

Betfred British Masters hosted by Danny Willett

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

Sutton, Coldfield, England

The Belfry

Lee Westwood

Press Conference

MATTHEW JOULE: Welcome, Lee, and welcome to this week's Betfred British Masters hosted by Danny Willett, a week where you've had success in the pas.

Does it ever get any less special coming back here?

LEE WESTWOOD: No, I've always loved coming back to The Belfry. Came here as a boy to watch Ryder Cups. Watched the '99 Ryder Cup and the '93 one, even at that stage it was a young golf course but obviously still a very good test. Then came back to play tournaments here. British Masters, Ryder Cup in 2002. It's only an hour and a half from where I used to live.

Yeah, it's a special place.

MATTHEW JOULE: Do you have one memory that stands out from all the time you've been here?

LEE WESTWOOD: I would say winning British Masters but obviously that's because we're all individuals. But come together as a team to play The Ryder Cup here, playing with Sergio, was struggling at the time and he's lobously a very confident person, very bubbly and kind of turned my game around and turned my mentality around because I was going through a bit of a slump at the time. I played well that week and got three points out of five.

That was a nice week.

MATTHEW JOULE: As well as success in this event, you've also hosted on a couple of occasions. How will Danny be feeling this week seeing all his hard work come to fruition?

LEE WESTWOOD: Tired. There's obviously a lot more to do and a lot more press engagements and sponsor things and stuff like that. It's as easy to come here and just think about yourself. You've got to think about other people as well. Yeah, he'll want to play well, but not often the host plays very well when they are hosting the tournament. There's too many things to think about.



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Q. Not played since a good performance, tied 14th at the Masters. Just tell us what you've been up to, and how is the game looking before the start of week?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, I was quite pleased with the way I played at the Master. I didn't play very well the week before. I played okay at the Match Play but didn't play very well the week before at the Valero.

And obviously going back to somewhere I like, Augusta, where I've played well in the past was nice. I did play well and every aspect of my game as all right, and I was obviously pleased with the finish. It was nice to finish top 20, earn a top 20 again.

Straight after that, I went skiing. Went to Val d'Isère skiing for a week and came back in one piece which is good. It's always good to do that. Then I've had the last couple of weeks off, working on my game a little bit, not too much, just having a rest. I feel at my stage rest is important as standing on the range grinding. Been doing some fitness work and gym work.

Went and had a weekend away for my birthday. I don't know if you know I'm 49 now.

Q. Congratulations.

LEE WESTWOOD: It seems to be mentioned in everything that anybody writes.

Just looking forward to getting started again over these next few weeks. I've had kind of a mini-break, and seeing if I can pick up from where I left off at the Masters.

Q. What leads nicely into the next question: What does that look like? Certain event in St Albans on the horizon.

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, this week obviously which is my primary focus, then Byron Nelson, PGA, week off and Memorial. And then I've asked there a release from the PGA Tour and European Tour for the Centurion like many others have. Week after that is hopefully U.S. Open if I stay Top 60 in the world. I think I have one other week off after that.

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Q. So what's the sense that you're getting about the releases? Do you think the Tour are going to grant them?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, I've asked for releases for tournaments for as long as I've been on Tour. It's not the first release I've asked for. I've asked for many. Not heard anything back yet. Ball is in the European Tour's court and the PGA Tour's court for that matter.

Q. Do you technically have to ask for a release from both tours?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, seems like I have to ask for releases from everybody. Yeah, we are just following the rules laid out and the protocols and like I say, the ball in the various Tours' court.

Q. How do you think The European Tour are handling it? Got to being a difficult situation. There's been threat of bans and all kinds of talk but nothing as of yet has happened.

LEE WESTWOOD: I haven't really paid too much attention to it. I've simply asked for a release, and then -- all the releases I've ever asked for, I've never considered how The European Tour are handling is. So I wouldn't -- it wouldn't -- it's not something that resonates with me for this.

Q. You've been on this tour for, what, 26 years?

LEE WESTWOOD: 9.

Q. 29 years.

LEE WESTWOOD: I'm glad you've done your research.

Q. So were you on Tour when you came here in '93 then?

LEE WESTWOOD: I got my card in '93.

Q. So when you came here you were starting out as a pro. To watch The Ryder Cup, I mean.

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, I came out to watch it in September '93 and I had either just gone to the first stage of the Tour school at Hopwood Cottage, or I was just about to go. I think I had actually turned pro by then. I'd kind of won the British Youths', finished second in the European Amateur in August and then I came here to watch the golf in September, yeah. I think I would have been going to Hopwood Cottage just after that and then off to Montpellier

and Lausanne in November.

Q. In all those 29, 30 years, you've shown more than any top player that loyalty to The European Tour and obviously European Tour through and through.

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah.

Q. Do you think that people talking about bans for somebody like you, who has been such a servant to the Tour, do you think that's fair? Do you think it's even right if that happened?

LEE WESTWOOD: I don't think it's a case of fairness. I think it's a case of whichever authority is feeling whatever they do is right. Like you say, I've supported The European Tour for 29 years. I've gone over and won on the PGA Tour in '98, not taken my card. I've had brief kind of goes at the PGA Tour, if you want to call it that and given up my card at certain times over there through personal things.

I've never been sort of driven by playing on the PGA Tour like a lot of the guys have. It's been their kind of goal to get on to the PGA Tour. It never has for me. My goal has always been to be a European Tour member and support this tour and kind of go in and out of the PGA Tour.

Yeah, I've hosted events on this tour and obviously played wherever I can through COVID and stuff like that. I consider myself a European Tour member and I've always tried to support The European Tour as much as I can.

Q. Is it a bad thing that somebody is trying to put all this money into golf? It's being portrayed as a bad thing.

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, it's being portrayed as an us and them, whereas the people from LIV Golf, all the reports I've said, have said that they want to stand side-by-side and run -- they are not going up against any of the really massive tournaments. They kind of want to run, what's the word, kind of they want everybody to be able to play, have options. They are not forcing anybody's hand, so I believe.

People always have a problem with change, don't they. They are skeptical about it and people like, in whatever walk it is, they like continuity and they like just the same to carry on. Whereas change in competition are good in any walk of life I think. It shakes things up and keeps everybody on their toes and keeps everybody trying to improve and improve their product.

Q. And you're a professional golfer, this is what you do. If you were growing up as a lad in Worksop and

somebody said, turn it down, you'd give them a slap, wouldn't you?

LEE WESTWOOD: I think some of my mates I grew up playing with in Worksop, if I went up to them and said I've been given an opportunity to play in a tournament, a 48-man tournament for \$25 million, they would probably pull me to one side and say what is it you're actually thinking about.

Like you said, this is my job. I do this for money. It's not the only reason for doing it. But if anybody comes along and gives any of us a chance at a pay rise, then you have to seriously consider it, don't you.

Q. But while you're considering that, it must be at the back of your mind what might what might happen Ryder Cup-wise, that sort of thing?

LEE WESTWOOD: Well, not really, no, because that's for somebody else to decide, and why should it? European Tour have no problem with me being a PGA Tour member, so this is just another tour.

Anyway, I'd prefer to talk to the British Masters, obviously, if you want to ask me a question about that. You probably don't.

Q. Are you back with Pete?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, I started working with Pete again at the Masters. Just I needed a new, old point of view. You know, Pete's watched me since I was, well, since 1995, I think it was, I started working with Pete. So you know, I think he's probably always just kept a bit of an eye on me and knows how my swing works and my body works.

I asked him and he was good enough to give me an hour on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the Masters and look at me a couple of the other days as well and I started to get a few of the old feelings back, yeah.

Q. Just one more on the LIV Golf stuff. The source of the money has caused controversy coming from Saudi Arabia, and we have seen it with the buyer from Newcastle, for example. Is there anything that would change your mind? Is there anything that you could learn about Saudi Arabia's human rights or anything like that or do you view this as a professional decision?

LEE WESTWOOD: Well, Saudi Arabia, money is in all different sports, isn't it, now, whether it be football or Formula 1. The first time I ever played in Saudi Arabia was

on The European Tour. The first three times played there, The European Tour sanctioned it. So they had no problem with where the money came from the PGA Tour gave releases for PGA Tour players to play the Saudi event this year. They have no problem with where the money comes from.

I think Saudi Arabia are trying to become more western sized and make changes and they are trying to make changes quickly, and that's probably worrying a lot of people and scaring a lot of people. But they are just trying to improve, aren't they. People give it different names. But I'm of a belief that sport and politics shouldn't mix, as we have seen it doing in Wimbledon, tennis, with the Russian players not being allowed to play there. I happen to disagree with what they have done there, as a lot of people do. I've seen Nadal come out.

So I don't think they should mix. A lot of the times, they do. It all comes down to opinions at the end of the day, doesn't it.

MATTHEW JOULE: Thanks for your time, Lee. Good luck this week.

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