

# John Deere Classic

Tuesday, June 28, 2022

TPC Deere Run

Silvis, Illinois, USA

## Zach Johnson

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Zach Johnson to the interview room here at the 2022 John Deere Classic. Thanks for joining us. Had Clair in a few minutes ago, certainly I want to get your thoughts on all he has done, but was looking and see that this marks your 20th consecutive start at the John Deere Classic. Past winner, three runner-ups and if I did my math right, you have posted rounds of par or better in 63 of 70 rounds totalling 210-under in your career at the John Deere Classic.

ZACH JOHNSON: No, I got a question. It's not a statement. When was the last time I shot over par? In 18 holes. Is that still going?

THE MODERATOR: Here?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yes.

THE MODERATOR: Last time you shot over par?

ZACH JOHNSON: Never mind.

THE MODERATOR: I think it was round 2 of last year. Is that right?

ZACH JOHNSON: I shot over par last year? I think I had an even par last year. I think it's been a long time.

THE MODERATOR: I'm selling you short.

ZACH JOHNSON: That's okay. I am short. (Laughing).

THE MODERATOR: With all that said, point being, you have wonderful history here.

ZACH JOHNSON: 2019? Dadgum it. Shoot. All right. Anyway.

THE MODERATOR: Yeah, just a wonderful history here at the John Deere Classic, obviously one that means a lot to you as does many people. So with that, just some thoughts on being back here.



ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I love coming back. I mean every time I'm able to get to this area to go work is special. I mean I feel like I'm able to wear a number of different hats this week. Clearly one is representing eastern Iowa, which I adore and then I think you couple that with the hat of representing this great company and John Deere is very special. And then in that same vein I piggyback it off, I certainly represent this tournament. So that has given me so much. I think they gave me two, may have been three sponsor exemptions. I think it's two. I would have to really think about it. But when I didn't have status. So the experience that I was able to get from those two starts, even though I didn't particularly play that well was huge. As a young pro, as a young guy trying to find his way on TOUR or any TOUR for that matter. I love coming back. It's just a special, special week. I know my family would say the same thing.

THE MODERATOR: And I know you'll get asked about it, but obviously a milestone coming to an end of sorts with Clair, his final year as tournament director. Just a thought or two on -- I know you could probably go on all day like the rest of us in here, but just some thoughts on Clair.

ZACH JOHNSON: Well it's obviously going to get a lot better from here on out, right? (Laughing) he's passing off the torch to Andrew, which Andrew will do great. But no, in all seriousness, Clair's one of my dear friends. I'm happy for him. No. 1. He's put a lot of, well, as the tee shirts say here, a lot of grunt work into this tournament and put his last 20 some years, right? No. How many, 20 years? 20 years. 19 tournaments? Technically. Into this community. Every time I talk to him when it comes to this week it seems the topic of giving away all those monies to local organizations comes up. That's what it's about. John Deere obviously gets that and they had Clair lead them in that. I think that's more than special. There's been times where he told me, yeah, we dropped some checks off today, drop some more off tomorrow. And I read some articles, some of those monies that are raised this week, I mean really support these organizations more than we know. Probably some to the fullest. So that's why we do what we do. That's the beauty of the PGA TOUR, right? There's no other entity like us in sports. Every week is special to that venue, to that community, to that area. Clair Peterson is very special to the Quad Cities. He's not going away, I'm not going to say good-bye, it's a new chapter.



So congratulations and thank you I think are in order.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, we'll take questions.

**Q. Can you talk about the respect that Clair engenders out on TOUR. It's probably beyond the level of respect that -- a lot of players don't think about the John Deere Classic, but they do know Clair and they do respect him, right?**

ZACH JOHNSON: 1,000 percent. It's almost rhetorical in the sense that when it comes to tournament directors and you see a gentlemen wearing either a white or a green shirt walking around with the John Deere emblem on there, they know that's Clair. They know -- I mean he, you know, he's got a lot of work to do here, but he also makes time to go out on the road. Whether it's Arizona or Florida or the East Coast. He works his way around and promotes this event and promotes this community. So I don't like speaking of hypotheticals and speaking for somebody else, but I do know when it comes to my peers they're like, Man, I wish I could play this year because I love Clair. And just the opposite too, but along the same line, Yeah, I'm going to come this year because Clair keeps getting on me. It kind of goes both ways. There's just distinct respect. When you have somebody that's passionate about what he does or she does it's attractive and Clair always had that. He's always represented I would say his role in the highest of integrity and character of ways and we see that. So we're spoiled too. We got other great tournaments. This one is just a little bit different, I think. I'm biased, but it starts with the people.

**Q. I read in a book somewhere that you made a comment about the relationship Clair's history with John Deere and the symbiosis, the way that he was able to, how that model works uniquely for this tournament.**

ZACH JOHNSON: I'm sorry, I don't understand what you're referring to.

**Q. Your relationship between Clair's history with John Deere as having come from John Deere.**

ZACH JOHNSON: Sorry. Yeah, I think it is. I think it's unique. I guess I don't know the ins and outs of the constructs of other tours entirely or, other tours, other events entirely, but this one's unique. When you have somebody that actually understands and knows the title sponsor intimately and knows what they're all about and what the company's all about and how they go about their work, and has been given the reins on something that really, I would say, magnifies or manifests what that company's all about, it's unique. I don't know if we have

any -- I mean how many events do we have on TOUR where I guess from 2 green you could, you can walk to the headquarters, right, of your title sponsor. There's actual true ownership there. There's actual just a unique sense of title sponsor community. I don't know how else to phrase it. It's just a unique week. The players know that. Shoot, the wives know that, the families know that, we know that. That won't stop. Clair's laid the template down and it's just a matter of handing it off to the next individual, which fortunately is Andrew.

**Q. Congrats on the Ryder Cup thing.**

ZACH JOHNSON: Thank you.

**Q. So I want to ask you about that. I'll try and get as much of this question in in one take as I can. Do you have any idea how you're going to be able to make captains picks and who will be eligible and who won't with this LIV thing, what do you think of this LIV thing and do you think it affects the John Deere Classic at all?**

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, okay, let's start with the first one. The first one was my picks? So what I know is this: In order to play on the Ryder Cup team whether you're top 6 or a pick, you must garner Ryder Cup points through the PGA of America. In order to garner Ryder Cup points through the PGA of America you have to be a member of the PGA of America. The way that we're members of the PGA of America is through the PGA TOUR. I'll let you connect the dots from there.

So what was the second part of the question?

**Q. What do you think of this LIV Tour and the people that have gone to it?**

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I mean, where do you go on this one? First and foremost, I mean I got some friends that have decided to go that route. A lot of individuals that I'm for. I mean these are my friends. I'm for them. I want them to do well. I want them to, you know, find contentment or happiness in whatever it may be. It's not for me to say how that develops or how they find that. I will say I have the utmost respect for them individually. I would hope, and I'm not concerned about this, that they would have the respect for me and who I stand for and what I stand for. And I don't think it's very secretive or outlandish in saying that I'm for the PGA TOUR. I'm for the individuals that paved the way for me in this great TOUR, this way of, this platform in order to entertain, compete and I would say utilize for the betterment of others, not just my family. I'm for that.

I'm for -- how many weeks are we on the TOUR, Doug? 47. There's some overlapping tournaments there. But 40 plus weeks a year I'm for those venues. I'm for those cities that pour in basically 358 days a year for that one week. I'm for them. Because these tournaments do so much to the communities we stop. And it may be seven days to us, but it's not, it's a full year. And that's the beauty of the PGA TOUR. So I am for the PGA TOUR, I am for the growth of the game through the PGA TOUR.

**Q. Do you think it affects this tournament at all and, secondly, I've heard a lot, I mean I've heard Justin Thomas and Jon Rahm, etcetera, which you just said, but I haven't heard PGA TOUR players condemn people going to the LIV because of who sponsors and pays for that. I was wondering if you had any public feelings about that too.**

ZACH JOHNSON: Do I think it affects this tournament? I think it's so raw and so new it's hard for me, it's hard for anybody to say that it's going to have a massive impact here or there. My hope is that it does not and my ever optimist brain of mine says it will not because of what's already established here. I think players are starting to see that, you know what, it's pretty darn good where we are right here. We're starting to see some young guys even come out and say, that aren't even on the PGA TOUR, and say, you know what, I had a dream of playing on the PGA TOUR and that's the route I'm going to go. So I'm encouraged by that. I'm encouraged by our leadership of the PGA TOUR and how they're continually sticking to their guns, knowing that the product we have, the people we have, because we are the product, obviously, it's our TOUR, are really good. Not only will sustain will you about continue to grow. So I'm encouraged. Was that it? Forgive me.

**Q. I asked about --**

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh, yeah, yeah. I haven't heard any fodder in that regard. I don't, it's not fair for me to make a judgment call on that. I don't know everybody's situation, so it's not fair for me to know why they do or do not go.

**Q. This kind of piggybacks off that a little. You kind of answered it, but you might not remember this, but when the tournament was cancelled a few years ago because of the pandemic we got to do a Zoom kind of talking about the 50-year celebration. I don't know if you remember doing that. We talked about the future of the John Deere Classic and obviously everything was exciting and bright. And I'm not saying it's not, but it seems like golf -- that was two years ago -- seems like golf and life is changing week by week. So here we sit a couple years later with the LIV Tour, with**

**the fact that PGA TOUR events are getting more money, getting people here is difficult. What's your thoughts today of where the John Deere Classic is at and where it's moving towards the future?**

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure. Well I think the state of the game, because we were talking about that too, the state of the game is really good right now. I mean if there's anything that's directly positive since 2020 is the growth of the game. I mean I'm not trying to make light of COVID, but it got people out. And, I mean, is it cyclical? Perhaps. I mean, will it come back down? Perhaps. But right now it's healthy. Yeah, I mean, I think we've always been kind of the face of the game, right, and I think the PGA TOUR in general or professional golf in general, and I think the John Deere Classic, I think the potential is still there to grow more. I mean I really do. Seeing and hearing and listening and obviously some of it has been given to the public about where we're going as a TOUR, I'm encouraged, I mean I really, really am. Not just trying to be PC, I think it's special. New date this year for this tournament, you know, which in time could be a benefit I think. It's just how we navigate that, how John Deere navigates that, certainly Andrew and his staff navigates that. But, yeah, I don't, I think when things start to settle down, I think the PGA TOUR's going to be stronger -- I'm not suggesting it's perfect, I mean, shoot, it's not. I mean it's a -- the PGA TOUR are the players and we're a bunch of imperfect people that look pretty good at playing golf. So it can get better and we will get better. I've heard, Man, that's too reactionary. Well a lot of things that have happened in the past week have been in the process for years. I get that. But when you have threats, you have to have some sort of reaction too. So it's both sides of that. But I love what Jay's done, I love what our board's done. I've sat on that seat as a player director and that's a lot of work. I had three meetings a year. I think they're having three meetings a week almost now. So a little bit -- I think I was around the inception of the FedExCup, that dates me, when I sat on it. But I'm grateful for those guys that are really putting a lot of work in right now and I think every event will grow and we're seeing that. The projections are that. Growth.

**Q. About your self coming into this week and we talked about how you've done all right here, done pretty good. Where is your game at? I talked to you on the range and then the game feels good and then you knocked on your head a little bit.**

ZACH JOHNSON: I saw you yesterday and I was really encouraged by what happened on Saturday and Sunday, even though I didn't make the weekend last week in Hartford. I had two weeks, three weeks off going into Hartford. I played a lot. That was my, that was what I was



told to do, that was my recipe. I played really good. So I kind of came into Hartford thinking, you know what, I'm just going to put away everything and just I'm going to play. No mechanical thoughts, no like really no swing thoughts whatsoever. I really have never done that. I always had a couple keys and I didn't have anything and man, my scorecard was indicative of someone that had nothing. Because it was awful. I played so bad. And I actually putted okay, which was, oh, man, that's how bad I played. My point is in those three weeks I didn't think fundamentals, I just played. And I got off. Once I got into a little bit more wind than what I was playing in, it kind of grabbed me and showed me what golf's all about. But we had some good sessions Saturday, had a really good session Sunday and then another good one yesterday with my coach. So sometimes it feels like it's miles apart but it's really about that far away and I think that's where I'm at right now. I don't know what's going to happen this week, I just know that from this point on we've made some decisions as a team that are, it's not like it's revolutionary, it's just commitment on what to do and what not to do and I love the direction. So I'm very encouraged. Typically in years past I've kind of been able to figure things out on my own a little bit more, so maybe, I don't know, I asked this question to my coach Mike Bender yesterday, maybe I'm just getting to the point with my feels at 46 that I just can't -- 46? 46. That I just can't feel like I used to. I mean I don't know. But the hunger is there, the mentality of wanting to compete and fight and claw is still there. Whether it's to make the cut or win, I still really relish those opportunities.

**Q. 10 years ago you won here. Does it feel like 10 years ago?**

ZACH JOHNSON: In some regards it feels like one, some regards it feels like 20.

**Q. Would it be pretty cool to maybe go 2012, 2022?**

ZACH JOHNSON: It would be amazing. Two different decades would be amazing. I would love for my kids to see me win again. Fortunately they were all around when I won my last event, but they weren't there, so or last two, maybe two or three events. Irrelevant. I don't know if my daughter remembers anything. So right now it's, I come home and my son's like, Yeah, I got another trophy. Where's yours? You know, that kind of thing. So he gets his -- well whatever you want to call it. Smart, whatever, from his dad, so touche. I deserve it.

**Q. You kind of touched on it a little bit with the state of in tournament. A lot of people are looking at the field this week seeing know top-50 players here. This tournament has been through tough dates before, before the British, after the British, now it seems like**

**even two weeks ahead of the British with the Scottish next week has proved to be a tough landing spot for this tournament. What do you tell the fans about the field to keep them excited about this tournament and what can be done in the future to maybe draw some higher-ranked players here to the Quad Cities?**

ZACH JOHNSON: Well I think there's a lot of factors there. I was talking to a couple of buddies of mine not too long ago like, hey the cliché question is, Hey, what you got coming up? Where are you playing? What's going on. How is the family. That kind of stuff. And a couple of them were like, Well I'm playing anything and everything I can get into. And the other one is like, Well I think I need to keep playing but I got to take a week off. It's just hard. Every week's so good that you got to take time off, one, and then two this time of year a lot of guys, especially the ones that can knock on the door in a major championship, are planning their schedule around a major championship. That's just what happens. I mean obviously I've shown that you can play here and still win and I get that and maybe even a couple other guys have shown you can have success playing here. I think that's noted. But scheduling weeks off depending upon your situation, because everybody's different, married, kids, or none of the above or all of the above. Scheduling off weeks sometimes is just as if not more important than scheduling your on weeks and rest, especially in the summer. So there's a lot on the horizon with obviously The Open Championship and then you throw in the FedExCup playoffs and then the Presidents Cup and that sort of thing. So there's still a lot out there. The individuals we're talking about, I'm not saying they won't ever come here, but time off is needed. That's the simple way of putting that. Now I think you're going to get some guys here every now and again come back here or showcase or actually appear and play. What would I say to the fans? Is the next guys that are playing on some of these cup teams are probably in the field right now. That's what I would say. Whether they're young pros or even some veteran guys that have been there before. I think we'll see some guys surface and make headlines in major championships and on teams. I mean it just happens. I think if you were to ask the golfing public out there that is somewhat golf literate, two and a half years ago did they really know who Scottie Scheffler was? I mean you know, we picked him at the Ryder Cup last year. For all intents and purposes he might have been our 12th pick or 6th pick, but 12th man. I don't think we have to question who he is now. So that would be my response. There's a number of Scottie Schefflers out there and my guess is there could be a few in the field.

**Q. Going back the question about Clair, you've got a unique perspective with him, you've seen how he handles and how he represents the John Deere**



**Classic. Give us some insight as to what he does differently than other TOUR directors that has elevated his status.**

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure. Well I don't work intimately with other tournament directors so it's maybe not fair for me to actually sit here and critique the others. But what I can say is Clair is passionate, has been passionate about his work. He is passionate about why he does his work. Maybe it's a poor analogy, but I don't necessarily feel like I ever really have had a true job since I graduated from college. When you're around Clair it doesn't seem like a job to him too. He loves -- it's a labor of love. That's kind of how I would equate what I do too. I thoroughly enjoy practicing. My body doesn't, but I enjoy it. Seeing Clair out there on the road or whether it's on a Zoom call or a conference call or whatever, there's not a stone that's not, that he doesn't turn over to see if we can make it better, to make it more efficient, more effective or just better. You can see that with the people he surrounds himself with and how he goes about his day-to-day operations. So I'm going to assume it's a unique leadership role he's taken over and taken to the next level, but again it's not fair for me to say relative to other tournaments. They're all good tournaments and we got great tournament directors. But I'm partial to this one. I thoroughly enjoy it. I've been honored, it's an honor for me to be, to have more than just a player in the field to be associated. I thoroughly enjoy it.

**Q. Realizing Ryder Cup is more than a year away how much does it pervade your thoughts and what do you anticipate the next year being like for yourself?**

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean it enters my thoughts a little bit. Honestly probably as of late -- well the last so many odd months -- I mean right now there's not a whole lot I'm doing. There's e-mails and mundane things that I'm kind of checking the box. My wife might be more busy than I am. Right now my focus is helping Davis in Charlotte. If you really want to get down to it. I think we've got good synergy now year to year from cup to cup and we've got a guy that's sat in my see the twice as our leader for Charlotte in Davis Love. So that's where my emphasis is.

Now, once October hits I'm heading over to Italy in early October, it's the one year advance I think they call it and once that hits and things start, things will start to escalate, pick up, speed up, whatever you want to call it, but I'll be ready, I welcome it. I am, not that I didn't know this before but it's just become so effect, so very obvious, the PGA of America's Ryder Cup team, technically their championship team, starting with Kerry Haigh and branching down from there, the individuals that I communicate with on a weekly basis, if you will, are just amazing. They're amazing. They will do anything and everything to try to make my

experience as a captain, well, fantastic. So far they have succeeded. It's special. But, I mean, yeah, if I have thoughts that get in there, it's, you know, I try to keep my feet right where they are, but it's hard, it's hard. I mean, because it is so special. I said it and I'll say it again, it's been the best thing that I've ever been associated within side the ropes. And I could go on and on as to reasons why. But I'm excited, I'm trying to pump the brakes on that and let things just -- I want to stay right where I'm at right now and then we'll get to that eventually. But next year will be busy, but good busy.

**Q. Are there different challenges now at age 46 of trying to compete and win out here compared to maybe four, five years ago and part two, going back to St. Andrews in a couple weeks, just kind of the memories that kind of flood back to you from that win.**

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure, I mean, yeah, I think there's differences. I mean I'm still trying to -- I mean I learned a lot last week, I'm still learning as I go. I appreciate that. That's not any different since five or six years ago. I think the more emphasis I can put just on my body, the better outcomes I can have. And I give it, I mean I'm doing something every day and it may be 30 minutes, it may be two hours, it just depends on where I'm at and what I'm doing. But I cannot play golf, practice or compete without doing something. I just can't. Part of it is mental but most of it is just, I can't physically do it without doing something. So the common denominator there from four years ago or 10 years ago is that I surrounded myself with great people, like-minded people that push me, encourage me, frustrated me in a good way, make me uncomfortable in a good way and as a result I think I can still compete out here.

There's so many factors involved there. But one thing I have now that I didn't have four years ago was four more years experience. So, I mean, my finishes haven't shown that, but I'm still encouraged that they will. I still, call me demented, I don't think it's demented, but I'm the ever optimist. Like I said, I am, I still feel like some of my best golf's in front of me. I'm not just saying that, because I really believe it.

**Q. Going back to St. Andrews.**

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh, sorry. Yeah. I can't wait. I can't wait. I am so ecstatic about getting back. That's obviously one of my favorite events. We haven't played there since 2015 and I'm actually bringing my coach, he's never been there, which is kind of weird. Yeah, strange. But it will be fun. I'm ready to go compete there too. I'll be ready. And I didn't get to play last year, so that stung. So I'm ready to get back.

**Q. These have been friendly confines to you and a year ago Lucas Glover won for the first time in a decade. Do you have some special feelings coming back here where you know you've had success and it's a pleasant distraction, a lot of questions today, not about the TPC at Deere Run and I'm just curious about your feelings.**

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, man, I have not felt distractions or distracted here in years. I really haven't. I feel it's almost like a routine here. I know what I'm going to do when I get here. I got a good plan of attack. I know what I'm going to do on the golf course. Although there are some change, some subtle, some not so subtle, which is kind of cool. But the integrity of the golf course has not wavered. I think D.A. did a great job in that regard. So, yeah, I love this golf course, the canvas, I love the character of it, I love what it demands. This time of year because of the heat, because of the humidity and in some senses at times well today and yesterday were gorgeous -- you know you got to push the accelerator down and make some birdies. I want to say the first year I played -- well I know the first year I played here was in the fall and I think Vijay won at like 11- or 12-under. My point is this place can have teeth it's just we're in the middle of summer when the wind drops a lot and the humidity comes up and the ball goes a lot further and it becomes a little bit easier, especially with all these guys in the field. So if I got to push the accelerator, I'll do it. I know you got to be somewhat aggressive and make some birdies out here. But that's fine. This place still has teeth.

**Q. Talking about the changes on the course and the renovations. What is that going to do to, how does that affect the play?**

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I haven't seen the back nine, I'm actually going to go play it this afternoon. I think most -- well I'm sure the bunkering is altered on the back as well, I know it is. Well, what does it do? It helps the grounds crew a lot because the square footage of bunkers have gone down dramatically, even though there's more bunkers, if that makes sense. There's just a lot less sand.

**Q. There's four fewer bunkers.**

ZACH JOHNSON: Okay. Well less square footage. Yeah. So that's going to help a lot. The sand is fantastic. I went in the sand on the front nine a couple days ago and just hit some sand shots and it was awesome. Like you can kind of see it -- it probably shocks a lot of amateurs when they're watching us on TV, maybe it's a par-4 or a par-5, but oftentimes we aim for sand traps, just because we know we can control it if we get in there around the green. There's some pin placements here on some of

these holes where if you hit it in the bunker you can get it up-and-down. You can generate some spin on bent grass and we'll take advantage of that. Especially on par-5s. Now, they're different. I knew where the old ones used to be, I knew the nuances of the old ones, I got to get used to the new ones. Some of the fall offs are a little bit more extreme so I would say that's going to be harder. The 8th hole looks awesome from the fairway especially. There's a little bit of fairway to the left, to the left of the bunker. And it looks awesome. I think, I actually Clair and I were talking about it, I think it's about a year away from looking really pristine. Because it's brand new. Some of the rough turf was put down I think at the beginning of the year. So it's still maturing. But it's subtle to the eye. But it's there. I think it's really good. First tee's a little longer, but I don't think that's that big of a deal, so.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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