

Honda Classic

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Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Resort

Sepp Straka

Press Conference



JACK RYAN: We will go ahead and get started here. We'd like to welcome the champion of the 2022 Honda Classic, Sepp Straka, into the interview room. Sepp earns his first victory on the PGA TOUR after entering the day five strokes back, becomes the first Austrian to win on the PGA TOUR. And the 14th player from the University of Georgia. Just start us off, just an opening comment on what it means to win your first victory on TOUR.

SEPP STRAKA: It's crazy. It's a lifelong dream of mine just to be heading to Augusta in a month or so. It's still surreal. I'm sure it'll sink in here before long, but yeah, it's just crazy.

JACK RYAN: You move to No. 14 in the FedExCup standings with the win. If you could, just explain what this does for you setting up the rest of the season for you.

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, I mean, you get to pick your schedule for one. You get to go to places you like to play at. It's huge.

I had a pretty bad fall. Didn't really play my best and kind of turned it around and been playing really well as of late, and it's just awesome to be able to capitalize.

JACK RYAN: This gives you a good chance to get into the TOUR Championship and accomplish a lot of those goals that you set out at the beginning of the season. What would it mean for you to reach that benchmark, especially a Valdosta native and a University of Georgia graduate?

SEPP STRAKA: It would be awesome. Atlanta is always the end goal of the year, and to have kind of a good start heading in there down the stretch here in the summer, it's going to be fun to try to get there.

Q. When you bogey the 1st, what does that do as far as did you just forget it and just move on, next play, next hole? Is that the thinking there?

SEPP STRAKA: No. I was pretty pissed, but I knew that I'd been putting really well all week. I had been reading --

at that point I had been reading the greens great. We'd been putting a lot of good rolls on it. It's just one of those things where when the greens get as fast as they are here, it gets windy, you're going to have some misses.

So you do have to kind of try to get over it and try to make the next one.

Q. You're the 14th Bulldog to win out here, Keith getting just absolutely dumped on in the rain to make sure he's out there for that moment. What is the fraternity like? And when you see other people as happy for you as you probably are for yourself in that moment, how much does that add to it?

SEPP STRAKA: It means a lot. I mean, that's really what it's all about. You know, those guys, they're just such a good group of guys, Bulldogs and also other guys. We rent houses every week. We stay together. We root each other on. We try to make each other better. I think that just adds so much more to it.

Q. At what point did you feel that you had a legitimate shot to win the tournament today?

SEPP STRAKA: I knew going into the round that I had a chance. This course is crazy. There's no gimme holes at all. You've got to be on it.

And there was only one guy I thought ahead of me, so I knew if I just kept my head down and just tried to score maybe the best score I could on every hole, just try to make the best swing I could, in the end there was a good chance of being there.

Q. I heard a story that when you were young you chose golf over soccer because it didn't require as much moving around. (Laughter) Do you care to comment on that?

SEPP STRAKA: Well, I was a goalie so there wasn't that much going on anyways. But, yeah, my brother and I kind of made that move together. We did a summer camp, and he really decided that we were going to start playing a little more golf. That's kind of how we got into it.



Q. Where was the camp?

SEPP STRAKA: It was at Fontana in Oberwaltersdorf in Austria.

Q. Given how volatile this course can be, is it a good course to chase on?

SEPP STRAKA: It is. I feel like historically there's been a lot of guys who have come from behind to win here, just because not only is every shot you hit really demanding and really tough, I mean, you add the nerves and the pressure on top of that, it just makes it really hard and just so easy to make mistakes.

So yeah, I definitely think so.

Q. Can you take us through 18 with that second shot in? What's the rain factoring in there? What are you facing?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, for sure. We were lucky we got to hit our drive before the rain, which is huge. I hit a pretty good drive down there, and, yeah, once we got there, it was a 7-iron. It was a perfect number, and then just started dumping rain.

We ended up switching to a 6-iron, tried to hit the same shot, and pulled it off.

Q. When you saw that Shane's putt missed and you knew it was over, is the first thought, I win? Is the first thought the check? Is the first thought Augusta? How quickly does Augusta enter the thinking in that moment as you're processing how things have just changed for you in an instant?

SEPP STRAKA: I really didn't even think about Augusta until an interview like 10 minutes later, and that's when it really sunk in, which is just still surreal to be going there.

I just was in disbelief really. You try to believe that you can win, but until you actually get it done, it really is hard to believe.

Q. You're obviously somebody who has a foot in two countries. From your perspective do you feel Austrian? Do you feel American? Just wanted to get your thoughts on that.

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, I have a good friend in Austria, Clemens. I used to always say that I was 50/50, 50 percent Austrian, 50 percent American. He was like, no, you're 100 percent Austrian and 100 percent American,

which is very accurate. I feel a connection to both countries and it's definitely split.

Q. How would you describe your accent?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, my mom is from South Georgia, so yeah, there's definitely not much of an accent there.

Q. Other than the national championship game in Indy, and every fan I know, Georgia fan, they've been on cloud nine forever. Did that victory in the national championship game, finally beating Alabama, did that have any motivation for you this spring season?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, I think we had 10 Dawgs in Hawai'i when we won that Natty. I think all 10 made the cut that week. Yeah, we're definitely riding that high, and I feel like it kind of got us over the hump.

Q. What was it like to call your dad? What was that conversation like?

SEPP STRAKA: It was awesome. I mean, he's been there, both my parents have been there from the get-go and they've been so supportive, just always cheering me on and always believing in me. That was a really special phone call.

Q. Your real name is Josef, right?

SEPP STRAKA: Uh-huh.

Q. Where did the Sepp come from and what does it mean?

SEPP STRAKA: Sepp is a nickname in Austria for Josef. Yeah, I've always gone by Sepp. Josef is just my legal name.

Q. Did your father have any clue before you called him?

SEPP STRAKA: Oh, yeah, yeah. He doesn't miss a shot, no matter -- he doesn't miss a shot whether I'm playing well or bad.

Q. I was thinking he was back in Austria.

SEPP STRAKA: He is back in Austria, but he watches every shot. Yeah, he's always right there.

Q. Does he provide any kind of guidance or analysis of your game?

SEPP STRAKA: Maybe a little too much at times. No, just

support. He just wants me to do well. He loves golf. He's a big golfer. He may not be the greatest golfer, but he does put his input in there every now and then.

Q. When you finished tied for 10th at the Olympics after the first round you seemed to have your game that week, and then since then you haven't really produced what you were hoping you'd take out of the Olympics. Why is that?

SEPP STRAKA: Golf is hard. My swing may have gotten a little bit off after that, and just trying to get back to hitting it the way I was that week.

But, yeah, golf is hard. You're going to go through ups and downs, and it's good to be on an up right now.

Q. You changed coaches in the late fall; my understanding is basically saying, I don't want you to rewrite or change my game, I just want to be a little better than what I've got. I need to be able to shorten my swing a little and do the things that you talked about in Tokyo. Is that pretty much an accurate assessment?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah. I switched probably in -- it was really December. Yeah, we definitely didn't reinvent my swing. My swing is still my swing, but just kind of refined it a little bit and just -- yeah, just tried to get the kinks out and just tried to keep it in those parameters.

Q. Who's your coach?

SEPP STRAKA: John Tillery.

Q. On 18, your drive, I know you said it wasn't raining, but you really tagged it. Going into 18 what was your thought? What did you think you needed to do?

SEPP STRAKA: There was really no telling. I didn't really know what Shane was doing on 17, and this course is crazy. You can make birdie on 17 just as well as you can make a double or a triple. I really didn't know. I just knew that I wanted to make at least a birdie to give myself the best chance.

Q. You said about the first hole after you missed the two-footer that you were pissed. Did that refocus you at all, as well?

SEPP STRAKA: A little bit, yeah. I definitely think it did a little bit.

It didn't really rattle me, which was nice. I didn't really let it get to me. I was obviously mad that I missed it. Those

mistakes can add up, especially on a Sunday out here.

But to make that putt on the next hole, had about a nine-footer-ish, something like that, to make that one was pretty big to just kind of keep my confidence and make sure that I know that I'm still putting well.

Q. The other thing is, Shane talked about it, felt like he kind of got a little -- you got a break that he did not get standing on the tee at 18. In reverse would you have felt the same way?

SEPP STRAKA: No doubt. I mean, without the rain I was able to hit it -- I don't know how far the drive went, but the wind was just straight off the right. There was no hurt. It was awesome to be able to get that drive without the rain.

I still hit a really good drive and I took advantage of it, which was nice. But yeah, the second shot was way harder than the drive.

Q. Kitayama clearly didn't want to hit his second shot on 18. Would you have been comfortable enough saying, let's go in and come back out, or did you really want to hit your second shot?

SEPP STRAKA: I don't think anybody wanted to hit in that. It was coming down pretty good. I don't think anybody wanted to, but as long as there was no lightning there was really no way around it. Yeah, Kurt ended up hitting and we played on.

JACK RYAN: Sepp, congratulations on your first victory on the PGA TOUR.

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