

The American Express

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La Quinta, California, USA

La Quinta Country Club

Phil Mickelson

Press Conference

MARK WILLIAMS: Thanks for joining us, Phil Mickelson. You're the ambassador and the host of this tournament at the American Express. Just how meaningful is it for you to be the host of this tournament having played here so many times.

PHIL MICKELSON: It's a special tournament and it's unique in all of sports to have the opportunity for amateurs to play with the pros and unfortunately that's not happening this year. And I'm appreciative of the lengths that American Express is going to to make sure everybody is safe and hopefully we will be through this by the summer and be able to be back at it in normal conditions next year.

But it's a unique opportunity in all of sports. And to be part of this tournament where it's only one of two in every sport where amateurs can play on the actual competitive field as the pros, that this is a real important event for the players to develop and strengthen their relationships with a lot of the decision makers in the game, and for me to be a part of it and bring those two together is exciting. We have a strong field this year, certainly one of the strongest we have had in many, many years.

And I also want to thank Bob Hope for starting this many, many decades ago and bringing everybody here to the Valley and celebrities, CEO's, golfers. He was the one that had the vision many decades ago to help get golf to the level ultimately that it is now, but to get it started and bring it to people that otherwise wouldn't be exposed to the game, so thank you to him.

MARK WILLIAMS: Great. One more question. You're wearing the Augusta National Masters face mask. It was the last time you played on TOUR. What can we expect to see out of Phil Mickelson this week on the golf course?

PHIL MICKELSON: Well I only wear masks from places I've won multiple events and that doesn't rule out AmEx, actually, here, so you might see me in one of those masks.

I am appreciative that we had a chance to play and compete in the Masters and many tournaments last year



with this pandemic still going on. I'm appreciative of the growth of the game of golf and the boom we have had in participation. I'm appreciative that people have been able to play golf and be safe. And the efforts made by the PGA TOUR and by the staff volunteers, it has not been easy, and yet we have been able to keep golf at the forefront and give some people entertainment at home. I'm appreciative to be a part of that and I'm sorry that we're continuing to go to these measures into this year, but it looks like there's an end in site soon, and I'm appreciative of all the companies that have worked so hard to get a vaccine out as soon as they have.

MARK WILLIAMS: Absolutely. All right we'll jump straight into questions.

Q. Obviously you're in the Hall of Fame. You have nothing left to prove as a player. I'm wondering what gets you motivated and excited for a new year?

PHIL MICKELSON: First of all, I'd like to state that you look very good into your COVID beard. I think it's very becoming and gives you a certain distinguished look. So it has thrown me. I don't even remember your question now, I'm so thrown by the new Alan Shipnuck COVID look.

Q. The question was, and thank you for the compliment, I'm quite flattered, is after all you've accomplished in your career, how do you get excited and motivated for a new year?

PHIL MICKELSON: So my love of the game of golf is extremely high and my desire to compete and play against the best players is high, and so I find myself just internally motivated because of my love to compete and my love to try to bring out the best in me.

So I've actually had a good off-season where I haven't had as much time off as I normally would take because it's been so much shorter. I feel like I've made a few good strides and I'm excited to start the year and see if I'm able to continue playing at the highest level. If I am, I'm going to really try to play more events on the PGA TOUR and make a push hopefully for the Ryder Cup.

But if I don't play well early on, I'll start to re-evaluate things and maybe play a few more events on the Champions Tour



because what's fun for me is competing, getting in contention, and trying to win tournaments.

But I've made some strides in my game. I'm excited to start the year and see if I can play at the highest level like I expect to.

Q. There was a lot of 30-year anniversary fanfare about your victory when you were an undergraduate and I'm wondering if when you watch those old videos when you were that young what do you see and what does that evoke in you?

PHIL MICKELSON: The babyish way I spoke, the childish look. I look like I'm in grammar school, not out of college. But it is fun for me to look back and think about how much joy the game of golf has brought to me over the last three decades and even more so when I started.

But I'm very appreciative to what this game has provided to me individually, personally, for my family, as well as just the joy that it has brought to so many areas of my life.

Q. You've played in this tournament back into the days when the celebrities were still here, much less playing with all the amateurs. There's been a lot of golf played since June without spectators, but this one will be played without spectators and with people hitting balls next to you who might be 17 handicappers. How much different is that going to feel this week and not playing La Quinta Country Club as well?

PHIL MICKELSON: So I always enjoy playing La Quinta Country Club because it's such a great course and fun to play on this rotation. But I really enjoy coming to the desert to start the year and really build a solid foundation for your golf swing fundamentals because we have such great practice facilities and an opportunity to really develop a good solid foundation for your game. I don't think that's going to affect the pros too much this week on whether or not there are amateurs playing here because we're able to -- they have always been so respectful of our games and have given us the space to work on our games and have been an added addition to the event, rather than taking away time from the pros, I've always felt, and so I'm disappointed that we're not able to continue those relationships that we started recently, especially last year. We had a lot of great CEO's, and the CEO lineup this year was even better. And those guys are the decision makers that really help grow the game of golf and grow the competitions and make it more playable and fun for the masses and so forth.

So I'm sorry we're not having the opportunity to strengthen

those relationships this year, but I'm appreciative that we're able to play. And again, we have a really strong field and we're still going to be in a position to give seven figures to many of the local charities here in the Coachella Valley, and so I'm excited and appreciative of being a part of that and that we're still able to do that.

Q. I know that you mentioned the Charity Challenge and being able to donate to the local Coachella Valley charities. How important is that and what kind of went into the planning of the Charity Challenge this year?

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, the Coachella Valley has been very supportive of this tournament, again, for half a century, and the ability to contribute to the people here and many of the local charities that continue to help those in need is an important part of this tournament. It's an important part of the game of golf, and I'm appreciative that we're able to continue it, even in this time of a pandemic.

And I'm appreciative of American Express really stepping up and maintaining the level of this event and the charitable contributions, and that's really where this Charitable Challenge came from was them creating opportunities to create charitable dollars. So I'm appreciative of them for thinking outside the box and really trying to keep this tournament elevated as it continues to get better each year.

Q. You were asked here last year kind of your thoughts on the PGA TOUR Champions with your birthday coming up in June. It sounds like from your first answer that maybe your outlook has changed a little bit depending upon maybe how your year goes on the PGA TOUR. Is that fair and if so why?

PHIL MICKELSON: So I played two events last year and I had some success winning both, but what I really enjoyed was the ability to play, compete, be in contention, and to play against guys that I have known for 30-plus years and compete against them again and see a lot of friends that I haven't seen in a long time, and golf courses that are more fun to play and are not built to beat you up the way a lot of PGA TOUR courses are, and rightfully so. The PGA TOUR courses and the setups are designed to challenge the best players in the world and so you're going to have more difficult setups and pin placements and so forth.

But it was fun for me to play in the Champions events where they were set up a little bit more like the 1990s when I first came out on TOUR and I could play much more aggressive. I was able to get up-and-down from some of the short sides, and it didn't feel as tricked up, and so I really enjoyed that, and it has me looking at it a little bit differently as though the enjoyment I get out of the game of

golf is to play and compete, have opportunities to win, go for it, try to make birdies, and play aggressive. The Champions Tour allowed me to do all of that, and so I certainly am looking at that.

However, it's the ability to play and compete against the best in the world that gets me in the gym every morning at 6 or 7, that gets me on the range working on my game, on the putting green working on my putting. That challenge of trying to play and compete against the best is what really drives me, and so I need to have that or else I feel I might get complacent.

So I'm trying to find the right balance, but right now my goal is to play at the highest level and play against the best. And if I can compete week-in and week-out, again, at the best -- and it's been a few years since I've had that level of consistency, but if I'm able to do that, that's what I want to do.

Q. I have a question for you about Rickie Fowler. He's playing this week. As I'm sure you're aware, he's been in a little bit of a slump for him. You've played with him a lot, you've seen a lot of his game over the years, he's actually currently not in the Masters. Any thoughts on what's going on with him and why he's struggled here for awhile?

PHIL MICKELSON: When you look at a player like Rickie Fowler or Jordan Spieth who are so talented, and you look at how long their career's going to be, which is going to be multiple decades, you're going to have highs and lows, you're going to have moments where you have ups and downs. And the downs tend to be not a lack of talent, they tend to be maybe a lack of focus, sharpness, maybe a slight one or two fundamentals might be just a little bit off, and the ability to get it back is extremely quick.

So although he might have had a rough few months or what have you, this game can flip in one week and we have seen a lot of guys come out and just win right away, and I would not be surprised to see Rickie or Jordan back at the top of their games very soon because their talent level and ability is so high that it can flip really quick.

Q. What do you take away from playing with a 18-year-old kid, like Akshay today, who's, like, you've got kids older than that? What do you get from that? And was there somebody who took you out there, was there an older veteran when you first came out who served that kind of role that you're now for some players?

PHIL MICKELSON: So when I came, when I was in college, I played a pro scratch at Troon with Howard Twitty,

and that meant so much to me to have a chance to play with a player of his caliber that has won multiple times on TOUR, and I don't think he realizes how I looked up to him and how much I respected and appreciated that opportunity to play with him. And even to this day, 30 years later, I'm still remembering how that felt.

But for me, to play with young kids like Akshay, who are so talented, it actually motivates me and it makes me feel and remember what it felt like to play golf as a kid, when I was a kid, and the love and passion that I have for it because as he starts out on his career, you can see and sense his excitement for the game, his drive, his motivation, his work ethic, and that is infectious.

So I enjoy being around, and always have enjoyed being around good talented young players like this, and I'm happy to answer any questions that they may have, but I also feed off of their energy, work ethic, and drive.

Q. I wanted to ask, with Andrew on the bag this week, kind of the genesis of how that came about and what you're looking forward to with that dynamic with your coach on the bag this week?

PHIL MICKELSON: To today is January 20th and it's the due date for my brother Tim and his wife Miranda for their baby boy. And I'm very excited for them, but with Palm Springs being a two-hour drive away and the inability to join your wife if you're not with her when you go into the hospital at birth, he has to be there with her, and so I just know that the birth of your, of any children, but especially your first, is the most emotional experience that you could possibly share and there's no sense to make it, to take any risk.

So he's at home with his wife, they're due any minute, any day, and I'm excited for them.

So Andrew's taking over the duties and yesterday, on Tuesday, he was Thursday ready. His game is sharp, he is working hard, he's going to be a great caddie and I'm appreciative of him stepping in to take-over for my brother.

Thank you guys and thank you for all the support you've shown for the game of golf and for this tournament especially. I think that we're all very appreciative and lucky to be able to still play and compete and we're appreciative of the sponsors for really stepping up and, even though they're not getting the same value out of the event, they have still been stepping up and supporting these events and the great game of golf. So thank you, thank you to them.

MARK WILLIAMS: Thank you, Phil. Can I just ask one

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

more on behalf of the Golf Channel. Just, you heard the news of Tiger's surgery yesterday again, just your reaction to that news.

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, it's sad to hear that Tiger had another surgery, procedure, whatever you want to call it. I can't even think about how many, it's been dozens, and I feel bad because golf should be a game of a lifetime.

And as he and Jack are arguably the greatest player of all time, to not have them playing is, hurts us all. And so I'm sorry that he's struggling with his health and there's nothing worse than not being able to do the thing you love most, which I know for him is play golf.

So, especially seeing him with his son Charlie, being able to play together, I mean that's time together that is taken away as well.

So I hope he heals up and recovers quickly, but it's sad to see how many of these procedures he's had to go through over the years.

MARK WILLIAMS: Phil, as always, very generous with your time, we appreciate it, good luck hosting and playing in the tournament and also hosting this afternoon's American Express Charity Challenge.

PHIL MICKELSON: Thank you, guys. Thanks.

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