

Honda Classic

Tuesday, February 21, 2023
Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA
PGA National Resort

Sepp Straka

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome defending champion Sepp Straka into the interview room at the Honda Classic. Sepp earned his first PGA TOUR victory at this event in 2022. What kind of memories came to mind walking around today?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, first time back. It was pretty cool, played all 18 today and it was fun just kind of reliving some memories from last year's tournament, especially from the last round, and yeah, just kind of looking back at that, it was real fun.

Q. (On Georgia Bulldogs) What did you learn about how tough defending a title is from watching them this season?

SEPP STRAKA: They did a great job, didn't they. It was incredible. Lost a lot of guys to the draft, and yeah, incredible that they still had that hunger. Felt like they wanted it more than anybody else, just to kind of prove that it wasn't a one-time thing.

Yeah, I think that hunger, that drive, as long as that's there, I think that's going to keep you going.

Q. You knew you were a good player long before the final round here a year ago, obviously, but I think you were asked that night, and I'm going to ask you again now. What changes when you know that you can win out here? What changes for you both mentally, opportunities that come your way, all of that? What changes when you can say you're a winner out here?

SEPP STRAKA: I don't know that winning a tournament really does it, but being in that moment and pulling off the shots, regardless of whether you win or not -- I've had a few chances since then and felt like I did enough to win a couple of tournaments and just unfortunately didn't get the win. But just putting yourself in that situation I think always helps you learn more about yourself and learn to be more comfortable in that situation.

Just knowing that you've been in there and had that feeling

and pulled off the shots, that definitely I think is the biggest takeaway from that.

Q. How often did you think after that tournament last year about the last hole or two or whenever that monsoon started where you were? And take us through it, when it was at its worst and how you kind of managed all that.

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it was crazy. I never thought it would rain. The whole week has just been perfect, and standing on the tee on 18, I look back and there's just this huge dark cloud right there sitting over us. I was like, oh, boy, we've got to get going to get this done. Obviously it's a par-5, so it's a little slower, you're waiting. Thankfully got to hit the tee shot without the rain.

But then walking up to the second shot, it just started flooding. It was crazy.

Yeah, thankfully hit a good shot on that second shot. There was a lot of stuff up in the air out of my control really with the weather.

Yeah, thankfully hit a really good shot in the middle of the green, was able to two-putt for birdie. Yeah, that was pretty crazy.

Q. To win at this tournament, you obviously have to have success on the Bear Trap in some capacity in those four days. Can you talk me through what the experience is like of the Bear Trap. I know the fan experience just keeps getting better every year. What's it like when you guys are out there as far as the pressure and having to deal with tough holes but also be surrounded by fans?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it's great. There's not many holes where on Thursday or Friday unless you're right on the cut line where you really feel a little nervous. But there's holes no matter where you are, I feel like you get some nerves going a little bit just because there's no bail-out. Water down the right on two of the par-3s, and yeah, you just have to step up and hit a good shot.



Yeah, it's a great atmosphere. Fans are always loud. It's always a good time. Yeah, it's nice to get out of there without hitting one in the water.

Q. I believe if I remember correctly you are the first Austrian to win on the PGA TOUR. What type of feedback have you gotten from Austrians, and is this a tournament people can just tune in and watch? I want an idea of sort of the golf excitement there and what it was like for you to win.

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it was great. I've gotten a lot of people that have written about it in Austria, I think they're all pretty excited. It's awesome to see golf be at the forefront because it's not a huge sport in Austria. It's growing a lot, though.

Yeah, I think it's awesome to see that there's a bunch of guys over there that are following along, and yeah, really proud of that.

Q. On that note, you took a trip to Austria with your wife and a couple of friends during that break in December; is that correct?

SEPP STRAKA: That's right, yeah. First time since COVID. That was awesome. It was so good to be back and see a bunch of friends that I grew up with. It was a great time to spend a few days in the mountains and then Vienna where I grew up. It was really good to go back and trying to get back on the once-a-year schedule that I was on before COVID, so hopefully that's doable.

Q. Were you recognized?

SEPP STRAKA: No, no. I keep a pretty low profile for the most part.

Q. What is your approach or how is it different playing in an elevated event versus a non-elevated event like this weekend?

SEPP STRAKA: I don't think the approach is really any different. You still try to play your best game. The stakes are bigger. The money is higher. But other than that, you're still just trying to win a golf tournament, trying to compete in a golf tournament.

Last week was special just because Tiger was there. He makes every week special that he's playing.

Yeah, I don't think the approach to the tournament is really any different, but the noise around it is definitely -- you can definitely feel it.

Q. Going back to the last hole last year, was that second shot on 18 as crazy a weather as you've ever taken a shot in tournament play? Was it raining harder than you've ever hit a ball in tournament play?

SEPP STRAKA: Probably as hard as I've ever played in. I remember Pebble Beach my rookie year, the AT&T it rained pretty hard, too. But yeah, I'd say that's probably one of the hardest it's ever rained when I've actually played golf. That made it pretty difficult.

Yeah, I'd put it up there.

Q. Having success for four days on this course, just talk about that because it has a reputation. It's a very difficult course. Some guys don't like playing it. What's suited you?

SEPP STRAKA: My driver was on fire last week. I hit my irons good, too, but there were only a handful of fairways I missed, I think. I don't really know what the total was.

But I hit it very accurate off the tee, which is huge, because once you're in the fairway, if you're feeling good with your irons you can actually take advantage and attack some of the greens and some of the pins. But the key is you've just got to put it in the short grass, otherwise just all the water comes way more into play, and it gets a lot more dicey.

Q. You said you played a practice round, right?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah.

Q. Were there memories that came back as you were doing that 18, maybe even walking up 18 or some of the things that came to mind as you were doing your practice round that took you back to last year?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, for sure. Just kind of the whole practice round. All the holes I kind of remembered a shot here or there that I hit last year, and it was pretty fun to kind of relive some of those shots and just kind of be back here where it all happened. Yeah, it was a great time.

THE MODERATOR: Sepp, thank you very much for your time, and best of luck this week.

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