

ANA Inspiration

Wednesday, March 31, 2021

Rancho Mirage, California, USA

Mission Hills Country Club

Inbee Park

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome inside the virtual media center at the ANA Inspiration. I'm pleased to be joined by Rolex Rankings No. 2 Inbee Park. Inbee, how are you doing today?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, I'm doing just fine. Really happy to be back here in the desert. You know, I've played this week so many times and know the golf course like my home course. Yeah, just very familiar feeling coming back to here.

Q. You're coming into this event now just winning off your debut at the Kia Classic. Now that you've had a couple days to reflect, was that like being able to start off your season with such a bang?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, it's great because you just take so much pressure off yourself by winning the first event obviously. You have the long season coming, but obviously to be able to win the first one I feel a lot less pressure coming into the tournaments that's being held after that.

So a lot of confidence. Definitely last week I was feeling a little bit rusty and I kind of thought that there was a lot of parts in my game that needs to be worked on, and obviously it worked out really good.

But I still have here and there that I need to fix on the way. Yeah, it feels good.

Q. I was going to say, you're saying you feel rusty and there are things you need to work on coming off a win.

INBEE PARK: Yeah.

Q. What are some of those things that you're really looking to focus and improve upon?

INBEE PARK: You know, the one that I was surprised last week was that I putted really good. Usually it is really tough putting on those Aviara greens. I worked on my putting a lot on the off-season. The ball striking has been



really good last few years, and I just kind of thought that my putting and the short game wasn't exactly there.

So I was kind of working on that in the wintertime. I'm happy that it kind of paid off last week.

Q. And has to do so much for your confidence. You said there is not as much pressure as you go into ANA week. What is the confidence level?

INBEE PARK: I got to say last week I was probably like 50 out of 100, and after winning last week it definitely got up to about 80%. I'm trying to get to the close to the 100% before probably the second major of the year. I just kind of thought -- I just love west coast swing. The golf courses that they play on the west coast is the golf courses I really love to play, so I really want to take advantage of these weeks.

Yeah, this week is another of my favorite weeks and it's a great golf course. Course condition is in great shape. Probably the best I've seen. So I'm really excited to play.

Q. I was going to ask, there is definitely some changes. I know you say it feels almost like your home course.

INBEE PARK: Uh-huh.

Q. You have so many wonderful memories here. What are some of the differences you're seeing and how do you think it'll level up to the way you're playing right now?

INBEE PARK: Well, I think this golf course is going to play hard and fast, which we always want to play this golf course hard and fast. I think that's going to be the case this week, so I'm really happy to see that.

It's going to be probably a little bit hot over the weekend, but think it's going to be good golfing weather, too. I think the course is in just perfect shape and it's like the fairways are like a carpet. The greens are just so fast and firm.

So, you know, probably it's going to get firmer over the weekend. The rough is probably not the thickest I've seen, but it is -- it can get very tricky. So I think it's going to be a fun week.



Q. I know Olympics and major championships are always top of mind, but have you given much thought to returning to No. 1 in the world? And now that you're No 2, are you honing in on that a little more?

INBEE PARK: To be honest, I really haven't thought about being No. 1, but to qualify for the Olympics being No. 1 definitely helps a lot. So I guess that could be a big yes.

Yeah, that really comes close to my goal. Obviously playing good in majors is a big focus of my season and I haven't won a major in a while, so hopefully this year could be the one this year.

Q. Have you had to work on being patient in that regard in the major department?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, I mean, I've come close few times after winning 2015 British. After that I came close few times but I just couldn't putt it off.

I think just putting, my putting wasn't just exactly there. So that's part of the game that I'm really trying to improve a little bit. I'm trying to get back to where I was -- I think where I was in 2013 through '15, that area.

So I think that's something that I have been missing.

Q. You just talked about trying to get back to that time in your career. Is there a moment or event that stands out to you that you felt like you really want to try and match?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, just I think the whole 2013, the way I putted was -- I just couldn't ask for more. Just really consistently putting well. Other than just like one week really good and one week really bad. I didn't really have that bad weeks I should say.

I was actually just above average most of the time and really good in the weeks I won. So I'm just trying to raise my average a little bit. Trying to put a lot of balls close to the hole. Trying to make it to the hole. But trying to get the speed right, rhythm right so my average is just a bit better.

Q. How much time do you spend working on your putting?

INBEE PARK: Probably not long enough probably. (Laughter.)

But, yeah, I mean, over the off-season because I was indoors a lot, I was home a lot, so I tried to do at least 500 putting strokes a day indoors at home. So, I mean, there is

nothing else that I could do indoors, so I just try to make my putting stroke a little more consistent.

Q. What did you practice on inside? Do you have some sort of special green that you use?

INBEE PARK: Special grain? No.

Q. Special green.

INBEE PARK: Special green? Do I have a special green?

Q. Yeah, for indoor putting.

INBEE PARK: Oh, no. I just have the putting mat. Just trying to have the consistent stroke.

Q. When you had your thumb injury, can you talk about what changes you made in your swing?

INBEE PARK: I mean, I didn't make any kind of swing change because of the injury. I just needed some time off. So swing just like before -- with the injury, you try to play with the injury, your swing just changes without you knowing it.

So I'm just trying to recover it fully it swing like before.

Q. Do you ever have any thumb issues now?

INBEE PARK: No, after that, no. I think I've recovered quite well.

Q. Amazing.

INBEE PARK: Uh-huh.

Q. Inbee, can you describe what the pressure felt like trying to win at the Rio Olympics compared to trying to win any of the majors that you have?

INBEE PARK: I just think it's just a really different feeling, because the Olympics is just you get so much attention from the people and the country and from everyone pretty much. I think it's double, triple, probably ten times more pressure than I ever felt in a major championship.

So it's just another level. I don't know how much exactly, but I can just say that it was just another level of pressure.

Q. So do you feel when you go back to Tokyo that, well, I've already won the gold so I have no pressure, or what do you imagine the level will be like?

INBEE PARK: Well, I'm hoping for little less. I think

winning the gold medal in 2016 in Rio will definitely take some a little bit of pressure off me hopefully. Always -- the good thing -- I mean, I shouldn't say good thing, but the something that was working on my advantage for that week in Rio Olympics was that everyone was feeling that kind of pressure. If I was the only one that was feeling that pressure I don't think I would've played as good.

Everyone was feeling so much pressure that I could just see from other players, too. That really made me feel a little bit more relaxed after seeing that.

Q. One last follow. That pressure that you're talking about, I think I remember So Yeon saying that you told her you saw people actually crying when they didn't medal. That was the pressure to win, and then you don't.

INBEE PARK: Didn't what?

Q. Didn't medal. Let their country down.

INBEE PARK: Yeah, yeah.

Q. Is that what you're talking about and can you describe the scene you saw?

INBEE PARK: I just think that athletes competing in the Olympics is just competing on behalf of the country pretty much. You know, the whole country is actually playing that week pretty much. They're watching but they're actually in there like so concentrated and they're in the tournament competing pretty much.

We are playing, but I think it's just that kind of feeling. They don't do that every week that we are out here playing on the LPGA Tour, but they definitely do that for the Olympics, yes.

And same for me. I mean, I watch other sports. Our countrymen and women representing the country, in Olympic Games I watch them and I feel like I am playing. So I think it's pretty much the same feeling.

Q. I just have two quick questions. Favorite Olympic sport to watch?

INBEE PARK: You know, I just really love watching everything. I love watching swimming, archery, athletics, yeah, like even figure skating in the Winter Olympics.

Pretty much like all the sports. It's just fun to watch the variety of sports in the course of the two to three weeks. I think it's just festival of athletes, so it's really good fun.

Q. And if you were to rise to No. 1 at this stage in your career, would it be meaningful in a different way to you?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, of course. I think that it would mean a lot because I kind of thought that will I be No. 1 again? I was asking the same question to myself for few years.

Being able to do it again would be meaning a lot obviously that I can still compete out here. Be the best player in the world still for the long time is a good confidence.

Q. What do you think is the secret to the longevity of your solid play?

INBEE PARK: I think it's the combination of everything. You know, I travel with my husband. That really helps a lot. It gives me a lot of comfortness, and obviously my husband is there and watching my swing all the time that I don't go to a bad swing over some period of time.

And it's just -- yeah, I don't know what else. Just, yeah, probably my swing is a little bit easier on my body, like not swinging so hard. Rhythm is not too quick. So maybe that's the key to the consistency. I don't know.

Q. At what point do you feel confident that you were going to be able to defend your title, that there actually would be an Olympics that you can compete in and defend your gold medal?

INBEE PARK: Well, not long at all, because until I -- maybe probably two to three weeks ago when I decided to come to U.S. to play in Kia Classic. Until then I didn't even know the Olympic was going to be really on or not. They say it's going to be on, but everything is kind of really -- it's hard to say for any kind of sporting event at the moment.

And we've experienced it in pandemic last year, so nothing to be guaranteed. I think once I came over here, playing in the LPGA events and seeing all players, I guess kind of got the feeling that Olympics was going to go ahead.

Maybe it's going to be the year that I really need to concentrate well.

Q. You're really close to So Yeon. She just missed out in 2016.

INBEE PARK: Uh-huh.

Q. What would it mean if you guys were both on this team together?

INBEE PARK: I just think it would mean a lot. I mean, it

could be our last time or it could be for years later we'll still be here. I don't know. I'll be like 37 probably by then so I'm not sure if I'm going to be still competing out here that competitively.

So I think having -- being able to represent the country with a good friend will be meaning a lot.

Q. As we wrap it up here, this is the 50th edition of the ANA Inspiration. A lot of tradition, history. You said earlier that it has a lot of favorable memories with you. What does it mean to be a part of such a legacy?

INBEE PARK: I mean, it is always a huge honor playing this week and being able to play this golf course. They have the history and the tradition going on. They have such a special ceremony after -- when you become a winner of that tournament.

I just think it's a huge honor as a golfer, athlete to play in this event. Yeah, it's like women's Masters.

Q. Were you nervous carrying the torch in 2018, into the stadium? What was that like in your experience of the many you've had?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, I mean, it was great, great, great experience being able to carry the torch in 2018 PyeongChang Olympics. It was held in my country, so being able to be part of it, part of the history, was just an honor.

Q. I remember Janet Evans doing it in 1996 and saying she was petrified she was trip. Did you have any of those thoughts?

INBEE PARK: It was so cold, like minus 20 degrees celsius. I was just so cold and just afraid that I was going to trip. It was only like 50, 100 yard run, but I didn't want to be embarrassed in front of a lot of people. So just a very slow nice run.

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