

The American Express

Wednesday, January 19, 2022

La Quinta, California, USA

PGA WEST Pete Dye Stadium Course

Patrick Cantlay

Press Conference

MARK WILLIAMS: We would like to welcome Patrick Cantlay, FedExCup champion, to the interview room here at the 2022 American Express Championship. It's been awhile since I've seen you, but it's good to catch up with you and congratulate you. You've played one tournament this season since winning the FedExCup, the Sentry Tournament of Champions, finished 4th. Some great scoring there. You shot 26-under. What did that feel like to shoot a score like that and to be in the mix but not really be in the mix.

PATRICK CANTLAY: Yeah, I thought at the beginning of the week 26-under would have a chance, but I think I lost by eight. I think we're seeing more and more of that now, especially in Maui. We got perfect conditions and basically no wind and so a par 73 and the guys are going to make a bunch of birdies and they did.

MARK WILLIAMS: Talking about low scores and good scoring, last year here you shot 65, 61 on the weekend, coming in with some good memories about that, unfortunately didn't quite get the victory, but runner-up finish. Talk about this tournament and what you need to do to maybe go as low or lower to try and win when the score's have been so good.

PATRICK CANTLAY: Yeah, I think this is going to be another week of really good scoring and I would say when I first came out on TOUR if you could get to 20-under you thought for sure, I'm going to win or have a really good chance to win, and I think we have seen the last few years that's not really the case anymore and guys are either better or more aggressive or both and so I think that's just the new normal. You'll have to get into the 20s to have a chance to win.

THE MARK WILLIAMS: Just before we take some questions, just talk about your form, obviously just having the one tournament, but I'm sure you've done a bit of work. What do you feel like with your game right now?

PATRICK CANTLAY: Yeah, my game feels really good. I feel like I knocked off a bit of rust in Maui after not playing



for a good little bit.

And now getting the season going and I'm going to have a bunch of starts here coming up and so that's exciting to try and get into a groove and get the year started off right.

MARK WILLIAMS: We'll take some questions.

Q. You and Rahm both talked at Sentry about taking some significant time off in the fall and now you both went out in the first tournament and went crazy. How do you feel? Are you ready to go? Obviously 26-under's pretty good. You must have done some work in the off-season to be ready for that.

PATRICK CANTLAY: Yeah, I think my plan is to show up to every tournament and be a hundred percent prepared to win. And so Maui I treated no different even though it had been a few months since I played last and even though this is kind of the beginning of the year and people always talk about the run-up to the Masters. Definitely you want to peak at the time of the Masters.

But in general I play a relatively limited schedule and I try to show up each and every time I tee it up with the intent to win.

Q. This was the beginning of your year last year, or early in the year, and you didn't win it, but you certainly impressed people with what you did here on the weekend. Do you feel like this was kind of a launching point for the year in terms of being in the mindset of being on the leaderboard all the time?

PATRICK CANTLAY: You know, I didn't think about that last year, but it could have been. I think that if you ask professional golfers, I would say at times the game feels really, really easy, and if you would have asked me Thursday, Friday last year playing the tournament, it felt hard, and then something clicked Saturday Sunday and it felt really easy. If you could tell me why that is, I would be better.

And then I kind of carried it over to Pebble Beach, and although it was kind of the opposite, I played well the first day at Pebble Beach and then maybe didn't carry it through. But the more times you can get it to feel like that I



feel like the easier it is to tap into that going forward.

Q. To follow up kind of on the idea that it's too easy. After Maui, because of the low scoring and probably again this week, there was a lot of social media pushback on maybe the game is too easy for the PGA TOUR players. Would you agree with that?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I didn't say too easy. I said at times professional golfers can make it feel very easy and if -- I'm sure even what's your handicap?

Q. Never mind.

PATRICK CANTLAY: No, but --

Q. It's never too easy for me.

PATRICK CANTLAY: But some days it feels relatively easy and sometimes it feels a lot harder and that's just the game.

Q. I guess my question was, when you have a week like Maui and again probably this week where there are going to be a lot of birdies and low scores, do you feel like those are fine and do you kind of ignore the outside noise of people on the outside saying the game is too easy?

PATRICK CANTLAY: Most people I've talked to as far as golf is concerned do not say that the game is too easy. Maui played historically easy last week or two weeks ago because there was no wind and usually it's 20 miles an hour. And it had a rained I think like 10 or 11 inches the week before and so it was very, very soft and almost any golf course where it rains and then is no wind, like at Caves Valley as well, is going to be easy.

Q. And kind of a different question. You're on the PAC and I think you're running for chairman. Why is that important to you?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I think if you're involved in something, which I am involved with the PGA TOUR, you want to do your best to make it better and so that's what that's all about.

Q. What's the preparation like for a tournament like this, playing three different courses, getting ready for it, obviously you've been here before, but how is that different from maybe other TOUR stops?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I think it's a little more difficult because the conditions inevitably are going to be different on each golf course. We saw that last year here with,

usually the Nicklaus Tournament plays the easiest of all the courses, maybe not La Quinta, but definitely more than Stadium and I think -- correct me if I'm wrong, but I think last year Nicklaus tournament maybe played even harder than Stadium because the greens were brand new and firm.

So the most difficult part is actually the changing conditions of the three golf courses, especially me having seen all the golf courses as opposed to learning the golf courses.

Q. For you, being from this area, after the season you had last year, now having accomplished what you've accomplished already in the game and I know wanting to accomplish a lot more, is it any different for you coming back here, coming home and having fans around from where you grew up to be a part of this, is it different now?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I wouldn't say it's different, I've always liked the tournaments that are in California, closer to home. I think just growing up, junior golf and then going to college here in California, I have affinity for it and the golf courses. It's just, maybe just a little different now, but it feels the same as in I like these events.

Q. You're a California guy, UCLA, how much do you love playing the desert, this event, and are you surprised you haven't won out here despite your 61 last year?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I don't know if I have given it quite enough chances to be, to say I'm surprised I haven't won. I think I played the event three times or four times. I thought last year when I finished I would at least have a chance at a playoff and then Si Woo birdied 16 and 17 and played awesome coming in and beat me. And that's just how it is out here.

Q. To build off that, what's your earliest memory of coming out here? Do you have any early memories, any memories that might stick out coming out here and playing desert golf?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I remember I played a tournament, I can't remember which golf course, but I played a tournament out here in the desert, I was maybe 14 or 13, and I maybe shot around even par and thought I played pretty well. I might have shot like a couple under the second round. And there was a kid who is a friend of mine, Rak Cho, and he shot 64, 64 and I thought, there's no chance I could ever do that.

MARK WILLIAMS: What's he doing now, do you know?



PATRICK CANTLAY: He might be on China.

Q. Along the lines of low scoring, are you concerned that the golf ball goes too far?

PATRICK CANTLAY: Well I saw the article that said that the guys came here and played in '87 and it was so hard that they boycotted and said they would never come back and obviously that's not the case for this golf course anymore.

I think the biggest concern as far as the golf ball is exactly that, is that to keep a golf course relevant or very, very difficult, you have to continue to improve the length, you have to keep getting a bigger, harder golf course, just to combat that.

So just judging off all the places we played, I imagine when they built the place in '87 or they must have built it before that, obviously, in the '80, but they could have never imagined me shooting 61 on the golf course because you just couldn't do it. You couldn't probably hit the golf ball far enough, drive it in some of the places that I did and have wedges into some holes that I did.

So that seems to me the biggest concern as far as distance and golf ball is, to keep a golf course relevant, the tees have to go back, back, back, all the time.

Q. How easy did it feel on Sunday last year here to shoot that 61?

PATRICK CANTLAY: It did feel easy. I mean, I hit a lot of good shots and then usually with rounds like that you hit a few that are good shots and then they end up great or you hit a shot on a hard hole to 35 feet, like on the 18th hole, and then I made a 35-footer that would have gone eight feet by the hole. So it felt easy and then I got a couple good breaks as well.

Q. Do you have a favorite of the three? I know a lot of guys like La Quinta Country Club, feel like they can go low, seen a 59 out there. Do you have a favorite of the three?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I like La Quinta Country Club. I think it's maybe the best conditioned golf course I've ever seen and it's like that almost every year, so that makes it really fun to play.

Q. What do you think that 61, making that big putt late in the round, do for you in terms of the success you had the rest of the season?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I'm not -- I try not to look at it in too

small of a lens. Like one round is not going to make or break or shape my season. And so I think a lot of the things that I was working on that enabled me to shoot those low scores on the last couple days last year were the same things I worked on throughout the year and the recipe that I've come up with for practicing and getting ready for events is a great recipe for me. And so as long as I stick to that, one event here or there, really, good or really bad, is not going to be the make or break.

MARK WILLIAMS: I want to talk about Jon Rahm. World No. 1, former winner here. What is it about his game that, his consistency, what makes him a consistent threat playing on TOUR?

PATRICK CANTLAY: The stats say he's obviously a really good ball striker, one of the best out here and on weeks where he rolls the ball and makes a lot of putts, like Hawaii, he has a chance to win.

MARK WILLIAMS: And just your thoughts on Phil at 50, winning at 50, in terms of his ability at that age, what are your thoughts on that?

PATRICK CANTLAY: He obviously had a different week as far as his weeks at the PGA last year, as far as weeks the rest of the year. And that doesn't surprise me, a player of his caliber, being able to find it for a week, especially at a major and then really believing in himself to carry through and get it done.

And that's what it felt like on Sunday, it didn't look -- I watched maybe the last back nine a little bit and it looked like he maybe didn't have it in as good of a spot as he did the three previous days, but out of all the guys playing, he looked like he believed he would win more than the other guys, and he had built a little bit of a lead, so that's dangerous when you're talking about one of the best players to ever play the game.

MARK WILLIAMS: No matter what age.

PATRICK CANTLAY: Right. You don't forget how to win. I hope not (laughing).

MARK WILLIAMS: Patrick, we appreciate you coming in. Have a good week.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

