

# Honda Classic

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Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Resort

## Padraig Harrington

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome two-time Honda Classic champion Paddy Harrington. Thanks for joining us for a few minutes. 2005 and 2015 titles here. You're making your 14th start and eighth consecutive if I saw that right.

Just came off the course, so just a few thoughts on how you're feeling and being back here at PGA National.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Obviously it's always nice to be back here. Golf course has been -- a few changes this year. I think they've softened it up a little bit for their playing guests, I think. I don't think it's going to make a big difference to the scoring for us. Maybe 6 and 17, maybe a little bit easier, but not to the winning guy. The winning score will be the same, but maybe a tiny bit easier for the cut line and definitely some good changes for the playing punters every day of the week.

THE MODERATOR: I don't imagine I have to go too far out on a limb to say you've got to be feeling good about how you're playing right now. You're coming off a runner-up last week at Chubb, the last season on PGA TOUR Champions was an exceptional one for you. A few comments on how you're feeling.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I'm feeling good about my game. It is interesting, you do come into a week like this and you do get a little bit anxious, a little bit stressed because it's like it's a one-off week, and I think I'm playing great and I'm so desperate to come out here and play great, and yet obviously that's not the way you play great. I've got to play like it's just any other week on the Champions Tour.

My game has really gone up on the Champions Tour because I'm obviously a big fish in a small pond. It's a little bit more relaxed, and it's let the good stuff come out. Clearly that's what I want to keep doing when I come back to the regular tour, but it's tough in the sense that you're wanting so much to show that form out here, and it's like a one-off. It's like a European coming over here for one week or like somebody getting an invite, as I have an invite

this week, but it's like a one-off invite; you tend to put a little bit too much emphasis on it. I have to be wary of that this week, to just try and play like I play on the Champions Tour and let it happen.

THE MODERATOR: It was announced today that you are one of the finalists for the 2024 World Golf Hall of Fame. Just your reaction to that?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, there's 20 finalists, and when you look down through the names, you'd hope all of them get into the World Golf Hall of Fame. Everybody on that list is very deserving.

I'd like it to be me for sure, but I look at another 19 very deserving candidates, and it's a pity some of us are going to be disappointed at the end of it, but hopefully, as I said, they're all deserving, and hopefully it works out for us all.

**Q. You mentioned the course. A couple of guys mentioned -- easy is not the word, maybe less challenging. Is the rough a little bit different?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: The rough is actually quite -- it's at that length of fliers, so it's not heavy rough, but you do get fliers out of it, and the greens are fast enough that those fliers will make a difference if you start missing greens.

I think the golf course is much more palatable for the guys playing. They'll enjoy it. Shortening the bunker on 17 just makes that hole -- it does make a significant difference to it. But I don't think it makes any difference to the leader. He wasn't going to be there. The changes that are made, the leaders -- the guys at the top of the field are going to be hitting of the middle of the fairway anyway, so it's not going to change their score so much.

The level of rough, yeah, this is what you tend to see nowadays. It's more of a challenge. You can always reach the green from the rough, but you can find some wild places with those fliers.

I think it makes for more interesting golf. I certainly -- personally I've been much more competitive on U.S. Open



style rough, really heavy rough where you don't get fliers, and I struggle a little bit on flier rough.

I find this level of rough tough. Not around the greens but off the tee, because as I said, you're getting -- you've got to judge your distances, and they can get pretty wild out there, some of those fliers.

Yeah, I like the challenge, and certainly for the majority of the field, even though I don't think it would change the scoring, I think the majority of the field would feel more comfortable with that.

**Q. Is your job the next two days to get between the two Ryder Cup captains and make sure nothing comes between them?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, my job the next two days is just to play good golf. With the three of us, we're all at that stage of our careers where I think we'd be somewhat -- I think there will be some nice conversations. We'll be enjoying it out there, pretty relaxed.

Luke and Zach know that their battle isn't on the golf course at the Honda Classic. Theirs is to come in September. I think it will be very nice, a very nice, comfortable group to be honest. I was very pleased with that draw. Nice to be playing with guys somewhat of my era.

**Q. Speaking of Luke, Ryder Cup is all about team camaraderie, getting teams together. He has no idea who's going to be available for his team. Does that make it a more difficult summer for him?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I think it does. But I think saying he has no idea, either, he has a fair idea who's making up the backbone of his team, and he definitely has a good idea of who else is challenging.

Whether you're some of these LIV players, it's a longshot for them to make the team, qualification -- like I don't know what -- nobody knows at this moment whether they'll be eligible to play or not, but it's a longshot. It's a pretty tough team to qualify to get into, so unless you play a substantial amount of qualifying events, it's very hard to make the team.

I just think it's probably a little clearer to Luke when he's looking at his potentials and looking at the stats and who's playing well and who's not. It's probably a little clearer to him than it is to the public who are maybe hopeful that some player is going to make the team, but when you look at the reality of it, well, it's probably not going to likely happen.

I don't think it's as big a deal for Luke as maybe an outsider looking in would think. When you're on the inside, you can see the team is shaping up.

**Q. Putting you on the spot with this one: 13 top 10s and 19 starts on PGA TOUR Champions last year, four of which were wins. Were you surprised by the amount of success you enjoyed in your first season out there?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, there are differences between the Champions Tour and this Tour. First and foremost is on the Champions Tour there's always Diet Cokes in the coolers on the tee boxes. It was all Smart Water out there, and they're very professional out there. On the Champions Tour we're a little bit more relaxed.

My game had turned a corner coming into 50 years of age. 49 I was starting to play well in regular events. Still a little bit hard on myself at those events, and what happened when I went to the Champions Tour is I just was getting -- I always explain it like this: If I play this week and say I have a week where I finish 15th. Pretty much most people will come up to me next week and say, "well done, you finished 15th." That's going to be about six shots back from the winning score. Now, if you finish six shots back from the winning score, I guarantee on a Sunday night you're going to go, I need to swing it better I need to hit it better, I need to hit it further; it's all technical stuff. Whereas on the Champions Tour on a Sunday night I'm going to be in contention with nine holes to play and in likelihood finish a couple of shots back. And if you finish two shots back in any tournament, I can guarantee on a Sunday night you are sitting there ruing the mental error you made on some tee box or some shot. So on the Champions Tour, all I'm doing is I basically -- I do a lot of talks, I talk to professional teams, athletes at home, and I'm always telling them what to do.

Now that I'm on the Champions Tour, I realize I was only paying lip service to it myself. I could see when I kept going close, a couple shots, that it was about doing the good -- the stuff I know to do, but maybe I wasn't allowing myself to, because as I said, when you're that far off the pace on the regular Tour, you're always thinking, if I fix this first, then I can get the mental stuff right, whereas on the Champions Tour I've just gone straight to the mental side. I've tidied that all up and I'm a lot better mentally. Physically I was playing well, so mentally I've gotten a lot better because I'm in contention so often.

It's a nice place to be. It's nice to be a big fish in a small pond. It's nice not to have the stress of a cut. Even the couple of events I played on the European Tour, even the

first one where I finished fourth, at one stage on the Friday I'm like, what's the cut going to be, where am I, and when you start thinking like that you just hit a brick wall. It's amazing how hard it is to play when you're thinking about the cut and you've got to get that out of your mind, which the Champions Tour, again, we don't have a cut. 54-hole golf is not 72-hole golf. That's very obvious. It's a big difference having a cut line. A lot of pressure, a lot of stress in that cut line, and it doesn't matter how good, what you've done in your career.

Professional golfers have this silly thing in our heads that we don't want to miss cuts. We don't want a weekend off. Who in the world doesn't want to have a weekend off? Professional golfers, we just all get uptight when it comes to the cut line, much more so for me. I could be chasing down the lead and it wouldn't bother me whatsoever, but if I'm on that cut line, I'm like, oh, you don't want to mess that one up.

It's freed up my golf somewhat, and like hopefully I can take that to the regular tour. Physically I'm very capable. It really is -- when you get to my age, it's a strange one. Even though you have so much more experience, you've lost your innocence. Those two things, there's always something going on in your head that you have to manage much more so than when you were a young player with all the future ahead of you.

**Q. You won here in 2005; what was your initial impression of Florida style golf?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, maybe not 2005, but it was very alien to me, Florida golf, U.S. golf. I was brought up on golf courses that we had different conditions, wind -- which we have here, fine. But not water and things like that. I still to this day, like it freaks me out when I see water down one side of the fairway, and it's just not what I grew up with. I'd rather see a pot bunker or something like that. It's just a different way of playing golf.

Obviously as a professional, by the time I got to 2005 I was starting to get used to that, but Mirasol was a good golf course for me in that sense. It was a links style golf course. It was playing hard and fast that week, very windy.

But probably at that stage I got somewhat accustomed to U.S. golf, and definitely down here in Florida it's kind of ideal for me in the sense that we've got wind, which definitely plays into my hands, and the courses are great and difficult, which again, plays into my hands.

I think the fact is it's not necessarily Florida golf, but it's the fact that PGA National is such a difficult golf course. It gives me a great chance on it, and Mirasol was difficult that

week, as well.

**Q. Bay Hill next week, a number of people doing tributes type things to Arnold Palmer and was asked to see if we could get a reflection on a favorite story about Arnie or a favorite anecdote, something, an experience with him?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: There are obviously plenty of stories about Arnie. I think my favorite -- I wasn't even there. I was watching television. Arnold, when he was a -- could have been 70 years of age. Certainly late 60s. He's playing a Champions Tour event, and he's come in off the golf course, and he's played well and shot a good score, and they're interviewing him. He's gushing with enthusiasm about how he's found the secret to the game. Now, he's in his late 60s. You'd think at this stage he'd thought there is no secret. But the enthusiasm, the love, the joy, the optimism, that I've found it. There he was, 70 years of age, I've found it, I have it, the buzz he gets.

You know, maybe I'm drawn to that so much because of the fact that that's why I play golf, as well. I get up every morning with the hope and the joy that it's just going to all fall into place and I'll have it, and there was Arnold at 70 years of age in the same boat. It was fabulous to see on TV that somebody could have that love and enthusiasm for the game of golf, knowing that having gone through his experiences, the whole game, that he's still going at 70 years of age and loving it, what more could you ask for.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time. We always do appreciate hearing from you, and would love to have you right back here Sunday night.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: That would be nice. Somebody actually said to me, I hope you win it this week but not on Monday, and I'm going, Monday is just fine. I'll take the win anytime.

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