

# John Deere Classic

Wednesday, July 3, 2024

TPC Deere Run

Silvis, Illinois, USA

## Sepp Straka

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Morning. We would like to welcome our John Deere Classic defending champion Sepp Straka. Sepp, start off with some opening comments, what it's like to be back as the defending champion here a year later.

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, always good to be back here. Always been one of my favorite tournaments to come to, and especially nice this year after winning last year.

Course is in great shape. I haven't seen it since the rain last night, but it was in great shape yesterday, so hopefully didn't get too much.

**Q. What memories do you have from last year's last round to going low with 62 during the final round?**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, big switch there. Yeah, last year first round was terrible. Puttered awful. Hit the ball okay, but just putted so bad. Then had a putting tweak and just got hot.

Ironically, my putting hasn't been as good as I've wanted this year, so maybe this place can inspire some good putting again.

**Q. Within top 20 FedExCup standing. Down to the final week. I know it's always a goal of yours to make TOUR Champ. What's it like to have kind of had some solid finishes and in good standing?**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah it's nice. You always want to finish the year in Atlanta. Don't want to miss out on the last tournament if you give yourself a good chance.

Feel like the last couple months I've given myself a pretty good chance to get there. Few more tournaments left, one major, and then the points ramp up for the playoffs.

So really just try and make sure the game is in shape and, yeah, there is a lot of movement this late in the season, and if it you can play it's really nice to be into Memphis in a good position.



**Q. The win kind of jump started an exciting finish to the end of the 2023 season for you. Talk about what you took to the British Open and then obviously the opportunity to play on the Ryder Cup had to be a good time.**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it was an incredible part of the year last year this time last year. I was playing some pretty good golf but wasn't getting much out of it, wasn't putting very well, and that all flipped here.

Went to the Open; had another really great week; my best finish in a major. Yeah, things went from there. Ended up making it to Atlanta. Playing on the Ryder Cup was definitely the highlight of the year, but that probably wouldn't have been possible if I didn't get hot here at the John Deere.

**Q. To say the least, last year at the start of this tournament you were flying under the radar. Coming back this year as defending champion, the highest ranked player in the field now, is it a different feel for you this year? Any added pressure or anything changed in your mindset going into this week's tournament?**

SEPP STRAKA: Not really. My expectations don't really change. Pretty much have the same expectations this year as I did last year.

So, yeah, it's not like there is crazy hype this year either for me I don't think. I'm doing all this with having won last year, but I don't feel like I ever really hype myself up too much. Just try to like prepare for the tournament and then try to give it my all when Thursday comes around.

**Q. Top eight and a couple Top 5s the last six starts for you. What's going right now and how do you keep it going right?**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, been hitting the ball really good and making a few putts. The putter all year has been not as good as I would've liked, as good as last year, but I made some pretty good changes and trending with the putter nicely.

I think that's kind of helped. Been hitting the ball well, hitting a lot of fairways, and giving myself a lot of



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opportunities.

Yeah, it's been nice to kind of have a lot of good events in the summer months. This is kind of the time you want to be playing well.

**Q. How are things out at Champions' House? Been pretty raucous? Six guys there last year back. Did you guys -- how much did Davis Thompson pay to be part of that rotation?**

SEPP STRAKA: I'm not actually staying there this year unfortunately. My family is coming into town tomorrow. But until they come into town I've been hanging out over there with the guys and playing some cards.

Yeah, I guess Davis snuck into my room. Maybe it can work well for him. Yeah, hopefully the mode changes a little bit this year and it's not somebody from that house that wins.

**Q. So it's JT, Greyson Sigg?**

SEPP STRAKA: Greyson Sigg, JT, Patton Kizzire, Davis Thompson, Denny McCarthy, Ben Kohles.

**Q. So you're not staying there and you paid for it?**

SEPP STRAKA: I paid for it last year, not this year, yeah. If I win this year they got to pay their own way, yeah.

**Q. Welcome back. You opted into a job several years ago that requires an awful lot of travel. What stands out about this place? Is there a different vibe when you go week to week at all the tournaments? Obviously you won the tournament, but you've been here before.**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it's definitely a little different. I feel like sometimes we play in bigger cities or around bigger cities and I feel like the involvement around this tournament is a little bit more. People are proud of it, as they should be. It's a great event; always has been.

It's just really special because the volunteers are probably second to none here. The fans are really engaged and love this event, and makes it a lot of fun to come here and compete.

**Q. In your mind, with all the changes that have gone on in professional golf in the recent couple years, how important are events like this one, as unique as it is, to being the backbone of the PGA TOUR?**

SEPP STRAKA: I think they're very important. I personally

don't like the small events. I just think it's less competitive when you get 140 something guys. It's always a tougher environment, tougher -- with a cut you kind of have to be ready on Thursday when the bell rings.

The bigger tournaments should be bigger fields as well I think. But, yeah, these tournaments are massive because a lot of the guys, most of the guys, aren't getting in those small-field, big events.

So for the majority of the PGA TOUR these tournaments are huge. They kind of are still the majority of the PGA TOUR here.

**Q. How regularly do you travel with your family, and was being defending champion here, did you want them to experience that with you? Is that one of the reasons you brought them and didn't stay at Champion's House?**

SEPP STRAKA: We've got a new son. He's six months old. So that's a big thing. He's traveling a little more. If it was just my wife we would've stayed in the house.

Yeah, I think that is the biggest thing. I didn't want to wake up the whole other five guys with the screaming baby at night, so I think I'll just take that on myself.

**Q. So he probably didn't dig the Big Dig yet.**

SEPP STRAKA: He is not doing the Big Dig yet. Not ready to drive a tractor, but we'll get him there.

**Q. How much has your life changed with the newborn?**

SEPP STRAKA: A lot. It's a life changer for sure. It's been great, been awesome. It's just my wife has been incredible. He's been battling some ear infections the last couple months and he won't sleep in the crib, so she's been holding him a lot at night and it's been a battle for her.

Yeah, it's been incredible. He's been awesome, and definitely a life changer and very grateful for my wife for all she's done for us.

**Q. Is it has this changed your golf perspective being a dad now?**

SEPP STRAKA: A little bit, but the goal I think is still the same for me: Just try to bring the best I can, try to prepare the best. My preparation has changed a little bit. Try to be more efficient with my practice than -- used to I would just go out to the golf course at 8:30 and stay there all day mainly just for fun.



Now it's a little more targeted. Yeah, still feel like I can prepare equally as much and get ready for tournaments, so that part hasn't really changed too much.

**Q. With the rain that came last night, you probably couldn't get away with an over-par round or even-par round on Thursday and then come back and win on Sunday. What do you anticipate this week?**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, I feel like you can never really get away with an over-par round here. I don't know how I did it last year. Scores are going to be pretty low. The course is in great shape. The greens are perfect. Going to be a lot of people making a lot of the putts.

Yeah, I think be a lot like every year. You just got to be on from the very start and give yourself as many birdie looks as you can throughout the 72 holes.

**Q. Have you replayed that Sunday round? Have you thought about where you were on 13 and -- or 14 -- and what was in front of you there since it all came out okay?**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah. I played the back nine yesterday so I was reliving some of the shots, some of the memories.

Yeah, had a lot of opportunities. Gave myself a lot of the looks coming down the stretch for 59. Then hit in the water on 18. That's not one I love to remember, but ended up being part of a win.

Yeah, it was very special to play the back nine yesterday and relive some of the shots that we hit.

**Q. This is going back six years ago I think, but do you ever laugh at the Kansas City week in regards to you sign up for -- I mean, the whole story signing up for Q-School that Monday and winning, changing. Do you ever look back and when things are down, that was pretty low, and then it changed six days later?**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, definitely. I mean, last week was talking to one the cart guys at Greystone where I play in Birmingham just talking about how fine the line is of being successful in golf and not.

Yeah, just telling him my second year on Korn Ferry I was 100 something on the Korn Ferry list, was about to lose my card, signed up for Q-School again, and go win with two tournaments left I think in Kansas City, get my card through the finals, and now this is my fifth on sixth season on the PGA TOUR.

If I didn't win in Kansas City probably none of that would've happened. So, yeah, it's just crazy how fine the line is in golf and how much luck is involved in getting where you go.

THE MODERATOR: Perfect. Thank you, Sepp, for the time.

SEPP STRAKA: Thank you. Appreciate it.

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