

Hero Dubai Desert Classic

Wednesday, 25 January, 2023

Dubai, UAE

Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club

Tommy Fleetwood

Press Conference



BRIONY CARLYON: Delighted to be joined here at the Hero Dubai Desert Classic by Tommy Fleetwood here in the media centre. It's a bit of a home week for you now being here in Dubai. You said you've been doing some of the school drop offs this morning, this week.

How nice is it to be at home this week and to enjoy some of those comforts?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, not this morning. Even I was too early this morning and the same tomorrow. But it's always nice, and I think it's a rare opportunity and a rare thing for pretty much you know every one of us that we get to spend a week at home while playing in a tournament.

So I just love sleeping in my own bed. I love doing things in my own house. So it's a bonus this week, absolutely is. Just kind of makes things that little bit more novel and comfortable, and no matter how much traveling you do, there's nothing quite like being in your own home.

Q. Two weeks already in the UAE and then now here in Dubai. Just what do you enjoy about being back here at Emirates Golf Club, and what are you looking forward to this week.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I think like a lot of us, I think that the way that the season starts, and we get a chance to come over and play in the Middle East, I think we get to play really good golf courses and really good conditions. With everybody, I love sort of the attitude that people have at the start of the year and everybody starts out fresh and hungry and wanting to get off to a really good start.

I think Emirates Golf Club in particular has become an iconic venue, an iconic tournament and I was just saying before, I'm definitely of an age where I got to watch it a lot on TV as the tournament was building and building and having champions like Monty and Tiger and Ernie or people like that. I've sort of grown up in that generation where this is like a dream tournament to play in and win. It's always been great coming back, and like you said before, kind of a home event for me as well.

It's always nice coming here and seeing everybody, how hungry they are to start the season off well and playing a great venue.

Q. Just talk about the way this challenge has maybe evolved in recent years. I know they made some tweaks and changes, but the challenge that you face out on this golf course?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, well, I think the last two or three years, the main thing has been the firmness of the greens, how they have set that up, and plus the rough. So you put those two together, it makes it a very different challenge.

Every par 5 they have now lengthened. 3; I don't particularly like the third hole off the back tee. I don't think it's that great. But every par 5 is reachable normally, so without the rough, without the greens playing the way they are, that lends itself to really low scoring that we have seen in the past. In the last two or three years, you've seen that change. You've seen it be a much more difficult championship setup. I've loved that it's not directly in front of you, the golf course, there's doglegs, there's cutting of the corners but you always get rewarded for good golf shots and I've always enjoyed this golf course and I think definitely the last two, three years, I prefer it playing like that.

I prefer it being tough. I prefer if you play poorly and you struggle, then you're not really going to have a chance at the weekend, and you have to battle to get something out of the week. So I like that side of it. I much prefer it playing like that, and that's how it's been.

Q. You predicted that a player for The Hero Cup would win in Abu Dhabi, you thought it would be Shane, but how do you think Victor will kick on from a big win like that in a Ryder Cup year?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Well, I mean, it's the perfect start to the season and it's the perfect setup for your year. I've said it many times, you look at the first event of the year and the first couple of events of the year, they are not



definitive by any means.

But I would say that more for playing poorly, you don't focus too much on playing poorly the first couple of events. You've got a long season to go but if you play well, it has a massive impact on the year and you very, very often see major winners that have won this week or last week that have come over the last few years.

And you see people, I think, you know, in 2017, when I won in Abu Dhabi for the first time, The Race to Dubai became a thing. And I do think it sets you up amazingly for the year, I think he played with a lot of confidence over the weekend and particularly Sunday which was really good to see for him.

For sure, there's no doubt about it, everybody out here is looking at The Ryder Cup or things that they want to achieve this year. Winning the first event is a massive stride towards that. I think qualifying is clearly more difficult now but he's put himself in the perfect spot.

Now it's just riding with that momentum and dealing with a little bit more expectation which I'm sure he'll be great at.

Q. You had such a strong finish to the year last year. How do you go about continuing that form into 2023 and what are your objectives for the year apart from The Ryder Cup?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Well, yeah, I definitely want to build on the consistency that I thought that I started to perform at second half of last year in the summer in particular. Make sure I take with me this year the things that I felt like I did so well last year in terms of my things that I worked on in my swing, the way that I managed my game, things that I improved on.

This year, of course, got Ryder Cup, that's one of the main goals. The majors are always up there. We want to be up there contending in Sundays in the majors and they are much more lifetime goals to be there, win multiple majors. PGA Tour is always going to be -- I've not won on the PGA Tour yet. That's something that I'm clearly looking at and being up there, you know, in Europe again at the end of the year in that Race to Dubai with a chance to win that, I always think that's an amazing feeling when you get to that last event and you have a chance at winning the whole thing for the whole year.

So there's always things to go out. There's always weeks that mean something, and I feel good about things. I played okay for some of last week and not-so-okay for some other parts. But again, once you get into the run of tournament golf, if you can keep your confidence levels up

and keep doing the right things, then hopefully the game can come to you and that's what I look for moving forward.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your good friend, Francesco, how well he played in Abu Dhabi; and did you guys have a talk, did you see something in him changing regarding his form?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Well, yeah, we speak most days. You can definitely -- I think you can sense the week before The Hero Cup, where his game is at at this point.

You know, it's easy for everybody to see but I think the most important thing is for him to know and he does, he knows he's playing better and he knows that he's on the right track, and without a doubt, we know that the Ryder Cup in Italy is going to be a huge motivating factor for him.

But Fran is always going to be someone that quietly goes about his business and you're not going to get much out of him. But he definitely feels confident. You can see in his performances that his game is coming back. He played -- he actually said he played really well on Sunday and putted well. It's just one of them days where it didn't fall for him on that particular day.

No question about it. Fran is coming back, and when he does play well, he's one of those people that he's a world beater. He's not somebody that I would be surprised to see performing at the highest level and contending for tournaments at any given time.

Q. What do you think what Jon Rahm is doing the last few months?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: He's playing very well. I think Jon is up there, clearly, with the best players in the world at the moment. I think the run that he has been on and the golf that he's playing, it's not necessarily -- it's almost not that he's winning the tournaments; it's the scores he's shooting as well and how he's playing.

He's a phenomenal player. He's a phenomenal talent and on the moment he's on one of those runs where he's showing just how good he is, and yeah, not just by winning. He's shooting amazing scores which is so hard to do consistently, shoot those scores. It just shows the level that he's at at the moment. You know, he's going to be looking too, I don't think he'll be settling for just the form he's been on. He'll continue to push.

You know, he has been arguably the best player for a while and he will be for a long time, I'm sure. He's a phenomenal talent and we are lucky to have him in Europe.

BRIONY CARLYON: Thank you for your time.

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