

Sony Open in Hawaii

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Waialae Country Club

Gary Woodland

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, we'd like to welcome Gary Woodland. (Audio issue.) If we can get some thoughts about being back on Tour and just the process you've gone through to get here.

GARY WOODLAND: It's been a long process. One, maybe even a couple weeks ago I didn't know if this week was possible. It's been a journey for me, too, but this was a goal of mine from surgery to be back.

I had some people tell me this was a little optimistic to be here this week, but last week my family and I came over to Hawai'i early. We were on the Big Island staying with friends in Kona. Ramped up practice, ramped up the training and the body responded beautifully. Kept getting better and better.

Had a lot of phone conversations with Butch to make sure the game was in a good spot. Came here feeling pretty good about the game itself. See how my mental brain holds up for seven days of focus and stress.

I'm definitely excited to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Before questions, you're making, as I mentioned, your 9th start here, three top 10 finishes on a golf course you like. Talk about being back.

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, always a great place to start in Hawai'i. Golf course I think is a very good golf course. One, driving is a premium. Ball striking is a premium, which usually sets up pretty good for me.

I don't think it favors any type of player. You just got to play well, long, short. Really favors who is playing the best golf. I'm excited about that.

Q. Just start at the beginning. When did you find out that you had a situation that was going to require surgery?

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, started feeling some symptoms in April, couple weeks after Augusta.

Q. What were those symptoms?

GARY WOODLAND: I mean, there is a lot. The big one was I just wasn't feeling like myself. It was a lot of jolting, especially in the middle of the night. Shaking; hands were really trembling.

A lot of fear. That was the one that scared me the most, was I'm a very optimistic person, I believe good things will happen. I was very fear-driven every day, mostly around death.

As it got worse, loss of appetite, chills, no energy. It started getting pretty bad to where I was meeting -- I have a performance coach, I'm working with her. It started getting so bad I called my doctor who I've been with for 13 years and I was like, man, I need something to calm me down. Almost anxiety.

And he's like, G-Dub, I can't give you anything without an MRI. I'm shaking so bad. He wanted to rule out Parkinson's. I got an MRI that night and came back with a lesion. Looked like a tumor on my brain. Started going through more testing, more MRIs, and they got me to a specialist in Kansas City who explained everything to a T.

The jolting and everything I was experiencing at night was partial seizures. The lesion in my brain sat on the part of my brain that controls fear and anxiety. He's like, you're not going crazy. Everything you're experiencing is common and normal for where this thing is sitting in your brain.

Got me on anxiety seizure medicine immediately. Seizures still continued, so they increased the dose. Once they increased the dose that started going down. I started losing memories. I started doing a lot of things. The only ones they were worried about were the fear and anxiety.

As the medicine started to increase my brain started to slow down and the seizures started to stop, which was nice for me because I was able to function during the day. The meds I was on were working for the seizures but were horrible for me as a person. I had horrible side effects.



The fear went away for a couple weeks and once it came back and I was calling the doctors, they were tracking the brain with monthly MRIs to make sure it was stable and not growing.

When the fear started to come back the doctor is like, we have to go in. The part it's pushing on in the brain they believe it was growing. I played through Greensboro and the game, the reason I kept play is my game from a physical standpoint felt are really good. I was in positions that I've been trying to get into a long time. It was a break from what I was dealing with off the course.

It was hard because we didn't tell anybody. It was just we didn't understand either. We didn't know exactly what was going on. My caddie pulled me aside after Greensboro, my wife was flying out most weekends because I didn't want to be alone. Sleeping was the worst part because I was jolting, jumping out of bed with fear, mostly like I said around death.

My caddie pulled me aside, you can't play this way. You got to go get help. You got to get fixed. I would be standing over a club and forget which club I'm hitting. I would be lining up putts and think, this is taking too long. I'm just going to hit it. Didn't have the focus or the energy.

Went the next week to see a specialist that I was referred to in Miami, which was nice because it was close to home. He was like, we got to go in and get this out. We can keep ramping up medicine, but the medicine is not slowing down the fear.

Biopsy, it's too risky where it was in the brain. He didn't want to go in any more than he had to. So surgery and removal was the next step. They couldn't get it all out from where it was located. It was benign. If it was cancerous they would've removed it all. It's up against my optic tract. They removed as much as they could and believe they cut off the blood circulation to what's left.

They track it now every three months MRIs still. Had one a week and a half ago and everything was stable from surgery. That's a huge relief for me.

So showing up in Hawai'i practicing the last ten days, I had a little bit of relief off my back that it's stable right now and we'll just pray and hope it continues to not grow.

Q. Did you start feeling better immediately?

GARY WOODLAND: The fear went down immediately. That was filled with thankfulness. The support from the Tour, from people outside the golf world has been

tremendous for me and my family. When I woke up and was realized I was okay, I was filled with thankfulness and love. That replaced the fear.

It was very emotional because I had gone four and a half months of every day really thinking I was going to die. The doctors kept telling me I was okay, but this thing pushing on my brain, fear and anxiety every -- didn't matter if I was driving a car, on an airplane, I thought everything was going to kill me.

You can imagine leading up to surgery how I felt going into having my head cut open and operated on. The fear going into that was awful.

I felt -- it was hard on me. Probably harder on my family for what -- they had to deal with me throughout this whole thing and try to keep me positive and keep me looking forward. That was a hard to do in the moment.

After surgery I definitely felt relief, one, that I could see and had the left side of my body. Those were the two big risks going in, losing eyesight and losing the left side of my body.

Having these when I woke up, being able to go home. I spent two days in the ICU and then walked out of the hospital.

Q. There was a chance you could have been paralyzed on the left side?

GARY WOODLAND: It was the risk. The blood vessels around where they were going in were connected to the left side of my body. The optic tract that the thing sat on, that's why they told me before surgery they didn't believe they could get it all out, because it was too risky for losing eyesight.

I knew going in probably weren't going to be able to get it all and they said they would get as much as they could until they weren't -- it was surgeon's judgment once he got in there of what he was cutting out and knew 100% it wasn't going to affect my livelihood.

Got most -- as much as he could to a point where he wasn't 100% sure what he was cutting. Like I said, he believes he cut off the blood circulation and it hopefully dies and won't be able grow, what's left.

Q. First MRI?

GARY WOODLAND: Symptoms started at Vidanta; first MRI was May 24th.

Q. Emotionally you have always been a portrait of control. What was that like that all of a sudden you're all over the place?

GARY WOODLAND: That was the hardest part for me, is I wasn't myself. That was the hardest part for my family as well.

I'm 39 years old. To live a life one way and all of a sudden you're not yourself, you have no control, you know, I've worked hard with performance coaches and psychologists since I was 16 years old. You think you can overcome stuff. I couldn't overcome this.

Every day it was a new way of dying, new way of death. The jolting in the middle of the night scared the heck out of me.

Q. What's the jolting?

GARY WOODLAND: It was a partial seizure is what they explained to me. I would be completely asleep and jump out of the bed and fear would set in. I have a fear of heights, and fear that I'm falling from heights. It was Wednesday or Thursday night of Memorial and I'm laying in bed at 1:00 grabbing the bed to tell myself I wasn't falling from heights, I wasn't dying, for an hour.

To have to get up and play the next day and play through it the golf was the only thing that was -- allowed me a little break for a little bit of time. I didn't have the energy to do it seven days a week, but did give me a little bit of break.

When I decided to shut it down, I was practicing five, six hours a day. I would play on Tour. When I shut it down and decided I was going to have surgery, I had had an hour of energy a day. I was telling my wife, I don't know how I just played. I played ten weeks with those symptoms. Eight weeks on the meds.

When I starts the meds, I would take the meds twice a day at 7:00 am and 7:00 pm. If I didn't take an energy pill or something, I would be asleep my 9:00 am. Just completely so slowed my brain down and depleted my energy and I had nothing.

So I'm eating energy stuff all day to stay awake and play, but it stopped the seizures, so that was a good thing obviously.

But the fear and the moodiness, energy, irritable, focus, the meds just depleted me. I'm still on the meds. They switched me brands, and since they switched the brands I guess I'm six weeks I've been on the new brand, I'm starting to feel like myself again. My energy is back.

The side effects I was feeling from the first meds have gone away, so that's been a huge, huge relief for me and my family and caddie. They don't have to deal with me being moody all the time now.

They were trying to switch meds throughout the process, but two weeks before the British they wanted to switch me and I said, doc, I got a major championship in two weeks. I know what these side effects are. I don't want to switch and get new side effects before the British.

I didn't want to mess up my chance to play well for golf. It was a big balance. It was a process hopefully I never have to go through again.

Q. How do you think this experience has changed you?

GARY WOODLAND: A lot. One, I realize there is a lot of good in this world. The love and support I've had has been unbelievable. Even being back this week, seeing the guys, haven't seen many guys. It's been overwhelming how good it's been.

I learned a lot about myself. Usually people ask me for help and I'm not asking. I'm very fortunate and probably lucky why I'm sitting here being able to play this week that I asked for help.

When I was struggling, if my doctor would've gave me anxiety or some medicine to calm me down and not ordered that MRI, who knows how much more it would've grown. Asking for help helped me process speed up. Helped us catch this quicker than we probably would've caught it.

That helped me -- saved me more than anything. So I can't do it all on my own. I need the right people around me. I'm fortunate I had the people around me willing to help and the right people to get me in the right places.

It's definitely helped me.

Q. Would you share one example of the love and support you received?

GARY WOODLAND: Obviously the Tour was amazing from Jay all the way down, people reaching out, sending stuff to the house. People taking care of my family and kids. The messages my wife has received -- it was hard, because in the start we didn't tell anybody, like I said, so my team and family now and that was it.

So when we announced I was going to have surgery, we

announced it so much later, four months after we had found out. -ish. And people started going through the same emotions we were going through when we found out.

It was hard, but the love and support of people reaching out, I mean, left and right, people outside the golf world, people in outside arenas, people that I hadn't spoken to a lot, didn't know very well.

Not only just saying we're thinking about you and praying for you, literally continuing to check in and ask if I need anything. What does your family need? My team has been tremendous. It's been nice to know we're not alone in this journey.

I could go through names left and right, but it's nice to know we're not alone.

Q. Curious, I'll throw one name out. Do you talk to or have you received messages from JB Holmes?

GARY WOODLAND: I did not talk to JB. I know he dealt with some brain stuff. I did not talk to JB, yeah.

Q. Why did you want to keep it to yourself?

GARY WOODLAND: The big answer was we just didn't understand what we were dealing with. They were tracking it. There was nothing they could do until the next MRI was coming, so it was hard to tell people because we didn't know.

The MRIs, even the MRI I had couple weeks ago, the readings and reports are a lot worse than what happened when they got in and pathology and when all that came back from when they got in there.

The MRI is saying it looks bad. Obviously they're cutting my head open and removing stuff from my brain, but pathology was inclusive. I was nervous when I got that reading but they're saying it's great because it's not stage four.

It's reading as a low grade glioma tumor, but pathology is saying it's grading so low they don't know what it is. It's hard to explain because we didn't know. They continue to track it and continue to believe they did what they needed to in surgery and it's not going to continue to grow.

Q. You say you were out two days after the surgery?

GARY WOODLAND: I the ICU for two nights. Yeah, they brought a wheelchair to the ICU room and I said, I'm sorry, I walked in this place and I'm walking out. I got out of bed and I walked straight to my car and got home, and it was

amazing seeing my kids. They didn't come while I was in the hospital. We didn't want to bring them to see me like that.

I mean, I had 30 staples in my head and was out of it for a while. It was amazing to get home and see them.

Q. You mentioned it was at Vidanta.

GARY WOODLAND: I was sleeping Saturday night.

Q. And what was that like?

GARY WOODLAND: Jolting and woke up jolting and then fear set in. I didn't know what it was. Didn't know -- maybe a panic a attack. I didn't know. I played Charlotte the next week and continued to get worse.

My caddie told me Friday, G-Dub, this is the best I've ever seen your mental side. I'm like, I don't know if I can play this weekend. I really don't. I'm like, I just fear that I'm never going to play golf again and that I'm going to die.

My wife flew in. I think I finished 14th that week. I don't know how I did it. It continued to get worse from there. The PGA was next. My performance coach is in New York. I went to see her for three days after missing the cut at PGA. I mean, I was nauseous the whole PGA. That's when I called my doctor asking for something and he ordered the MRI. It was the week after PGA.

Q. Something on the course, did you think about it when you were playing or pretty much separated?

GARY WOODLAND: The golf was a break because I was so focused and trying to hit a golf shot. Probably why I didn't have the energy to finish a round. It was a small break. Most of it all started in the middle of the night. It wasn't every night, but when it did come it was throughout the day and it was a horrible experience.

I had it three nights the week of the PGA; two nights the week of Memorial. Memorial is the week I started the medicine, so it was a process. That was the biggest fear, not knowing. Didn't know if it was coming tonight.

I didn't want to be alone. Started renting houses with my caddie if my wife didn't come out and renting houses with people to make sure I wasn't alone.

Q. Couple things. Are you hearing from people that you never met who are inspired by you, and vice versa who, are inspiring you? Are you sleeping through the night okay now?

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, I had a little tough spell leading up to the MRI a couple weeks ago because I was a little nervous probably leading up, but everything came back well. I've been sleeping very well. People say -- I've had some messages saying I have inspired people.

At the end of the day, I just want to prove you can do hard things. I want to prove to my kids nobody is going to tell you you can't do anything. You can overcome tough, scary decisions in your life. Not everything is easy. This came out of nowhere for me, but I'm not going to let it stop me.

I don't want this to be a bump in the road for me. I want it to be a jump start in my career. I've had people reach out that of gone through similar experiences, and hearing their recovery and dealing with similar things has definitely helped. Talked to athletes that have gone through concussions and protocols, because that's some of the similar stuff I'll be dealing with going forward.

A lot of communication with a lot people. At the end of the day, I'm here because I believe this is what I've been born to do, play great golf. I want to do that again. It's been a while. Been a couple years.

Nothing is going to stop me. I believe that. I believe a lot of great things are ahead.

Q. Did you see Kuchar last week?

GARY WOODLAND: I did.

Q. Did you (indiscernible.)

GARY WOODLAND: We didn't play together but I saw him. Played with Kuch months -- month and a half ago maybe. Came in before surgery and after surgery to check on me at the house, so seen him a couple times.

Q. Did you beat him?

GARY WOODLAND: The game we played, the only time we played was a team game, so I don't know. I'll say I did, but, yeah, for sure.

Q. Curious, when you got back from the hospital what was the first month like?

GARY WOODLAND: I was on the couch for a month, so my kids definitely aren't used to seeing me on the couch. My son, it was hard. My son was very scared of me when I didn't have something on my head to cover the scar, the staples. He is six and doesn't understand. He thought I was dying.

So that was hard for him. I kept a bandage on my head most of the first two weeks. Once the staples came out he was so excited it was healing. I was on the couch for four weeks. Didn't have much energy from surgery.

There wasn't much I could do. It was an eye opener to see what my wife deals with. I'm usually gone at the golf course and traveling, and now I'm seeing her raise three kids and being my nurse as well. I have a bigger respect for what my wife deals with.

It was nice. The first two weeks, like I said, I was filled with love and thankfulness. Then it was, what's the next step? How do I get back? How do I get healthy? My wife was nice to me and allowed me to turn our dining room into a putting green, so I had Full Swing Simulators come in and we put the Putt View into our dining room. I was putting two days after surgery, so the 30 minutes or hour of energy I had a day I've been putting the whole time.

So that was nice. Then I started swinging. Got cleared to swing four weeks after surgery. Didn't have the energy to do it, so waited five weeks after surgery before I started swinging. Also couldn't drive. That was the hard part. Fortunately my dad was in town so he would drive me to the golf course and pick me up when I started. I started swinging about five weeks after surgery.

Right after that is when I played nine holes for the first time. I don't remember exactly when it was. I could go back and look. I played so poorly. I called my doctor, can I travel? Yeah, you can fly. I called Butch, are you home? I'm coming. I'm like, I'm coming, I'm flying.

So I was nervous to fly the first time. Walking through metal detectors, but I guess it's all titanium in there. Walked through, cleared that, flew to Vegas and saw Butch.

20 minutes in it was very rusty, and 30 minutes in, he was like, G-Dub, you're right where you're supposed to be.

Q. Where is the titanium?

GARY WOODLAND: It's here. So it was a craniotomy, so they cut me open all the way down to my ear. Cut about a baseball sized hole in my skull and went in through that and then put it back with plates and screws. So I've got a robotic head, I guess.

Q. Curiosity, knowing you, what did you ever fear before these symptoms?

GARY WOODLAND: Not much. Fear of not being great I guess would be it. Feared of failure would be the only

thing I had.

But it was -- like I said, it came out of nowhere. This was a new experience for me. Being an optimistic person, taking that away and everything is death, everything from driving a car to getting on an airplane, which we're traveling for a living. Coming home, see my kids do something, oh, something bad is gonna happen to them.

It was a horrible experience. All you wanted to do was go to sleep to not think about it, and going to sleep was the worse part. That is where all the seizures were happening. It was a horrible four, five months.

Q. What's the most impactful thing Major Dan said?

GARY WOODLAND: He's been amazing through this whole process. When we announced it, he reached out weekly. Obviously people that know him, he's one of the most motivational people around. Not only talks to me, he talks to my parents so he knows what all my MRIs are, knows all that. He is checking in on a regular basis.

But one, just keep your faith. Stay positive. Continue to believe. Like I said, he's been there for me my whole life. Since I met him in 2006 he's been there for me. Through this process he's been unbelievable.

Q. How would you describe the size of what they took out of your brain?

GARY WOODLAND: I don't know. It wasn't massive. My wife saw the video of it. Fortunately didn't see that. It wasn't massive. I asked him when we found it how long do you think it has been there? They were like, without a previous MRI we have no idea. The fact that my symptoms were getting worse and rapid, they believe it was growing.

And so however much was in there, I believe they got half of it. I don't know that. What is under there is up against the optic tract and blood vessels close to the left side of my body and they didn't want it mess with. The last MRI a week and a half ago everything is stable from the MRI I had immediately after surgery.

Q. How long will you be on the medicine?

GARY WOODLAND: For a while. It's standard protocol for six months. The big deal, I was talking to a neurologist recently and he said the fact that I haven't had a seizure since surgery, there are only two explanations. One, surgery, the part they removed was the part causing the seizures, or the meds are working. Which we know it's not the meds because I was on them having seizures before.

They believe surgery was successful from that standpoint. The only way to know that is to come off the meds, which six months would be March 18th. I don't know if I want to come off a couple weeks before Augusta.

I might wait until I have a bigger break to taper off the meds. I'm looking forward to getting off the medications.

Q. Goals for this season?

GARY WOODLAND: This week will be a big week. I can hit every golf shot I want right now physically. It's can my brain sustain the seven days of tournament golf?

It's different playing with my buddies back at home at Pine Tree and coming out here and playing against the guys on TOUR. Obviously a whole 'nother animal.

Can I get back to the focus and stuff I'm used to since I've been on Tour? If it's not this week, can I adjust and go home and practice and work on that focus stuff? Obviously I'm in the major championships. I'm not in the signature designated events, so need some help getting in those.

I plan on being competitive very quickly. Like I said, physically I can hit any shot I want. That's not going to be the problem. I am looking forward to being back and where I'm at and expecting to be ready very soon.

Q. Circle back to something you said at the very beginning. Something about how there was some advice that maybe this was too soon. I don't know if there is precedence, but what would to normally be?

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, I don't know that. Everybody is different. Surgeon told me before surgery, I was like, how quickly can I be back? They told me I would be hitting balls within four to six weeks, which I was five weeks after surgery. They're like, you just won't want to play golf. You won't want to compete for a while because the focus. I can go out and do it for a day or two. Can I do it seven days this week? We'll find out this week.

So far it's been good. I slept great last night. Played nine holes this morning; I am going to go play again this afternoon. It's the focus deal, over stimulation. I'll be at the house, if my all three kids are on an ipad or phone, it's just too much. I have to leave the room for a while. It's what can I handle? Next week will be four months from surgery. That's probably the date where they said after four months I should be pretty good. We'll see.

Q. Like you don't really know until you do it.

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, exactly.

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