

The Saudi International powered by SoftBank Investment Advisers

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King Abdullah Economic City, Saudi Arabia
Royal Greens Golf and Country Club

Paul Casey

Press Conference

STEVE TODD: Thanks for joining us here at the Saudi International. I just wanted to start, couple of days on from the victory last week, nice to hear from someone with a bit of time perspective to look back on it, but give us your thoughts on last week and the reaction you've had since.

PAUL CASEY: It's been fantastic reaction from everybody. What is always very cool sometimes is peers. You know, the players out here, but also players not on the road, some of the older guys, previous champions have reached out, messages, stuff like that.

It's very cool. As I said last week, it's one of the iconic events on The European Tour. It's one of the coolest trophies we've got in golf, and having watched that championship many times, I know it's been seven years since my last appearance there, but it meant an awful lot: 15th win, in Dubai. And from there it puts me in a great position for the rest of the year. It's a very, very sweet victory.

STEVE TODD: You have a great record in this part of the world which you added to last week. Give us your thoughts on coming to a new venue at Royal Greens. I know you've only played the back nine. Just give us your thoughts on this week.

PAUL CASEY: Cracking-looking golf course. I don't know an awful lot. So here to try and play and beat an unbelievable field. Even today, learning about some of the guys who were here this week. I'm not one necessarily to look at entry lists to see who is playing week-in, week-out, but it's stacked. We're going to have huge World Ranking points.

This is going to be key for guys like myself who don't play an awful lot on The European Tour for moving up things like The Ryder Cup list, as well.

I'm excited to get stuck in.



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Q. It's always said that it's very difficult to back up a good round with a second good round. Tell us from your own perspective how difficult it is to back a good tournament with another good tournament, and given the field, how much would you really love to win over here?

PAUL CASEY: I'd love to beat these guys, when you start putting guys like defending champion Dustin Johnson in the field, any time you can beat guys, the best in the world, that's what I would like to try and do.

Backing it up, I've always admired guys who do back up, not just, say, a good round followed by another good round, but a win with another win, it's not something I've typically been able to do; that's where I always thought Tiger was so amazing.

I think the golf courses, we've got very different conditions this week in terms of grass types and we've got more wind to contend with in a different style of golf course. I guess that can either help or hamper those chances.

But from what I've seen so far, I really like it. So I if anything, I feel good, and knowing -- what I've seen so far, there's a lot of touch putting required around this golf course, and I'm a great touch putter. It's probably the key to the victory last week on those difficult greens.

There's no reason why I can't have a really good week and put myself in a position to challenge. It's not like there's a massive time difference from last week, either. So there's a lot of things in my favour to try and back up last week's performance.

Q. And how good are you on paspalum?

PAUL CASEY: Not something that I have typically played a lot of golf on. I'm not sure how many guys have played a lot of golf on paspalum. Obviously guys who live near the coast. Trying to figure it out. It's a very cool grass type in terms of the way the golf ball kind of sits on it. The trick is to figure out how it rolls on the greens, and these greens are huge, but they are going to play very, very small. You

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guys obviously know it; you've seen this championship many times.

I guess it requires great iron play, as well, judging the wind. The grass shouldn't -- it's not a hindering factor, paspalum.

Q. More general topic. How would you explain to somebody who barely knows golf that this sport can be so frustrating, and even of course maybe not for you, especially last week, but when you struggle and it can get you mad, how would you explain that to somebody like that?

PAUL CASEY: How long have you got? (Chuckling)

Q. Two hours.

PAUL CASEY: Golf is, I guess, like life wrapped up into a few hours. It shows -- I don't know how you explain it. How do you -- I've always felt like it's one of those games that teaches you and helps you grow. Golf is a beautiful game because it's basically never perfect. So many other sports or endeavours in the world, you can achieve perfect. But in this game, there is no such thing as perfect. Nobody is going to hole every single shot that they face.

How do you explain it to somebody? It's basically -- I don't know where to start. I really don't. I don't -- I don't -- going too much in depth. I'm probably looking at the wrong angle.

I love this game but yeah, frustrates the hell out of me. But that's why I continue to play it.

Q. Can you achieve perfection?

PAUL CASEY: No. I think you can hit the perfect golf shot but I don't think that's -- I don't think there's such a thing as a perfect round of golf. Maybe there is. Maybe I'm setting the bar low, I don't know. But I've certainly seen some amazing rounds of golf. Viktor Hovland had -- one of the caddies on Tour last week in the US said he thought Viktor Hovland's 65 he shot might have been the greatest round of golf he's ever seen.

There are greatest rounds of golf, but I'd like to focus on probably the greatest shots or perfect golf shots we will witness. That's something that's very attainable. If you get somebody who is new to the game, you know, everybody can make a relatively short putt, and that's perfect. You get a little bit further away, can you still make a perfect shot.

With guys like us, you sometimes get to see the perfect shot from 250 yards away or something that has infinite

odds which we manage to pull off. That's the cool aspect of this game.

Q. I come from Spain and it's special year, tenth year without Seve, and maybe for you on The European Team on The Ryder Cup, do you think you can find some inspiration as it happened at Medinah?

PAUL CASEY: I hope that we are leading The Ryder Cup this year and we don't need as much inspiration as the guys did at Medinah. But there is always inspiration coming from Severiano.

I was fortunate enough to have played many rounds of golf, one of my heroes, and so -- I can't believe it's ten years. It's sad. He should still be here. I think he's inspirational to the guys who grew up looking at him and honouring him and looking at him as a hero.

I think the important thing is to continue to embrace that and talk about it and make sure the younger guys can understand, as well, and the role he played. He was instrumental in the Europeans competing in America and breaking down the doors and blazing a trail for guys like myself.

So we have so much to be thankful for to him, so hopefully just -- you know, and you still have -- look, he's always there because the only time I'm in a difficult position on a golf course, you always think, you know, there's always that little, what would sort of Seve do, is that a Seve shot; Seve would be proud. I'd like to think that we are always trying to honour him every day we play.

Q. Can we talk about the reasons why you're playing in Saudi this year? You previously declined to play for political reasons and now you're obviously there. Can you talk us, how difficult a decision has this been for you and what specifically changed for you?

PAUL CASEY: I don't think I was necessarily that political before, but you are correct, I took a stance where I didn't participate before.

I think something that -- which I felt at that time a couple of years ago, was that I think I was a little bit torn. You know I'm a father. I've got two kids. You know my charitable ties with UNICEF, and I felt that it was not right for me to play.

I've spent the last two years thinking about that a lot. I've learnt an awful lot. I've read an awful lot. And one of the things that I was flat-out wrong on was -- was with my UNICEF ties, is that they are not a political organisation. Their focus is purely on the vulnerability of children around the world, and making sure they look after children around

the world and doing everything they can to save them. And that's important to me and that's my focus with my charitable views and endeavors.

And so I was reminded that if you stay away, if you don't engage, if you don't talk, you don't visit, then you're merely kind of hardening positions, and so that actually doesn't do any good.

Engagement and inclusion is really what it's all about. And look, I think things are not black and white. It's very much a grey area what we discussed in the last -- two years ago when I made a position. You know, if you mentioned something like children's rights -- there's not a country on the planet that meets every single rights of a child, not a single country on the planet. And so all you can hope for, Neil, is that a country is on a path towards meeting as many of those as possible.

There's something called the convention of a child, conventions of a child; the rights of a child. You can look it up. This country has signed up to those conventions and is making progress to ticking off as many of those as possible. And that's all I can hope for. And if my -- I felt that if my participation this year can assist in that process -- and if that can make a difference, one iota of a difference, then that's something important.

So it was more -- so I will hold my hand up and say that the position I had two years ago was probably not the right position to have. And so that is why I am here.

Q. You said in your October statement, "I hope my participation will make a difference." Amnesty International called golfers this week to speak up about human rights issues in Saudi Arabia, and since that statement, Loujain al-Hathloul has been jailed for five years for her activism. So would you like -- is part of that process to make a difference, would you like to condemn that?

PAUL CASEY: Run me through that again.

Q. Right. You said in October, you said in the statement, you said, "I hope my participation" -- "my participation will make a difference."

PAUL CASEY: Yes.

Q. In Saudi, okay. Amnesty International called the golfers in Saudi Arabia to speak up about human rights issues in Saudi Arabia. And since that statement in October, Loujain al-Hathloul a very well known human feminist activist in Saudi has been jailed for five years. That happened in December. So would

you like to take this opportunity as part of that process to condemn that action by the Saudi government?

PAUL CASEY: And that's who is jailed her?

Q. Saudi Arabia have.

PAUL CASEY: Okay. Neil, this is the first I've read of that. Clearly I'm not well enough read on that particular topic. Clearly with what I just said to you in our previous question, yeah, there's no question that that is not aligned with my beliefs, does it.

Look, I didn't want to go -- I don't want this week to be about this situation. You know, what I've just said in my statements to you to answer your previous question, I think it's very clear you know my views.

Q. Won't make it so tricky with my question. My question is looking at your record of 21 victories, about two-thirds of them have been at the start of the year, and I know you've got a big this year this year, the Olympics and four majors and hopefully on to The Ryder Cup team. But what does it do for you when you do win so early in the new year, which you've done so many times?

PAUL CASEY: It makes me realise that maybe I need to focus and try and win later in the year, as well. And maybe in the middle, as well.

Q. You seem to get out of the box pretty quickly in the new year.

PAUL CASEY: Yeah, look, 2020 was -- I was very happy to put 2020 behind me and felt very rejuvenated. And we're still in the middle of a pandemic and there's still lots of issues related to that around the world and it seems maybe more difficult than ever, doesn't it, this pandemic. But I was happy to get the mental reset of going into 2021, felt good.

I took some weeks off. I worked incredibly hard at the game. I think probably most of those victories you're seeing is the fruition of an off-season, of coming out and starting the year and putting that hard work into effect.

What does it do? It tees me up really beautifully for the season. I feel really excited about the year ahead. We're still in the middle of a pandemic, and we still have events which looks like they are being postponed and moved. It's difficult; I know that.

I'm thankful we're playing golf, and while I've got that opportunity to play golf, I want to maximise it. So hopefully

got four majors, not three. I don't know what to tell you. I just want to crack on from here. I'm happy -- what am I, I'm back about 16th in the world, back in the Top-20. I'm now considered a veteran, Bernie, like yourself.

Q. Thanks, for that.

PAUL CASEY: You are, though. I'm enjoying my golf, though. To me, I've got very little -- there's nothing to kind of -- I've got nothing to lose and everything to gain. So to me, it's a great start and kick on from here and try and make 2021 a fantastic year.

Q. Can I just throw you one right out of left field, probably reading into this too much, but if Rory or Russell were to be appointed Chairman of the Players Advisory Committee, is there any benefits for European Tour players?

PAUL CASEY: Yeah.

Q. And could you see it, sort of going forward, a stronger merger with the two tours?

PAUL CASEY: I think -- that's a voting process. So there's nothing -- I don't speak out of turn, but I actually think the PGA Tour would like that. If you speak to Monahan, he would love to see Russell or Rory in that position. It gives a very different perspective.

I sit on the PAC over there, and yeah, you've got to have that -- here we are in Saudi this week. You've got to have that international perspective, haven't you. Either one of those guys, Rory is obviously a little higher stature in the game, but I'm not sure that matters that much. You just want to have perspective.

So I hope they -- I voted. I know who I voted for (smiling).

Q. Russell is pretty popular.

PAUL CASEY: Very popular. Yeah, he is. Either one of them would be -- are an asset to golf, and either one of them would be an asset in that position. And I think, yeah, the PGA TOUR, no question their strength and their position in the game. But with this new alliance with Europe, I kind of think it's important they would want him in that position.

STEVE TODD: Thank you, Paul, for joining us and all the best this week.

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