

Kia Classic

Sunday, March 28, 2021

Carlsbad, California, USA

Park Hyatt Aviara Golf Club

Inbee Park

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Inbee, career win No. 21 on the LPGA. What made this one special?

INBEE PARK: Well, I think what's special about this week is I always love to play this week and I have played really, really well on this golf course but I was never able to win. I just looked at this trophy in the final round and I thought, I almost had it last -- couple of times, but I didn't win, and didn't end of winning it.

So finally being able to win is a relief, and obviously being able to have this one in the collection of my trophies is a beautiful trophy, so...

Q. Have to get a bigger trophy case. You join Marilynn Smith at No. 25 on the all-time wins list on the LPGA Tour, the late, great Marilynn Smith, LPGA founder. What does it mean to have your name alongside hers?

INBEE PARK: Well, you know, it's always a big honor to put my name next to names like Marilynn Smith, the founder on the LPGA.

And, yeah, it's just -- I mean, I think it's just a big honor and I'm just going to try to keep playing my best and trying to follow their footsteps. Yeah.

Q. You are four wins shy of Re Ri Pak for the most winningest player from the Republic of Korea on the LPGA Tour. For those of maybe like the casual golf fan, take us through what Se Ri meant not only to you, but to your country.

INBEE PARK: Well, she kind of started everything. She gave a lot of encourage to all the women's golfers in Korea that you can compete out on the LPGA Tour. And obviously that's really important, and that's driving a lot of players to come out to the USA and try for the LPGA Tour, try and compete among the best players in the world.

So obviously being able to do things that's following her steps is always a great honor. I you looked up to a lot of legendary players growing up, and definitely Se Ri is one

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of my top players that I looked at.

Q. First question is just what is it about your game that enables you to come back after a long layoff and look like you never left?

INBEE PARK: Well, yeah, that's kind of the mystery that I'm trying to solve this week, too, because coming into this week I kind of felt like I needed a little bit of work.

Ball striking wasn't quite there and the putting and chipping and everything was just a little bit off, so I just thought that because it was the time I took off, I have to get used to the a little bit of tweaks on everything.

That's what I was trying to -- been doing for last couple weeks and this week. But obviously everything is not perfect. I always try to like try harder and have a little bit of a pressure always. I think that sometimes works really good in the tournament because you're never like too much on yourself. You're never -- you have a confidence but not like over confidence. I think it worked really great this week.

Q. So that's not your laid-back approach then that does it?

INBEE PARK: Well, this week was I think more tight approach for me because it was first week back. I'm just trying to tweak things around a little bit and trying to make it perfect.

But I thought I was not quite there so I always had that a little bit of a tightness in my system, yeah.

Q. So before you came to Vegas to practice, how much time did you put the clubs away completely?

INBEE PARK: You know, I spent probably just over two months in Korea, and obviously it's really cold in Korea and you're not playing golf in minus 20 celsius. Yeah, I did just a little bit of indoor golf and I did a lot of just weight training and just working on the body.

Probably took about a good month off like not touching the clubs, and then when it got a little bit warmer I started to go out.

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Q. What motivates you now with all that you've accomplished and all the goals you've achieved? What is still your motivation for being out here? Second part of that is the Se Ri win number kind of part of what is keeping you out here?

INBEE PARK: No, it really is not. I mean, I'm not looking to over -- like try to beat someone's record. I'm never playing golf for that reason. The good motivation for me is obviously now the Olympics, and obviously in 2016 and 2021 I knew that the Olympics was going to happen and it really motivates me really well trying to prepare for that time, prepare myself at my best so I can represent the country.

Yeah, I mean, if there was no Olympics I don't know, would I be here? I'm just asking the same question. But it has been definitely good motivation for me.

But like I said even if it wasn't Olympics I think as long as you try to find the motivation, it can be anything, it could be just like this week. Kia Classic I came so close to winning but I didn't win, so I want to win this week. Just those little things can motivate you for sure.

Q. The Olympics, you started last year out of the bubble for getting in.

INBEE PARK: Yeah.

Q. Being the Olympic champion, was that an uncomfortable feeling for you? What did that kind of just give you motivation just specifically for that?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, it is quite different eligibility, I should say, because I'm pretty much eligible for any tournament if it's the game of golf.

But it was quite different obviously because -- and plus I am defending champion of that event and I am not qualified -- so it's just very different approach.

Obviously trying to qualify myself to getting into the Olympics is actually not just -- not as easy as like winning a tournament. You have to play really well for four years after the Olympic is done, and obviously you have to be playing best at the time.

So, yeah, it is not an easy task, but, yeah, I was -- I think I am getting close. I wouldn't say I'm safe, but getting close to my goal. I'm happy with that.

Q. Your first round of 66 seemed really impressive considering you hadn't played in a while as mentioned and it was cold and wet.

INBEE PARK: Yeah.

Q. How were you able to do that?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, I don't know, because like looking back and thinking about it, the first round was the toughest condition and I played the best that day obviously. I was probably the most -- I would say today was probably the most nervous, but I was pretty nervous on the first day being out for three months or so.

It was really tough conditions, but I putted the best on the first day. I think that was the key to the 6-under round.

Q. Can you talk about your swing? I read a quote that a long time ago you said you didn't feel like you owned your swing.

INBEE PARK: Yeah. Yeah, since I started working with my husband I found a lot of things that needed to be fixed, and obviously I definitely feel like I own my swing now and I know my swing and I know how to fix the problems when I don't hit it as well.

So he's always there with me and he can like fix things that's -- quickly that's not going to go as bad.

Q. Have you always taken the club back slowly?

INBEE PARK: Yes, I have.

Q. Does that make it easier to control?

INBEE PARK: To me it is, but I guess it depends on people.

Q. The eagle putt, kind of a big deal.

INBEE PARK: Yeah.

Q. What do you have on the length of that? What do you think it was?

INBEE PARK: I think the length was probably about 30, 40-footer, yeah. And it was just going straight uphill. Obviously goal was to two-putt that, but I read it perfectly and it just went in just as pictured.

Q. You just mentioned you felt most nervous today.

INBEE PARK: Yeah, like out of the four days, yes.

Q. Win No. 21 and you still get nervous.

INBEE PARK: Yes, of course. Everybody asks me like, Do you still goat nervous? Yes, of course. You look so the comfortable. Are you comfortable? I'm like, No. (Laughter.) What do you expect, yeah.

Q. So this is the second time you've won the event leading into a major tournament. You did it in 2013 at the Walmart Northwest Arkansas Championship and then went on to win the U.S. Women's Open the following week. Is this foreshadowing?

INBEE PARK: Yeah, I would love to jump in the pond right now and wash myself up a little bit. Yeah, that would be really nice. It was a great year in 2013 when I won the tournament before the major championship. It's always a good vibe going into the major tournament, so I am really looking forward to next week. Obviously I've won that before and I know how it feels and how great that feels, so hopefully I can do it again.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Inbee, congratulations.

INBEE PARK: Thank you.

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