

Alfred Dunhill Links Championship

Wednesday, October 4, 2023

St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland

David Howell

Press Conference

CLARE BODEL: Delighted to welcome David Howell to the interview room.

David, I don't want to make you sound like the elder statesman here, but 722 appearances, ten years on from your win here, two Ryder Cup appearances, five DP World Tour wins. I mean, how does it feel just sitting here this week?

DAVID HOWELL: Yeah, I do feel old. It must be about seven years since I've been in the press center actually for any good reason.

So it sort of feels a bit weird really. But lovely, listen, you start off trying to get on tour, you want to earn a living, you eventually realise you're going to do that and have big hopes winning tournaments, eventually Ryder Cups, but I don't think you'd ever dream of being here this many years later. And overtaken first, Sam, and eventually, Miguel, who still goes strong as we know. It's been a life's work and it's been amazing.

CLARE BODEL: How special to reach that milestone here at the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship, that place where you had that memorable win back in 2012/3.

DAVID HOWELL: Yeah, it means a lot actually, the last win I had here at St Andrews was amazing. The Barras family in Crans were very nice in inviting an invite for me a few weeks ago. Have to mention that invite request allowed me to be here for this moment, and kudos for them inviting me once more.

And to jump over and above Miguel here at the Old Course is amazing. So I'm really looking forward to it.

CLARE BODEL: Where would you say that win back here at the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship in 2013 ranks?

DAVID HOWELL: I've won five, nice ones, but not many people as a professional golfer get to win at St Andrews. Obviously The Open is the dream. That didn't come my way, clearly. But here is our other chance.

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I had a few good chances to win here over the years and always just managed to fail on the 17th it felt like. I made a bogey, a double-bogey and a triple on the way to not winning this event. And then to finally get over the line here in 2013 was amazing. It was a culmination of two or three years of my first come back from a slump, and yeah, to hole that putt in the playoff here was incredible. So it goes down very highly in my list of high achievements here.

Q. What would you put your longevity down to, and how proud are you to sustain that?

DAVID HOWELL: Well, it's always going to be a number of factors. My form has not been as good as it had been the past couple years, but over my career, I had some exemptions.

Mentally, I just love golf. I've always seen it as a privilege to be able to play in a European Tour event whether it's the biggest ones or the smallest ones. I've always played a lot because of that. Played a few too many times with injuries, as well.

I just thought the opportunity each week was always an immense one, whether you're playing Madeira in the early days or even St. Omer when we are co-sanctioned with the Challenge Tour, and up to this championship and the BMW PGA. Each week is like a life-changing opportunity and I always struggle to turn that down. As I've got older and you realise you're getting toward the end of your playing days, no matter what, it's going to come to an end at some point, I wanted to eek every last bit out of the career I'm privileged to have and got to 722.

Yeah, the body is tired, but the mind, mentally, even though I haven't played well, is still filled with optimism and I'm happy to turn up and go for it again.

Q. How aware were you of overtaking Miguel the last few months?

DAVID HOWELL: I wouldn't say it's been in my head, but when I got to 700, a lot has been going on in the world of golf the last few years. There were some pretty stressful moments for me as a player and chairman of the players' committee and stuff. It's not been an easy last few years

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on a personal front from that perspective.

But once I got to 700, then I thought, well, maybe the opportunity is there to get there and actually there's other people. Sam Torrance spoke personally to me, in such a lovely manner. I broadcast with Sam nowadays, and he was pleased I got past him. We've become nice friends over the past couple years.

More than anything, other people say what an achievement they thought it was more so than what I thought. The more other people mentioned it, I bought into it and sure enough I've played every chance I could get this year and here we are.

Q. Your impressions of the Ryder Cup last week?

DAVID HOWELL: I thought it was incredible. I thought what an amazing development was put on by the Tour. It was bigger than ever. I was shocked when I walked on to the golf course. It was like playing in a city or stadium. Incredibly impressive from an organisational perspective.

From the competitive side, Luke as our captain was clearly, I would say, flawless. The moment he spoke, the entire first paragraph in his speech in fluent Italian with an accent, he looked like he had taken to the role incredibly well. The decisions he made seemed perfect just about all the way through, and boy, did his players perform. It was absolutely incredible. It just seems to get bigger and bigger and bigger. I have wonderful memories of the two I played and they seemed big at the time and of course they are.

But in terms of the size of the stands and just the infrastructure, it seems to have gone on again and it's an incredible event.

Q. How important is that to the Tour going forward?

DAVID HOWELL: Yeah, the Ryder Cup's always been a huge event in terms of the logistics of how our tour runs year and year. We've tried to make it less so, as Keith Pelley has come in, the business model has changed somewhat, but fundamentally it's the biggest event in golf.

Obviously we are always going to want to try and maximize it but not just for commercialisation in its own right. It's a better event when it's big for the fans; the amount of people, the energy from the crowd last week was just incredible. You come in, it's an event in itself as a spectator, isn't it. It's gone on from the days of when Sam and Seve were at The Belfry, it was an incredible then.

It's a different event now in some ways. But inside the

ropes, ultimately it's still just 24 guys trying to beat each other for the best reasons I think. The pantomime; and at times it is like a pantomime there with everything that goes around it, is for everyone else to enjoy.

Q. Have you and Miguel chatted about it? Do you have a number in mind that you want to get to?

DAVID HOWELL: We don't speak anymore -- no, no. (Laughter) no, we haven't really discussed it.

Obviously I got a video message from him when I hit 700. But no, we are not battling it out to be the last man standing. You know, I'm pretty sure Miguel will overtake me again unless I play exceedingly well this week. I'm getting very close to the end of my playing days sadly on this tour which will be a sad moment for me.

Miguel with the brilliance he's shown into his 50s is I'm sure just about more than welcome at any tournament that we have at any time of the year. If he's got it in his sights, I'm sure he can leapfrog over me once more. He'll leave that down to him. He's place pretty well in America. Hopefully he won't. But I don't think it's going to be a running battle I think.

Q. What's the difference in terms of enjoyment?

DAVID HOWELL: Well, I would say on the course, I enjoy the idea of playing well but it wouldn't take a long scroll through the recent record books to see I haven't been playing my best golf the last couple of years. I haven't had a lot of joy on the course.

In the commentary booth, yeah, I'm really enjoying that. It's nice to be part of a team. It's not stressful and hopefully I keep getting asked back and I want to do a reasonable job.

I would say the commentary at the moment is more enjoyable than my on-course golf but being at the Alfred Dunhill Link Championship surrounded by everybody who loves golf is amazing.

This week sums up what is great about our tour more than any. Johann Rupert put this tournament together to build a golfing community, really, which he's done over the course of the last 20, 25 years and that's like a microcosm of our tours and I've been incredibly privileged to be around the players, the caddies, the staff, my enter adult life, and even in here, it's lovely. It's great to be out here but if my golf doesn't bring me much joy, I can walk the course surrounded by nice community and it's all good, anyway.

Q. Two years ago, you spoke after Whistling Straits,

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no need to panic. How pleased --

DAVID HOWELL: Well, very pleased, obviously. It's always nerve-wracking, isn't, it when you get a hammering what's going to happen next time. But a lot been talked the last few days about how the home team keeps winning nowadays, unless I'm on the team then we tend to win when we're away as well.

But we didn't panic. There was obviously a bit of flip-flopping early on with the captain. Luke has done a great job. We've got great belief on this side of the Atlantic, haven't we. I was with Sam all last week and he was so, so confident from Tuesday onwards.

No one has more love in their heart for the Ryder Cup other than maybe Sam and José Maria, everyone on this side of the Atlantic loves it and we get it. It just something in our blood about the Ryder Cup that intrinsically as players and captains and players and ex-players, I think that collectively adds up to something. When you put the crowd on top, it's a powerful force.

Q. Players already say they want Luke back --

DAVID HOWELL: There's reason why he couldn't. We're going to have a different selection process this year I believe. Details to be confirmed going forward. A lot of support for Captain Fantastic at the moment and rightly so. Where we go with it as a tour won't be down to the players' committee.

It will be a collaboration of a few different entities within our environment and we'll come up with the best choice possible. Of course we have history with Jacklin and Bernard Gallacher doing it three times in a row each. We have moved away from that model to give everyone a fair crack at the whip and have their moment at the sun. Luke has enjoyed that. We'll see where we go.

Q. When do you think you will discuss the new captain?

DAVID HOWELL: I think that will be a process, I would imagine, that we'll start somewhere before Christmas. That's the normal time frame. No great rush. As I said, I think there's going to be a new way of going about it this time around. I guess that will happen organically over the next three or four months.

Q. Do you know what the new process might be?

DAVID HOWELL: I don't think we're going to be interviewing players, put it that way.

Q. (Reflect on beating Tiger at the HSBC Champions in 2005 in Shanghai at Sheshan International Golf Club.)

DAVID HOWELL: I was riding high then. Just played in the Ryder Cup and so forth. I wasn't a prolific winner by any means. Yeah, that was the ultimate -- gave me the ultimate believe that on my day I could beat anyone.

Tiger was in good form and I proved to myself that when it mattered I could go out and put a good round of golf in front of the world's best players and that's what it meant to me. Doesn't mean you're going to sustain that level week-after-week and become one of the world's great players. Clearly I didn't do that but I had my moments. Gave me the self-belief that on any given day, I can beat any given player, and that's a powerful thing for a golfer.

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