laughter).

I just wish I had played better. It was such an amazing opportunity, and we had great venues for the four years that I competed, and it's just sort of a hole in the record that you didn't play any better.

But as I think about these young athletes that are going to get to play next month, what an amazing opportunity they have to compete in this championship that's so old and so well thought of, it's just an amazing opportunity for everyone that gets to play.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: You were an individual medalist at the NCAA Championships, your teams, great success, part of Coach Williams' run there. What was it like to be a part of those Houston teams?

BILLY RAY BROWN: One thing is, you know, it was preparation for the whole year centered around this one tournament.

Now, granted, the teams now have a totally different way to qualify for nationals, and it makes it very difficult; one, just to get there. You could be the No. 1 team in the country and still actually play bad the week of the regional and not get in. But when I look back at that time, I look back at not only the play, but also some of the great venues.

It was pretty much because we had won three national championships when I was there team-wise, it was talked about on a daily basis, so you knew the importance of it, unlike Charlie where he felt like he really wasn't ready for -- I won't say he wasn't ready for it.

But it was a main focus for us at the University of Houston under Dave Williams. That's the way he coached and that's a big job nowadays for these coaches to prepare these kids. They always play at great venues. But this one is so special because it can put a notch on your belt that you can't take away ever, and the friendships I gained and the loyalty to your teammates, I think that is one of the biggest things.

When I went on to the PGA TOUR the one thing I did miss was the team golf and the team unity, and guys pulling for each other, pulling and playing for yourself and your other teammates, but also the school in which you attend.

CHARLIE RYMER: Billy Ray, we focused, but we just didn't play very well.

BILLY RAY BROWN: I will tell you, I just think I had a unique opportunity playing at Houston which had such a great, rich tradition that that was our main focus; when you went there that you knew that you had a long-standing history not only of players but great success as a team.

I think that played a huge factor in the mental approach in which we approached the tournament.

CHARLIE RYMER: I will add this, too, and thinking about the years that I had an opportunity to play this game, everyone talks about the old Qualifying School from the PGA TOUR, how much pressure you felt, and I did; I felt a ton of pressure. It's the most I ever felt in professional golf.

But I'll tell you this: Going to the NCAA and you get your 14-match coach (ph) and you work all year to get there, I felt more pressure in that team environment, because I wanted to play so well, I felt more pressure than I've ever felt in any other competition.

It's just -- sometimes it's almost too much to handle. You wanted it so bad, and that's -- maybe we wanted it a little too bad, but that's something that I'll never forget because you don't get many opportunities in golf to play for other people. Every other competition in golf, basically you're playing for yourself. When you have got a chance to win a national title, that's something really special.

BRANDT PACKER: Can you guys just talk about the phone call -- once we found out we were doing the NCAA men's golf championship, the phone calls we got from talent, from players -- put me on that show, I want to be on that show, it was unbelievable, unlike anything I've ever seen. Can you just talk about the excitement that you have?

BILLY RAY BROWN: Well, that's a great point, and I hope Charlie second's this, also.

But once I found out the Golf Channel was going to partner up with the NCAA and able to showcase these great young players, the future of golf, professional golf, right there in front of the camera with the pressure, Charlie, you talked about; I want to do this show more than any show that I've ever wanted to do, because I get the sense that it will take not only for me personally, it will take me back to a time, and watch when you see a group of guys come together as one, and really play together as one.

And I was so excited to get back to the state of mind in which these players are going to have to win the championship. And from the get-go, I wanted to do this show, really, really bad. And Brandt will tell you we've had a number of conversations about it that I was -- once I had the opportunity to do this show, I've been pumped ever since.

CHARLIE RYMER: Yeah, I'm right there with you Billy Ray. I share your excitement and Brandt's excitement -- can you guys hear me? Am I still on? I thought I got dropped there.

But no, I certainly share the excitement. Brandt and Billy Ray will be involved in the live broadcast and I'll be working in the capacity of the news around the live broadcast, and to be there on site, Brandt will tell you, you can only cover so much in terms of back stories and breaking things down and interviews during a live broadcast.

But for us to have the number of hours that we are going to have outside of the live broadcast and be involved in that, be able to sit and talk to the coaches, sit and talk to the players, get some of the back stories out, and really be able to accentuate what these guys will do an amazing job with on the live broadcast, will be a lot of fun.

I'm starting to get into the mind-set of I'm going to the NCAA, it's been a lot of fun because it's bringing back a lot of neat feelings, a lot of neat stories and I'm sure for me because we'll have time to sit on those and talk about them, it will be a lot of fun.

Billy Ray, the thing I'm worried about is keeping these coaches away from Holly Saunders. You know, Holly is coming out and the coaches are all going to want to talk to Holly, so I'm a little worried about that. So not only am I going to get to see an analyst on the news show, but I'm also going to get to be Holly Saunders' bodyguard, so

that's a lot of fun (laughter).

BRANDT PACKER: We talked about rivalries -- how many security guards would it take for you to not run out on the 18th green --

CHARLIE RYMER: Well, you know, that's going to be tough because if you look at what Georgia has done, and I'm very vocal about being a Georgia Tech guy and we have not won our first National Championship yet. It's going to come at some point. I'll be neutral once I get out there but it's going to be a big challenge, I can tell you.

BILLY RAY BROWN: You won't have to worry about just getting one. I can tell you after wining in 16 in Houston, it's a good feeling.

CHARLIE RYMER: I hate to deflate you, Billy Ray but how is that diet going? Not to change the subject.

BILLY RAY BROWN: We sat on this phone call waiting to get on, so my cheeseburger and onion rings are getting cold right now. (Laughter).

One thing we need to touch on, and Charlie already mentioned it, some of the great venues and now you get a chance to showcase these young players at a place like Prairie Dunes, I think that is going to be a test in itself, too, and that's going to make it so much more interesting when you get a venue like that.

Q. Talk about Georgia State's men's golf team and their chances for advancing all the way to the big tournament.

CHARLIE RYMER: The question is about Georgia State's golf program? I'm not intimately familiar with the Georgia State program other than I know Joe Inman is there. He's done a great job, and certainly it's a great golf town but I don't have any particular information about their program right now. I'm sorry I can't help you out with that.

BILLY RAY BROWN: And I will say the same thing. If you look at a couple players they have, they have two, in my opinion, two solid players but I think when you start factoring in a program and how they are going to, if they are -- I think once I start looking at it and breaking everything down, I'm not going to really focus in on the stars of the team, and it was the way that I was taught about trying to win one; I look at the three, four, five guys.

Those are the players that you're really going to have to buckle down and do your homework on. I think the players from the -- the three, four and five players, that's going to be the

integral part that comes out and really plays well that week. That's the glue to the team right there.

CHARLIE RYMER: I'll tell you this, as well. If you get to these final eight and you get into match play, it's an amazing accomplishment to get there but if you get into match play, it is absolutely wide open.

I really love the match-play format, because you can get a team that is ranked low down that gets into the tournament, plays well and they will have a chance to win. Match play to me is absolutely fascinating.

And I don't know, Billy Ray, but, but I never got a chance to play match play in college golf. We never played any duel matches and we never played any tournaments, and that's one of the things that I wish had not been the case when we were there. I would have liked to have had a blend. It would have been fun to play some duel matches from time to time and have a national championship that's match play.

BILLY RAY BROWN: And Charlie, I'm the same way after going through medal play the whole time. I think that's the interesting part. It really, once you get into that final and the teams that are strongest mentally, and I'm not sure that we would have ever won a lot of match plays. We had guys that probably weren't very good match play players; we had some consistent players.

But I will tell you it's certainly deserving of a true champion when you have match play and you put these young kids to such a mental test to -- match play, it's a different animal. You have to have a totally different mental approach to be successful at it. And all year long, they play medal play, and then all of a sudden now, they have to change their focus to match play; and I will tell you a lot of the focus is going to come on the coaches preparing the players just for that.

I've played a lot of golf with Joe before and a lot of tournament golf on the TOUR and you don't get many words in edge-wise when you play alongside --

STEVE BURKOWSKI: This is a team peaking at the right time, they have won three straight events, including the Sunbelt Conference last week, Damon Stephenson playing some good golf and it's something you guys talked about, when you get to match play, maybe a little bit of a different animal, I think it opens up avenues for more teams and I'm a big believer, play well at the right time of the season and right now, Georgia

State is doing just that.

BILLY RAY BROWN: I think that's a huge key, just like any type of a team aspect, if you're able to bring your team along and peak at the right time, and there is an art to that, that's for sure.

But going into it and you see your team starting to play better and better late in the year and gaining confidence, that could only prove to be just a big positive as they move into not only medal play but matching into match play.

Q. Along those lines, how realistic is it for one of these teams from the non-so-called big conferences, a mid-major or smaller conference team, to really break through and make a dent in something like this and just have a really quality impact, the Cals, the Georgias, the Texasas, they are always going to end up being there but is there a realistic chance for somebody from a small conference like an Ohio valley conference or something like that to really do something in this kind of tournament?

BILLY RAY BROWN: There's a program right down the road in Augusta, Georgia.

CHARLIE RYMER: I knew you were going to say that. They may be in a little different circumstances. They concentrate on DI golf even though they are a DII program.

BILLY RAY BROWN: I will say, I have to say yes. I'm probably going to go against the grain here, but I certainly think there's enough good players out there, and you get a group of men and kids buying into what you're selling as a coach, and I certainly think it can happen.

It reminds me of the PGA TOUR right now that it's so much tougher to win out there because there's so many good players, and I see that, also, in college golf right now. And it goes back to that point, okay, as the year is progressing and you gain confidence and you start to peak; I certainly think that there's a great chance for a mid major school to go ahead and win one and it would not surprise me whatsoever.

Now, if you have to put your cards down and really be -- you would probably pick some of the major conferences that have an array of players but I certainly think that a mid major school can actually come in and have an influence.

Q. Would you care to venture which one at this point?

BILLY RAY BROWN: I'm going to be a homer, the American athletic conference, I'm up at

at Dave Williams school of golf now as we speak and they are playing in their college championship right now.

If you throw a mid-major school in there, American Athletic Conference is not, per se, the SEC or Big 12 or Big Ten or whoever it may be but you have a team here in Houston right now that's No. 8 in the country and loaded with superstars. You've got a gentleman here, Roman Robledo, who has won four tournaments this year and a gentleman from Scotland who just made the Palmer Cup team. So they are very strong. It would not surprise me that they are around on that final day.

Q. Kent State?

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Yeah, Kent State what Herb Page has done at that program for decades, a pretty strong move at Riviera a couple years ago, so I don't think it's off the beaten path. Tennessee State, a team over the years, head coach Fred Warren has done a good job there.

You go out on a limb a little bit saying it could happen, but Billy Ray hit on it to a point, the last ten or 20 years, the depth of this college game is beyond the top five, ten, 15 teams. Now things will have to fall into line nicely and play some very good golf but to not think it couldn't happen would be a little bit foolish.

BRANDT PACKER: Pleased to be joined by Erik Compton, PGA TOUR member and former Georgia All-American, and Erik we appreciate you taking some time to join us today.

Looking back to the late 90s and early 2000s, your time at Georgia, you are part of some very good teams, what are some of the memories that stand out to you 15 years later.

ERIK COMPTON: I would say that some of the great memories is the competition we had. We had such a stacked team that our second team was very -- would have been very competitive in the NCAA Championships. It was very strange when we had five guys that were ranked in the Top 15 in the country, so our qualifying round for playing were like qualifying for like a PGA TOUR event, Bubba Watson, Dustin (audio interference) who is probably one of the best college players I've of seen who does not play golf anymore, who was regularly shooting in the low 60s. And we had Pete Abernathy who shot 59 in qualifying one time.

As a matter of fact, I think Bubba Watson sat out one year and Dustin didn't play. I

didn't play on the National Championship team when I was a rookie or a freshman there, so -- we were just loaded.

We were absolutely loaded and we all wanted to beat each other's brains in but going back to some of the comments before, all of us were so young, and I think any team can really win. Sometimes we were expected to play better in the NCAA Tournament and I think we kind of fell short because we had so much pressure on ourselves to perform.

I remember Nick Gilliam, he won an NCAA Championship as an individual and he had not played well all year at the University of Florida. As kids, we were all young and learning. Some kids that are not in college -- might be starting the PGA TOUR and that might be their come-out week at the NCAA Tournament.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: You talked about 2001 back at Duke, Nick Gilliam victorious, what was the pressure like feeding off that last phone call asking about maybe an underdog or a mid-major to go in No. 1 as the team to beat; what's it like knowing anything short of a National Championship, you don't want to say it's a disappointment but you have not achieved your ultimate goal. How hard is it at that age?

ERIK COMPTON: I think it's extremely hard because we come in as junior golfers and we are very individualized. You go to tournaments with your parents and then you come in there as a young guy, the atmosphere changes as you get to be a senior.

So some of the younger guys, you know, I especially -- I may have not understood how big qualifying was. I remember qualifying at regionals and how -- Coach was basically eating his shirt -- for us to get into the tournament. Nick Cassini was on our team and he was our best player, and I mean, the pressure was so -- inaudible -- after the round.

So I think it's the one tournament where the -- same as the U.S. Amateurs, whether you win as a team or as an individual, you've accomplished something so big that you're going to get so much exposure going on to the next level. Having said that when you are -- looking back on it, I really wish I would not have put that much pressure on ourselves because in the grand scheme it doesn't define whether you're going on a great pro or not a great pro.

I just see the kids -- I watched Jordan Spieth when he won and how the team tackled him on the green, and to see how much enjoyment the

kids have and the coaches have, it's memories that will last a lifetime. It is a big tournament, but I just wish that the kids would go in thinking it's another big tournament or a regular tournament and not -- and it's really hard to do that I think.

BRANDT PACKER: Thank you so much for joining us and wish you continued success.

BILLY RAY BROWN: Thank you and look forward to the future at Prairie Dunes, excited about seeing you guys.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: It's about the teams and coaches and players, pleased to be joined now by five of the top head coaches in the country: Jay Seawell, Alan Bratton from Oklahoma State, Conrad Ray from Stanford, Bruce Heppler from Georgia Tech and Mike Small from Illinois.

And before we get to some questions, coaches, I know there's been some bad weather throughout the country so our thoughts that everyone around your universities are safe and doing well.

But we will start with Jay Seawell, the defending national champion from Alabama, just picking up their third straight SEC title over the weekend.

Jay, what's it been like over the last 12 or 24 months, coming so close at Riviera, getting redemption a year later and now the target is on your back all season long?

JAY SEAWELL: It was a special moment last year in Atlanta, especially after coming so close at Riviera the year before, as I think eloquently Billy Ray and Charlie and Erik talked about, it's a unique opportunity for a young golfer.

It's an individual sport but for four small years of their careers, they get to do something with somebody else and be on a team, unless they play a Ryder Cup and things like that, and so it's unique, and it really becomes about others.

And so it has been a great ride. As many people on this have experienced it maybe as a player or as a coach, and it changed my life. You dream of doing things special, and it was an unbelievable moment in Atlanta, I think Bruce and their school did an amazing job of hosting a wonderful event, and I hope that the people at Prairie Dunes and everybody at the Golf Channel understands how fun this format really is.

It became really, truly Alabama football there for a little bit. It was a Ryder Cup format -- arena, basically. And so it's been great. It has changed us and there is a different feeling about

us. We do have I guess a bull's eye on our back. We try not to let our players feel that way and it is golf, so I don't think anybody is shooting at us yet.

It's been fun and it's something that our university and I will always remember and are very proud of.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Alan Bratton from Oklahoma State, leading the men's program, resurrecting and rejuvenating that Cowboy golf team this year. We spoke a month or two in Las Vegas when we were out there at Southern Highland about a memorable moment 20 years ago at the National Championships that you were a part of, how exciting is that now Golf Channel will be broadcasting and your team may be one to beat this year?

ALAN BRATTON: I think that was the last time Golf Channel televised was that 1995 championship. Obviously that was a dream come true for me and my teammates; that's why you coach college golf, to try to bring the same opportunity and experience to your kids. Hopefully we can qualify for the championship, get in the thick of it, and maybe do the same thing.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: What's it been like going back to your alma mater and to lead the way and hope to add to the Trophy collection at Carson creek?

ALAN BRATTON: It's great. Oklahoma State has been a part of my life for a long time now, and really humbled to be leading our program and been proud of the performance from our team so far this year, but still lots of work to do.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Conrad Ray, the Stanford men's head golf coach coming off a Pac 12 title over the weekend. You won back in 2007, your team peaking at the right time of the year, how excited are you for post-season push and holing up a trophy on Golf Channel come Wednesday evening?

CONRAD RAY: We are excited and I think I speak for all of the coaches on the call. It's a time where everybody buckles down and we know there's a regional tournament to play ahead and the guys have to come out and do their best to qualify to get to Prairie Dunes.

I think we are excited about the way our team has been playing out here out west, and we hope we can see that continue. We have had a nice contribution across the board, and I think we are working hard to continue to foster our depth. Charlie or Billy Ray mentioned that, depth is a huge key to I think all that we are doing, and all the coaches are thinking about that. We hope our

young guys can continue to contribute well and excited to are what lies ahead.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Very similar position as to Alan, going back to your alma mater to coach. What's the responsibility you feel, you had success playing there and some really good teammates but now you're the man in charge so to speak.

CONRAD RAY: It is a humbling experience and an honor to be at my alma mater and to represent our program and our kids. There's a lot of people that have come before us that have laid some great foundations.

Thinking about my old teammate, Notah Begay, as he deals with a little bit of some health issues today. And some of those guys, and in fact, great memories of that fight that we had with Oklahoma State back in '95.

You know, it's just so exciting to be part of that, and thinking about no matter what year you're involved as you move forwards the National Championship there's always great stories that will come from that and we hope to be front and center in that narrative, and you know, it is an honor to have the keys to the bus for awhile so to speak and hopefully the best for our team.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Bruce Heppler from Georgia Tech, you had another ACC Championship, a year ago you made it to the semifinals with five players that had never played in a National Championship before; how much more ready are they to make the next jump here in the coming weeks at Prairie Dunes?

BRUCE HEPPLER: I think they started the year a lot more grown up from that experience, obviously we lost to the national champion and that was a great experience for everybody.

So I think they have shown up with a level of maturity to just go take care of business and focus on hopefully another opportunity to be successful at Prairie Dunes. It's been a great year for us. They talk often times that golf coaches are just bus drivers and every now and then you get a team that that's really almost all you have to become because they are older, we've got three seniors and two juniors who can work and do what they are supposed to.

So this is an enjoyable year for us, and look forward to another opportunity to see what we can do there.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Four runner-up finishes in Georgia Tech's illustrious history, how

rewarding is to see the growth a year later and to have somebody like Ollie Schniederjans become one of the marquee players across the country, does that spearhead the rest of the kids to take it up a notch, as well?

BRUCE HEPPLER: I think if you look at who has won the Match Play, almost every team had had a guy that can go win every match and you look at what Patrick Reed did at Augusta State, I goes 6-0, and at that point if you have a guy who can do that and now you've just got to go 50/50 in the other ones.

So I think looking at it and having watched it, if you have somebody that you have a really good chance of winning every match, it makes it much easier than trying to -- you lose that first one, and now you've got to win three out of four. So we are excited about Ollie's progression and I think Seth Reeves has come a long way, and that was his coming-out moment at Crab Apple and has just moved forward.

We feel good about everybody, but I think if you have a guy who can go out and get you that first point, it makes a huge difference in the other matches.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Finally Mike Small, head coach of Illinois, kind enough to spend a few moments with us. A year ago, taking down the defending Texas Longhorns in the opening round and making it shot championship match; what has it been like getting so close and having a team continue to burst on to the national scene where maybe in years past, most people wouldn't think much of Illinois.

MIKE SMALL: Thanks, Steve. It was a heck of a ride. We looked at it as an opportunity.

Bruce mentioned that a couple times and it's helped our program so much, it's helped our young guys to be in that position and to be able to come out and play against the top teams in the country and to be considered one of the top teams was a huge bonus for our program, but that's what the NCAA does. It opens careers and opens people's eyes to certain players, and gives them an opportunity to be as good as they can be and it's one heck of a ride once you get there.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: You've had one of the great lines I have ever heard in college golf. You said: "You have a blue-collar team in a white-collar sport." How does that help you grind through the tough times, especially when it comes to match play at the National Championship.

MIKE SMALL: That was big for us last year. We've had that mentality, we had the three

PhD's, poor, hungry and determined. Sounds pretty professional but it is kind of to down-to-earth and grounded and we play that way.

We still have our conference championship to play this weekend, and you know, who knows what the weather conditions are going to be like. And when you prepare a certain way and you play in certain conditions, then you have the opportunity to play against the best teams in the country on the best golf courses, you have to have something to fall back on, some kind of identity and that's the way it's evolved for us.

We have great players and we have some great advanced and talented players, but there's a mentality you have to have to play at a certain level. I think the guys on the PGA TOUR have that mentality and that's what's helped to get to that level. If our guys can learn that mentality earlier and understand that it is a white collar sport but you play it a blue-collar way, it's pretty strong and that paid off for us last year with some tough competition in the finals.

Q. Can you talk about the golf course, your experience playing?

ALAN BRATTON: That's one of the things I'm most excited about is just for the rest of the country to get to see Prairie Dunes. It's not the easiest place to get to but it truly is a special place. I'm sure a lot of the teams have gone in since we had a opportunity to go ahead of time, but the Golf Channel I'm sure will do a great job of showing the country Prairie Dunes and the people there do a great job.

I was fortunate we got to play the Big 8 there every year when I was in school and a number of Big 12 Championships. It's such a unique golf course and it will be a wonderful test in the Match Play and I'm very excited to get back.

Q. Bruce, can you talk about your draw?

BRUCE HEPPLER: Well, you never know where you're going to get sent for sure. The reality is no matter where you go, playing for reduced spots since we have gone to six opportunities, I don't think it matters where you go. If you don't play well, you're not going to get through.

The depth and breadth of college golf is -- in '89 when they first went to a regional format, changed college golf forever. There's good players and good coaches everywhere. Erik

Compton talked about -- and the reality is, one bad round, and that could be it for your year.

So you have to be ready for that and try to make sure they don't look at it that way. But no matter where you go, you're going to have to play well to get through, there's no question about it.

BRANDT PACKER: Thank you, Coaches, very much, we appreciate it and good luck in the regionals and we hope to see all of you here in about a month.

STEVE BURKOWSKI: Excited beyond belief, thrilled, thankful to the coaches and everyone that joined us today. This is what college golf is all about in both of our years of being around it and covering it, it's one of the most exciting, untapped parts of the game as our press, Mike McCarley said at the coach's convention, we are all in. This is a yearlong, year after year after year commitment and responsibility, and thrilled beyond believe to get it going here in a few weeks' time at Prairie Dunes.

BRANDT PACKER: Want to thank you for all of the hospitality, and that concludes our press conference, I thank you all for coming, appreciate it.

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