

The Sentry

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Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA
Plantation Course at Kapalua

Chris Kirk

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome the champion of the 2024 Sentry, Chris Kirk, to the interview room.

Chris, this is your sixth PGA TOUR victory, first of the new season. What was it like out there?

CHRIS KIRK: It was an unbelievable day. I'm really thankful that I was able to play as well as I did and I was certainly nervous coming into today, and I was able to kind of stay calm and just played really, really solid golf all day.

THE MODERATOR: With that we'll open it up to questions.

Q. When you got the Courage Award, you talked about the joy of competing and trying to keep that and then when you talked after today, you talked about the joy of competing. Did you always have that joy throughout your career or is that something that's new to this new phase that you're in?

CHRIS KIRK: I had it for a long time and then lost it. I lost the joy of most things in life for awhile there. But, yeah, it's certainly back. I think I just love how hard this is. Like, it's so hard to be great at this, and I love the process that it takes. I love the work that it takes to try to be the best version of myself. I definitely have fallen back in love with that process, and sometimes you get rewarded for it, like today, and sometimes you don't. That's just part of the deal. I think to be successful and to really enjoy your life as a PGA TOUR player you've got to love the work.

Q. When you're in the midst of the back nine like were you today with people making runs at you and all these birdies, is it joyful or stressful that you're feeling?

CHRIS KIRK: It's both. I probably don't look very happy, but that's kind of by design. I sort of feel like -- even on the last hole when all I needed to do make was par to win, I just was like, you know, I wasn't willing to break character, if you will. I want to play where I don't show any emotion.

I'm certainly feeling it, obviously. I've just kind of found over the years that's how I play my best. I'm truly just trying to go step by step, shot by shot, just little by little. In my mind, the results are not -- you add it up at the end, but it's something you have no control over. You only have control over, like, right now, and so I try to spend as much time as I can during the day of just kind of zeroed in on what's next.

Q. I want to get to 17, but I'm curious, as steady as you keep yourself, is there one time that you really lost it, up or down, like overjoy or Tyrrell Hatton, and do you have any memories of this?

CHRIS KIRK: In years? I thought were talking about today.

Q. Presidents Cup maybe? I'm trying to think of some moments.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, making that putt on 18 at the Presidents Cup for birdie, that was certainly the most emotion I've ever felt and the most emotion I've ever showed, by a long shot. That was huge. Making the putt to win, I had an 8-footer or something like that to win at Colonial. Like, you know, tap-in to win is what you want, for sure, just to avoid the incredible stress.

But yeah, making a putt like that, that's the only time I've, like, made a significant putt to win a TOUR event, and that was an amazing, amazing feeling. Those are two that I can definitely point at.

As far as the negative side, I'm more of a moper, self-pity, woe is me when I get really pissed off, so it's not that exciting.

Q. 18's always going to be a birdie chance for you. 17 was playing the toughest on the back nine of the holes. I'm just curious what your thought process was going into the hole and if you could just go through the -- please tell me that was a 5-iron.

CHRIS KIRK: It was.



Q. Thank God. Okay. Go ahead.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, so, I saw the leaderboard at some point on the back nine, I can't remember exactly when, and I had it in my mind -- most of the day I was kind of chasing 29. Like, let's finish at 29, and that's probably a pretty good spot. As it was kind of progressing through the back nine, I was like, okay, 29 might be a playoff, so we're going to try to get to 30, and really was disappointed that I didn't hit a great putt, my eagle putt on 15, after hitting two great shots.

Then 16, I thought I hit my wedge a lot closer, and I did hit a good putt on 16, just misread it a little bit. That was two, what I felt like, big missed opportunities, but then still had, okay, we've got two holes here, we can make a 3 and a 4 or a 4 and a 3, whatever it may be, was kind of what I was thinking. But, yeah, that shot on 17 was crazy, one of the best shots of my career, for sure. Definitely one I'll never forget. Because of the situation, you know, being on the 17th, or 71st hole, but then also we played the tee shot into the wind and we got down there to the ball and it had switched and was blowing straight down, so I had 192 adjusted and I was ready -- if I had been first to hit, before Akshay, I would have pulled out 7 and hit a nice full 7 downwind. But the wind kind of -- that was not what the wind had been doing for hours, and it kept sort of switching back and forth. We felt it off the right for a little while, we felt it off the left, and then it eventually settled back into out of the north like it had been.

So, thankfully, Akshay took a minute trying to -- understandably so, trying to figure out this wind that was going all over the place, and so by the time it was my turn to hit, I felt pretty confident the wind had settled back into what it was and just kind of choked up on a 5-iron and hit a great shot.

So, I'm very proud, very, very proud of that shot, that I was able to make the right call and that's -- talk about a tough shot to commit to. When you're about to pull 7 and you end up hitting 5, that doesn't happen ever. That never happens. So to be able to commit to it like I did and make that good of a swing was an incredible feeling.

Q. You mentioned you find joy in how hard this is. Do you find the joy in just the process and the work leading up to the tournament or the actual tournaments themselves?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, both. I love getting out there and competing, but yeah, I'm not sure which one I love more. It's tough to say. Yeah, it's one of those things, you know, if it was easy it wouldn't be nearly as fun. It's just really cool the whole process that all of us go through to try to be

as efficient and be as good as we possibly can with our mental coaches, trainers, swing instructors, our caddies. You know, all of us are so invested in what we're doing and it feels amazing. I've got the kind of my group of people with Michael, my caddy; Jeremy Elliott, my agent; Scott Hamilton, my swing coach; Zach Sorensen is my mental coach; and Jake Crane is my trainer.

I've had this group of people that are -- you know, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt, it's like they don't care because I pay them, they truly, really care about me and truly care about me being successful, and so I feel that every day. It's amazing having that group of people behind me and it just makes me more motivated to want to go to work for it.

Q. There was a video of you playing left-handed in the off-season. What prompted you to try the game left-handed and what have you discovered or did you discover anything playing left-handed that you've been able to carry over to your profession?

CHRIS KIRK: Nothing, no. Before I had kids, I would play for a -- every December me and some of my friends would play every day for a week left-handed. We were all terrible. It was just a lot of talking crap to each other and just having fun goofing off. That's mostly what it is now. Like, it's just fun. Like, for me to be, like -- feel really great about a shot that I hit right-handed, it's got to be something phenomenal, something like on 17 today. But, you know, left-handed, like, if I hit the fairway or if I hit a 7-iron on the green, like, hell, yeah, that's awesome. You know, like, you make two pars in a row, I mean, that's unbelievable.

So it's just -- it brings back a little bit of the kind of childlike nature of the game, and my expectations are so low that it is way easier to be happy about what I'm doing than it is right-handed, to be honest.

Q. You did say you like golf to be hard.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, it's really hard left-handed. Really hard.

Q. You talked about turning over every rock to try to get better in the offseason. What specifically were some things that you guys worked on?

CHRIS KIRK: I would say, yeah, from once the playoffs were done, I played two tournaments in the fall, but I spent more time in the gym probably from September, October, November, and December than maybe I had in the last -- and I've always worked out some, but that was definitely the hardest I've gone as far as working on my fitness level in years and years, maybe ever. So that was a big thing.

I think for me, you know, the harder I work at that and the stronger I feel and the fitter I feel, then that sort of carries over to a lot of things. But then Zach Sorensen, who is the Atlanta Braves' mental coach, is how I got connected with him, he and I started working together in around January or February of last year, so it's been about a year now. This fall, with me not playing as much, we were able to really kind of dig in and look into a lot of different things and sort of start to work out how my brain ticks and what we can do to improve. He's been a huge help.

Q. What's Michael's name?

CHRIS KIRK: Cromie. Yeah, Michael's involved in every process. He works out with me most days. He doesn't go every day, quite like I do, but he works out with me a ton. Whenever I -- not whenever I talk to Zach, but he's very connected with what Zach and I are working on, and, yeah, so he does a great job.

Q. You played here four times from 2012 to 2016 and then not for eight years, and you come back and win, man. How did that happen?

CHRIS KIRK: I think I just love playing golf in Hawaii. I've had a lot of really great weeks at the Sony Open. I haven't quite managed to win that one. This golf course is one that I love. It's so fun to play. It's just so unique, it's so different from everywhere else that we play. Some of the crazy lies that you're hitting off of and you hit one drive that goes 240 and the next one might go 450. It really kind of brings out the creativity in what we're doing and it's just a lot of fun.

Certainly, you know, like I said, I've worked hard on my game and a lot of things, but this was very unexpected to come off of that break where, you know, I spent a lot of time in the gym, and I spent a lot of time working on my mental game. I didn't actually play a whole lot of golf. I didn't practice that much. So to come over here and to play as well as I did, I'm very thankful and a little bit surprised.

Q. Historically, you've played quite well at the Sony Open in Hawaii at Waialae, as recently as last year. How does what you've accomplished this week help you in your mindset for next week?

CHRIS KIRK: My mind needs a little break at the moment, I would say. I'll take tomorrow off and maybe even Tuesday off as well, just to try to kind of decompress a little bit. But Waialae's a golf course that I've played so many times and I'm so comfortable on and just really enjoy playing the golf course. I've had some good success over the years, so, yeah, I'll just try to get some rest and take it

easy. Thankfully, it's a little easier walk than Kapalua around there. So, yeah, that's another incredible thing about our sport, you know, when I tee off on Thursday, what I did this week doesn't matter anymore, it's all square, and the gun goes off and we try to do it all over again.

Q. Cromie gets to wear the FedExCup-leading caddie bib for next week, I think, so...

CHRIS KIRK: Oh, do they have that now?

Q. That's got to count for something.

CHRIS KIRK: Okay.

Q. Couple things. You take a lead into the final round and shoot 65 to win by one. I got to think you were expecting that. That's not, that's fairly unusual, when you have the lead to have to go out and throw down a 65.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, when I saw how calm it was, getting out to the golf course, getting out and starting my warm-up and everything, yeah, you just know there's that kind of group of players not that far behind you, and just kind of like, all right, somebody's probably going to shoot 10-under, somebody always does out here pretty much, on a calm day anyways. I'm just thankful that Sahith shot 10- and not 11-under today.

Yeah, it's definitely a -- it's never easy playing Sunday with a lead, but it's kind of easier a little bit mentally when you know, like, all right, yeah, I'm in the lead, but I probably won't be by the time I tee off, and then if I make three pars in a row I'm definitely not going to be anymore. So you just, you got to keep the pedal to the metal.

Q. Secondly, I can't think of a better way to put this, but when you were contending at Rocket Mortgage in 2020, and won on Korn Ferry, certainly won Honda last year, it's always the guy who had to step away to overcome alcohol and depression, etcetera. How much longer will that be with you? When you do something great that the first reference is, the guy who did this, as opposed to who you are as a player, and are you okay with that?

CHRIS KIRK: I hope it stays with me forever. It's a huge part of my life still now. Definitely the best thing that I've ever done in my life is to get sober. So, I understand what you're saying, that, you know, but I don't feel like it's taking away from anything that I'm accomplishing. It's a hundred percent the reason why I'm able to do what I do. I've said that a lot, but there would be -- my PGA TOUR career would have been over awhile ago, had I not gotten sober.



So, yeah, I'm fine with that staying with me for until the day I die.

Q. Could you have done what you did without going public?

CHRIS KIRK: I've never really thought about that, if I could have. It certainly has been helpful and been beneficial to me to be open and be public about it. I live a decent amount of my life sort of in the public view, somewhat anyways, and so, you know, the biggest thing for me was waking up every morning and looking at myself in the mirror and knowing that I've got nothing to hide, and I can be proud of who I am. So, I didn't feel like that was really going to be quite as possible if I was not open about it.

Q. Kind of an accountability thing?

CHRIS KIRK: Somewhat, I guess so, yeah, but it was just more of just the freedom of not lying to myself and lying to other people, that's what it was more. Yeah, there is some sense of accountability there, for sure, but, yeah, like I said, it's definitely more about just, I felt free for the first time in a long time.

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate the time, Chris, congrats.

CHRIS KIRK: Thank you.

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