

John Deere Classic

Tuesday, July 6, 2021

TPC Deere Run

Silvis, Illinois, USA

Eric Cole

Press Conference

MARK WILLIAMS: Thanks for joining us at the John Deere Classic. This is your third PGA TOUR start, Monday qualifying, of course. It's always a challenging route to get into the tournament. You've done that three times for the three tournaments that you've played. Can you explain to us what's that like, Monday qualifying for a tournament on the PGA TOUR.

ERIC COLE: It's a little different everywhere you go, but typically it's just like you know you've got to go low; you know there's only really one shot that day. I played a lot of mini-Tour golf in my past, a lot of one- and two-day events which kind of gives you good prep for what the Mondays are like when you have to get off to a fast start and kind of keep it going.

MARK WILLIAMS: You're a Korn Ferry TOUR player, you have status out there and you've played 27 events this double season, '20-' 21. What have you been learning out there? And I guess you've tried to Monday qualify several times, and when you've been unsuccessful perhaps you've gone and played those events, so that's kind of a nice little thing to have in your back pocket there.

ERIC COLE: Yeah, I have learned that the guys out there are very good, so it requires some good play to have good finishes and stuff like that. I haven't played a ton of Mondays, just because I've kind of been focusing on that. I played Punta Cana Monday earlier in the year because I'm from south Florida so it was near where I live.

But the reason why I did this one is where I'm at on the Korn Ferry points list, with the two seasons in one, it takes a lot to move from 170th where I'm at to top 75 to make Korn Ferry finals and I already have some non-member FedExCup points from Punta Cana, so if I get in a tournament I could get in that top 200, so that's kind of where my focus turned. I kind of realized that recently so I have a little different outlook here.

MARK WILLIAMS: You brought up Punta Cana and I'm interested because you Monday qualified there but you were in a 10-for-1 playoff and you were the one who



successfully got through and it went six extra holes I think on Tuesday because of darkness.

ERIC COLE: Yeah.

MARK WILLIAMS: When you look at that and you go to Punta Cana and you finished in the top 25 there in your first PGA TOUR event, that's a huge accomplishment; wouldn't you say?

ERIC COLE: Yeah, thanks. It was a crazy ordeal. It takes a decent amount of luck to get through a 10-for-1. Doesn't matter how good you are. So I was definitely lucky. Once I got into the tournament I kind of capitalized on it and kind of tried to keep that mindset of like this is kind of a bonus opportunity where I didn't know if I was going to be here or not.

I just try to make the most of every opportunity I get.

Q. You had a lot of success on obviously the mini-Tours, 52 wins; is that accurate?

ERIC COLE: Yeah, I don't know exactly what it is. I've got a decent amount.

Q. Can you kind of explain the difference between the levels? It's minute; I don't think the average golf fan quite understands how close a mini-Tour or Sun Coast Tour or the Korn Ferry and the PGA TOUR, what the separation is and the challenges that guys like you face to overcome just that one --

ERIC COLE: Sure, yeah. Like when you go into mini-Tour golf, especially in south Florida where it's really strong, you have the top few guys are really, really good. You don't have a whole lot of -- you don't have the depth that you have in like a Korn Ferry event or out here on the PGA TOUR as far as like down the list, but you're still playing -- like I said, especially in south Florida you're still playing against the top few guys that are really, really good, capable of -- either have had success out here in the past or are capable of it in the future.

I kind of focus on the top -- like doing well in those smaller tournaments, like that's kind of where I can gauge how I'm doing, and then obviously a Korn Ferry TOUR is kind of like a bridge in between the two, and the depth obviously



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increases a lot. It's kind of crazy how many good young players there are playing the Korn Ferry TOUR and just kind of learning the ropes of professional golf. I see it out there a lot, how many guys are going to have a lot of success out here in the near future.

Q. Have you tried the MacKenzie Tour or the Latin American Tour?

ERIC COLE: I've never gone to either of those Q-schools. When I first turned pro they weren't affiliated with the PGA TOUR, so I never really went to them. I just tried to focus on making as much money as I could, like mini-Tour stuff, but I did play a Latin event somewhat recently down in Miami. They had one at Doral, so I've played one event out there, but I played that as like a Korn Ferry member is how I got in, so I've never done the Q-schools or anything like that. I know that that's a really good avenue now that I didn't have when I was starting.

Q. What kind of stories do you hear from your dad about the PGA TOUR before it was all exempt?

ERIC COLE: Yeah, no, I've obviously heard a lot from my dad and a lot of stories from the LPGA Tour from my mom. It's kind of cool to look back and imagine. I kind of wish that I was their age, and it kind of seems like although we're playing for a lot more money now, it seems like they had a better time maybe. They had more fun in between the golf, and that's something I wish was still kind of more prevalent in big tournaments because it does kind of exist -- there's a little bit of connection between the stories I hear from my dad and some of my mini-Tour stories are kind of somewhat connected. I feel like I relived it a little bit, but I definitely wish I was kind of my dad's age to have some of those golden years.

Q. Just talk about the grind that it takes to get to where you're at, to have to do Monday qualifiers and then re-prepare yourself for tournaments and just the grind it takes for you to stay out here and do this year after year.

ERIC COLE: Yeah, no, it definitely is. Before last week I played 11 events in a row with the U.S. Open in there. I've definitely had a bit of a grind this year, and then in the past doing more Mondays and mini-Tour stuff years ago, it's just something that you have to kind of take the positives of and try and find a way to enjoy because it's just part of -- if you're not one of those kids coming out of college and really having extreme superstar success, it's kind of just something that you have to kind of relish it and kind of take the positives and enjoy it when you can.

Q. What's your focus this week for the John Deere?

Obviously wanting to win, obviously make the cut, things of that nature, but what's your major focus as you go in from being a Monday qualifier?

ERIC COLE: Yeah, just to kind of get the best out of my game. I'm fairly confident in my game and kind of know what I'm capable of. I'm just going to try and hold myself to the level that I expect out of myself. I try not to look too much into results and just more out of like a preparation and execution standpoint probably.

Q. Talk about this week; why was John Deere that next PGA TOUR event that you wanted to try to qualify for and get into?

ERIC COLE: Well, it's kind of just a -- I kind of just became aware of this top 200 non-member. I kind of just figured you had to be a member of the PGA TOUR to be eligible for the Korn Ferry finals, so I kind of came to that realization, talking with Chase Koepka about a week ago, and he was like, that's what he's doing. He's kind of focusing on Mondays out here and trying to get some spots to get some points to make Korn Ferry finals.

It kind of fell into I was going out to Colorado to play the Korn Ferry event from Florida, so it kind of was somewhat on the way and kind of realized that a Monday in and a good finish can really do a lot for me.

Q. Talk about your lineage; with your mom and your dad's situation, did you feel like you were destined to be a pro golfer? And how has that played out over these 33 years?

ERIC COLE: Yeah, you know, I was always around golf when I was young. I don't know if I would say I was destined to be a pro golfer but I was pretty athletic at a young age and kind of saw that my size wasn't going to let me play some other sports that I liked more than golf, so when I got to maybe eighth grade or something like that, I realized I should be focusing on golf.

I definitely thought being around a lot of professionals, not just my parents but their friends and stuff when I was young, I thought it was going to be a little easier road to the PGA TOUR, and it's definitely taken -- and Korn Ferry TOUR. It's definitely taken a lot longer and maybe a few bumps and turns in the road, but I'm happy to be here, and I'm trying to make the most of it.

Q. What were those other sports that were ranked ahead of golf?

ERIC COLE: Well, I played middle school basketball, believe it or not. I was a point guard, leading scorer on my



middle school basketball team, because I could shoot and I was relatively fast. But I kind of realized that at 5'9" I'm not going to be anybody special on the basketball court.

Golf is a little more fair to people my size.

Q. Who is a better golfer between your parents, and secondly, who did you learn more from?

ERIC COLE: Who's a better golfer between my parents? That's a good question. I'll answer the second part first. I learned probably more technical stuff from my dad and more like the how to play golf and like the mental side, the feel type of side from my mom.

As far as who's better, I enjoyed playing with my mom a little bit more growing up because when I was little she hit the ball shorter so it was more relatable. Like we hit the clubs the same distances at a younger age versus my dad was always -- it kind of seemed hard to do what he did.

I'd say -- I don't know who's better. I think you'd have to, I don't know, go to some kind of records or something to figure that out.

Q. How has the game changed in terms of the depth of young talent coming up through college and through the AJGA just in the time you've been out as a pro?

ERIC COLE: Yeah, no, I can't speak to how it was before me, but I was talking about this with somebody the other day, the amount of good young players who are much more prepared to have success has -- it's crazy how many more there are. Their skills are better as a whole when they come out of college, and also they're just more used to big tournaments and the mental side of it. Just going down the line, everyone is -- there's more depth. Everyone is more prepared at a younger age. I think that's -- I wouldn't even say that's my opinion. I think that's almost a fact at this point.

As to what causes that, I don't know. Probably bigger level junior tournaments and college tournaments maybe, better instruction. I'm not sure.

Q. When you Monday qualify you come to a place that you haven't played before, you've got a lot of work to do over the next couple of days, does your mini-Tour experience help in acclimating, making up for maybe some of that knowledge gap that you'll have against guys like Zach Johnson who's played this 20 times?

ERIC COLE: Yeah, maybe. I mean, the more golf you play, it just turns into the little things, seeing how the ball is bouncing, how far the ball is carrying, stuff like that. Then

it just kind of turns into I'm trying to hit the ball a certain yardage at a certain target and it kind of just gets into that mode for me.

There's definitely some advantage to the guys who have played here a lot, but I think I can make up some of that by just simplifying it and maybe -- it's funny when you don't play a course that often you also don't really know where a lot of the bad stuff is, and you might not have some of the scar tissue that some of the guys have. I'm going to look at it from that perspective.

Q. You said you could relate playing against your mom more than your dad; at what age did you start beating both of them on the golf course?

ERIC COLE: That's a good question. I'm not sure. I played a lot more golf with my mom, so I'm not sure exactly when the first time I beat my dad, but I bet I beat my mom like from the same tees, probably, I don't know, maybe when I was like -- not regularly, but I probably beat her for the first time maybe when I was like 13-ish. I'm not sure. Something like that. Sometime around there, 13, 14, I'd say.

Q. How about your dad?

ERIC COLE: Dad, probably after that, but I don't know. I mean, I'm saying from the same tees, so probably when I was 15, 16. Not exact, though. There wasn't like a monumental moment. I'm sure at the time it was, but not one that I remember to this day.

Q. Probably more monumental for them than it was you.

ERIC COLE: Yeah, I don't know. I hope so. I hope they saw it like that.

MARK WILLIAMS: Eric, your mom and dad have probably given you a lot of advice; is there anything specific that sticks out from either or each of them, advice that when you first turned pro or started playing out here that sticks with you?

ERIC COLE: You know, there's a lot of stuff. Most of it has to do with just like the not-on-the-golf-course stuff, the off-the-golf-course stuff of playing professional golf, just the grind that it is and the belief you have to have in yourself and the constant positive self-talk. My mom is really good at that, so she kind of told me you've got to believe in yourself and you've got to continue to be positive even when golf beats you up, because it beats everybody up, it doesn't matter who you are.

MARK WILLIAMS: I want to go back to that Corales Punta Cana event, your first PGA TOUR event, got through in a 10-for-1 playoff, finished T22. That's a really good achievement in your first PGA TOUR event. Do you have a feel that you were a little bit overlooked in that tournament, just given that Andrew Yun, who also Monday qualified, played really well in the first round, got a lot of publicity, and you guys finished in the same position. Did that kind of -- not irritate you, but did it feel like you made a really good achievement and it kind of got passed by or overlooked?

ERIC COLE: I wouldn't say that. I'm fine with whatever publicity I get or not. But I did play with Andrew Yun the first two days in that tournament, so I was front-row seat for him. He played really well, and it was kind of a nice thing. Me, him and Alex Smalley were all in the same group as all doing really well as Monday qualifiers -- Alex may have been a sponsor exemption, but we were all right there and playing really well on what was a big stage for us, so that was kind of a cool thing to share together. But as far as being overlooked or whatever, that doesn't bother me at all.

Q. Just your experience at Torrey Pines, what was that like playing in a major championship?

ERIC COLE: I mean, it was incredible. I really wanted to play well and was disappointed in the way I scored. But the overall week was awesome, and it was cool to have my mom out there and my girlfriend out there, so to kind of share that with them.

It's a big stage and somewhere I've always wanted to be, so I was really happy to be there, and like I said, although I was disappointed, I tried to take the positives from it.

Q. If you could talk about your journey. You might fit the description "journeyman."

ERIC COLE: Sad but true.

Q. Are there any things you'd do different over the course of your pursuit of the PGA TOUR and the opportunity to play out here, and is there a certain urgency to this year? Is there a reason that you've been able to make a couple starts? Has that Korn Ferry status been a confidence booster? Is there anything in your game that's working particularly well this year?

ERIC COLE: Yeah, it's definitely been a journey. I have played golf all over the place in some small tournaments and stuff like that to try and get some reps.

As far as things that would change, I'm not sure. I think

going back to what I said with my mom being positive, I think I could have been a little more confident and a little more positive earlier in my career. I think that would have given me a faster track to this point because like I said, golf beats you up, and it's easy to get down.

I forget what the last part of your question was.

Q. Is there any particular urgency to this year, and do you feel like anything in particular has been elevated in your game?

ERIC COLE: No, I don't think necessarily anything has changed. It's more of like a belief thing and a comfort level that I have now that I feel a little bit more at ease as far as Mondaying into tournaments. Being a Korn Ferry member helps with that a lot because you don't have to go to pre-Qs for the Mondays and the Mondays are a lot cheaper at 100 bucks as far as 450 bucks. That probably plays a role.

But as far as the good golf, I think -- before during the season, I've actually played really well. Like six, seven years ago when I had no status I got to Q-school and kind of had a little bit of a block there, so now that I just got through that one little hurdle, I feel like my game has kind of been about the same as it always has, it's just I've had more access to play tournaments.

MARK WILLIAMS: Eric, we appreciate you coming by and sharing your story a little bit with us, and good luck this week at the John Deere Classic.

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