

BMW Championship

Tuesday, July 11, 2023

Olympia Fields, Illinois, USA

Olympia Fields Country Club

Nick Hardy

Stephen Cox

Press Conference



BMW
CHAMPIONSHIP

MODERATOR: Good morning, Nick. Good to see you.

NICK HARDY: Thanks for having me.

MODERATOR: Had a little audio issues here on our end.

NICK HARDY: Sorry about that. Can everybody hear me?

MODERATOR: Yeah, we're good.

Okay. Great seeing you. Congrats on a great finish last week at the John Deere. Nice performance on Sunday there. Congratulations. Keep climbing up the rankings.

You grew up here in Northbrook and we have seen an incredible amount of excitement from Chicago area golf fans over the BMW championship. We're making it back to Olympia Fields this year. What are you hearing from your friends and family back home?

NICK HARDY: Just excitement. It's great to get back to Chicago. I really believe -- (audio feedback).

MODERATOR: You've competed in several events here in Chicagoland. Obviously our championships the NV5 and you had quite a finish there. What's it like to play in your hometown? Is there something different about it?

NICK HARDY: Very much so. I think it's just so special having a bunch of friends and family around me. It's a super special feeling. I think just the excitement of getting to play at home this week at Olympia Fields in front of friends and family -- (audio feedback) -- not only just being there to play but to play well.

MODERATOR: So you've played the North Course at Olympia Fields, obviously, during your college career at Illinois with two top-5 finishes at the Fighting Illini Invitational held here. What's the required success for this golf course to be successful?

NICK HARDY: Yeah, as Coach always said about that golf course, you can't really fake it around there. You got to play really strong tee to green. I think it requires a great all around game. You can really set it up like a U.S. Open and if the weather allows it to and I think just all around -- (audio feedback).

MODERATOR: This is your second year playing the PGA TOUR full time. What has been your biggest adjustment to playing on TOUR?

NICK HARDY: The biggest adjustment, I would say, is just the week-to-week competitions. I mean, just adjusting to the Korn Ferry Tour, I think -- (audio feedback) -- the greens are a lot firmer, faster. It requires you -- there's no -- you can't have holes in your game, basically. Week to week, I can play more and more in terms of what I can do to -- (audio feedback).

MODERATOR: So obviously this has been a huge year for you with your victory at the Zurich Classic in April. What was that week like for you? Leading up, was there something different about it? And then as the week progressed, what was that like coming down the stretch on Sunday?

NICK HARDY: Super nerve wracking. I think the whole weekend I was really nervous. It like a team event. It's a lot different than something you normally do. So I didn't want to let down Davis as much as I wanted to play well and have a chance to win that week.

But Davis and I had a really good connection going on that week, a chemistry, a great attitude. I think -- (audio feedback) -- with our personalities and how we approached that week.

MODERATOR: After your win in Zurich, now that you have that first win under your belt, what has changed for you besides the money?

NICK HARDY: Honestly, not much has changed. I think -- (audio feedback) -- I got a trainer, I got -- just more things I'm doing to keep track of my body and make sure I'm healthy and ready for the long season and the long haul.

MODERATOR: Right now you are inside the top 50, which would qualify you to play in the BMW Championship, a



spot here. What would that mean to play in front of your hometown fans and how many tickets do you need?

NICK HARDY: (Laughing.) That's actually something I mentioned to my friends. I'm like, I'm sure I can tickets. But -- (audio feedback) -- getting the exemptions through the Korn Ferry Tour event -- (audio feedback) -- and all the Western amateurs. It's a great event.

Bottom line, I think just the excitement. I definitely will need a lot of tickets. But if I'm there, I've got some work to do, so I'm just focused on that. First and foremost is I got to finish strong. I got to play well in Memphis to get there.

MODERATOR: So take us inside the mind of a player right now who is kind of in your position. Whether they're 40th to 60th on the FedExCup points, what's the mindset with just a few weeks left? I know you played for the past three weeks in a row. Obviously played great at John Deere. What's the mindset going into the last couple weeks of the season?

NICK HARDY: Yeah, so it's a lot of golf. I made the tough decision to take the Scottish off. I wasn't qualified for The Open Championship, so I didn't think it was the best idea to go over there having played the previous week four weeks. So it would have been five in a row and a long flight and I decided to take a week off and rest. I'm planning on playing the Barracuda in Reno, and then I'll play the three -- (audio feedback.) I'm leaning towards taking Greensboro off to be fresh for that event. So it's all about making sure I'm fresh and I think that will give me the best chance to play in the BMW.

MODERATOR: With all the proceeds of this event benefiting the Evans Scholars Foundation, we're obviously all about caddies, how important is that caddie-player relationship to you and what's that dynamic with your caddie?

NICK HARDY: Extremely important. A caddie's job on TOUR is not easy. I think, first and foremost, the responsibility is there to make sure there's really good communication. Whenever communication gets lost in any relationship things go downhill. So I make sure that my caddie and I communicate in the best way as possible so there's no internal -- (audio feedback) -- that can go on out there. I think it's really important to make sure to know what we're doing.

MODERATOR: Obviously you mentioned the Evans Scholars Foundation, which is the beneficiary of this championship. How does it feel to be a part of a tournament -- week-in and week-out on TOUR proceeds benefit local charities. How does that make you feel

knowing that as a player you are contributing to that success of those local charities but ultimately here at the BMW Championship with the Evans Scholars Foundation?

NICK HARDY: Yeah, I think that's one thing that the PGA TOUR does really well, I think is just give back to local charities. There's a lot of small communities. Communities like last week at John Deere that are benefiting big-time by us being there, and just seeing young kids. They talk a lot of times -- (audio feedback). It's amazing once they get -- become an Evans Scholar, it just changes their life.

MODERATOR: All right. So a real hard-hitting question here. What's the most -- so the most important question we have for you today is: When you have all these friends calling you for tickets and they're coming to town, where are you going to tell them to eat in Chicago?

NICK HARDY: I'm a Lou Malnati's guy, personally. I love Carson's Ribs as well. I think those are the hotspots for my buddies.

MODERATOR: Well, we've got Aurelio's Pizza here on the South side, so we're going to serve some of that up in the championship this year. But we actually took a social media question from Juan from Munster, Indiana, and his question, again, really tough one, deep dish or Chicago style hot dog?

NICK HARDY: Deep dish.

MODERATOR: Deep dish all day for Nick Hardy.

Nick, thanks so much for joining us today. We appreciate everything you've done for the Western Golf Association and being with us here today and we look forward to seeing you in August at the BMW Championship. So thanks for being with us today.

NICK HARDY: I look forward to seeing you guys too. Thank you for having me.

MODERATOR: I would like to welcome our second special guest, Stephen Cox, who is one of the PGA TOUR officials who will be responsible for setting up that test for Nick and the other 49 players in August.

As a long-time rules official and senior tournament director for the PGA TOUR, Stephen plays a critical role in planning of many PGA TOUR championships, including the BMW Championship. I know the members are very interested in how this golf course will play. They saw it once in 2020. But Stephen is joining us from Scotland where he's preparing for the Scottish Open and at this point in time I

would like to welcome Stephen Cox.

STEPHEN COX: Thank you. It's great to be with you. Like you said, I'm in Scotland. Apologies, it's a little noisy here in the office. We've got a nice typical Scottish squall rolling through. But I'm very much looking forward to the championship and fast forward in the next couple weeks and I'll be back in the States getting things ready.

MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us. What are some of the characteristics that make a golf course a good site for an event like the BMW Championship, which is a premier championship on the PGA TOUR and a playoff event?

STEPHEN COX: Well, I think it's very much a partnership. We've got to be cognizant of what our host organizations' needs are. We got to be very cognizant of our title sponsorship and markets that's we're playing. Clearly, back in 2012 we were typically at Cog Hill and playing the same venue year after year.

Now we're back in -- from 2013, I think it was, we took it to moving it to different markets. And Chicago is the home base obviously of the BMW and we had to find the right venue and obviously once we tick the boxes from the host organizations at one point, tick the box from the sponsorship perspective, the next question we're obviously asking is does this satisfy things from a competitive standpoint.

There's no question that given the club's history of staging some of the biggest tournaments in the world it ticks all those boxes. So we were obviously delighted to see it come back onto the calendar.

Q. What specifically about the North Course that makes it such an ideal host? Are you in the media center? Is there beers flowing there, Stephen, is that what's going on?

STEPHEN COX: We're in an office. I apologize. I've got an awful lot of feedback from my side. Are you hearing me loud and clear?

MODERATOR: We're good to go.

STEPHEN COX: Okay. Very good. I'll have to suffer on my end.

MODERATOR: Tell us about the North Course. What make it such an ideal golf course for this championship specifically.

STEPHEN COX: Well, I like to look at three buckets (audio feedback) second is economic and thirdly is operationally it

has to be sound. The infrastructure we bring in and (audio feedback) forty plus thousand people, hospitality clients, etcetera. So the a footprint that needs to be pretty large. Fortunately, the facility offers, having staged big championships, proved that it can cater to all those different constituents. And again you do need a golf course which can stand up to the August heat. And as 2020 proved, you do need sound economics. We could not have achieved what we did in 2020 without having really good sound economics. And that's not just a case of flipping a switch. You need year-on-year input from a club. Getting through the pain barrier, unfortunately, to the detriment of the membership at times. But we really reaped the benefits of that. Because Mother Nature cooperated, we were allowed to push things and we got the golf course firm and fast and it presented with an awesome challenge and we were obviously granted one of the finest challenges that the game's ever seen.

MODERATOR: It was an incredible, I think the playoff was 4-under, with Jon Rahm obviously making that incredible 66-foot putt to win. But we only really received, got that moment because we played the golf course in its traditional routing. Normally, or prior to COVID, we probably would have flopped the nines because of maybe space constraints on the golf course. But what went into that decision to play the golf course as the members and all the media today will play?

STEPHEN COX: Typically one of the big challenges as you alluded to, because of the space (audio feedback) typical build out with hospitality. For example, when the U.S. Open was played there it made sense for them to do that. It's always a little uncomfortable, for example, in terms of -- not criticizing the USGA -- but they had a 36, 34 routing and two par-5s were on the front the way they routed the golf course. I was never really comfortable with that. I wanted to have a nice, easy balance with the yardage across the two nines. Have a nice 35, 35. But as you pointed out that's not what we originally agreed to. And obviously COVID hit and we had to pivot. And in conversations with the club (audio feedback) it was an opportunity for us to allow us to play the club and the tournament in its traditional club rounds, which was fairly consistent with the way other tournaments held by the WGA had historically done. We wanted to recognize that. We wanted to turn what was ultimately a negative into a positive. We also wanted to showcase some of the holes that were hidden away on the front. Wonderful golf holes like 13, 14 and 15. Typically they would have got lost on to the front nine. And because we didn't have any hospitality obligations it allowed us to pivot. And we were just graced with an incredible finish and obviously the decision was then, look, knowing (audio feedback) we were going to be returning in the future, thanks to the creativity of Patrick

and others on your team we made it work to remain consistent to the routing that we had in 2020.

MODERATOR: Our hope is we have a few more people out here than we did in 2020. So, should the top-50 players expect anything different, any big changes to the golf course from what they saw in 2020?

STEPHEN COX: We have actually done very little to the golf course, to be honest with you. I think, again, just a little interesting tidbit, what we know as the 7th hole in the club routing, which was going to be played as the 16th hole, we've actually got ideas to play the hole drivable on one or both of the last two days. We added in some bunkers to make the layup, should they not wish to take it on, to be a bit more challenging. And those have been removed back to the original architectural nature of that golf hole laid out by Willie Park. But outside of those changes what we've done is narrow the fairways. Because we were so delighted with the way the golf course played, we were really focused on how do we improve it from an operational standpoint and how can we continue to support Sam and his team from an agronomic standpoint, because I was satisfied, competitively, the golf course could stand up to it without doing anything.

MODERATOR: And the club has done an amazing job inside the ropes, but also outside, which will make for a great fan experience this year. So for those of us who are playing the golf course today, which holes do you expect to play a larger role in determining the BMW Championship winner?

STEPHEN COX: I would say that stretch through 13, 14 and 15 is going to be pretty pivotal. We may just ease the tee forward on the weekend to maybe allow you to get home on the par-5 15th. But, again, you got to golf your ball. If you're crooked off the tee it could be seriously punishing. But birdies can be made.

I think Jon Rahm was a good example of that. It was a significantly great test through two rounds. He was 6-over par through two rounds and not particularly happy with the way he was playing and he was not particularly happy with the way the golf course was set up, because it was very, very challenging. And then he shot 10-under for the last two rounds. And, again, that included a penalty stroke on the third round where he shot 66, minus 4, for picking his ball mark on the 5th green. So, yeah, he shot 5-under. And to think that he shot 10-under par for the last two rounds it was quite extraordinary, really. I think we had five players in 2020 under par.

MODERATOR: Yeah, we remember that, him picking up the coin. And I believe he got some luck on the 15th hole

too with the trees on the right.

I think many of us here today will probably get strokes on 14 and 18, so even bogey, net par is going to be a good score on those holes. But thanks for all you do for the Western Golf Association, Evans Scholars Foundation. I know it's going to be a great championship setup and appreciate your time today. So good luck in Scotland and appreciate everything.

STEPHEN COX: Thank you. Have a great day.

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