

BMW Championship

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Owings Mills, Maryland, USA

Caves Valley Golf Club

Tony Finau

Press Conference

DOUG MILNE: We'd like to welcome Tony Finau to the virtual pressroom here at the 2021 BMW Championship. Congratulations on your second career PGA TOUR win last week at the Northern Trust. Now that the dust has settled, I know you've done a lot of talking, a lot of interviews, a lot of shaking hands and so forth. Just a couple comments on how you're feeling now that you've had a day or two to let things sink in.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it's been wonderful, thanks. It's been a fun couple days since Monday, since that last putt dropped. Just being able to experience the win again, and to be able to experience it with so many people that have reached out and kind of -- I've been able to share this win with so many that I knew about, didn't know about.

It's been really cool to see the amount of joy a lot of people have for my success. Selfishly I want to win, and of course that's a really cool thing, but to be able to see how many people have enjoyed this win for me, my family, my friends, it's really -- it's been really, really cool for me.

I've been soaking it up, and just finished the pro-am, so right back at it this week. But I wouldn't have it any other way.

I'm in great position here in the FedExCup now to make a serious run at winning the FedExCup. My attention needs to turn to that. But I have enjoyed the last couple days soaking in another victory. It's been five years. You were at the last one, Doug, in Puerto Rico. Seems like a really long time ago, so I'm a totally different player than I was then, but everything is earned out here. All the wins were earned, and I definitely had to earn that second one.

DOUG MILNE: I know I speak for a lot of people and I couldn't be happier for you. You mentioned the FedExCup. You are actually in the greatest position now coming into the week with the No. 1 spot and moving to No. 10 in the World Ranking. You're making your seventh start in the BMW Championship, and I was looking at your results, you haven't finished worse than eighth in your last four starts here. Obviously different courses. Is there something



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about the Playoffs maybe that kind of gets your blood pumping a little bit more that can help result in some of those top-10 finishes?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I think it's almost like the major championships where you have that little extra bit of energy about you and you know you're coming toward the end of a season. No matter if you're finishing playing 18 holes, 72 holes, there's always something about finishing strong, finishing your season strong.

I've always tried my best to do that, and I've played nicely in this tournament, and I want to continue that this week. I'm playing some good golf, and piggy-back off that victory last week and take that momentum right into this week.

Q. How did you celebrate Monday night?

TONY FINAU: We went to Ruth's Chris after I left the course with my manager, my caddie and my coach Boyd, and we had a meal. We finished, leaving there about 11:00.

I couldn't really sleep. I was still on quite a high, which was cool. Then about 3:00 a.m. came around after returning some messages, talking to some family, and then Boyd and I got hungry again so we went to McDonald's about 3:00 a.m. and got some fast food.

I'm not really -- I haven't been into fast food like I was when I was a kid, but I felt like that was worth the price of admission at the time. We hit McDonald's at 3:00 a.m.; I fell asleep about 5:00 a.m.; I was back up at 8:00 a.m. and normal routine. I worked out in the morning and then I shot my way over here. That's kind of what I was up to.

Q. What's your go-to at McDonald's? What did you have?

TONY FINAU: I had a lot. I ordered a Big Mac, I had a Double Quarter Pounder With Cheese and then 10 chicken nuggets. It reminds me of when I was a kid and I had large fry with Oreo McFlurry and a bottled water. And I had no problem cleaning all of it up.

Q. Could you give a few more details how many people did reach out to you? Who were some of the most important ones that you got?



TONY FINAU: Yeah, well, right out of the gate one of the first messages once I got down to reading all the messages, one of the very first was from Tiger, and that was a very special one. He was just explaining to me that he was proud of me and the fight and grit that I had. That was obviously a very, very special one for me to see.

Again, he was one of the first, which means he was watching, which for me is very, very cool. I have to throw that out there as probably right at the top.

And then countless athletes. Donovan Mitchell is an amazing basketball player for the Utah Jazz. Being a Jazz fan, that was a cool one for me. My buddy Mike Conley, who's a point guard for the Jazz.

But those are just a few of I feel like so many people. It's been really cool to see how many are following my career and are generally happy for this victory.

I've kind of starved I think a lot of my fans and supporters of a win for five years, so this one is special in that I've gained, I think, a lot of fans in these five years, and to be able to share this with so many people has been very, very special.

Q. Hundreds of messages? Thousands?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, in the thousands for sure, yeah. But yeah, it was in the thousands. Which again is just pretty amazing how many people were willing to reach out and just show their support and how happy they were for me.

Q. As far as the Utah element and the Salt Lake City ties that you have, you already mentioned Donovan and Mike Conley, even the governor tweeted something out about it, what kind of feedback have you gotten from your friends back here in Utah?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, well, I never shy away from being proud to be in Utah. I have so many supporters, so many friends and family all from Utah. Again, like I mentioned before, people that I really didn't know were following me, which is really cool.

I've had tremendous support from Utah from day one, and it was great to share this with all my fellow Utahans and just golf fans and sports fan and fans of mine. It's really special.

You've seen me play growing up in Utah and are one of those guys that have followed my career for a very long time. We all kind of share this together, and that's been extremely special for me to share it with all my Utahans

who have known me a lot longer than just on the PGA TOUR, have enjoyed this journey with me since I was a kid. Pretty special to celebrate it with all my fellow Utahans.

Q. You had to answer questions about winning for so long in a way that I think could have shattered somebody with less mental strength. I was curious, was that harder than you let on at the time? Now that you've won maybe you can say that. Just as a second thing, do you consider yourself a mentally strong person?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I consider myself a very mentally strong person and it ties in with your first question. I think it was a lot harder. A lot of those losses, you just have to take them on the chin.

I've always had an attitude of perseverance. I was somehow taught since I was a kid, and something that's very important to me is try and overcome the obstacles, try and learn from your mistakes and overcome. I will say it was extremely hard to do that. I have had a lot of disappointment and frustration from those losses, but I took it on the chin and I wanted to get better from it, what can I learn from it and how can I persevere through that.

You know, I didn't get discouraged. That was the biggest part was I used it as fuel to do better, to try and learn and not think about how impossible it is to have a feat such as winning a golf tournament and a big one. It was more of the attitude of, okay, not quite good enough yet, keep working. That's all it was. It was, all right, keep doing what you're doing, one foot in front of the other, and it's going to happen.

So I had to have that type of belief, but it was extremely hard to do that. But that's why, answering the second part of your question, I do feel like I'm a very mentally strong person, because we live in an era now where you guys are watching our every move, and I'm going to have critics, but that's how it is, and that's what I signed up for, and I know that.

I expect that, and now that I've kind of broken that barrier, at least I feel like I have, with this big second win, my goal moving forward is to continue with this momentum and make a run down at this FedExCup.

Q. Speaking of watching your every move, I've heard that you were at Whistling Straits recently. Is that true? When was the last time you were there?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I was just there a couple weeks ago, and it was just for a shoot I had for one of my sponsors,

which was Aon. I went out there for it at that point. It's not like I knew I was on the team or anything. I still don't know at this point if I'm on the team, but I have a great opportunity to make the team this week, and so there's a lot riding on last week, and just like this week, there's a lot riding on this week. But I was there for a sponsor obligation, not to like practice or anything.

Q. Did you get on the course at all or just the shoot?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, yeah, I was out on the golf course and we played. I spent time with a few different groups, so I got through about 15 holes there. I didn't play all of them, but I saw most of them. It was cool to see the infrastructure and everything. The golf course looks primed for the Ryder Cup.

Q. Is your beard fuller than we're used to seeing?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it's a lot fuller. It's grown in nicely. I've been growing this --

Q. It looks nice.

TONY FINAU: It is a lot fuller, but I actually told my wife before this playoff run, I said, I'm not shaving it until I know I've made the Ryder Cup team or I win. Those are the two goals going into these Playoffs, and I was able to knock that right off. Don't be surprised if you guys see me tomorrow and she's all gone.

Q. Why do you think people like you so much?

TONY FINAU: Man, I don't know how to --

Q. Brutal question, I know. I was asking Jon yesterday, and nobody likes not winning and he was just so happy for you. What is it about you do you think that people have warmed up to?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I don't know how to answer that. I just know that I try my best to treat people the way that I would like to be treated. I always try to do that in a respectful way, no matter how I feel about what's going on in my life.

I think I've been able to take the losses on the chin with class, and that's something that I was taught since I was a kid, no matter what, how things go, sportsmanship is very, very important.

I want to be a light for those around me for exactly that. You're going to have -- if you want to be good at anything, you're going to go through some really hard times. When you go through those, it's okay to be nice, it's okay to be

kind still. I never wanted to be one where golf was going to kill me. I've seen it happen to too many people where they let the game literally drive them crazy. I've never wanted that to be the case.

No matter what, the game has given me so much already to this point in my career. I have no animosity towards the game of golf and towards my life. I have an amazing life because of the game, and I try to portray that in who I am and how I am. I'm a very grateful person, and I try to portray that, and I think that has helped on my journey to just attract people that want to see me succeed.

Q. Was there ever a moment in terms of learning how to lose with class, was there ever a teaching moment as a kid?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, there was actually a really good one. I was playing a high school match my freshman year. I had on the very last hole, if I two-putted this hole I would have got into a playoff to win the individual medalist as a freshman, which was a big deal, playing against this senior in high school.

I lag it up there from about 40 feet, lag it up to about five feet. I go on to lip that one out and then I go to tap it in because I was really frustrated that I had now missed the playoff. I missed that out. I went to tap in -- so I ended up five-putting the last green and stomping my feet around the hole just like acting like a child.

My dad didn't say a word to me, and my dad was my teacher and my hero. But he didn't say a word to me when I left. I was grumpy, I got into the car, I was really, really upset. But just from that silence I understood what that meant to him, that that was not how he raised me. That's not what champions do. That's not how you act on a golf course. He actually didn't say anything to me, but I was so disappointed in myself that I knew -- I said, That's never going to happen again.

I didn't want my actions to portray me as a person that is a brat. I'm not that way. That's not who I am. So that was a teaching moment for me; I was not ever going to do that ever again. Not only was I mad about missing the short putt for potentially winning a tournament, but I'm going to deal with my losses, take it on the chin and deal with it with class.

That was a big -- again, I was a freshman in high school, so as you would expect, maybe that's I should have acted, but I felt like I was better than that, and my parents taught me better than that.

Q. I was just wondering if there was anything that you



specifically did to kind of filter out any of that doubt or negativity that came in from the outside or if that mental toughness means you can hear it and still deal with it?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I don't -- I think that's what it is, more of the second thing you said there. It's more about hearing it and just dealing with it. I wasn't really shielding it out, but I was very determined just throughout the year to just not only prove myself right in that I was learning and that I can win on a big stage but prove a lot of people wrong that I can win a big tournament; I can come down the stretch and make birdies when I need to and make big putts when I have to. I feel like I'm that type of player.

I have to keep believing, and last week was I think a big stepping-stone for me in accomplishing that maybe to silence some people, but more I know what type of player I can be and the potential I can have out here. I think that was cool to be able to just play really nicely on the back nine and get a W last week because of that.

Q. Is there anything that you would tell yourself maybe a couple years back, now with the hindsight knowing this big win was coming in the future?

TONY FINAU: It's taken me a lot to learn how to control my wedges. That was a huge part last week. The greens were so soft. I've really learned how to control my wedges and hit them with no spin. That's been a huge -- that was a huge part of winning last week. I was able to chip out on the sixth hole last week to 85 yards to a back pin where it would have been very easy to land a ball close to the hole and spin it to 30 feet.

I trusted what I was doing and I hit a knock-down 50-degree to a couple feet, saved par there. Hit it to a couple feet on 12 to another back pin. But little things like that added up throughout the week.

But learning how to hit that shot, if I would have done that sooner I think I would have won sooner, but that was part of my game that I knew I needed to get better at, and I have gotten a lot better at hitting knock-down shots and wedge shots with no spin. That was a huge part, and I just wish I would have learned how to do that a little earlier.

Q. You've been the inspiration for hundreds of junior golfers in Utah, especially in the Polynesian community and culture. I just wonder, do you feel the weight of that responsibility, and how important is it to help grow the diversity of golf, especially among our junior golfers in Utah?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, thanks. I wouldn't say there's a

weight that I feel. I think there's a responsibility that I have to just act according to what I believe and how I was raised. I think that's more than anything else. Polynesian culture is a very respectful culture, very loving culture. I try to portray that in who I am and what I do. Hopefully I'm looked up to in that type of regard. That is important to be a good person and things of that nature.

And then to know that doing something different is okay. Polynesians don't really play golf. Rugby is kind of more, I think, the avenue for Polynesians and football and things like that, but I think we're a very talented type of people, and hopefully I'm just a beacon of if you want to do something different, it's totally okay; you can succeed at anything.

Q. Your foundation now is a few years old and it's doing some great things. Are you happy with the way the Tony Finau Foundation has progressed in its movement?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I'm really excited about the foundation. I think it's grown a lot bigger than I would have expected. We're seven years now as a foundation. The amount of support has been overwhelming in Utah, and it's been really cool to get the support of the community back home. All my sponsors are on board, making big donations, and then for me it's the physical evidence of seeing the kids that -- the lives that we touch.

During the pandemic we provided over 50,000 meals in 2020 to families throughout the Salt Lake City Valley that were in need throughout that time.

I mean, to see the physical evidence of the families that we helped and going to these elementaries and having them say thank you for clothes and all these different things that -- the reason I have the foundation, that's what makes it worth it for me to continue to fight for those opportunities for the less privileged.

Q. Fergie mentioned earlier that Jon Rahm had nice things to say about you yesterday. He obviously congratulated you in person at a time that probably wasn't his favorite moment given how the tournament ended. I wonder what you've learned about him as a competitor over the years and maybe a little bit off the course, how that is different from what we see on it.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, Jon is a great individual. I got to know him really well over the pandemic. We had those 13 weeks off last year in 2020 on the PGA TOUR where we took time away from tournament golf, and we played quite a bit of golf together at Silverleaf throughout that time and really throughout that summer. We're both members at



Silverleaf in Scottsdale, Arizona, and I got to know him really well there. We played a lot of golf together, and what a great kid. That's what I thought to myself. I thought, I don't know if a lot of people see this side of Jon. They see that he's very fiery, he's very competitive, and they see that nature in him. He's such a kind human, and he's a very generous person, and I enjoy being around him.

I think he was very genuinely happy for me, which was so cool to see. Such a class act, and for him to stick around meant a lot for me and our relationship, and just it speaks volumes about who he is. He was willing to stick around and congratulate me, like you said.

He had a chance to win that. I felt like most of the day I was chasing him. He was the guy I was trying to beat, and I ended up doing that in the end, and he handled it with class, and he was very genuine about congratulating me.

Wonderful individual, amazing golfer, but if he keeps messing around and hanging around watching me winning golf tournaments and hanging around, he's messing around with being a better person than he is golfer.

Q. On his golf, what does impress you about a pretty complete game at this point?

TONY FINAU: Very complete game. He's one that doesn't have a weakness. He can hit the ball high, low, right to left, left to right. He can chip and putt. He has absolutely no weakness. He's been one heck of a sparring partner in practice. He's beaten me more times than I've beaten him in practice when we have our matches. It's been great for my game, and vice versa. I believe if you ask him, he'd say it's been good for his game, as well, for us to have these battles.

Amazing, amazing player and one of a very, very few select guys out here that don't have a weakness at all.

Q. We've had a superseason basically with six majors and starting the way we did. Has there been any challenges to that? What's that been like?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I mean, it's been a superseason, but you try and just take it one tournament at a time. I don't think there's really a lot I can -- as far as like feeling like it's been a longer season. It has definitely been -- the pandemic was definitely tough because we had to deal with having fans not there, getting tested.

I think all of that was a big part of it, was learning how to get used to the new normal of what it's like to be on TOUR not having our spouses out, then eventually having them out, all those -- learning about the new protocols I think did

make the season feel very long and all those things.

We seem to be getting back towards a little bit more what we were accustomed to before the pandemic. I don't know if we'll ever get fully there, but yeah, with that being said, it has been an extremely long season. We've got two more tournaments left, and to be No. 1 in the FedExCup is a huge deal, and hopefully we're having this conversation after the TOUR Championship. That would be really cool.

DOUG MILNE: Tony, we appreciate your time. Congratulations.

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