

Kingsmill Championship

Presented by JTBC

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Inbee Park

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: It is my pleasure to welcome in Rolex Rankings No. 2 Inbee Park into the interview room. Inbee, thank for coming in because we haven't seen you in a little while. Took some time off, took three events off with a thumb injury. Give us an update. How is it feeling? How much time did you actually take off from playing? Give us a bit of an update.

INBEE PARK: Yeah, I took the whole three weeks, whole last three weeks off because I had inflammation in the tendon, so it's like the thumb area is really -- it's a small muscle, small tendon, so it's really hard to work with it, or it just takes time to heal. I wouldn't say it's 100 percent right now. I mean, I took three weeks off thinking that it's going to be much better, but unfortunately it wasn't like a big change, and I still feel the pain. Just got to take it easy, and I really -- I thought about taking a couple more weeks off, but I'd really like to get ready for KPMG and get myself ready to get ready for the coming weeks. There's so many important tournaments coming up, so I thought I'd like to give my best.

Last week was a great week. I had a couple of rounds in Cordevalle and a couple of rounds in Sahalee, and also threw a first pitch and I had a great time the last four days. Yeah, I kept myself kind of busy last week, but before that it was just very relaxing and just enjoying time with family.

THE MODERATOR: I want to talk about the upcoming stretch, 11 weeks consecutively on the schedule. Obviously hard to maintain and manage without an injury, but how it's maybe an injury getting worse or whatnot. How hard is that to maybe in your head thinking, okay, how am I going to manage the schedule? Does that throw a huge, no pun intended, curveball into your plan?

INBEE PARK: Well, I am going definitely to KPMG, and after that I just kind of have to see how I feel and go from there because there are just so many tournaments in a row, and you've got to work with it. Probably last year or a couple years ago when I had no injuries, I said I can do five, six in a row for sure, but I've just got to see how I feel this year because I don't want anything so crazy before coming majors or



Olympics or stuff like that, so I'm just going to take it easy.

Q. You've been pretty lucky throughout your career with not many injuries. How are you able to deal with that mentally? Are you kind of an antsy person who itches to get back out? How have you been able to deal with it?

INBEE PARK: You know, it was fine until probably the last week at home. I didn't watch golf, didn't think about golf or didn't do anything about golf, but probably the last couple days before I come here, it came to mind like on TV, seeing everyone play, it was like, you know, I think that's where I belong, and I'm here. So I was just thinking like I kind of miss being on the Tour. I think it was a good time to come back. It's tough because I never had major injuries or never really taken time off during the season, and this is really the first time in 10 years. It was hard like not being able to play when everybody else played, but yeah, I kind of got used to this. This is already the second time of this season. Yeah, just hopefully no more from now on, but it's just hard with your body what's going to happen. It just doesn't really talk to you that much.

Q. You mentioned this being the second time. It was your back earlier, right? How is your back, and are you having to spend an inordinate amount of time over in the fitness trailer?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, I mean, I definitely do travel with a physio, so I don't need to go to the trailer. I work with him every day, and my back is so much better. I feel pain from time to time, but it's definitely nothing serious. I feel probably like a couple times in maybe three, four weeks, so it's not too bad, and it's handleable pain, so that's a good sign.

And the thumb is just inflammation. Everybody has inflammation, like if you're a golfer you have inflammation somewhere, but the thumb is a really tough part because it's a very small muscle and small tendon, and you just feel it so much with your hand in golf. The left hand, when you take a backswing that's when I feel it, and when I hit the ball that's when I feel it. It's not like a big pain where I need a surgery or something serious, but it's just bothering pain.

Q. How does this course -- we've had a lot of rain here over the last couple of weeks. How does this

course and how does your game change when where you're playing is saturated as it's probably going to be here this weekend?

INBEE PARK: Well, the golf course was in the best shape I've ever seen in Kingsmill. The greens were firm and fast, and rough was long, and fairways was just pure, and I really -- I had a practice round on Monday, and I thought, this is going to be a really, really good test. Tuesday, yesterday, I didn't get to play because of the rain, but they got quite a bit, good amount of rain, so it's going to make the greens obviously softer, and it's going to be a little bit slower. But I think how good the shape was on Monday, I don't think it's going to ruin it so much, but it might become a little bit more softer for us to play, a little bit more generous. Monday I thought it was going to be a pretty tough test.

Q. Do you think it will play longer?

INBEE PARK: Well, it might play a little bit longer for me, so I might hit a little longer irons into the greens. My ball is not so high, and it doesn't have like a lot of spin, so actually I think it helped me for a little bit when it rains where I can stop the ball a little bit quicker.

Q. When you look at the top 5 or the top 10, you're a veteran among that group, just the youth movement and what the young players are doing, first-time winner we've had the last two years here. What do you think about just how quickly these women can make an impact? As a veteran player, is it exciting? Is it intimidating maybe?

INBEE PARK: Well, I guess it's both. It's exciting and intimidating at the same time. I mean, because I was probably the one that was doing that probably five, six years ago. I mean, it's definitely -- I mean, it's a natural thing to see young players playing well. Obviously it's getting much younger than what everybody else thinks it would, but yeah, it definitely makes the Tour tougher, and obviously helping each other's game definitely, because if there was no competitors, we wouldn't be improving our game.

So I think it's good cause for everyone.

Q. What about this course suits your eye?

INBEE PARK: Well, I never won around here before, but yeah, I definitely had a couple of good finishes here. This golf course I think is a very good golf course and very good test for the game. Just didn't win, but obviously this week is the first week out in a while for me, so instead of just thinking about the trophy and the win, I'm just going to think about getting back out on the golf course, getting the feel of the greens, getting the feel on the tees, and I'm just going to concentrate on my game and how I am going to improve from now on through the season.

Q. Maybe because you haven't played three tournaments in a row, there's been quite a variety of winners this year. Is it better if there's one or two players who are dominant, or if we have like a great competitive level every week and you never know who's going to win?

INBEE PARK: Well, I think it's nice to see like everyone have a chance instead of only like three or five players having a chance, and especially when like one player dominates one season. It's usually really tough to beat that player because it's really her moment. When somebody is that hot, you really can't stop her. But when we have this kind of competition, I think it really encourages everyone to get in the field and try to improve their game. I think it's better to have a variety of winners so everyone has a chance.

THE MODERATOR: You were that person dominating, in that position.

Q. Inbee, you mentioned course conditions in general and the thick, really, really healthy rough in particular. Does that cause you any concern with your thumb? Would it be better to hit every fairway?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, I mean, that would definitely help me, hitting every fairway. But I'm going to do a lot of taping this week just to try to protect it a lot, and obviously I'm not perfect; I'm definitely going to hit out of the rough this week for sure. So I'm just going to prepare myself to do it.

I think rough is obviously not going to help. It just needs more tension to hit the ball out of the rough, and with obviously wet rough, it's going to be even tougher, but I'm going to just try it and see what happens.

THE MODERATOR: Now, something that's flown a little bit under the radar because the way the LPGA Hall of Fame is set up is a little quirky, but you earned the 27th and final point towards the point criteria at the end of the season when you won the Vare Trophy, low scoring average. You're so young, you did it so quickly that you still needed to do the membership criteria, which is slowly approaching, and quickly at the same time. After the first round of your tenth event, you will officially be qualified for the Hall of Fame. Have you been able to wrap your head around that? As of right now it's scheduled at the KPMG Women's PGA Championship.

INBEE PARK: Yeah, I think the schedule came really -- I would say really nice, being able to do it in the KPMG where I defend my title for three consecutive times in a row. I mean, I didn't work it out to have an injury and do it in the KPMG, but it actually just happened to be

like that. You know, I'm actually thankful for the opportunity. It's going to be a great moment. I mean, it's a moment I really dreamed of myself being in. Yeah, I mean, I'm going to have family coming in and celebrating. Yeah, it's going to be a great moment.

But I think it's just unrealistic right now how I'm going to feel then, but I felt so much joy last year when I finally got the points, and obviously this is going to be second time I get to enjoy it.

Q. The last two times you've played here, top 10 one year, top 20. What in your mind kept you from taking that next step perhaps and to really perhaps winning the tournament?

INBEE PARK: Well, I think everything kind of combined together. I think -- I can't exactly remember which part of my game was not great, but it's probably the combination of ball-striking and the putting together. But most of the time it's putting, and the last couple years, I felt like my ball-striking was pretty good, but my putting just wasn't there. I think the last couple years was probably just putting, just holing the putts.

THE MODERATOR: Give yourself a grade on your first pitch. Inbee did the first pitch at the Mariners game last week. The form was pretty good.

INBEE PARK: The form was pretty good. For a first experience I think it was pretty good. Just too high, and I'd say like maybe B.

THE MODERATOR: At least you didn't hit it in the dirt. High is better.

INBEE PARK: Yeah, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you coming in. Have a great week.