

John Deere Classic

Wednesday, June 29, 2022

TPC Deere Run

Silvis, Illinois, USA

Webb Simpson

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Webb Simpson to the interview room here at the John Deere Classic. Thanks for joining us for a few minutes. Making your fourth start in the event. First start in quite awhile. I think 2010 maybe. Just some thoughts on the decision to come back and how excited you are to be here.

WEBB SIMPSON: Yeah, this is a very special place for me, although I haven't been back in a while. Clair and I have had many conversations just about how it's tough for me to come here prior to the Open championship, but he's been incredibly understanding over the years.

But the reason it's so special is because my wife and I got engaged here. My wife loves surprises and she knew the question was coming in the next few months, so I thought I'm going to get her when she least expects it. So she did not think I was going to propose at a golf tournament. Did not do it at the Big Dig out of fear of losing the ring in a tractor. But did it on the river and so, yeah, I called her when I landed and it feels nice to be back.

THE MODERATOR: That's fantastic. I did not know that. Coming off a top-15 finish last week, just some thoughts on how you're feeling about your game coming into the week.

WEBB SIMPSON: Yeah, last week was a lot of positives considering my year so far. But also incredibly disappointing on Sunday just to have the start I had, 3-over through 5 and then bogey two of the last three holes. I wanted more out of the week, but my ball striking, which has been very inconsistent this year was super solid last week.

So all around I feel like my game is in the right direction. This is tough. It's 14 years of ups and downs that we all go through, no matter how good you are at the game. When you feel like you simplified it and you're on the right track it makes you eager to play, eager to compete, eager to have another chance on Sunday. So the few times I have played this tournament I enjoyed the golf course a lot, some of the best green surfaces we play all year. So I'm very excited about competing and hopefully having a



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chance on Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Can you go into a little more detail of your engagement. What year was it? Why did you decide to do it here? Can you give us some more details about that?

WEBB SIMPSON: Yeah, it was 2009. My rookie year. So Clair gave me an exemption in 2008. Came back in 2009. Didn't really know where I was going to do it, but decided right by the river's a beautiful area, I can take her to dinner, I can surprise her. So my caddie caddied for me off the golf course that night. He had the ring. I told him how much it was to make him nervous so he wouldn't drop it.

And it was not a good move but I did it on a dock. So I was more nervous about dropping it than her saying yes. I knew she would say yes or I -- 99 percent she would say yes. And that year was, we had a lot of weather and so Sunday we had to play 36 holes. So we were up late kind of celebrating, calling people and then had to wake up about 3:45 in the morning I think to play 36 holes. So I was running on a lot of adrenaline that Sunday. We got married six months later.

Q. So you proposed on that Saturday?

WEBB SIMPSON: That Saturday night.

Q. Down on the knee and the whole thing?

WEBB SIMPSON: I did. I did. Some folks on the river who had one too many cocktails almost ruined it because they saw kind of the setup before and knew what was happening. And then as my wife and I are walking out one of them yelled something like, Did she say yes? And thankfully my wife didn't know what they were talking about. But they almost ruined it.

Q. Coming back to a golf course you haven't played in a few years, does everything look a little more familiar or does it -- there's been a few changes just this year.

WEBB SIMPSON: Yeah, surprisingly everything that I remember, I just walked the front nine and a lot of the things I remembered are still part of the strategy we're

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going to have this week. There's more fairway bunkers now, a couple holes are a little longer, but no surprises. The course is in incredible shape. Every year I watch this golf tournament and you got to make a lot of birdies and it certainly seems so this week. The greens here are very familiar to me. I grew up on greens like these where in the summer they're really good, but they're softer. So you don't want to lose bent by cutting them down too short. I think that's why it yields a lot of birdies.

But, yeah, a lot of familiar looks to it. I'm playing the back in the pro-am today and I'm sure we'll see the same on the back.

Q. Does Deere Run have any similarities to places you've had success at like Wyndham and courses like that?

WEBB SIMPSON: Yeah, even like last week, it's not, step up on every tee and hit driver as far as you can. There is strategy, there's options. Hybrid, 5-wood, 3-wood, driver, whatever it might be. And I do like golf courses where you got to get an early start and make birdies from the beginning. So I certainly imagine with good weather it will be another year of 18- to 23-under probably.

Q. What is it like to be back at a place that holds a lot of emotions for you, where you proposed, you haven't been here in 12 years. What's it like to be back?

WEBB SIMPSON: It feels great. This is you know of the most loyal sponsors to the PGA TOUR I think. Some 50 years, if I remember correctly of the but I remember this area being a great area for golf fans. Such big support for not just the PGA TOUR but Zach Johnson, his foundation and all that they're doing around here. So it does feel great to be back. There's tournaments that we go to that have kind of a laid back atmosphere and this is one of 'em. Where there's not a lot of stress, certainly come Thursday you want to compete, focus and do as well as you can. But it is fun to see all the families out, see all the kids and just in nine holes I saw a ton of kids out there, which you don't, we don't always see that on the PGA TOUR.

Q. You come in probably favored too. What's that like coming in knowing that a lot of people are assuming you're going to have a pretty good week out here?

WEBB SIMPSON: It's a great feeling. We always take that, if that's how people see us. I'm certainly glad I'm playing after last week. As tough as it was to not top 10 or top 5 there was so many positives. So I was eager to get another start in quickly. So went home for a couple days, regrouped and now I'm back. So look forward to it. A lot of good golfers are here though so I got a lot of work to do.

Q. You say a lot of good golfers are here, a lot of work to do. Do you look at the field and how the field shapes up? I mean at number, what is it, 58, you're the highest ranked golfer in this field. Does that change your approach or mindset for the week thinking you might have the target on your back this week?

WEBB SIMPSON: It really doesn't. It might come as a surprise, but it really doesn't. I know that there's, I'm guessing the field is 156 players, but the level of competition is so deep now that, I mean, a hundred guys could win this week. Just because the field isn't as strong as other weeks it's still going to take a really low number.

So I don't think about it in that way really at all. I really think about it kind of from an individual perspective of how's my game, how did I prepare yesterday at home, today during the pro-am, am I going to be ready.

Yeah, it feels nice to be the top-ranked player but you kind of got to put that to bed and go out and take care of business one day at a time.

Q. You talked about having getting that sponsor exemption here early in your career. This tournament has been known to jump start some careers with those sponsor exemptions. How key are those, especially for some of the younger guys in the field now trying to make their marks?

WEBB SIMPSON: They're huge. I remember when Clair invited me to come, I was elated because there's so many uncertainties when you turn pro as a young player. You don't know where you're going to be the next six months. You don't know which tour you're going to be playing on, if any tour. So to have a tournament director believe in you and not only that but to be able to come out and play against the best players and maybe you'll surprise yourself and you play better than you thought and you're closer to that level than you thought. Or the other way, you realize how good everybody is and it really gives you something to go home and work on and it gives you kind of a measuring bar of, I got to get better in these areas.

So I was grateful of those. I got a couple other ones that summer but they set me up for kind of a great end of 2008 to get through Q-School.

Q. Are there any youngsters out here now that you've kind of taken under your wing?

WEBB SIMPSON: There's a lot of youngsters who are playing a lot better than me this year. I'm trying to get under their wing a little bit. Scottie Scheffler asked me a

couple questions last year and so that mentor role has reversed. But, yeah, it's fun because I still think I'm young and I'm one of the older guys now on TOUR. I'm seeing that a little bit, guys wanting to know certain things, how I prepare and stuff like that. Which is fun, I love to help. Because I was certainly a student of some guys when I turned pro. Like Zach, like Davis, like Ben Crane, some of these guys that really helped me.

Q. 10 years ago we were asking Zach and Stricker and some of the veteran guys on TOUR about the young guys like you. But when a Michael Thorbjornsen comes out and does what he did at Hartford and obviously we're looking at just a steady wave of these players that just seem to get better every year at coming out of college. Assess, how do you feel to be one of the guys that's getting this question now? How do you assess the young guys and the competition that just keeps coming?

WEBB SIMPSON: Yeah, I mean, like you said, it seems every year they're getting better and they're younger. I played with him Sunday and he really played like a 10-year veteran. But we're done being surprised at how good these young guys are. Collin, Viktor, Scottie, Sam Burns, some of these young guys who act like they're not afraid of any moment, they love the big moments so much. Scheffler's playing in his first Ryder Cup, playing against the No. 1 player in the world and birdieing the first bunch of holes.

So we're kind of done being surprised when a 20-year-old comes in and almost wins a golf tournament. I think the days are done of needing experience to get on TOUR. Maybe you need experience to win on TOUR and stay consistently at the top. But in terms of getting on TOUR, when I came out it was rare for someone right out of college to get on the PGA TOUR. Now it's very common place every year. I think we'll continue to see that. I think there will be a wall hit soon. I mean I don't think we're going to see any 15, 16 year olds out here, but certainly 18 to 20 will be, I think that age group will be plentiful on TOUR in the next few years.

THE MODERATOR: You're a good man. Thank you, Webb.

WEBB SIMPSON: Thank you.

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