

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Billy Horschel

Press Conference



RACHEL NOBLE: I would like to welcome Billy Horschel to the interview room here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard. Billy, coming off a T-2 finish last week at the Concession, just some thoughts and comments on the state of your game and your momentum heading into this week.

BILLY HORSCHTEL: My game's in a really good spot, we have been -- I mean I've said it for many years now and for many months lately -- we're always working hard, but I feel like over the last year, two years we have been doing some really good work, my teacher Todd Anderson and I with the short game putting, swinging it. Sometimes you don't always see the fruits of your labor right away and I feel like we have been seeing some of that with other parts of the game, but the ball striking just still hasn't been as consistent, the iron play hasn't been as consistent as it needs to be to compete on a regular basis out here and hopefully get up to a higher World Ranking.

But we have been, I think over the last month we have been hitting on some really good things in my swing that's allowed me to be a little bit more consistent, get back to the ball-striking numbers that I've had earlier in my career. So it was just nice to finally see really good ball striking for four straight days last week at Concession, a course that really requires you to strike it very well, controlling the distance and direction of the ball.

So feel really good about my game. I love coming back to Bay Hill, Arnold Palmer's event, I grew up about an hour from here, so it's like a home event to me, it holds a special place to me in my heart, and so hopefully I can have another really solid week and just continue to build the momentum I think and history shows that when I have momentum and I keep building I do some really good stuff down the road.

RACHEL NOBLE: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. What's your take on this golf course?

BILLY HORSCHTEL: I think the rough is healthier than I've

ever seen it. It's thick. I mean, it's long, but it's just really thick. And then I think the course is softer and slower than it has been in years past. I know up in Jacksonville area we have had a lot of rain over the last four to six weeks so I'm guessing the Orlando area's gotten some of that, but I expect the next couple days it's going to dry out, get a little faster, firmer, and then Saturday it looks like we have got some weather moving in.

So it's in great shape, they have done a really good job over the last handful of years, the condition of this golf course has been in tremendous shape year in and year out.

Q. Looking forward to next week, towards next week, can you take us back a year and what is your lasting memory from Friday the 13th and your take on what it's been like for a year now.

BILLY HORSCHTEL: You know it's funny I remember talking to somebody in the media maybe it was Saturday or Sunday after my round about COVID, asking about signing autographs, this and that and I was, I say naive, we were all naive to a little bit, not understanding fully the extent of it. I said, I'll just stand back a little bit, I'll make sure I use hand sanitizer after I wash my, or sign an autograph or take a picture.

Then you fast forward to a week later at PLAYERS and it being shut down, I think some of us were talking about it last week, we never thought it would be an entire year of this, we, some of us thought, as I did, it would be maybe four weeks and we would be back at Augusta and so forth.

To last as long as it has, to be in a better spot than we were a year ago but still have a lot of the restrictions and a lot of the mandates, not having full fans at events yet, I think we have done a really good job on the PGA TOUR. We have done an unbelievable job compared to other sports. I don't think we have gotten enough credit on the PGA TOUR for what we have done. And I'm not saying the players, who have done a really good job, as well as the caddies, of realizing that if they're not smart with how they take care of themselves off the golf course, it could affect us continuing to play.



But just the way the PGA TOUR, our sponsors, everyone has been supportive and made some really tough decisions to allow us to keep playing.

Q. Where were you when you found out that the tournament got cancelled?

BILLY HORSCHEL: I was laying in my bed right about to go to sleep and I got a text message saying that the tournament had been cancelled. I wasn't sure the text message was real so I went on Twitter to look and verify whether that was correct or not and I saw that the tournament had been cancelled. So it was tough because my wife was, we were just talking about it the other night, she's like, Do you think we're going to be, the tournament's going to get cancelled? Because obviously NBA is shut down, NHL is shut down, some other leagues are shut down and I was like, No, no, we're going to continue to play, we're not shutting down, we're fine. And literally like an hour later we get the text message.

Q. How long have you found greater credibility on Twitter than a text from the PGA TOUR?

BILLY HORSCHEL: (Laughing) Maybe that one instance only. I have, I backed away from Twitter as of last August and it's been one of the best decisions of my entire life. Maybe the second best decision is when me and Steve decided not to be friends anymore (laughing).

Q. I don't recall, I wasn't at Phoenix, I don't know if, what it was like. You had a couple good rounds Thursday, Friday. But if you could kind of speak to what that was like and my main question is, if you can remember the last time you heard a real throaty, big cheer for something you did on the golf course and can you actually remember what that sounded like?

BILLY HORSCHEL: Yeah, I mean the last time that's been was at Phoenix. I was playing with Jordan when he shot that 61 on Saturday and he made a big putt at No. 16 for birdie from about 30 feet and, I mean, there was only a couple thousand fans around that hole, but I mean it was a really large cheer.

And then he drained a massive bomb on number 17 for birdie. Another really big cheer.

I mean, it was the first time in since THE PLAYERS Championship that you heard a roar that was, like gave you goose bumps. You could feel it, your hair stood up on your arms.

So it's been awhile, so it was nice at Phoenix to have 5,000

fans out there. It's going to be nice to have 5,000 fans out here at Bay Hill this week is what I've heard. And then going forward it looks like we're going to have more than just 500 fans, it's going to be a couple thousand, depending on the restrictions and what everyone feels comfortable with at each event.

Q. Could you talk a little bit about what you've been working on with Todd and specifically driving the ball, because you've been just phenomenal the last few events, what's been the difference?

BILLY HORSCHEL: I think one thing is equipment. I found a driver that allows me to get back to my driving stats of a handful of years ago, where I've always been a really good driver of the golf ball. So now I've got a driver that I feel like my misses, the dispersion's a lot tighter, I'm not giving anything up in the sense of yardage.

And then what Todd and I have been working on is, it's a lot of the same stuff we have been working over the last couple years, it's just trying to figure out the right little mix to make it work. So I think the week before Concession one thing we tried to do is just set up more on my right side, feel a little bit more behind the ball at address. That allows me to just more or less turn behind the ball. I don't have really good internal rotation so it's tough for me to get behind the ball if I'm not set up in a position already that gets me there.

And then pretty much on the down swing what we have been working on, which I think has been a big key, is staying longer into my right side or my right leg, my right glute, that allows my right arm to get back out in front of my right hip, which allows my club face to be a lot quieter through impact. So then I don't have a lot of saving or flipping, getting the club to close at impact. So it just allows me to be a lot quieter with the club face through the ball and that's what's been a big key for me in driving and I just haven't been able to transfer that over into my iron play until two weeks ago when we just changed the setup a little bit and that just sort of instantly took care of what we were looking for.

Q. What model driver was that?

BILLY HORSCHEL: Yeah, it's a Titleist driver. I'm fine with saying it. They're a sponsor of mine. It's a Titleist TSi3 that I put in play at the beginning, at the U.S. Open last year. I was playing a TaylorMade after I left PXG and Titleist came the week before the U.S. Open to work with Lanto Griffin and Cam Smith at TPC Sawgrass and I just happened to be there, they said, Hey, do you want to work, test out this new driver we have. And I said sure. And I hit about 50, 60 drivers that day and I was just really

impressed and right away it went in the bag and since then I've been able to drive the ball up to my ability since last September.

Q. How would you compare your game right now, your confidence level, to where it was at your TOUR Championship winning run?

BILLY HORSCHEL: I actually think my game, my overall game is in a better spot than it's ever been. I'm a lot better short game, my short game's a lot better, something I can rely on now. My putting has been something I've been able to be a top-25 putter in strokes gained the last three or four or five years on the PGA TOUR.

The ball striking is the only thing that's sort of been missing and I feel like we're in that realm of getting where it's going to be more consistent week in, week out. So I feel like my game's in a better spot than 2014, I think confidence is getting there, it's just continuing to build the momentum and the confidence and hopefully we can have some runs like we did in 2014.

Q. What was the first time you came to this tournament, your best story from that tournament and give us your best story about Arnie.

BILLY HORSCHEL: I don't know the first time I came to this event. We didn't have a lot of money, so tickets weren't very easily bought for us. But I remember coming over and caddieing when I was in high school. You come caddie in the pro-am on Wednesdays, they needed caddies. So that was pretty cool. I remember getting paired or I think I carried the bag for the CEO of Sprint and the pro in the group was Joe Ogilvie. So it was a really fun experience. Then we got tickets to come one day. So it was just a really, really cool deal that we had when I was in high school.

I don't have a lot of stories about Arnie. He was always gracious to me and nice to me. I did, I was talking to Sam Saunders, his grandson, the other day about a story. I remember playing number 14, the par-3, I think it was like on a Friday, and we teed off in the afternoon and Arnie was watching Sam. And Sam was a couple groups behind me and Arnie was watching him in his golf cart. And it was on the 11th green I was watching and Arnie drove right up to the right front corner, watched Sam tee off on No. 12 and then Arnie just drove his golf cart literally like on the green, you know, just to follow him. Instead of going all the way around, he said, hey, I own the place, I'm just going to drive right across the green, pretty much. And I told Sam that and he says, Yeah, yeah, that sounds about right. So I thought that was pretty funny.

But Arnie's just, he's a legend in the game of golf, as you guys know, and so it's, with this being so close to where I grew up and what Arnie's done, it just means that I need to play here every year, just to show my respect.

Q. Two-fold. I'm sure this is fairly obvious, how much you put a Ryder Cup on your list of goals when you start a year. I'm trying to get a sense of what it's been like since we're kind of wrapping two years into one, A, and B, a very unusual year in which Stricker is going to have six captains picks. As a guy who is not in the top 6 right now, would you think he's just going to look at points or wide open six picks and what's the best way to think about how he's going to think about it?

BILLY HORSCHEL: Yeah, the Ryder Cup is a big goal of myself and our team this year. I know I'm behind in the points, so I would have to do something decently special to be able to qualify automatically. But I think the six picks are actually really good. I think -- can I say they're going to do that in the future? No. But I think that it may be something that is talked about, because it just allows the captains to pick who they think is the best player.

The thing that I think I've said for so long is that someone could have a great season the first year and then the second year not do much and he still makes the team because of what he did the year previous. We have seen that in the last few Ryder Cups. So this, I think he's going to, I don't think he's going to go just based off points, I think he's going to mix and match based off who he has as the six automatics, who he thinks may pair up well with those guys in maybe or a four-ball or a foursome, the personalities. I think you're going to see something a little bit different from Stricker. That's my personal opinion and I just hope that I can continue to play well and show him something that would allow me to make that team, because the Ryder Cup would be huge for me.

I've loved team competitions, I was successful in team competitions in amateur golf, I bring a lot of emotion to teams and a lot of support, so we'll see what happens and but we're still a long ways away. But it would be nice to have the Ryder Cup back here in the States with 30,000 fans.

RACHEL NOBLE: Appreciate the time and good luck this week.

BILLY HORSCHEL: Thanks.

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