

Hero Dubai Desert Classic

Tuesday, 16 January, 2024

Dubai, UAE

Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club

Tommy Fleetwood

Press Conference



CLARE BODEL: Tommy welcome back here to the Hero Dubai Desert Classic. Bit of a spring in your step after last week, I'm sure.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, last week was great. It's always nice; I think like having good performances to show positive signs of your hard work and give yourself confidence in your game is always a great feeling. And now on top of that, you get the ultimate and you have a win, that feels great.

So looking forward to this week. Feel like I sort of took a lot of positives from last week. Looked at things where I felt like I could improve. Started practise yesterday. Looking forward to another great week.

CLARE BODEL: It's back-to-back weeks in Dubai, the first Rolex Series Event in the season, and you're a Dubai resident now as well. Is it special to be playing these big events here?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, absolutely. I think Dubai is where we live now. Kids in school and everything. So it's obviously got a really nice homey vibe, and weeks out here, see a lot of faces that I know very well that I see week-in, week-out, and that's always nice, playing in front of those.

I think Dubai and the Middle East has such a strong place in the Tour's calendar. And I think, you know, I've been on Tour for, I don't know, 11 years, 12 years maybe, and I think I've played this event every year.

I think everybody just associates the Middle East with both the start of the year and the end of the year, and I think everybody feels very at home here, very comfortable, and you know, they are always excited about coming back the it's got a lovely feeling to it always.

Q. You didn't seem to have great expectations at the start of last week because of jet-lag and coming back from Hawai'i. Were you freewheeling it a bit at the start, and did that help?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: No. You know, expectations, I think maybe they weren't at the highest, but I still got up on Wednesday. I practiced. I practiced well that day. I think I was semi-surprised how well I played on Thursday.

And then I think on Friday I got a bit frustrated because I was playing well and I wasn't quite getting the scores that I wanted so.

So there's that point, that period where the expectations go up a little bit and I got a little bit impatient on Friday knowing I was playing very well.

Regardless of the travel, you know, I had arrived to play another great tournament last week, and I have my goals for -- I have my goals for this period of the year. I have my goals throughout the year. Every time you play, it's important to remember those, and everything you do goes into sort of trying to achieve those throughout the year.

As much as it was a long travel week, and I might not have expected my best golf early on, I still felt like I was there for a purpose and I wanted to work my way into the week. Just so happened I played a bit better than I thought I would, and I was in the tournament from there.

Q. Was there an occasion where you suffered the same sort of disappointment as Rory; you've had some near misses, but was there one where you felt perhaps you had gotten away with a couple mistakes?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, multiple times where I think I've come down the stretch. There's always a couple of things that happen when you're contention and you don't win. Either you'd played well and somebody has played better than you, or you might have hit a bat shot at the wrong time. I've done it plenty of times.

Back nine in a tournament where at the end of the tournament, the tournament is 72 holes, and you play to the very end, and whether there are mistakes or a bad shot comes later on in the tournament, people recognize it more, whether you made mistakes early on and have to fight your way back.



I think I've had a lot of near misses where I feel like I might have hit a shot that has cost me a tournament, and other times people play well. Experience tells you that there's going to be those moments. I think the more that you're in contention, the more that you're in those situations, obviously the more it's going to show up because you're not going to win every single week you play.

I think that's just the way the game is. This time it was my turn, and you know, just be happy when those times come.

Q. Given the level of golf that you played last year, and during all your career, can you give us an appreciation of why it is so hard to win a golf tournament?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: There's a lot of very good players. I think in general, if you look at the strength and depth in the world of professional golf on any given tour, and then you add in -- so every single week, somebody is going to play very, very well. Probably 20, 30 guys are going to play very, very well; so you put that on top of how strong the standard is, obviously winning is going to be very, very difficult.

72 holes is a long time. You know, you tee off -- sometimes you tee off at 7.00 on Thursday morning and the tournament finishes at 6.00 on Sunday night and everything you do in that period counts.

Yeah, it's difficult, and I think you know, even I think the best players in the world and the people that win the most, Rory very much at the top of that list, if you look at the amount of times he actually just puts himself there, I think that's the No. 1 thing you can do. Keep playing to a high standard, practicing to a high standard, putting yourself in those positions all the time, and then you get a chance of winning.

It's not going to work out all the time, and it's very, very hard and there are always players that play great and that are going to be hitting great shots. You just have to be there, and like I say, your times will come.

My time doesn't happen, or it hasn't happened nearly as much as I would like, but you know, we just hope that it comes more often in the future.

But I just think winning is very, very hard, and of course, everybody judges you on the tournaments you've won. But even last week, I played great golf last week, and everybody was saying "well played," and it was great to win. The last hole: I made a birdie and Rory made a bogey; and that was one hole out of 72 holes that made a

difference in the tournament, and you could look at it very, very differently.

I think you just have to make sure you're always looking at your performance and how strong that is, and just go from there.

Q. And did you work on anything specific during the limited off-season that you had coming into 2024?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: No. That was my period. I think I played -- finished the year at the DP World Tour Championship at Jumeirah, and I didn't play or practise properly until the year started.

In January, we went back to our home in the U.K., saw friends and family over there and had a nice break over Christmas. Because really that is the only break you get throughout the year, took that time to relax and enjoy it. You know, I might have chipping and putting comps with the kids and I might play mine holes. I did very, very little and started out the new year practicing and playing again.

It is a limited break, but you do come back feeling like you haven't played for a while. But it's always nice when you -- I just think you do so much work throughout the years and throughout the year before; that if you can continue to do the right things, hopefully you pick it up quicker rather than later, and this year, I sort of got off to a sharp start last week.

Q. Forgive me, I would not have bet on you last week given the travel commute you had. I was curious, do we overrate the effects that jet-lag has on you guys, or do we underrate how used to it you might be and how good you can be at dealing with it?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I don't think so. It's hard. It is difficult. Of course it is. I think one of the best things that can happen to you when you travel that distance and you're there for a tournament is you have to get up and do stuff the following day. I arrived Tuesday night, and you don't get the best sleep, but at least Wednesday I had a reason and a purpose to get up. And adrenaline of preparing for the tournament and doing things properly sort of keeps you through the day.

It doesn't always work out like that. Like your body not feels great, but you can swing, and I got off to a great start, but it doesn't all work out like that. But you know, just one of those things. Traveling is one of the hardest things that we do if you are playing like a global tour. But yeah, I guess you do get used to a certain amount. But it's still pretty difficult.

Q. And part of the discussion these days when it comes to like the top level of pro golf, the negotiations, is where pro golf should be. Rory laid out a dream scenario. Says he a lot of it should be in America, but a lot of it should go to the Far East and a lot of it should come here and in the U.K. I know you would probably be biased because you live here, but how important is this country to the future of pro golf?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Well, I think very. I think it's been a big part of -- I grew up dreaming of playing on the DP World Tour. I'm from England, and I grew up dreaming of playing on this tour, and a lot of my heroes are on this tour and the Middle East has been a big part of that for a long time.

Living here, I always get to see a lot here and play a role in the development of young golfers out here and how big the game is for the nation.

Yeah, I think it's very important. I think it's held a place in the world of golf for a long time, and it should do for a long time in the future. I think everybody has great things to say about here. You have iconic golf courses. People watch tournaments played on these courses year-in, year-out, the same courses, and I think people are very, very passionate about the game. I don't know what the numbers are, but there's definitely a strong ratio for people playing the game.

There's not so many golf courses in terms of the actual numbers, and I just think that will continue to grow. I think more golf courses will be built. I think more people will take up the game and I think it will keep growing here. So it definitely has a strong place in the world of golf.

Q. You've played this golf course several times. Which is your favourite turn over here?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Favourite hole? On the Majelis? That's a good question. I would probably -- the two -- I mean, what are the two most iconic holes, 18 and 18, I would say.

I do think the 18th is a great finishing hole, and I think there's a lot of holes out here that have -- they involve a lot of game plan. I think there's multiple ways to play a lot of the golf holes out here, which make a great golf course.

I think I as a fan and as a golfer, having watched over the years, I associate the 18th with so many great moments, so I think that hole is one of the holes that I get excited to play the most.

CLARE BODEL: Thank you.

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