

TOUR Championship

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Stewart Cink

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Stewart Cink to the virtual media center here at the TOUR Championship. Final event of the FedExCup playoffs. Stewart, thanks for joining us and making some time this morning. This is a wet, ugly day outside, so I'm sure you're happy to be inside. You arrived here at number 23 in the FedExCup after a great season, winning twice, the Fortinet Championship, the first one of the season and then this year the RBC Heritage. I think that's your first multiple-win season since 2004 and it's actually your first trip back here to East Lake since 2009. How does that feel for you to be back here?

STEWART CINK: It's incredibly satisfying to be back here. It just feels so good to be included in this field and to know that you've done what it took to qualify. It's not easy. The players are just amazingly talented and skilled out there, and so to be in this field itself is a real accomplishment and I recognize that, especially at my age and it's been awhile since I was here. So it's a really exciting time for our family, for me, and I can't wait to compete out here this year.

THE MODERATOR: When you won the RBC in 2004 you were nine shots back going into the final round. That's got to be some sort of record to come back from that amount of shots. But you're nine shots back today starting the round here. What does that feel like? How can you adjust to that situation?

STEWART CINK: Well, I made up nine shots in one round in 2004. I don't see why I can't do it in four rounds. It seems real easy, doesn't it? (Laughing). It's a little daunting to know that you're playing against the best players of the year and you have a nine-shot deficit before you even tee the ball up. But to be honest I think if I was a thousand over I would still be happy to play here. It's a great challenge. Really, I mean, for me and the guys in the 20s here, maybe in the 15 to 30 range, we don't really have anywhere to go but up, so why not just go out there and give it everything and see how well we can focus and battle this golf course for four days and give it all and then we can rest after this.



TOUR CHAMPIONSHIP

But it's a really cool format to be a part of and there's not going to be too many people in the end that get to say, I played at the TOUR Championship in this format. So it's really going to be a fun experience and I'm interested to see how I respond to it without really any formal scores on the scorecard, on the scoreboard, necessarily. It's not like you're trying to shoot 64 every day. You just are really just trying to gain ground on the leaders.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. I think you and Sergio might be the only ones who were playing on TOUR in the pre-FedExCup era who are here now. So curious, from your vantage point, how has the FedExCup evolved or changed as far as where it ranks in the priority level of players? It's obviously not a major, but where does it fall as far as how high is it on your guys' list?

STEWART CINK: First of all, I think we all have to recognize that the FedExCup's not trying to be a major. We're just, the idea, and I was actually on the policy board when the FedExCup was coming about. I was part of the original points structure, which I will claim very little responsibility for since it's been overhauled about four times since then. But it's not trying to be a major. It's doing exactly what it was intended to do and that is, look at these fields? I mean, look at Northern Trust and BMW and now TOUR Championship presented by Coca Cola. Players are here and playing and if you look back to the pre-FedExCup days, the players that were ranked in the top really weren't playing very much once we got past the PGA and then the TOUR Championship was almost like an afterthought in November.

So it's doing exactly what it's supposed to do. Players are arranging their schedules around being ready to go for these playoff events. It's hot. They're compact and you physically have to be ready to go to be competitive. So no, not a major, but that's never been the intention of the FedExCup and it's really fun to be a part of it and I think the fans are enjoying it and it's a good product on television. Players are playing.

Q. I wasn't trying to suggest that it was trying to be a major, but what I was trying to get at was, beyond just the money, which is obviously a huge draw. We're all

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human beings and \$15,000,000 is \$15,000,000. Is this something that you feel like the great players are now saying, Okay, I want to win the majors. THE PLAYERS and the FedExCup is something that I want in my resume when I hang it up?

STEWART CINK: Absolutely. Whether it's the FedExCup, whether being a winner and having the trophy and the 15 million is, I mean, that debatably is very, very important. Whether it's that or whether it's knowing you did what it takes to outlast everybody and eventually be the winner in this format, I think that's the most satisfying part of it to me is if I were to be able to win this, to know that I outlasted everybody and I was the last guy standing. That to me would mean the most.

\$15,000,000, don't get me wrong, is just an unbelievable sum for playing golf, but I think, to me, though it would mean even more knowing that I went down that gauntlet and I stuck to my guns and I did what it took and I stared down everybody -- I mean, this is, this field is just superb. So to me that's what would mean the most.

Q. This is kind of in reaction to what Bryson seems to have been going through the last couple of weeks with fans. What's the worst thing you've heard directed at you from a fan while you've been playing and at what point do they step over the line in your opinion?

STEWART CINK: Well, I don't really hear a whole lot of bad stuff necessarily, not personally at me. I hear plenty of bad stuff that fans just like to yell at golfers or any athletes in other sports too. But mostly I just kind of shed that off and it's kind of fun to hear that. I mean, if we're expecting to be one of the major sports and play for the kind of money that we're playing for and have the sponsors and attract the fans, then you got to kind of be ready to perform in front of big league-type fans. That's kind of what we're seeing.

Now, this year I did play a lot of golf with Patrick Reed and I played quite a few rounds with Bryson, and so it's a little different hearing the two personalities of the fan group with those two guys, but I did hear some pretty astonishing things when I played with Patrick, and I love playing with Patrick Reed. He and I just laugh about it when we hear it and I can't believe that there hasn't been a murder yet in the crowd.

But it's pretty intense. I think in the end the fans sometimes just like to hear themselves and they like to be able to yell out something and then poke their buddy and say, Did you hear me? I said something like that, you know? And, you know, it's maybe a little childish, but I think the players out here don't get too wrinkled by it

necessarily because it's not really a personal thing. I think in a one-on-one situation those fans that yell probably wouldn't be quick to say those same things in a one-on-one situation.

So it's more about just getting the laugh out of your buddies and it comes at the expense, to a certain extent, of the player that it's directed to. But big boys out here. We got to be big boys if you want to play in this game and that's just the way it is.

Q. I wanted to go back to the format for a second, having, last time you played, obviously there was two trophies at stake. Now there's only one. What's your thoughts on if you shoot the lowest 72-hole score this week and you might not come away with any trophy?

STEWART CINK: Well, I think the format is known by all players in the field before you start and that's kind of the way it is. We could argue that, it's just like would I skip the match play next year because I might shoot a lower score than my opponent and not win? I don't think I would be skipping that tournament for that reason.

So same thing here. Like, I just don't think that is really a big factor. You know where you start. I'm minus 1. There's a guy minus 10. I got ground to catch up if I want to win this thing and it's a lot of ground. And if I don't, if I fall short, if I finish last, whatever, it doesn't matter what the score card says, it's the format that we're playing under.

Q. A question about the guy everybody's chasing today. Patrick. Do you see him as in any way kind of underrated by the general golf public and what in his game is going to make him tough to catch this week?

STEWART CINK: I wouldn't necessarily call him underrated, but I might call him under-appreciated. The reason is because he's, he doesn't have any one particular thing that just makes him like you want it drool over that, like Rory's got the driving, Dustin Johnson, they have the driving. And I love watching those guys hit it too.

Patrick just doesn't have any one thing that stands out, but that's what makes him such a great player is that he doesn't have anything that is a weakness either. He's plenty long. He hits plenty of fairways. He's got a massive short game. He's tough under the gun, and he's a great putter. I mean, I know golf pretty well. You know it pretty well. You tell me if I'm missing anything here. He's just the whole package. He doesn't get super excited out there. So I think a lot of fans want that explosion of emotion and Patrick doesn't give it to them, so they might pass over him in favor of another player, but that's why I would call him maybe under-appreciated by the fans.

Certainly in the locker room in here you're not going to find one player that under-appreciates him because his record stands alone and we all played golf with him and have seen how he plays and goes about his business. So under-appreciated, not underrated.

Q. In this super season nobody's really separated themselves as the player of the year, in my opinion anyway. I'm wondering who at this point do you think you're going to vote for, what is your criteria for that, and how much does this week impact who you will vote for?

STEWART CINK: Oh, boy, well, if I was voting for that, I would probably -- and, first of all, do we vote for that? I forget. I think we vote for that. I think I would count the FedExCup up there with the majors as far as Player of the Year voting because I know what it takes to survive all this and to be the eventual No. 1.

This year we have six majors, I think, on the calendar, so there's a lot to consider. There's a lot of players who have played great and also not great at times, and so that's interesting. It's going to be a really tough choice for Player of the Year. And you're right, no one has really just like established themselves as the clear cut guy.

So I don't know. But I mean the answer to the one part of your question would be that I will count the FedExCup as, alongside the majors as far as Player of the Year consideration.

Q. You don't have a name? You don't no who --

STEWART CINK: Oh, I guess when I think of this year, I just think it's kind of been defined by Bryson, just because I mean, he's played awesome at times. He's been like a magnet for the world of golf to come and watch. And the feud, make that whatever you want out of that, but it's just, he's fun to watch. He's revolutionized the game. He's just had some incredible wins and losses, and so I would probably choose Bryson right now if I had to pick.

Now I haven't considered everybody and I may be way off in forgetting somebody, but I just think Bryson has been the guy that would be probably the, he would be carrying the torch for me right now.

Q. In most other or maybe all other American sports there's an acceptance of the fact that you have to win the big game at the end, the Super Bowl, the World Series, whatever it may be. For example, in football, if you went 17-0 like the Patriots did but lost the Super Bowl nobody would really say that was unfair. It feels

like in golf there's a lot of resistance traditionally to the idea of the person winning the championship event is the champion regardless of whether through the rest of the year they were the 15th best player or whatever. Why do you think that's different in golf than everything else we watch here in America?

STEWART CINK: I don't really know, to be honest. I mean, to be the No. 1, to be No. 1 in other sports, you do have to finish with a win at some point. World Series, Stanley Cup, Super Bowl. The list goes on. Yeah, agreed.

But golf is just a little bit different animal from those other sports and it would be different if we didn't have majors. We do have majors. It's hard to say. It's hard to say because I don't think there's anything that's invalid about the FedExCup claiming the top player for the season. We're talking about the top player on the PGA TOUR for the season. It doesn't mean you didn't win the Masters or you didn't win the U.S. Open. It just means you're the top player in the FedExCup.

The FedExCup is its own thing and it is a little confusing. But, I mean, let's take hockey. Sometimes, I know hockey a little bit, but I believe every other year there's a World Championships and some of the NHL players go and play in that, and if they win that, but their team doesn't qualify for the Stanley Cup, does that mean that that player didn't win the World Championships on their team? It doesn't.

So it's like a season within a season. All the majors are almost like their own season. That, yeah, they could count towards the FedExCup. But it's, golf is just a little bit different and I think that if people are arguing that the only way you should be the winner of the year is to win the last tournament, then I just don't think that really holds much water when golf is such a long calendar season, there's so many shots, and there's so many players. It's not like, if it was a match play thing every week and you just came down to the final two and the winner was the winner then great. But we whittle it down pretty far to get to 30 when there's usually 156 each week.

Q. Jon Rahm's next in that hot seat you're at right now. What have you noticed in his maturity as he's climbed to world No. 1 in the past few years?

STEWART CINK: I think that we don't see the complaining anymore on the golf course. Maybe it's because we don't see much to complain about on the golf course either. But we don't see Jon emotionally giving away energy by complaining about a result, a lipout, a bad bounce, or something like that, and I think that's a huge sign of maturity. I don't know if somebody got ahold of him or he just understood himself, but he just is on full go. I mean,

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he's just, he's rocketed, his potential was always there and he really never had a rough patch, but, man, he's just all systems go at the moment.

Probably to me my favorite story this year from the world of golf was him winning the U.S. Open after what happened at Muirfield, and so, I think a lot of people would agree with that. It was good to see Jon Rahm get that win after that tragic moment and in Ohio. So, but, yeah, he's definitely lost that little bit of complaint. He seems like now that when something bad happens he doesn't like he might grumble about it for two or three seconds but then he goes on and he gets over it quickly and he's back in. So he would probably admit too that maybe hurt him at the very beginning of his career, but it didn't take long to recognize it. The guy doesn't have very many weaknesses, so when you do have something that can be improved it's easy to identify and he's done a good job of it.

Q. Do you feel like a big week this week could help you for the Ryder Cup? Do you still have aspirations for that?

STEWART CINK: Of course I have aspirations for it. I think I probably need to, whatever you call winning this tournament. I need to play really great. And I don't know, I mean, I still, I probably have -- I think winning two times, yes, I've done enough to be in consideration, but I don't think I've been quite consistent enough to really be one of those like last remaining few guys that they're considering for a pick. I would love to be a part of the Ryder Cup again. It just means so much to me and it's so fun, but I would probably need to make an enormous splash here this week to be one of the guys on that little final list.

Q. We saw a couple guys go 27-under last week. What are the defenses this place has in place and how will it defend itself against that kind of onslaught?

STEWART CINK: These are two very different kind of golf courses. Between Caves Valley and East Lake. The one similarity they have is that neither of them are very punishing off the tee from a penalty stroke perspective. Like you're not, you have the 8th hole here which a dangerous drive and you got water up the left side, but other than that you just got rough and trees. And Caves Valley was a lot like that where you could kind of hit the ball over the place and there wasn't a huge penalty. The rough wasn't that bad, the bunkers were very forgiving. At East Lake the rough on the other hand is very bad and it's a major penalty for not hitting the fairway. So driving is much more of a premium here just because of the rough. You're not going to lose a lot of golf balls here, you're not going to hit balls OB or in water that often here, but you will lose strokes by hitting a ball in the rough because you just

simply can't reach the green very often. So that's the main difference between here and Caves Valley. Caves Valley you could hit it kind of all over the place, the greens were very receptive, they were very large, so I would think that statistically it was probably one of the highest greens in regulation averages for any tournament in history on the PGA TOUR. That would be a stat you would have to go and dig for, but it was relatively easy to hit your ball on the green and the greens were just immaculate. So you saw low scoring. Here at East Lake the greens are challenging, they're slopey, they're going to be quick and the rough is severe. So this course has much more of a resistance to scoring, you're not going to see a lot of triples and quads at East Lake, but you just don't see that many birdies either. It's a tough course to really shoot low on and I think that's why the players love it. It's straightforward, it just asks you to be very, very precise with your tee balls and it's got everything really you could ask for in a golf course.

THE MODERATOR: We appreciate your time, have great week this week at the TOUR Championship and enjoy it once this rain goes away.

STEWART CINK: All right. You got it. Thanks, everybody.

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