

O'Brien: Arizona game changed outlook

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season for her up to [the Arizona game], and I'm very pleased that the Tash we all know and love is back."

When suffering through slumps, many athletes are able to leave their frustrations on the court, but O'Brien says that wasn't the case for her.

"It affected me off the court as well," the Australian native says. "I'd talk to my parents on the phone and I'd be upset, then they'd be upset because their daughter a half a world away is upset. Also, I think Lisa got a bit sick of me," she adds, referring to her roommate and Oregon guard Lisa Bowyer.

There have been recent reports that O'Brien was ready to quit the team prior to the Arizona game, reports she says are false.

"I was asked a few weeks ago whether I had seriously thought of quitting," she says, "and I answered that I had thought of it after the California game [Jan. 2] and after that I decided I was going to stick the season out. I wasn't going to quit after going through everything last year."

O'Brien admits the pressure to immediately perform at a high level got to her early in the season and the pressure didn't only come from outsiders.

"At the start of the season I put a lot of pressure on myself because I got suspended and all these people were supporting me the whole time, people who had never seen me play," she says. "I think I put too much pressure on myself in that way

because I wanted to play well for them."

There were a few different factors leading up to the Arizona game that prompted her sudden turnaround, O'Brien says, including a change in attitude, more playing time and a talk she had with Oregon assistant coach Sara Wilson the night before the contest.

"I was not getting on the court, and I was upset about things," she says. "That Wednesday I just changed my attitude. I said if I get on the court, I'm just going to shoot it. I'm not going to think about anything else. That was the turnaround there. I had a totally different attitude."

That Wednesday was also the day she had the heart-to-heart talk with Wilson.

"She was great because she tries to make sure you've got confidence and you know she's behind you," O'Brien says. "I'm glad I talked to her. I talked to her for about an hour and it really helped me."

"She just said keep your head up and things like 'I know how you can play so you've just got to go out there and not get down' because I get down. Then I go out there and I don't have any confidence and I'm not going to play the way I need to."

Ah, the confidence.

O'Brien has had plenty of that recently, but exactly how important is confidence for a basketball player?

"Huge," Bowyer says. "Confidence is the most important part of the game. If you don't have

confidence, you're not too much use out there on the court."

O'Brien has been plenty useful to the Ducks in the past five games, helping to pick up the scoring load that was lost when Brianne Meharry tore her ACL and was forced to miss the remainder of the season.

With O'Brien's increased productivity providing a sorely needed boost, Oregon has won two of its three games since Meharry's injury and six of its last seven overall coming into tonight's contest.

The Cougars, meanwhile, have lost four straight and six of their past seven games.

Oregon has already beaten Washington State twice this season, once in the Kona Classic last December and again in Pullman on Jan. 17.

With a key matchup against No. 17 Washington looming Saturday, Oregon can ill afford to overlook the lowly Cougars as every win is vital in Oregon's bid to make a fifth straight NCAA Tournament, O'Brien says.

She seems confident the Ducks will not overlook the Cougars, displaying that same confidence she has had ever since the Arizona game, the game that changed her season around.

Just how much of a difference did her performance against the Wildcats make for O'Brien?

"I didn't even notice the rain at Oregon the day after Arizona. I was walking around campus and didn't even have an umbrella."

Martin: Judge took three hours to decide

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Additionally, Coffin said Martin won't be riding the whole time; he still has to walk to and from his ball.

"The PGA Tour is disappointed with the court's decision," wrote Finchem. "As we have said from the onset of the lawsuit, we believe firmly in the basic premise of any sport, that one set of rules must be applied equally to all competitors."

"Additionally, we believe strongly in the central role walking plays for all competitors in tournament championship golf at the PGA Tour and Nike Tour levels. Therefore, we disagree with the judge's ruling on the issues."

Martin responded: "The public has spoken, the courts have spoken, you would think they'd get it."

Contrary to what PGA Tour lawyers argued, Coffin also ruled that PGA Tour competitions are

places of public accommodation. The ruling was significant because it forces the PGA Tour to comply with the ADA, which applies to public accommodations.

The PGA Tour will allow the 25-year-old Martin, a Eugene native, to ride in a cart on the Nike Tour while it appeals the ruling.

"Now we have the obligation to furnish Casey Martin with a golf cart, and we will," said PGA Tour spokesman Bob Combs.

Wednesday's proceedings began with each side giving its closing arguments. One of Martin's lawyers, Martha Walters, told the judge that Martin was not looking for sympathy, just a chance. PGA Tour lawyer William Maledon asked Coffin not to be swayed by the intense public favor to let Martin ride.

"That is not what this case is about," Maledon said. "The right thing to do would be to decide

this case based on the applicable law, not in accordance with public opinion."

Coffin took only three hours to deliberate.

"I hope five to 10 years from now, if I'm still able to play golf, the PGA will lean back and scratch their heads and say, 'Why did we fight this guy?'" Martin said.

Asked if he went into the trial with the intention of being a trailblazer for the disabled, Martin replied: "Admittedly, no I didn't. I did it for me. But I knew that if I won it would open the way, but I didn't do it for a cause."

Nor did he ever feel like a victim.

"I've been too blessed in life to be a victim," he said.

Martin, who won the Nike Tour's Lakeland, Fla., event in January while riding a cart, will next play in Texas at the Nike-Austin Greater Open on March 2.

PGA Tour loses in more ways than one

By Ron Sirak

The Associated Press

If it were just about Casey Martin it would have been an easy matter. He's a nice guy and a talented guy. Let him play. Let him ride a cart.

But the PGA Tour saw Martin's lawsuit as a challenge to its right to rule the game and as a fundamental change in the way the game has always been played at its highest competitive level: By walking.

Yet in the battle of emotional images — Ben Hogan limping along and Ken Venturi stumbling along vs. the withered stick that serves as Martin's right leg — it was never a contest.

The reality of a courageous young man in the present was far

more compelling to the public than a couple of memories from the game's past. This trial was a total public relations disaster for the PGA Tour.

Non-golfers, most of whom don't see golf as an athletic event, were near unanimous in their support for Martin.

Even recreational golfers, many of whom ride carts regularly, were also mostly on Martin's side.

The tour players, those guys who have experienced the fatigue over five hours on a hot day and over four consecutive days of competition, were reluctant to say much publicly, but the vast majority said privately that riding gave a player an advantage simply by reducing the fatigue factor.

Nearly everyone saw it as a matter of rich, powerful men trying to deny a disabled young man the right to earn a living and pursue his athletic dream.

Casey Martin can ride a cart in the Nike Tour event in Austin, Texas, the first week of March. U.S. Magistrate Thomas Coffin said so.

The question now is what happens next.

The PGA Tour will appeal to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco.

PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem, who said privately he expected to lose in Oregon, may have to go beyond the notoriously liberal court in San Francisco if the tour is to win its appeal.

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