

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Thursday, March 3, 2022

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Graeme McDowell

Quick Quotes

Q. Graeme, you guys talked about how difficult this course is. Compared to the other years you played it, how would you characterize it?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: Obviously, tee to green, I think, the premium on accuracy is more so than normal. The rough is thick. But we've seen thick rough over the years. The most benign conditions I've ever seen at Bay Hill this morning, but that's obviously not going to continue into the weekend. We're going to see some wind.

In and around the greens is the biggest change. The runoff areas we've seen being developed the last seven to ten years have all been taken away and replaced with heavy rough pulled in close to the greens. That means you can get a little more aggressive to some of these pin locations, but the ball doesn't career quite as far away, but you are faced with quite a thick lie around the greens as well.

Very different. Pushed some of the par-3s forward today. They pushed 17 forward and No. 2. I think there's a realization here that this golf course is not loved by every player, and they maybe need to change the setup a little bit just to try and appeal to everyone. The par-3s here can be love-hate relationships. When you're playing 17 off the tips to the back right pin, there's a love-hate thing there, like is this good or is this really bad?

I do believe they're really making a big effort to make sure the players continue to come here to this great championship and fall back in love with this golf course. For the guys that obviously don't love it. Some do. I like it.

Q. Graeme, where do you fall on the love-hate here? Obviously, this has been a special event for you anyway because you've been here. Where do you fall in the love-hate here?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: I'm probably somewhere in the middle. I don't think you can ever really love really, really tough golf. It's like a U.S. Open setup, for example. When you're having to play away from flags, there's a certain



frustration to that, but there's also a certain amount of discipline required to do that.

That's what made Tiger great. That's why Tiger won so many times around here because, A, he's really, really good. B, you have to be super efficient with what you're doing. You have to ignore pin positions and stay away from trouble. So I think that appeals to that type of player.

I feel like they've backed that off a little bit this year and given, for example, with more heavy rough around the greens, the ball isn't being repelled quite as far away from the putting surfaces as we've seen in years come by.

Perfect example is probably 15 to those front right, front left corners, when you kind of miss those, in the past they've gone a long way from the putting surface and left you nothing. Now they just go off the edge. You're going to have thick lie, but you're going to be right there.

You know, I like it. Like I say, I've always enjoyed the test here. I think it appeals to the major style player for the discipline and the patience that's required. Even though the golf course does offer up five or six really good chances, there's 12 or 13 pretty difficult holes out there.

Q. Graeme, did you expect to play well this morning, or has this come as a pleasant surprise?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: It's always a pleasant surprise, but no, I've been trending in the right direction. I've been struggling to put it all together lately, but there's been a lot of good stuff happening with my game the last three or four months. Scores maybe haven't suggested it, but I played fantastic in Phoenix a couple weeks ago and just made nothing. Got off to a great start in Palm Springs and just didn't continue it.

There's been a lot of really, really good stuff happening in my game. I feel like I'm in a good place mentally and trying to layer good days on top of good days at the minute and seeing where that takes me. Trying to be really patient with it as well. Enjoyed it out there. It was a nice walk this morning on a tough golf course.



Like I say, it's been simmering. Some good stuff simmering. I've just got to keep knocking on the door and see what happens.

Q. What would be your abiding memory of the week you came to prominence on this TOUR in 2005?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: I just signed on the dotted line for my first home over in Lake Nona the week before, and then I came here. I don't remember much about the week at all.

The only thing I remember is I finished the 72nd hole, I think I was in third, or maybe tied for second or whatever, and I was in the grass center talking a lot as I do.

Someone told me that Vijay Singh had just dumped it in the water on 18 and it just bumped me up a spot. I was like, oh, okay. I hadn't played much on the PGA TOUR for the kind of money they were playing for and realized it was a fairly large bump in my check.

That's really my only memory. I was staying with my friend Ricky Elliott, who caddies for Brooks Koepka. I was staying in his house. I had chicken parmesan on the Saturday night. Don't remember much else about it. I've killed a few brain cells since then, I think.

Q. (No microphone)?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: I was well behaved. It might have been St. Paddy's weekend, and they all went out, and I stayed in.

Q. Why do you think TOUR players don't like the runoffs around the greens? Most people would think that woe separate the guys who have great short games from not, rather than just kind of luck of the draw, what kind of lie you get?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: Great question. Don't know the answer to it. I think when chipping becomes so difficult, it nearly levels the playing field too much. Take 15 for example to that front right pin, and you've hit a pretty good iron in there. It goes long, and it gets swallowed up, and it goes 20 feet below the level of the green and 60 feet away, I don't care who you are. That's an unbelievably difficult chip shot.

I think maybe this rough maybe gives the better chippers more of an advantage. The ball is staying closer to the flags, giving you more of a little look at things. I wasn't sure I loved the change when I first saw it, but it's kind of growing on me a little bit.

Like I say, as one of the player ambassadors here after Mr. Palmer passed away, I'm passionate about this event, and

I want to keep the best players in the world coming back here. If putting some tees up and some par-3s and making these pin positions more accessible is what it takes around here, then so be it because this is a great tournament. We want to maintain Mr. Palmer's legacy.

Q. You talked about your connection, it is home. Such a long way to go, but a start like this, what kind of jolt does that give you for this week?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: It's always important to get off to a good start. I kind of feel like I'll have family and friends watching tomorrow afternoon. I think the kids will come out and watch me play a bit, so that will be exciting.

I enjoy this event. So many good memories and people and friends. Obviously, I love the city of Orlando. It's home. This event's cool. I've had some good memories here, and hopefully we can make a few more this weekend.

Q. If you were on TV and you had pick out one of your shots today for a video highlight on SportsCenter tonight, which shot do you pick out?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: Am I getting on SportsCenter?

Q. I said if.

GRAEME MCDOWELL: Probably not. Don't know. They were all just decent. This wasn't really any stand-outs. I can't really think. I hit a nice 9-iron into the 4th, so three feet for birdie there.

Nothing real special. It was all just steady away.

Q. Graeme, you mentioned the success of Tiger here. It's not quite at the same level yet, but Rory would be in that love-like category. Why do you think he has such success here?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: Don't know. Because he's good. You know, it's a drive into the ball golf course, this one. I think, when Rory's on with his driver, there's no one better in the world than Rory with a driver. You can really kind of bring this course slightly to its knees. Not totally to its knees, but slightly if you drive it well here. I'm interested to see what his game plan is if he hits a lot of drivers around here.

He obviously feels comfortable here. Played well here. I was going along nicely, got it up to 5, and I looked up, and he's 6. I thought, of course he's 6. Like I say, obviously, just golf courses that fit your eye. There's a lot of draw shapes out there. All I can say, when he's on with a driver,

there's no one better. The greens are pretty quick out here. I think it suits his stroke. Don't know. Not really sure. He's just good, isn't he?

Q. (No microphone)?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: I don't know. I'm obviously playing with Zach this week, walking around thinking maybe should I throw my hat in and go with him? I just don't think I'm quite ready. Part of me would love to because part of me thinks, if I don't take this one, I might not get it, which would be disappointing.

But I kind of have to put my own individual career first, I feel like. I desperately want to get back playing consistently well at a high level again rather than maybe taking my attention away and taking the Ryder Cup captaincy.

Maybe part of me would be suggesting that I'm not good enough to make the team. Are there 12 better players than me in Europe right now? I've got to ask myself that question. If I'm out here doing what I'm doing, I have to say there's not 12 guys better than me, and I'm good enough to make the team.

To be able to compete at a high level, I have to have that belief. If I take the captaincy then, that belief's not there. It makes it hard for me to compete. That's sort of what really the decision's got to come down to. I'd love to be captain one day, but if I don't take it this time, I'm well aware that I might miss, which would be disappointing.

Q. What makes you think you might miss?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: I think there's too many great guys stacking up. There's too many great players. There's going to be seven or eight guys vying for the next five or six. Someone's going to miss. When you're talking about Westwood and Garcia and Justin Rose, you're talking about top, top European players, of which I am one, but those guys have maybe slightly different credentials than me.

Q. Is that what it takes to be captain, good credentials?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: I think that's what we do in Europe. Yeah, I think we -- it opens the debate. Should it be great leaders of men, or should it be guys that are legendary players that deserve to be Ryder Cup captains.

End of the day, I look at the captaincy as an honor. Padraig Harrington did a phenomenal job last year. I thought he ticked every box and he got a historic beating.

Does that mean he's a bad captain? No, he's a great captain.

To me, being captain is an honor. It's very, very hard to be a game changer. The way we do it in Europe to a certain extent where we take the Legends and the guys that deserve to be there and we give them that honor. I think that's okay. To me, the captains that have been thrown under the bus over the years, it's a bit unnecessary because it comes down to the players at the end of the day, and there's not really a whole lot the captain can do to help the guys hole putts.

Q. How much does Europe need to get this Saudi situation sorted before they can pick one?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: Yeah, there certainly needs to be a slight delay on our side. It seems like the Saudi league seems to be a variable that is kind of putting things on delay at the minute. Like I say, from my point of view, certainly nothing to do with the Saudi league why I'm not going to take the captaincy. It's really about me just trying to focus on what I'm doing out there as much as I possibly can.

We'll see. I think Luke Donald will do a great job. I think Henrik Stenson will do a great job. It's just a case of which one of these guys want it.

Q. Lastly, have you ever been asked a yes or no question?

GRAEME MCDOWELL: Well, I'd have to expand a bit on that. No. (Laughter).

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