

TOUR Championship

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Webb Simpson

Press Conference

MICHAEL BALIKER: We'll get started with Webb Simpson. Welcome back to East Lake. Eighth time here at the TOUR Championship. How does it feel being back? Does this experience of being part of the top 30 ever get old for you?

WEBB SIMPSON: No, it never does. This is a goal every year. No matter how you play throughout the year or how you think you play, being here, you realize you've done some things correctly. I remember missing in 2015 and 2016 and really, really missing being here. I got back in 2017, and I remember walking from my car to the locker room and just kind of looking all around, taking it all in and realizing it's a gift to be here, so I'm super thankful every year now.

I don't want to take it for granted. Nothing is promised. I'm not promised to come back next year, so I'm going to soak it in and look forward to competing starting tomorrow.

MICHAEL BALIKER: What about East Lake makes this such a worthy venue for the season finale?

WEBB SIMPSON: Well, I love the golf course because I don't think it favors any type of player. You have to drive it well. The rough every year is up. The fairways aren't that tight, but if you do miss it, the rough is very penal. And there's no tricks. There's a little bit of water, but it's mainly right in front of you. Greens are always fast. They're always pure.

It's a great championship-style golf course that I think is perfect for our year-end race to the FedExCup. The best golfer is going to win here this week; whereas we play some courses where you can get away with a little more and maybe not the best golfer won that week.

But this week the best golfer will win, and you've got to play well every day to get the job done.

Q. I have a question about the closing hole. From tee to green what makes the 18th here at East Lake a great closing hole?



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WEBB SIMPSON: It's a great closing hole because guys can make eagle, and I love -- typically on the last day they put the pin front left, which is kind of the most accessible pin. A guy could be two back going into the last hole and still have a good chance and make an eagle. It's not a very difficult driving hole. The bombers can kind of even hit it down that little hill and have as little as 5-iron in.

I'm usually back on the downslope with a 3-wood in, but it's a great finishing hole. I think there's definitely more excitement than there used to be than when the par-3 was the 18th hole. I think that was a little bit less dramatic. I love that they switched the nines.

15 now, tough par-3, and then 16 and 17 are birdie opportunities, and then obviously 18 you've got a chance to make eagle, and I think it's better all around.

Q. Not so much about this year, but going forward, can you ever see any issues with the rotation when you get to certain courses that are basically set up for bombers, when we're at Boston, when we're at Crooked Stick, when they have moments like that where it might not identify all aspects of the game?

WEBB SIMPSON: Yeah, I definitely think that that should go into the consideration of where we're going to be playing, and even if we are playing at a golf course that really favors one type of player, I think there's small inexpensive things that these clubs can do.

I've mentioned this before, but the 10th hole at Quail Hollow, my home club, that bunker was 305 to carry, and so a lot of guys can carry that and their fairway is twice as wide.

Well all Johnny Harris did was they flipped the bunker, so now it's 330 to carry. Nobody is really going to carry that, and the hole actually looks the same. If you're on the tee box you can't really tell that it's different.

So I do think, to your point, courses can tweak things here and there inexpensively to really cater towards the whole field instead of just the bombers.

But I think being on a rotation is really fun for us. Certain guys might like TPC Boston more than Liberty National or

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whatever it might be. But it's good, I think, for us to kind of see a fresh rotation every year, too.

Q. What about being at East Lake? That's the one time you're getting the same course every year. Does it become a destination just because when you talk about FedExCup you talk about East Lake, or would it be nice to see that move?

WEBB SIMPSON: No, I think so. I think with the history here, I think as a whole, all 30 guys would probably say they really enjoy this golf course, and I do think there's no advantage. You look at the winners here, Jim Furyk, Bill Haas, Brandt Snedeker who don't hit it that far. Then you've got bombers like Rory McIlroy, Tiger Woods, Henrik Stenson. You have winners, all types of drivers of the golf ball, which I think shows that it's a really good golf course and a test because you have all these different types of winners.

So I do think East Lake should stay the destination for the TOUR Championship. I think it's hard enough. I think it's fair enough. Like I said, the best player is going to win.

Q. Do you have a membership here yet?

WEBB SIMPSON: No, I don't (laughing). Maybe they'll give me one.

Q. What does it say about the PGA TOUR that you guys return after 13 weeks, and from Colonial to here you got here, while other leagues have struggled? What does it say about the PGA TOUR being able to come back as successfully as it has?

WEBB SIMPSON: I think it's a huge deal that honestly hasn't been made a big enough deal. I think you see the other leagues, and they're having all sorts of issues with the coronavirus. It seems like so many decisions have been in limbo, the fans not knowing what to expect, which teams are sitting out.

Now, I know things are different with us, less players than typical other leagues might have, but they've done a phenomenal job. Our numbers are so shockingly low compared to other organizations or groups of people, and I never thought that we'd have this smooth of a process.

Now, it probably hasn't been smooth behind the scenes, but I feel like Jay Monahan, the board, the PAC, all the PGA TOUR staff, whoever has been responsible for keeping us going, has been huge.

I think when he flew up to Travelers, when Jay flew up, I thought that was a really big deal, because a few positives

this week. I think players were scared that he was flying up to shut it down, but he went the opposite way. He said, Listen, this is here to stay. We're going to have to deal with it. As long as we're being smart, we're going to keep going.

And I'm so glad he did that, because we've had less positives since. But we're here in Atlanta. Guys are so happy to be playing and have a job and competing that yeah, I think it's a great example to the other leagues of what he's done and what the PGA TOUR has done as a whole.

Q. You had to deal with it yourself personally with your daughter. When that happened, did you think we would get here?

WEBB SIMPSON: I didn't, and I didn't know what my future held. I was negative that week and I talked to the TOUR doctor and my management team, and I didn't know, does that mean I'm sitting at home for three weeks or a month? What does that look like?

Having her retested again and she was negative that time and she didn't really have any symptoms, so we felt good about it. But I'm nervous every week taking that test because I know what it means if I'm positive. I think I was most nervous this week because this is the week you want to play the most.

I think after this week we can exhale a little bit, even though we do have two majors coming up.

Really for me personally and I think the other golfers, my house has been shut down for months. We don't allow many people to come in just because we're trying to be careful and protect not only us being able to play but everybody else out here.

Q. I just want to talk about your off week last week. I just was wondering what went into that decision and how did you spend that time?

WEBB SIMPSON: Yeah, so I mean, it's a hard decision -- last week Monday and Tuesday was very difficult for me because I was very tired. I played four in a row, knowing I'm coming to East Lake, knowing that the U.S. Open is coming up. So we're kind of dealing with that as players all year of when to rest, when to play.

Even though we're playing well we might need a rest, or you're playing well you want to keep going. So we're always dealing with those questions. In that moment of WD'ing I was extremely tired. I had been in contention in Greensboro, major championship on the West Coast,

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WGC in Memphis, and a good long week in Boston.

My daughter did have her tonsils removed the week prior. I wanted to be home for her, but I felt like within my right of playing or not playing, I wanted to be most ready for this week.

I hated taking it off. BMW is an awesome sponsor. I wanted to play in a tournament with only 70 guys and no cut, but I felt like it was best for me to stay home and get ready for this week.

Q. You're very strategic with your schedule, so you're coming off off weeks a lot and play well right off of an off week. What's the biggest benefit when you do take a week off and what do you think allows you to play well after an off week versus guys who do better when they're on a roll, if that makes sense?

WEBB SIMPSON: Yeah, that's a great question. I think I'm putting in a lot more kind of mental energy into each tournament week now than I used to, and so I'm coming off of playing a little more tired mentally than I used to. I'm working out. I'm in a better physical shape than I have been. But like I said, with that extra mental work each day I see the value of rest. My sports psychologist has really tried to get me to take more time off when I'm home. So maybe I used to take two days off on an off week from golf; now I'm taking four or five.

So I'm coming off of an off week fresh and more rested. I'm actually more excited to be here than I used to be because it used to feel more like work. Now it feels like, man, I get to go play in a golf tournament. So that kind of subtle shift for me has really helped. When I show up at a tournament I'm all there mentally, physically. I feel fresh, ready to go.

And even in a long stretch, three, four in a row, I'm trying to take those Monday and Tuesdays off. Greensboro I didn't show up until Wednesday; Boston I flew in Wednesday. So there's things I'm doing even on tournament weeks to feel like I'm fresh and rested.

You know, I looked at the top 10 in the world a few years ago and realized, these guys aren't playing as much as other people. Their two-year divisor is 40 to 46 for most of them. There must be something to playing less, and it's really benefitted me.

Q. How do you feel like East Lake suits your game, especially being an old-school Donald Ross?

WEBB SIMPSON: I think it suits me well because there's such a premium on hitting fairways. There's not really any

forced carries out here where if where you can carry it 320 you'd have an advantage. The guy who hits it straightest has the biggest advantage. That's what I'm focusing on this week is hitting fairways.

You know, iron shots, yes, they're important, but the green surfaces are big enough to where you don't have to be as accurate as, say, Hilton Head coming into the greens.

Yeah, the guy who hits the most fairways I think is going to be the guy who has the best chance to win Monday.

Q. No real surprises, you kind of touched on this in terms of scheduling and playing, but they just released a schedule yesterday that's got six majors and 50 events. Can you get your hands around what this next season is going to look like? And secondly, I don't think off the top of my head you've been one who's gone over to Korea or Shanghai or things like that; can you see yourself going to Vegas and Sherwood for these events?

WEBB SIMPSON: Yeah, I'm going to go to ZOZO. I don't think I'll go to CJ Cup. I've actually never played in those, in Asia. But I love Sherwood. I played in Tiger's event there a few years. I'm going to go there and I'm going to play Shriners, but not CJ Cup.

Yeah, and then next year I did look at the schedule. The Florida Swing is very different. We've got Bay Hill before THE PLAYERS, THE PLAYERS is a little earlier, and then we don't have Valspar until late April. That's a good change for Valspar. I think it'll give the golf course a little more time to grow up.

But I haven't really looked for me personally at exactly what I'm going to play in, but I think it's exciting given that we have all these majors back-to-back. Two Masters within six months is awesome. I think first-timers at Augusta in November, they're going to be that much hungrier to make it in April because they're going to, I think, want to experience it as a normal Masters with fans, a par-3 tournament and all that.

I think fans are hungry to see golf. We're hungry to play. I got excited at least getting the email yesterday with the schedule being released, seeing, okay, how am I going to map out this year, because guys will look at it differently. Guys might plan around the majors. Guys might plan around their favorite events.

For me, I look at it as where am I going to have my best chance of winning golf tournaments, and that's why I'm going to Shriners instead of CJ Cup, just because I feel like I love that event. I love the golf course. I've got a better

chance of winning there than I do Shadow Creek, so that's why I'm skipping that one.

Q. Have you won Shriners?

WEBB SIMPSON: I did in 2013.

Q. Have you played Shadow Creek?

WEBB SIMPSON: I haven't played it. Talked to a bunch of guys who have played it and said it's great, but what I've heard and been described to about it is that it's not as good of a golf course for me as TPC Vegas -- whatever it is, TPC Summerlin.

Q. Did you not watch the Tiger-Phil match?

WEBB SIMPSON: I didn't watch it. I didn't watch it. Yeah, I don't know what I was doing. I was probably changing a diaper.

MICHAEL BALIKER: With that, thanks for your time, and best of luck this week at East Lake.

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