

The 151st Open

Mixed Zone

Thursday, 20 July 2023

Stewart Cink



STEWART CINK: It was a good day out there. I was actually having fun watching him because he was the group in front of me. So I got to see his scoreboard and a couple places where the course crosses you can see shots.

I am happy for him. We know each other because I practise at their place down in Atlanta, so I see them all the time.

He's got a lot of game, so I'm not surprised that he had a good one today.

He may feature in this thing later on too.

Q. What about you?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, same. I've played a lot of these and experience matters here probably as much as anywhere else. Right up there with probably Augusta National.

But it was a good day. I stayed patient and I executed well. Game plan is pretty good here. This is not the kind of course you can just game plan your way around because off the tee the bunkers are so staggered that you're just going to have to contend with the bunkers. You can't just avoid the bunkers like in the old days we used to.

I did a good job with sort of game planning it, and never got myself into a lot of trouble and was able to just kind of keep it steady, no bogeys, always a good thing in a major.

Q. What is it that fits your eye about links golf?

STEWART CINK: Well, nothing really. To be honest, it's not like I just knock it dead every year. I won the one year, and then I don't have a whole lot of great results other than that.

I love playing it, but I haven't had tremendous results other than a few -- the win and a few top 10s.

I'm fascinated by the way the course is set up. I think it's a really fun test and it's very challenging. It doesn't really fit my game, to be honest.

But playing smart and being disciplined and patient and keeping your heart in the right place, that fits my game.

It's required on courses like this, and it comes down to execution. Today I executed very well, and it was pretty evident in the scorecard. It was a nice clean day. Puttered well from inside eight feet. That's the kind of stuff you have to do in a major.

Q. Did you find a bunker today?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, on the 18th hole I was in a bunker but I was right in the centre of it. Had a pretty reasonable shot. Left it about 12 feet short.

Q. Is it fair to say if you're in a lot of these bunkers it's at least a half shot if not a shot?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, and it's a regression thing. The more you hit into these bunkers you're going to end up getting hosed big time.

I was in one today and I was in the dead centre of it so I had no lip issues really at all. But in my group we had some backwards and sideways shots out of bunkers.

Eventually it'll catch up with you. You don't want to be in these bunkers. They're so flat. The bottoms of them are so flat that if a ball comes in with any momentum, it's just going right up to the lip and stop. There's not a little upslope that helps you at all. They are very penal.

Q. You mentioned backwards and sideways. Is that something you practise when you go over to play links golf?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, you do. You'll find your ball in places like that in the practice days and get creative hitting shots out and see how much you can do, how aggressive you can be, where the lip is in your backswing, stuff like that. Just kind of get it -- the awareness, spatially, of everything.

Yeah, just kind of hope that doesn't happen. Today I avoided the bunkers pretty well. When I was off, when I missed the fairways, I just missed them in places where the bunkers weren't.

It was fortunate in that regard, but you've just got to take that when you can because you'll have days when you miss just by a



few inches and you end up in five bunkers.

Q. Have you played with Christo or just seen him practise?

STEWART CINK: We've never played together. I don't play with the guys on the team that much because they are always doing qualifying rounds and stuff. I've only hit balls next to him a bunch and hang out at the range.

Our golf course, our practice facility at Georgia Tech is not a course. It's only a practice facility.

Q. Why do you say he's got game? What impresses you about watching him hit balls?

STEWART CINK: Well, he's got -- and I'm sure it's no surprise -- pretty huge power because he's a giant man, and a lot of club head speed. His short game, too. He's got really nice hands and a soft touch around the greens with the little shots.

As a 50 year old golfer seeing a guy like him, he is pretty much like your basic nightmare, watching a guy like him coming up. He can hit it like 330 in the air and he hits those little shots around the green so soft, it's amazing. He's got a lot of really good potential in front of him.

Q. What are your golfing goals these days?

STEWART CINK: Well, I like winning. I like winning tournaments and it hasn't been that long since I won so, I know that I can still get up in the mix and give myself a chance to win.

The key to winning out here in this game, you're not going to wrestle the bull to the ground very often. You're going to just need to get yourself in position enough times where the winning happens. Sometimes it happens; sometimes it doesn't. It doesn't matter who you are.

The greatest thing about Tiger was he put himself in position to win a whole lot of times, and it happened for him a lot of times.

I want to get myself in the mix to have a chance to win on the last round, last nine holes, and the key is just to stick to your -- just stick with the attitude and the game plan that you bring to the course on Thursday.

At my age it's kind of hard to keep the -- to avoid hitting the ball. That's what I've found since I've been in my late 40s and now 50, is that you just kind of get fatigued. I don't mean like physically tired, just mentally sort of get drained.

Q. How do you combat that?

STEWART CINK: I really try to offload everything before the rounds, and if I have something that I've got to take care of, I

usually take care of it the night before so that the day of is completely offloaded as far as decision making. I feel like I can make decisions for like a finite amount of time.

I just don't do any decision making before the rounds because -- it even goes to like figuring out a game plan for all the hole locations and everything. All that stuff is done the night before so when I get to the course I don't have to be out there deciding like, now what's this pin? Is it right next to that mound or is it over the bunker?

I already know all that stuff and I'm very fortunate they started giving us the hole locations the night before so I can build that in the night before and try to offload some of those things that sap energy so I can be fresher a little longer and hopefully long enough to get through 72 holes.

Q. I know Lisa has been on the bag for a while but how does she factor into this?

STEWART CINK: She's kind of almost like a therapist out there for me. She just knows me so well. The psychology of golf and the mentality and the emotional ebbs and flows are just to me a huge part of the game, and it's something I really enjoy kind of learning about myself and monitoring, and she knows all that about me, and she can also be a good monitor like that. She's really good about keeping my heart in the game and my head in the game.

When things start to get off the rails a little bit, she's there and really good about kind of reminding me about getting back where our two feet are, in the present. While she might not be as good about helping me decide if it's a 4- or 5-iron, she's really good about keeping me sort of where I need to be to be my best out there on the course.

Q. I saw you at baggage claim Tuesday morning. Can you talk about the 48 hours of prep time you had?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, pretty fast.

Q. Is that your norm to come in on a Tuesday for a major?

STEWART CINK: No, it's not. We had some travel difficulties, and because of what is right there on my shirt, I'm not going to tell you what happened.

Our flight Sunday night got cancelled so we had to reroute, and the best we could do was fly 24 hours later from Atlanta.

Q. How did that affect your preparation and how you spent the 48 hours that followed?

STEWART CINK: Well, we had to really organise ourselves as far as -- we had to sort of balance rest, preparation on the



course -- I've played here the last two times, but it hasn't really helped me because I don't remember that much about it, to be honest, and we played two vastly different conditions.

2006 it was like -- that was the year, right? It was a drought. Then we had the flood. This year we've had probably more flood type conditions than drought.

But it's been three different kind of golf courses, so we had to get out there and figure out the golf course, make a game plan. We had to rest and help ourselves adjust to the time.

We had a super long day on Tuesday, and I got in trouble for that. Lisa got mad at me because I kept at it too long. We're still trying to get there, but that's one of the great things about golf, is when the gun goes off and you start in the tournament, you've got that adrenaline, and adrenaline does wonders for your jetlag.

Q. Do you think a man in his 50s can win The Open?

STEWART CINK: Oh, yeah, for sure. I just have to look back a few years to Phil Mickelson winning the PGA. I think that was probably a more difficult course than this.

Q. Do you draw from that?

STEWART CINK: I do. Absolutely. Watching him win that was -- it didn't really surprise anybody. He's been so good for so long.

I have wins recently, and so I'm not that different of a golfer than I was then. I have no doubts that I can win this.

It's going to take a lot. It's going to take some really, really exceptional play on my behalf, but it's in there.

Q. You even got an up-close view of what might happen at Turnberry 14 years ago.

STEWART CINK: Yeah, exactly. I watched Tom do that in 2009, and I'm still way younger than he was then.

Q. Are you playing next week?

STEWART CINK: I am. Yeah, Minnesota.

Q. I meant Porthcawl.

STEWART CINK: I'm not. I actually committed to play that and then I decided to play 3M.

Q. Is it hard, because obviously the FedExCup and everything going on, you hate to lose a week?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, that's basically why I decided to play because FedExCup is coming up and I'm pretty far down the list. I'm still trying to figure out what I'm going to do going forward after the FedExCup. I've got some options, PGA TOUR and Champions.

Q. If you're outside the top 50 does that change your mind?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, I think it might. I'm not going to say it's going to change my mind 100 percent, but I have a feeling if I'm outside the top 50 and not in the designated events next year, I'll probably throw more Champions on the schedule next year.

Q. One question about the Ryder Cup after you've played five times. Can I get your thoughts on '02 and what it was like on that very first tee shot and what was going through your mind at the time?

STEWART CINK: I'll tell you what was going through my mind. I was partnered with Jim Furyk and I got sat out the first morning, so I had to wait all that time to get there.

Me and Furyk decided in practice that I was going to hit on the odd holes, and about five minutes before the tee time, we were on the practice green about to walk over to the tee and I went to Furyk and said, I don't think I can hit odd holes because that includes No. 1, so you're hitting it.

He was like, I understand. He played the last two or three Ryder Cups, so he's like, I get it. So he hit off 1, and he hit it -- he couldn't have hit a more perfect shot off the tee for someone who is nervous about their first shot in the Ryder Cup because he hit it in the first cut of rough and the ball was teed up about that high; I had an 8-iron into the green. It was the most perfect scenario.

I hit a nice shot. Hit it up there about 20 feet and I kind of felt like, okay, that moment is over. I can relax now.

Furyk gets up on the putt and he stroked it and it rolled about four feet past, so now I had now my first four-footer in the Ryder Cup on the first green.

Yeah, I'm still trying to get my heart rate deescalated from that moment, and it's been 21 years.

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