

Sony Open in Hawaii

Tuesday, January 12, 2021

Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

Waialae Country Club

III Charles Howell

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome Charles Howell to the 2021 Sony Open in Hawaii.

Charles, this is your 20th consecutive start here at the Sony Open. What is it about this tournament that you've enjoyed the most over these last two decades?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, enjoy Hawai'i, No. 1. You know, this is a tournament that we all enjoy coming back to. Family loves it here. The kids get to see a lot of their friends of the other players, and so I mean, it's a great place to even come to this time of year.

And you know, Waialae is a golf course I enjoy playing. We don't play a lot of old-style golf courses quite like this one. So it is nice to play this style of golf with some wind and right on the ocean, and I don't see anything bad with it.

THE MODERATOR: Over the years, what have you learned about this course? Is it a course that you feel like more reps, more rounds, benefits a player?

CHARLES HOWELL III: It's a golf course where it's really hard to keep the ball in the fairway. So it's a golf course where you always have to play your angles, your misses, etc., where you'll see a lot of balls, especially if the wind stays up this week, you'll see a lot of balls land in the fairway and bounce out into the rough. It's important to know what sides of the fairway that you can miss and play from. You know, that, and the greens don't have a ton of slope in them.

So if you do get the putter going, guys can make a lot of putts, which last couple years has not been very strong winds and guys have shot some low scores because of it.

Q. I realize that you hate talking about Hawai'i, so let's shift gears. Do you mind?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Sure.

Q. Just given your history, I thought you would be worth asking what you thought about Augusta in April

with limited attendance, how much of a difference that would make and whether you see that as a -- I hate to say a positive or a negative, but were you hoping for more, I guess?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, first off, from playing it in November with no fans, not that I didn't know this, but I didn't give enough credit to how much the fans and the whole atmosphere builds and makes the Masters, so --

Q. You don't know what you were missing until you missed it?

CHARLES HOWELL III: That is correct. I didn't give enough appreciation to the importance of the fans, the everything.

So I think with that said, No. 1, any fans we get brings us closer back to the Masters. And so I was really excited to hear that.

Now, I need to play my way in it, which obviously is always a goal, not just for me but for everybody. It's a step in the right direction and I do think it is a positive. And if the Masters feels like they can host fans, and host them safely, then they clearly think that we're making progress on this. Because knowing them and knowing the committee members, which I do, they are always going to err on the side of caution and they are always going to make the right decision to do the right thing.

So if they feel like we can host some amount of fans safely, I think it's wonderful.

Q. Good luck in the Sony Open this week.

CHARLES HOWELL III: Thank you.

Q. One more Masters question. How is your preparation any different, if at all, with two Masters so close together, five months apart?

CHARLES HOWELL III: So the preparation for November was quite different simply because the grasses were different, not all the overseed had come in, and so you're



chipping actually from some bermuda and you get the grain, etc., etc.

So the November one was quite challenging. I think going back to April, you'll see guys maybe get back in the routine of flying up there a week or two early and playing a couple days, kind of back into the quote, normal Masters time, if you will.

I don't think it will break many players' hearts if it stays in April because so many guys are used to the April Masters. They are used to the overseed being in, the green speed being a certain way, etc., where the November one was quite a bit more different and challenging to prepare for.

Q. And then just an actual Sony Open question, to bring it back to that, your record here speaks for itself but I'm curious how you view it having not won but having had so many Top 10s, Top 5s, and so forth, and if there is ever moments of frustration or felt like ones you should have won, or how you view it, I guess.

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, this tournament has obviously been really good to me. It's an event that Lord willing, I'll never miss, as long as I can play, and so it's -- for sure. There's been a couple that I've kind of messed up there at the end or could have played a bit better to maybe have won, but it's been such a great event to me.

Q. What's an example of one that got away from you?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well there, was a couple back there. But you know, honestly, I think looking back on it, though, I'm more impressed that I've had as many Top-10 finishes as I've had here, you know, simply because it is the first event back, if you will, after a break, and you don't always know how your game is.

I'm kind of a little bit more surprised about that. I do love the golf course, though, because I feel like it's different some so many other places we play. So many golf courses we play now are huge ballparks and it's just bash driver everywhere, and where here, I feel like every hole you kind of have to think and know your angles.

When the wind blows, the wind obviously is the defense of the golf course, but it makes it really hard to hit the ball in the fairway here. So you're bouncing it more. You're playing more on the ground here.

I just think it's quite so much different than what we're normally used to and playing.

Q. You've lived through this 20-odd years ago. I'd be curious your thoughts or advice if you had any for the

number of great college players who are coming out and doing the exemptions, etc., trying to get a card. When you do it, at what -- how much do you owe the tournaments that gave you a spot, and if you've come out and succeeded quickly, like, say, a Matt Wolff or something like that or a Spieth or what-have-you, how do you balance between trying to set a proper schedule and feeling like you owe some of those sponsors who looked after you when you needed their help?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, I remember back in 2000 when I first started, I remember handwriting letters to tournament directors and to sponsors, and I always felt it was important to come back to thank them in a way or to make them aware that it meant something to me; that I appreciated them taking a chance to let me in the golf tournament, but then that it meant something; I would come back.

A lot of the young guys now, for whatever reason, they are ready to win sooner. They are ready to win faster. You know, whatever that is, so it is -- it's really tough for them to balance the schedule. Because as soon as you win, you're in everything. And I understand it.

Looking back, I would encourage them to play a lot of golf, being young, because you don't have the obligation of a family. You don't have kids. You don't have a school schedule that you're dealing with. You're not booking a father/daughter dance and a this and a that. So while you're young, my advice is play a lot. It's what you do.

We are so fortunate to play the game of golf. The places we go; the way they take care of us; the purses we play for; that my advice to these young studs, because they are, they are awesome, is to go play a lot. Enjoy every minute of it.

Q. Was there ever a time where you felt like you needed to go back somewhere and you simply couldn't, there was too many things on your schedule, as a younger guy?

CHARLES HOWELL III: No. But see the schedule, as you know, was different back 2000, 2001, than it is now.

So no, it was always easy for me to go back to those events, except for Kingsmill at Michelob where I won there and the tournament went away. So maybe --

Q. Maybe that's why it went away.

CHARLES HOWELL III: I'm quite aware of that, yes (laughing).

Q. Wonder what your first professional event that you played in was, and what you remember about that versus playing as a professional for the first time. In other words, where I'm going with this, is it possible for an amateur to ever actually win out here? Hasn't been done in a long time?

CHARLES HOWELL III: So my first PGA TOUR event ever was the Buick Classic in Callaway Gardens, Georgia and I was 15. So they gave me a sponsor invite to play. I was paired with Hugh Royer and John Elliot, the first two days. They were great to me. Clearly I had no chance of winning. I didn't make the cut; close, but the experience was incredible. It really got my attention to the PGA TOUR thing, how great these players are, the difficulty of the golf course setup, etc.

Now, the fast forward my first event as a pro was the Greater Hartford Open, obviously up in Connecticut, and that was in June of 2000. And you know, that gap of being able to play in a PGA TOUR event as an amateur to when I actually played, those are a lot of golf growing years, if you will. I was much more prepared to do it then at age 15.

But just the experience. I mean, any time -- now, to answer your other question, an amateur, yes, older than me at 15, yes, absolutely can win a golf tournament. Because we see it so many times, in a field of 144 players, everybody has a chance to win a golf tournament. I would for sure say an amateur could win a golf tournament. No question.

Q. You think it's easier now or harder now, than, say, 20 years ago?

CHARLES HOWELL III: I would say -- well, you look at the level of these college players and let's just say for example, Matt Wolff or Viktor Hovland would have stayed amateur for a couple years and stayed in college, but played some PGA TOUR events, absolutely. So I'd say in that realm, that regard, it would be easier if they were to stay.

They tend to be turning pro a little bit earlier now. So that might throw the answer off a little bit. But if these guys, or a Collin Morikawa were to stay all four years but then sprinkle some PGA TOUR events in there, absolutely, they could win. So in that argument, I would say it's easier now than it would have been, let's say, X amount of years ago.

Q. The Callaway thing really got me to thinking, because I've seen so much, especially here at the Sony and a few others, when you get someone young, either four spots or whatever, they will get to the course at 7:00 and they won't leave till after dark because they

are trying to soak up every single second. Do you have any recollections of doing that? Of course you did that for your first five years as a pro, I realize. Do you remember what that week was like, in terms of not wanting to let it end, if you will?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Oh, absolutely. I remember getting out there at the crack of dawn on Monday and Tuesday to play practice rounds and whatever. But I remember after missing cut going out and watching on Saturday and Sunday.

So I didn't want the week to end. And furthermore, I wanted to watch and compare -- well, I drove it here, where did they drive it. You know, I hit it here, I did this; what are the guys winning doing.

So absolutely, yeah, I remember coming straight back out on the weekend and watching it with my parents and just seeing, okay, how big is the gap between where I'm at and where these guys are.

Q. How big was it?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Pretty big. It sent me right back to high school and college.

Q. Did anyone recognize you on the course?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Not that I remember. Not that I remember.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time and good luck this week.

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