

John Deere Classic

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TPC Deere Run

Silvis, Illinois, USA

Zach Johnson

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, like to welcome the 2012 winner of the John Deere Classic, Zach Johnson here in the press conference room. It has been a sentimental journey down memory lane. We've had Jason Day in and Jordan Spieth in, and here we are with Zach Johnson making your 22nd start at the John Deere Classic.

In addition to the win, you've had six top 10 finishes. Just been a staple in the area. Just get some comments on being back here this week.

ZACH JOHNSON: Going to sound like a broken record, but I love it. I love it, I love it. Sound like Jim Zabel right there. You Iowa guys know what I'm talking about.

Anyway, yeah, this is one of those weeks that, I mean, just kind of -- I don't know if it's clarity or perspective sets in in the sense of this is the first sponsorship, tournament, you know, that gave me a lot of really unbelievable starts that I didn't necessarily -- wasn't warranted, but they allowed me to do that.

I don't take that for granted. I think I had at least two sponsor's exemptions. I have to think about it. But it was a lot. For an Iowa way kid to come in here and compete and get your feet in the soil, playing against the best in the world was amazing.

So I look at that and my tenure at this event, some successes, maybe a playoff that still haunts me every now and again, I think about probably most importantly just the fact that they honored me with be a board member for the Classic. I love that.

Clair made that phone call to me, Clair Peterson years and years and years ago. Love sitting on this board. Andrew Lehman has taken the reins and done a great job.

This place is unique. I did live here. I don't remember, but I did live in the Quad Cities when my dad was in school. I don't remember.

But the uniqueness for me is the fact that it's like a



hometown event and I get to keep coming back and you've got this great 25, 26 year title sportsmanship. What is it?

Q. 25.

ZACH JOHNSON: 25. Okay, my math was close. Just so happens the headquarters is right down the road. That's something we don't see in this sport.

And so the ownership that they've taken with this event is special. Just happy to be a small part of it.

Q. Upstairs you were on the camera with Jimmy Roberts and you described it as the John Deere Classic to me and my family is a part of our family.

ZACH JOHNSON: Uh-huh.

Q. You talked a good bit about how much this tournament does for the community, the impact did makes. We're here one week a year, like you said. 51 other weeks a year they're giving money out, making the community bigger and better. Obviously that's something very near and dear to you.

ZACH JOHNSON: I think you -- well, maybe I said it perfectly but you reiterated it. I don't know. What I do know is I know how tournaments are orchestrated. You know, do a small part, if you will, with the RSM Classic down at home on St. Simons, Davis Love's foundation. Amazing.

I know why RSM is there. Yes, they do create business. Yes, they can showcase it to their clients. But they give. It's stewardship.

This tournament is the epitome of that. Not a small community here but not a substantial one relative to some of the other cities and venues we go to. So the thumbprint here by John Deere stretches. The ripples of what they do is massive. Hundreds of organizations. Clair always sent me a text or picture or video, and now Andrew is doing the same thing, of when they're able to go out and started distributing.

It's like another Christmas. The impact that those monies, funds, the resources that John Deere puts together, it's hard to measure. I hope it goes on and on and on, long

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after I'm gone or not playing or whatever you want to call it.

I just think it's, again, you said it: We're here for that one week. Yep, it's the catapult, I get it, that launches everything into the community, but it's the other 51 weeks that really make a difference.

Q. Last week Rickie, 35 years old, refers to Neal Shipley as a kid. Luke Clanton finishes in the top 10 in Detroit. Are you starting to feel father time catching up a little bit?

ZACH JOHNSON: Starting? No. I have been feeling that for quite a while. Few things there. (Knocking on wood.) No surgeries. Don't take that for granted. Got a great team that helps me along on the physio side of things. I hurt. I mean, every day I hurt, but, you know, it's not an injury. It's just subtle pains.

Unfortunately, anti-inflammatory has become a friend. Yeah, I just think it's the seasons of life out here. Another cool thing is that, yeah, we've got this youth coming out. If I'm sitting here a year from now, hopefully I am, God willing, I'm going to say the same thing.

There is more youth coming. The game is far and wide as to the reach, and these kids are good. They're athletes. They're hungry. You can call it whatever you want. The knowledge of the game, the Tiger Woods effect, technology, all that plays a factor.

I think when you talk about growth of the game I think it's fantastic, whether it's the youth here domestically or around the world. That's special. I do not take for granted that I'm almost to that age and I'm still playing out here. You know, Stewart Cink is here. He is one of my best friends in the world and just turned 51 and he is still competing out here, too. He's got to be one of the rarest that can still do it. And no one is surprised, because if you see him playing, yeah, of course he can.

So I'm still hungry. A lot of what I do in practice, a lot of what I'm doing in tournaments, I've had a lot of peers -- and I'm not just saying this to be -- sounds arrogant but I don't mean to be -- man, you still got it. Thank you. I feel like I do, too.

It just hasn't shown up on Sunday late afternoon yet. Maybe it will; maybe it won't. But that notion does not detract from me wanting to get there and motivated to get there.

Q. In recent years you contended splendidly in very recent years and shot only terrific rounds. How is your game coming in this week? Are you feeling primed?

ZACH JOHNSON: I feel great about it. The beauty of I think the status of my game right now is just execution, and I love that. It's not -- there is nothing fundamentally that's glaring or needs to be altered or worked on. There is nothing -- physically 72 holes I can obviously do it. That's not a problem, thank God.

So really comes down to execution and probably that six inches between ear to ear. Managing the game, your emotions, managing the noise. I've got an awesome team of individuals that help me monitor that. You know, I'm subject to a lot of periphery and arrows shot at me like anybody, and so it's time for me to hunker down and keep competing. That's the way I'm wired.

I feel good. May not show up this week; it may. I'm confident that it will.

Q. I just want to point out that when we call you sir here it's because you're John Deere Classic royalty.

ZACH JOHNSON: That's very kind. Steve Stricker is not here, so yeah, we'll go with that.

Q. Jordan Spieth is here. He is royalty, too.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah.

Q. He talked about trying to find -- play the game with that kid-like enthusiasm, that joy. How hard is that to do at his age and yours?

ZACH JOHNSON: Obviously I'm not in his shoes. He's closer to being a kid than I am. Yeah, I think that notion is fantastic. There is something to be said about here is your club, peg, ball, and be a kid and hit it. A lot to be said about that, the simplicity of it. It's a sport. Be an athlete and go play. A lot to be said about that, but very difficult to implement at all times.

The mere fact that guys are really good. If you make mistakes out here, some are not, so it's hard to recover from those mistakes. At least that's how I feel.

Yeah, I think ya'll know this. You've been around. Jordan is extremely intuitive and bright. The six inches between his ears is one of his deepest and best assets. I think he hit it right on the head. I don't know if I'm quite in that realm right now as far as the way I'm approaching it, but something to be said about it.

Q. How is it playing with Keegan today? Two kids from Cedar Rapids, Iowa at the top of your profession playing golf together. What was that like for you?

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ZACH JOHNSON: It was awesome. You know, we've heard it -- this is really the first time I've ever got to meet him. You hear the Murray boys, nice boys -- it's so true. They've got awesome parents. Shoot, met his sister, too. She was fantastic. His mom who I got to know. Been around her a few times I guess, and obviously Kenyon who I looked up to, both physically and as a kid.

He's only a year or two ahead of me. So awesome. Keegan, he gets it. I'm not surprised. I saw Kenyon at my event Monday. Monday? Yes, at my event Monday. They get it. They want to do something for the community and they will. They're going to partner with some other individuals. That's spectacular.

My hope in all of it is they both -- both boys stay healthy because it's hard. Sounds like they got their ducks had a row. Kenyon knows. This is not necessarily all foreign to him because of what he did as a high, high level basketball player.

I was reminiscing with him. I said I remember the Great Alaska Shootout when he made that turn and made that layup. I won't ever forget it. I remember a lot of his other great plays as a Hawkeye.

That was awesome. It's a nice substantial dose of reality knowing that Kenyon Murray has kids that age. What a cool family. Great to have other athletes that you really just want to push from your hometown. And there will be more to come. The Murrays, you can't not be a fan.

Q. How is Keegan's game?

ZACH JOHNSON: He's good. I forgot to mention that. He played in high school. You can tell. I mean, what he is, 6'8", 6'9"? I don't know. He plays lefty. Found that a little odd.

But fundamentally speaking, because he generates a lot of speed, probably feels like he's this far off; he's about that far off. Coach and I were talking about it. You can't give swing tips during the course of a round and I'm not a coach, but if he pursued this game like he does basketball, he would be really, really, really low handicap because he has great hands. He is a phenomenal athlete.

He played in high school. One of his high school teammates I've gotten to befriend over the years and his family, so kind of full circle there. It's kind of cool.

Q. Keegan said he doubted you had a jump shot. Response to that?

ZACH JOHNSON: I have a shot. There may not be a jump involved. I could shoot okay back in the day. Maybe first, second team all-intermural. Slight difference between first team all-Big Ten and the fourth pick in the draft.

Q. How special have the last couple of (indiscernible) been? Caitlin last year, Keegan this year. Obviously some hot -- your Hawkeye fandom is pretty well document. Got to be fun for you.

ZACH JOHNSON: I'm a state of Iowa fan. When you have two of the best athletes certainly as of late and John Deere is willing to host them, I think that's awesome. Sincerely. I would say 75% of the fans out there wanted to rub shoulders with Keegan. I get it. So was I.

So I think it's awesome. Last year was special, too with Miss Caitlin. So pretty cool. I mean, I don't care who it is. I don't care, you know, what school they went to, community they're from. If they're from the state of Iowa, I'm behind them big time.

UNI, Drake, Iowa State, I'm a fan. Two kids from Iowa State at my event on Monday. Man, they're big. Ben Brahmer and Charley Kolar.

Man, just massive humans. And great guys. So I'm removed from the state and so my attachment to the state is watching those from here to some capacity or whatever that relationship is. I'm a massive fan. Obviously I was born at the university so that's in my blood.

Man, I love it. I love my Bull Dogs, Hawks, and I'm cheering for the Panthers, Cyclones. It doesn't matter. I'm just a fan.

Q. You talked about still being hungry out here. Has your perspective --

ZACH JOHNSON: Lunch, I'm hungry for lunch.

Q. Well, go to the caddie tent. I hear they're getting taken care of today.

ZACH JOHNSON: They do a good job.

Q. Hunger with the game. Has your perspective about winning changed at all over the years, or is that still what you're striving to do out here? Are you content with top 10s, top 25s, or are you still pushing for those wins?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I think maybe we're talking semantics here, but content, at this level can be kind of dangerous. For me, the finishes -- what you're saying, I

understand what you're saying. Obviously you want to win. That's why you enter a tournament. Not anything but that, right?

But content goes hand in hand with maybe maintenance, and the more and more my mind has resolved around those notions I feel like I go astray. So what I'm alluding to is I'm always trying to improve. Doesn't matter what age I am, where I'm at. This is going to sound pretty boring, but this is the way I operate. This week is a way for me to improve for the next week, and next week is a way to improve for the next week.

The moment I lose sight of that is a moment I'm going to get really lapped and I will probably not be playing much. I'm fallen into that, mind you, what you're saying. We're getting into semantics. Content is not a negative word. Yeah, we're good. You know, no, I want to get better. Whatever that may be. On and off the golf course there is room to get better and be more efficient, effective with my time, my body, my mind, all that.

So I'm still learning at 48. I've had peers of mine out here at 48 and said the same thing. Some of those guys had amazing careers between the age of 40 to 50, 45 to 50 even. Shoot, some of them had careers between 45 and 50. Like, oh, my gosh.

But the game has changed. It's definitely gotten younger. I don't know what the age was then and where it is now. That part doesn't really matter much. But guys are just more ready.

Q. With the depth out here on TOUR it has to be getting harder to win.

ZACH JOHNSON: I think so. Scottie Scheffler doesn't think so. Again, it's all relative, right? Yeah, I mean, you can go down a number of roads on that I think.

When I was first playing out here Tiger was without question in his prime. It was hard to win. I had many tournaments where I played really good and finished sixth.

I didn't have any average tournaments back then where I finished sixth. Feel like I didn't anyway. Maybe a couple where I felt like I could have played a little bit better.

Bottom line is it's hard. Yeah, if you consistently finish in the top 20, 15, specifically the top 10, you're talking about putts lipping in versus lipping out. That's the difference, right?

Some guys are just really, really, really, really good right now. It's impressive. Scottie being the epitome of that.

Q. Knowing how popular you are out here and how much the fans enjoy seeing you here, does that give you a boost as you get into competition starting tomorrow?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, you know, this is -- I've said it every year and I'll say it again: They're amazing. They're amazing. I feel it. You know, I see it, but I really feel it.

What I really appreciate as a competitor, this game is hard, is it doesn't matter what my scorecard says, they keep coming back. I'm grateful for that. They do that for a lot of other individuals too. Don't get me wrong. I just really appreciate the fact that they like having me back. That's why this is another home.

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