

Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

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Orlando, Florida, USA

Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

Charles Woodson

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Hi, Charles. Thank you so much for being here. Welcome to the 2026 Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions. As a local resident you know this course really well and you've played this tournament a couple times. Talk about this week and why you look forward to it every year.

CHARLES WOODSON: Yeah, it's always a fun week. It's here in Lake Nona. This is my home course so I live right here and played this course as often as I can.

Beautiful course. I think our club here, they do a fantastic job, groundskeepers and all those guys year-round making sure we have a great experience.

It's great that it's here in my backyard. I don't have to travel very far. Too bad I tried to help with the weather but I failed, so sorry for that.

But, yeah, a chance to always think about this experience as getting a chance to play the course in someone -- or play the game in someone else's field. Playing golf, it's not of course what I did for a living, but I get to walk around with the pros and watch them in action, watch them up close.

You know, I always marvel at how effortless it looks to these professionals out there on the course. I'm out there slapping it around. It's always fun to be around that and just go out and have a great time, four days of golf.

I'm coming off the football season so I don't get to play as much as I would like to, but it's always a great four days for me to play.

Q. Do you have any pairings you're hoping to see, LPGA players or celebrities you enjoyed playing with in the past?

CHARLES WOODSON: Yeah, I played of course with the number one golfer, Nelly Korda. Played with her a couple

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times. So, again, another pro that you get to play up close with and watch her perform and just all around great player, great person.

So other than that, other celebrities, I played with so many. I feel like I'm always paired up with Dwight Freeney somehow, but he always beats me. So you know what, hopefully I draw him again this week and I can take him down.

Look forward to seeing him as well.

Q. I know you said you don't get to golf much during the football season. Does this get your competitive juices flowing? You feel as a former athlete you want to win when you go out in any competition, right?

CHARLES WOODSON: Absolutely. And I treat it just like I did when I played the game of football. When I went into the season I always felt like I was going to win the championship. Didn't matter what kind of team we had, we're good enough to win.

I go into the week thinking I'm good enough to win. I look forward to it. I'm just like all of the other athletes out here; we're all competitive. We all want to put our best foot forward.

Like I said, I played with Dwight a few times and he always at the end of the four days always has more points than me. I'm pretty POd about that.

So hopefully I have a little get-back this weekend.

Q. How long have you lived here and what has been your interaction with Tour players, LPGA and PGA over the years? Anyone you play a lot of golf with that lives here, too?

CHARLES WOODSON: Yeah, been here since 2011 so been here quite a while. Yeah. We have a bunch of people around here, bunch of players, all-timers, greats. Annika, our kids were friends growing up or are friends growing up, so I've been around here quite often.

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Henrik, Ian. I haven't played a lot of golf with those guys. Played nine holes with Henrik one time. Again, like I said, being next to the professionals and watching the way they play the game, their striking and distance control and all those things is quite impressive.

So yeah, this neighborhood has afforded us with a lot of greats of the game.

Q. When did you get the golf bug?

CHARLES WOODSON: Yeah, I started playing or really trying to play probably around 2017, so I've been here few years. I'd come out to the club and hang out but was never really interested in playing.

There was a few members here that invited me out to play and it was pretty embarrassing and I didn't like being on that end of it. I started playing a lot more and really paying attention to and watching other golfers.

I bought all the contraptions people buy, wasted a lot of money. I don't think it helped as much as I would've liked it to, but I caught that bug probably around 2017, '18 and been going ever since then.

The game is -- I love the game. Any chance that I get to get on the driving range or get a round in with some of the members here, I jump at it.

It's just a fun time to try to get better at a game that you seem to never be able to perfect. No matter how great you play one day, the next day a totally different. No matter how the course looks one day the next day it's totally different. It's all the same piece of land but plays so many different ways. I just love that aspect of it.

Again, just trying to get better at it and be respectable when I'm out there.

Q. Charles, this is a tournament that has more applicants for these celebrity slots than there are slots. What's your process to get into the field year after year?

CHARLES WOODSON: You know what, I don't know how I got into the field actually. You know, I think you know somebody that knows somebody. I feel like that's the way it happened.

I know a couple years ago I was asked -- yeah, I think I was in Tahoe. First time I played in Tahoe and I think I met Mackenzie and she talked about playing in this tournament. I played in Tahoe maybe once or twice before I met her, and I think it was some time passed before I got

back in touch with her.

She was like, yeah, would you like to play? It wasn't played here at the time. It was just about to come over here to our course. I was like, yeah, man, I would love to do it.

So that was my introduction to this tournament.

Yeah, I don't think I initially went out looking for -- to play in those tournaments because I wasn't playing a lot of golf. It wasn't my thing.

And then once I started going out and going to the range and swinging it a little more, then these opportunities started coming around. That's how it happened.

Q. Is it possible that because you were -- you're living here that gives you a little bit of an inside into getting into the field?

CHARLES WOODSON: Yeah, I guess it could have helped. You know, I don't know. I don't know what it is. I don't know. Maybe, maybe she thinks I'm handsome or something. I don't know. (Laughing.)

You know, but, yeah, I'm in and I'm glad I'm in. As long as they keep asking me to come back, I'm coming back.

Q. Who is the best NFL player that you think you played with in golf, former or current?

CHARLES WOODSON: The best, probably Marshall Falk. Probably the best one that I can think of offhand. Strong game. Really smooth swing. Yeah, I mean, I was playing with him and I was like, yeah, I got to step my game up. This guy is way ahead of me.

So I think he's the one guy that I think of right now that is a really, really good golfer.

Q. And how would you assess your game in terms of the best parts of your game, parts that you work on the most?

CHARLES WOODSON: Yeah, I'm on the driving range a lot, so I would say my drives usually work. Because I spent so much time on the range I'm not on the chipping greens as much as I should be, so my short game kind of lacks a little bit. I think I'm a natural putter so I think I am pretty good there.

So it's all intermediate game, so drives usually, they'll work for me. Then when I get to my irons and then when you get to that 150 and in sometimes can get a little shaky.

So I'm hoping, hoping -- like I said, I haven't played a lot so hoping I can put a decent round together this weekend and have a respectable game this weekend.

Q. Super Bowl is right around the corner. Any thoughts on the matchups between Seahawks and Patriots?

CHARLES WOODSON: Yeah, I really like the Seahawks. You know, I think defensively their front, they're built in a lot of ways the way that the Seahawks teams were built under Pete Carroll. The defense is strong up front, strong front seven. Secondary is good with long defensive backs that play coverage really well.

Offensively, Sam Darnold is really doing his thing right now. We know the criticism he's taken over the years as a player, but they have an outstanding receiver who will probably be Offensive Player of the Year this year, the running back. His name is escaping me right now.

Q. Kenneth Walker?

CHARLES WOODSON: Kenneth Walker. Yeah, had to take on a little bit more of the load with Charbonnet being out last week. Outstanding player. Not to take anything from New England, but they're a well-coached team. I think they find themselves in a position where sometimes they may be ahead of schedule a little bit.

But they're in the game so of course there is a chance. I think Seahawks will be a little bit too much for them on Sunday, so I like the Seattle Seahawks to win the Super Bowl.

Q. You're quite familiar with Big10 football. What was your thoughts on the Indiana Hoosiers this year and that story?

CHARLES WOODSON: Man, very impressive. Very impressive. You know, when we think of Indiana we don't think of them being a national powerhouse, a national champion contender. When you look at that team, a lot has been made about of course the transfer portal and getting older guys in there and the average age and all those sorts of things.

Which are true, but still at the end of the day comes down coaching. I think Coach Cignetti, he obviously put together a great staff. He's obviously very confident in his ability. You know, he told everybody what he was going to do. He was going to win; he did it.

The team, watching them all season long, I just couldn't

buy into them. I just wouldn't allow myself to buy into Indiana. The one thing I noticed about their team all season is they were very physical. If you're a physical team you're always going to be in the game.

Mendoza, Heisman Trophy winner. He did a great job of navigating the entire season as a quarterback and being a leader of the team. Yeah, very impressed with what he was able to do in a short amount of time, two years. Made it to the playoffs once and then win it the next year is quite impressive.

Q. Speaking of coaching, thoughts on Kyle Whittingham?

CHARLES WOODSON: Yeah, you know what, just a weird situation of course that went down to get us to this point. You never know how the process is going to go. I think that Ward did a great job of making the best choice with the people that he had available. He brings in a winning coach, a guy who over the years you know that he has had good teams. They've been a physical team, the teams that he has coached.

He's going to be a discipline guy. I think it was a good hire for us and I think most importantly the big thing was going to be was who was he going to be able to retain. Were the guys going to initially buy into what he was selling.

He did a great job retaining players, great job in the portal. Got some guys I'm sure they recruited before he left; some guys that were committed to Utah that game over. And some other guys in the portal, safeties, defensive lineman, linebackers.

And so other than that, most importantly the quarterback, Bryce Underwood is still there. So I think what he needed to do he did. He put together a good staff from what I understand. The guys that I've seen that he brought in. Offensive coordinator, defensive coordinator.

So I'm excited for it. I think between Ward, Kyle, and his staff and keeping guys on board I think we did about as good as we could possibly do.

THE MODERATOR: Great. Thank you so much, Charles. We appreciate you being here.

CHARLES WOODSON: Appreciate it.

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