

U.S. Senior Open Championship

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Omaha Country Club

Alex Cejka

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: It's my pleasure to welcome Alex Cejka into the media center, four-time winner on the European Tour and the winner of the 2015 Puerto Rico Open. You've already won two senior majors this year, the Tradition and the Senior PGA Championship in May. What's your first year been like on the PGA TOUR Champions?

ALEX CEJKA: It's better than I expected it. I knew it was going to be tough. I was really looking forward to playing out here for the last two years before I turned 50, and I had to Monday qualify in the beginning of this year for some tournaments, and then winning obviously the two big ones, it was a dream come true.

That's what we practice for. That's what we want to achieve in our career, to win tournaments. And then to win two kind of back-to-back, it was something special.

THE MODERATOR: And then you decided to skip the SENIOR PLAYERS Championship. What was the reason for sitting out?

ALEX CEJKA: Well, I wasn't sitting out. I was playing actually, but I went over to Germany because we had our German national open, so I wasn't sitting on the couch and watching on TV, so I had to play my national German championship. They canceled it last year. Very patriotic, very proud to be German, so I'm part of the European Tour, so it was nice going home for a week.

To be honest, I was wanting to play in Ohio, but it was nice to play once -- I haven't been in Germany in a long, long time, and it's a great tournament, the BMW German Open, and I kind of wanted to play it.

THE MODERATOR: You're back in the States playing in the next major championship, the U.S. Senior Open. This will be your first U.S. Senior Open. You had a tie for Pebble Beach back in 2010. Based on what you've seen so far, do you expect the challenge of a U.S. Senior Open



to be the same as what you faced in a U.S. Open?

ALEX CEJKA: Yes. I played yesterday nine holes, actually more. Today I played the back nine, and it's like the real U.S. Open. The rough is up. The course is in great shape. It's a tough course already, not only the heat and up-and-downs, it's a lot of great holes. It's narrow. The rough is brutal, so you've got to really drive it well. Even around the greens, they're so tricky. I didn't really expect it to be as tough as I just found out the last two days, but it's a great challenge for us.

So many great players here from all over the world, and you know, that's what a great championship should be, tough. There is a limit to tough and unfair. It's a fine line. But so far the two rounds I played yesterday and today, it's really, really going to be tough to shoot around par.

Q. How has your life changed since winning the two majors?

ALEX CEJKA: The only thing it really changed is I can enter the tournaments and I can play. Nothing really is different now than it was one and a half months ago. I'm still grinding like I used to. It didn't matter if it was the Korn Ferry TOUR, the PGA TOUR, some of the little tournaments, or if I got ready for the Monday qualifier for this Tour.

That's the only thing that really changed, that I can now enter the tournaments I want to play. Obviously it's my first year, so I really want to play a lot of tournaments to kind of get to know the courses because I know like Madison and Des Moines, they were two great courses for me, but because I played for the first time, I kind of didn't know my way around.

I have a feeling if I play next year, I'm going to do better, and it's about knowing the courses. I know I'm going to play almost every tournament still in this season just to know the courses, and obviously trying to make a move up in our rankings, in the Charles Schwab Cup.

Q. Is there more security that you don't have to worry about Monday qualifying for quite a while?

ALEX CEJKA: Yes. I'll tell you what, the Mondays, it's tough. Not only time-wise but you've got to be there on



Saturday or Sunday, you play a practice round, then you play against 30, 40 great guys, one-round event, trying to qualify. It's not always a guarantee, so I'm glad the pressure is off.

Also, even pressure when I play a regular tournament and I'm not doing well, you finish 40th, 50th -- it happens. As you said, the pressure is a little bit gone because I have my status for the next couple years. So in that matter the pressure is better.

Q. Is there something that is different about your game that propelled you into these two wins and getting you ready for the Senior Tour?

ALEX CEJKA: Yeah, I'll tell you what was great last month, or actually the last two months, my driving was phenomenal. I hit a lot of drives, and I hit them long and straight, and that was the key why I did so well.

You know, I'm fading a little bit. My driving statistic is now I'm spraying a little bit the last couple tournaments, so it's been a little bit tough, but the two majors I just drove it well. My game was there, and that takes a lot of pressure off you when you know your drive is coming.

Obviously we played a little bit different golf courses compared to like this week. The rough wasn't as severe, as bad, but that was the key. I must say I putted well and I drove it well, so that was the only reason, I want to say, when I look back that I had such success in those two majors.

Again, the last couple weeks I've not been driving it well, and it makes the game way more difficult, I'm telling you, and especially on a course like this where if you hit it in the rough, it's 100 yards, 150-yard hack-out with a 9-iron, so it makes a big difference here.

Q. Did anyone welcome you to the Tour? Being a European player, is there someone you've relied here in the first few months of the Senior Tour?

ALEX CEJKA: I'll tell you what, it didn't matter if it was international players or locals, I know all those boys from playing the PGA TOUR for 20 years. I know all those guys from the big Tour. So I had a really great welcome. Everybody come up and say finally, oh, you're 50. You're going to love it. It's so great here.

The welcome I got the first couple weeks, especially the first tournament -- I qualified in Tucson, my first one, my debut. I want to say every player came out, when they saw me on the range, it was like, welcome, and you're going to have a great time. It was really welcoming, really nice to

see.

Q. Tell us the story of your RV. You've got the best parking spot in the tournament here.

ALEX CEJKA: Yeah, I'm sandwiched in between other buses right now, but yes. We've been RVing now for about, I think, four or five years. It's been great. I don't use it for like every tournament, but I want to say 80, 90 percent to a lot of the tournaments. I love it. Luckily my wife likes it, too, and that's a big factor if you have your spouse kind of liking the same lifestyle.

Obviously as I say, we don't do it every week, but it's great, especially here, being literally right in the parking lot, 50 yards from the driving range and the pitching green. I should have no excuses after the end of the week.

Q. Are there other advantages to that rather than --

ALEX CEJKA: Yes. I mean, yes, I like it, especially now the last one and a half years. People have tough times in hotels, so you can't have service. It's tough. You want to be a little bit careful. You know, you sleep in your own bed, you have the stuff you need always with you. You have your own fridge, you have your own couch, TV, whatever you want.

It's pleasant. It's not for everybody, but we love it, and the guys I talk to who either had or still have those buses, they still love it, and it's a great way to get around right now to those tournaments.

Q. I'm always curious, we'll have the British Open coming up, those that travel to Europe, those in Europe that travel over here, are you used to the adjustment, time zones, getting your body ready? How long does that take?

ALEX CEJKA: Well, I'll tell you, the time zone change wasn't as bad this time like last week or 10 days ago when I went to Germany. I was -- and I know it was Germany, we're a little bit strict. It was not easy with the restrictions we had because it was Germany, it was Bavaria. I heard so many stories from my family, from my friends how bad it was. Strict, not bad. And when I got there, it was a nightmare.

We here in America, it's different. Like COVID never existed. Everybody is vaccinated, nobody wears a mask, no really restrictions. We had a really tough bubble during the tournament. You could only go to the hotel and to the golf course, nothing else. You had shuttles. You were not allowed to go to the gas station and buy a pack of gum or nothing.

They had two restaurants, but the caddies and the players had to stay in the same hotel, two little restaurants. It was tough to get food because everything was so small. So it was really a big shock after coming what we have here.

England is going to be probably not much better right now, what it looks like, but things change day-to-day basis. But it was really challenging. I'll tell you this, compare what we have right now here.

But I'm really looking forward to it. I'm definitely going over.

When I was in Germany, I was thinking about in three weeks if I'm going to do Sunningdale. I had a little bit of doubt, but after being here, you can't say no to a major. I don't care -- unless you have a broken leg, you should just play.

It's going to be challenging, but it's going to be challenging for everybody, you know.

Q. You've played Augusta, you've played Wakonda and here. What are the hilliest courses you've ever had to walk?

ALEX CEJKA: I'll tell you what, this is one of it. I think Reno, the little tournament we used to have -- not this year in Reno, I think it's in Truckee, the older version in Montreux, I think. That was a hilly course in hot weather, plus it's 6,000 feet elevation, or 7,000 almost. It's incredible.

So that I think is the toughest walk. Obviously with the weather the last couple days, like yesterday was in the 90s, it's really tough, especially like last week I rode in a cart on a flat golf course in upstate New York. Maybe another great preparation for coming here on a hilly course like this. So I feel it in my legs yesterday and today, to be honest, and with the heat, this hilly course, it's tricky.

Q. Olympics coming up, you competed in the 2016 Olympics for Germany, finished tied for 21st. What was that experience like, and have you talked to the two guys who have now qualified this year for Germany, Maximilian Kieffer or Hurlly Long?

ALEX CEJKA: Yes, I'll tell you, the Olympics was my favorite sporting event I've ever witnessed, not only from our perspective, from our event playing, but as an athlete you get -- you can basically see every sporting event. So we went to see a lot of other disciplines, and with our credential you were literally close by or right there. Even in the dining hall you sit next to Michael Phelps and stars you normally see on TV. You have the best athletes from all

over the world.

It was great to see everybody close up, warming up, seeing them in competition, and our golf course was great, as well. I was very proud to represent my country in the Olympics.

I wanted to do it this year, too, but then I knew I'm just too old, so I offered Stephan Jäger, he was a long time on the list, and I offered him, I want to go back and I want to caddie for you, so that was our arrangement. I was going to go over and caddie for Stephan Jäger, but unfortunately he pulled out -- we talked, two weeks ago he pulled out because he's leading the Korn Ferry rankings and he wants to finish No. 1, so he canceled and he gave the position to Maximilian Kieffer who's a great player on the European Tour, great friend of mine, too.

We talked two weeks ago in Munich about it. I told him he's going to have a great time, although it's going to be for sure different than it was in Rio with COVID, of course, but he's looking forward to it. And long, as well. I know his dad for 30 years now. He's a great young player, and I think the boys are going to have fun.

I'm a little bit disappointed that I'm not on the bag for Stephan Jäger because I really wanted to go back and be part of the Olympic Village, Olympic team, whatever you want to call it.

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