

Sony Open in Hawaii

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Waialae Country Club

Gary Woodland

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Now joined by Gary Woodland here at the Sony Open in Hawaii. Just to start, yesterday was Grayson Murray's celebration of life. Can you speak to how special that moment was and to your friendship with him.

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, obviously it was a beautiful celebration, a hard day for all of us. This should have been a very special week for Grayson, winning here last year.

I played with Grayson on Sunday last year of the PGA Championship, and I'll say this: Grayson was very open about his struggles and everything he battled. We had a guy that was following us for a couple holes and he was yelling at Grayson, trying to get Grayson's attention. Him and I were talking, weren't paying attention. Finally Grayson looked over and the guy broke down and started crying and thanked Grayson for how open he was about his struggles and everything. The guy was sober now. He was getting into golf because of Grayson. He heard Grayson's story.

Grayson was helping people, and I'll always remember that.

Yesterday was a very nice celebration. I hope his family -- I hope it meant a lot to them. I unfortunately wasn't at the one at Memorial. I wasn't playing that week, so I was happy to be there yesterday.

I want to say one more thing. I just want to say how hard it's been the last month for my wife and I with the loss of Babs and DiMeglio. They were more than just part of the golf world to us. They were friends. I knew Babs off the golf course. Through my struggles the last year and a half, DiMeglio has texted me regularly, and he was going through something way worse than what I'm battling, and he was offering words of encouragement.

Those two losses, the golf world has some holes in it, but we're all better for having those guys in it. I just wanted to say that.

Q. You played with Grayson last day of Valhalla. Had you known him for a while before then?

GARY WOODLAND: I've known Grayson since he's been out here. Grayson and I, we were always friendly. Uber talented kid, obviously, and he was a big hockey fan, Hurricane fan there in Raleigh, so Butchy, my caddie, is big into hockey, so they were always going back and forth with that. But yeah, I've known Grayson since I've been out here.

Q. Talk about open; he was so open that a lot of times he was screaming open. How do you chat with him during those moments when someone can be that emotional and that open?

GARY WOODLAND: I mean, the best thing for me is to listen. It's hard to be open, and it's hard to talk about struggles. I say that story about Grayson because I've been very open about what I've been going through, and last year wasn't a good year for me golf-wise, and it's been hard for me to do things that I want to do, but I know that it's had a positive impact on other people because I've seen the messages. I've seen people come up to me when I'm playing.

Not everyone has the support systems that a lot of us have out here, and I'm very blessed to have a big team around me. There's people battling and going through a lot of stuff that don't have that.

So I've been open because I want people to know that are going through something that's hard that you're not alone in this, that I'm out here playing, I'm playing, living a dream, but I'm struggling, too. Like I said, I'm blessed to have people around me that can help me. Not everybody has that.

Grayson being open about his stuff, I saw the guy yelling on Sunday at Valhalla, he was helping somebody. That's a beautiful thing.

Q. Did you think the guy yelling --

GARY WOODLAND: I thought maybe Grayson made him



mad. He was yelling -- "Grayson, Grayson," time after time, to a point where finally Grayson had to look. We were trying not to, and we were laughing about it talking, and then Grayson looked, and it was beautiful.

I mean, I didn't know -- it was aggressive yelling, put it that way.

Q. On just your own end, I've got to think you guys have no idea about who you're reaching when or why. Did you have a moment last year where that became -- where someone approached you, whether it was maybe more public than --

GARY WOODLAND: A lot. I've had grown men come up to me crying that they've been battling brain tumors or battling stuff, and seeing me out here playing again gives them hope. I'm trying to do that. At the end of the day, I want to have a positive impact in this world. I'd like to have a positive impact on myself playing golf, and I'd like to have a positive impact on my family.

It was hard for me last year until the last couple months when we figured some stuff. It's been hard for me to be around my kids. My kids have so much energy, and my brain couldn't stand it. My brain couldn't keep up. My poor wife has to explain to my kids why Dad has to go to the room because too much energy and excitement -- my kids are full of life and Daddy can't handle that.

So I couldn't be the father I wanted to be. I couldn't play the way I wanted to play. But my story and being able to help and talk about it has helped me, and that's one thing that kept me going because I wasn't who I was trying to be, but I'm helping other people hopefully go through something that they're battling with, and their stories kept me going, as well.

Q. The other thing, too, you were extraordinarily grateful to be back out here last year. You're grateful I'm sure every day. You're also playing golf for a living, which is the most aggravating sport known to mankind. You're going to get upset every now and then. How do you balance gratitude with golf?

GARY WOODLAND: Last year was one of the hardest years of my life from the standpoint everything was new. I was very thankful to be back in this seat last year less than four months from surgery, but everything was new. It was like I was a rookie again. I didn't know what to expect. There were days waking up I didn't know if I was going to feel good. I didn't know how I was going to be, going back to places where the year before -- talk about PTSD; I'm driving through places where, yeah, I pulled over there and had to call my wife crying because I thought I was going to

die. I come back to a hotel, I'm like, I had multiple seizures in this bed. Everything was new, and it was hard.

I had a lot of setbacks physically. But over the last couple months, having some time off, sitting down with doctors, sitting down with my team, we've came up with some stuff; these are the weeks I felt bad and we started to figure stuff out why.

Now the days of me getting up in the morning and getting out of bed and just going about my life, those are over. The days of me just jumping in bed and going to sleep, that's not how it works anymore. I have to do breath work every morning before I get out of bed. I have to do it again at night because it slows my brain down. I know if I'm playing multiple weeks in a row now, I'm going to have to do more of it to give myself the stamina in my brain to be prepared for the stimulation. When I got overstimulated is when I shut down.

I didn't understand that last year. I was blaming a lot of it on the medicine. Well, I'm on the medicine indefinitely now I've found out.

So being able to find ways to settle my brain down is a massive deal because now I have hope because over the last couple months I'm starting to see signs and I'm starting -- it's a lot of work I have to do every day, but a lot of that work gives me hope because I can start to feel well again, and on top of that -- yeah, initially it was like, this stinks because it's over an hour a day of all this stuff I have to do to feel well, but now I'm like, wait a second, I'm slowing my heart rate down, I'm slowing my thoughts down. That's going to make me a better golfer. That part is exciting to me, so it definitely helps me get through that every day.

I can spend more time with my kids now. I can handle the stimulation because I'm in a better place for it. That wasn't the case a couple months ago. So the last couple months for me has been really exciting, and I'm as optimistic now about my future as I have been in years.

Q. Good thing you're not in the TGL, right?

GARY WOODLAND: That's a lot of stimulation for sure, but I'll be prepared for that if that call comes.

Q. The breathing exercises takes about an hour?

GARY WOODLAND: I do it in the morning, I do it at night. It adds up to about an hour, the yoga, the meditation, the chanting the neural feedback. There's a lot of things I'm doing and a lot of things we've found through doctors, through specialists. I've traveled everywhere to meet with people. This stupid thing sits on my amygdala; it controls

fear and anxiety, and a lot of times it's telling me I'm dying.

Now that I'm in more control and I can slow my brain down, I realize it's not true. The doctors are telling me, I've seen my MRIs, they're all stable. My next one is next month, but my MRIs have been stable. I understand that it's this thing in my head telling me that, now that the last couple months I've been in a lot better control, and it's not as much work, and it's beautiful.

Q. Is there a specific tournament this past year where maybe you reached a turning point or where you learned something the most?

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, it was Saturday of 3M I hit rock bottom. Friday I started not feeling good. It was the third week in a row. A major championship, the British was the week before. Every time I played three in a row last year, it set me back a little bit, and Saturday of 3M I left the golf course in tears, called my wife and I said, I think I'm dying again; it's all back.

We went home, I was on the internet all night. I reached out to my doctors. We sat down and started realizing that the scans are stable, this thing hasn't grown, it hasn't changed.

We need ways to slow the brain down, and that's when the breath work started. I've done twice-a-day breath work since that day, the yoga, the meditation, and everything to slow down my amygdala, to slow down where this thing is. I guess that was over 150 days ago, and I'm starting to see signs, and it's been exciting.

But rock bottom was, yeah, Saturday of 3M.

Q. Didn't you get off to a pretty good start there?

GARY WOODLAND: I did, and by Friday my caddie when I got done, Butch, he's like, you're not feeling well, and I'm like, I'm not, and Saturday was really bad.

Yeah, so it took that, right. It would have been very -- I'm proud of myself. I told myself that week, which I don't think I've ever told myself, I won the U.S. Open and I had fun and celebrated, but I told myself I was proud of myself that week because it would have been very easy for me not to play last year, to show up, to take a year, to take a medical, and from a results standpoint that was probably the thing to do. But I wouldn't be sitting here today as optimistic because I know what it takes now for me to feel well. I know what I have to do if I'm going to play multiple weeks in a row. I know the work I have to put in to get myself in that situation. I wouldn't have known that if I didn't go through what I went through last year.

It stinks to come out here and play and not really have a chance, and that's not what I signed up for. That's not what my sponsors and everybody has signed up for. But I'm as optimistic about everything going forward because of the struggles I went through last year.

Q. It must have been an important year last year?

GARY WOODLAND: For sure. It was the hardest and probably I'm going to say the most beneficial year that I've had out here.

Q. Would you put 'satisfying' in there, or is that too strong?

GARY WOODLAND: Not satisfying. But I'm proud of myself for that.

Q. How has Butchy been through all this?

GARY WOODLAND: Amazing. I'm back with Randy Smith, who's a father figure in my life, and his voice has really helped me because his whole goal is to put me in a position to swing where I don't have to think. He's been massive on making golf simpler for me again, which is probably why I'm starting to play well and everything is coming together.

But Butchy, he's with me as much as Gabby is. It's been hard on him, too. It's not easy to come out here and see me struggling and being with me all day and have to manage me both mentally and physically.

But I'm very blessed that he's stuck with me and he's battled with me. I think we've grown together after that.

Q. Who's been the biggest help for you out here other than your caddie?

GARY WOODLAND: I mean, Randy Smith, being back with Randy has been huge; Phil Kenyon, who's been with me through the whole thing; obviously Mark Steinberg, my agent, has grinded with me; my sponsors have stuck by me, which you don't know how that's going to go when you're not performing. But the whole golf world has been amazing to me.

It's been amazing. I would say I was surprised by that. Everyone has reached out, from Jay all the way down, checking in. It's special. It meant a lot. It helped.

Q. I hear from a lot of people that golf is not who I am, it's just what I do. But I wonder if you could identify with that while also acknowledging that the support

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

that comes through golf you wouldn't be here without?

GARY WOODLAND: No doubt. No doubt. Golf is something that I do. It's not who I am. It gives me a platform. It gives me an opportunity to chase my dreams and do something that I've always wanted to do.

But I've realized through this process that I'm something a lot more than a golfer. I'm obviously a father, a husband. I have an opportunity to leave this world a better place than I found it, than when I came into it, and I've realized that in the last year and a half, and I'm trying to do everything I can to give back to people that are struggling because if you're ever feeling alone in that moment, it sucks, and it's hard.

Like I said, I'm blessed to have a massive support system around me, but not everybody has that. So being able to talk about it and just let people know in a they're not alone, that yeah, I'm out here and I'm playing golf and I'm living a dream, but it's hard.

Q. In this 150-, 200-member organization, are you able to notice those who don't have a big group, or is it hard to detect?

GARY WOODLAND: I think it's hard to detect. Like I said, we're all out here living our dream. Not everybody is vocal about the stuff that they're going through, and it's hard to talk about it.

I went through, what, six months without letting anybody know what I was going through before I did, and you try to put a smile on, you don't want to be the guy that's dragging the energy down, so you put a smile on and you act like everything is okay. I don't think that's the best way to live, speaking from experience.

So I hope if somebody out here is struggling that they know they can come talk to me and I'll be there for them.

Q. What's your optimism level now compared to a year ago?

GARY WOODLAND: I'm as optimistic about my golf game as I've been since I won the U.S. Open in 2019.

Q. Why?

GARY WOODLAND: One, I'm starting to feel better. Two, I understand what I need to do, slowing my brain down, slowing my heart rate down. Being back with Randy, I'm starting to see signs that I haven't seen in the golf game for a long time.

I think from a golf standpoint I'm in a better position now than I was in 2019, I just had a lot of confidence then. I had played well for 10 years straight.

The confidence is coming. But I know my game is in a better spot, and that's exciting.

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