



Brooks Koepka

Press Conference

Thursday, April 6, 2023

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to welcome Brooks Koepka to the interview room, our joint leader shooting a round of 65 today, eight birdies, one bogey. Fantastic round. Congratulations, Brooks.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Would you like to share with us what gave you momentum today and how did you feel on the course?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Honestly, I think it was just the start. Got off to a good start. Anytime you're 2-under through 3, it's a good start. So felt good. Kind of just piggybacked off that momentum and very happy the way I played. Drove the ball really nicely. Left it in some good spots. Even missed quite a few putts. I think I missed a short one on 6, 8, 9, 10, so they were all kind of inside ten feet. But could have been really low but I'll take it, 7's pretty good.

Q. This time last year, Full Swing episode, you seemed pretty far from this spot, 7-under 65 in round one. What changed year over year for you?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Anytime with something like that, you don't see everything, right. A lot of it, it's all injury-based. Any athlete, anybody that's going through something where you can't even bend your knee, I mean, I'll spare everybody the details of what had actually happened. It was pretty gruesome, right. They told me getting out of surgery that it was going to be pretty much a year and a half anyways, and then you just create bad habits, and it's just frustration. You feel like you're never going to be healthy.

I wish I had celebrated kind of the little milestones along the way instead of thinking I could just power through it. Three weeks after, I was here, and they didn't even think that was possible.

So yeah, it was definitely frustrating. But once you feel good, everything changes.

Q. Did you feel like the way that show played out was misrepresenting you in any way?

BROOKS KOEPKA: No, I don't think it misrepresented. I just don't think it showed the whole thing. You know, it's not just frustrations from the golf. It's frustrations from my body, and I think that's -- there is some layover there, but not as much as it is just frustration with not being able to move how I want to move.

I mean, getting out of bed takes 15 minutes just to even kind of feel right. I wouldn't even say feel right. Just feeling like you can't get around for the day isn't exactly fun. It's probably the closest I can be to Tiger without his leg. I'm not saying it's anywhere near his, but I understand how painful it is and how just mentally grueling it is.

Q. You've been unapologetic in the past about your feelings toward the majors versus the regular TOUR events; that you prepare for these, and maybe not prepare as much for the other ones. Considering that and all the pressure, the focus that you put on the majors, is there more added pressure to perform in these, given the sort of uncertain status of the future of

LIV golfers in the majors, particularly with Augusta National? I think your exemption would run out if you don't perform after next year.

BROOKS KOEPKA: I don't really think about it. It's just a major. It's Augusta National. So, you know, it's the Masters. You'd better show up. I kind of just count out the last two years, not feeling good. But yeah, if you win, you're fine.

Q. What advantage does being tied for first currently and 7-under after round one give you going into the next three rounds?

BROOKS KOEPKA: What did you say?

Q. What advantage does your score today, being 7-under, currently give you going into the next three rounds?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I don't think my score really gives me much of an advantage. I think maybe my tee time with the weather coming up, I think I might be able to squeak out a few more holes than everybody else before it starts dumping. I would say that's probably the biggest advantage I've got going for me right now.

Q. You talked about the fast start and what that did for you. What momentum do you pull from a finish like that where you turn a very solid day into a great day?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, it was pretty good. Love to finish with two birdies like that. Just kind of hopefully ride that into tomorrow. You know, putting good, driving it well, just kind of build off all those things, and get myself, you know, in contention with nine to go on Sunday, that's the whole goal.

Q. You've always taken pride in dialing in for the big events. I just want to ask you, how does your current situation affect you, because you're playing a lot of other events which have lesser heritage compared to perhaps the other events that you were playing before? And now that you've recovered from all your struggles and you seem to be back where you like to be, just would you reflect on how the rest of the season kind of plays in your mind?

BROOKS KOEPKA: How the rest of it plays? I just take it one day at a time. There's a lot going on. But, you know, just try to play the best I can play every time I tee it up. Play well this week takes care of a lot of things. You know, it was nice to win last week. But just try to build off that momentum. There's quite a few big events. We've got a lot of golf to play over the next three months. It would be a good time to start peaking.

Q. Do you feel that you've kind of rediscovered how you identify yourself as a golfer coming back from injury?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Say the first part?

Q. I'm saying, do you think that you've rediscovered your best?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I don't think I've rediscovered anything. I just think I'm healthy, so I can move the way I want to. Like I said earlier, you just kind of -- if your body won't allow you to do the things you want to do, it's frustrating and all of a sudden you create a lot of bad habits and then try to work out of the unhealthiness, takes a while, and then all of a sudden you have to get out of those bad habits. When you break three, it's kind of nice.

Q. You touched on the pending weather with the rain. How does that play into your strategy?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I don't think anything of it. I really don't. I just take it -- I know it's so cliché, but I just take it one shot at a time. I never look at the pin before. I kind of ask Rick on the tee box where they are at or if -- depending if you can see a few greens, I'll look at them as I'm going around just to see what's going on.

But I don't over-prepare or prepare ahead of time. I just do whatever the course gives me or whatever the conditions will give me at the time.

Q. The man who operated on you, Dr. Neal ElAttrache, who operated on Kobe Bryant, Tom Brady, catastrophic injuries,

how much confidence did you gain from him going through that surgery, knowing that those athletes had been through, not the same injuries, but similar catastrophic injuries and came back and were very successful?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, Dr. ElAttrache is the best in the world at what he does, I think. It was funny, I was trying to get in touch with him, and it was a funny story. So I somehow got his number from -- I think it might have been Saquon Barkley's agent. And called him, and he just so happened to be at Jupiter, and he was at Jimmy Dunne's house. So that was kind of ironic that he was right there, looked at it. We flew back to L.A.

Look, I have a lot confidence with him. We have a great relationship. I still talk to him today. His daughter was out here today. I feel like I'm pretty close with him and his family. He did a hell of a job. I think he said it was the first time that surgery had ever been done. I think the closest to it was probably Travis Scott when he dislocated his kneecap. I don't think he shattered it.

It was nice to know that he was the one operating on me. That was the one I wanted.

Q. You said break free. Can you tell us when you felt like you got out of being injured and? And second, does limited schedule, the limited schedule of LIV, did it help you get through some of this?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Well, I'll go with the limited schedule. I think it definitely helped. I wouldn't say probably till maybe end of December when I was like, okay, everything is starting to click now, being able to bend my knee fully. I've worked hard with Dr. Ela, Marc Wahl, Andrew Cummings, all these guys; the team behind me has been super dedicated and made me kind of rededicate myself.

Obviously it's the hardest I've ever worked, just trying to get back, because I felt like I was on the cusp of it, and it was nice to know that I was able to get through that.

Q. On Twitter, there was some suggestion that there was a problem with Ricky putting his hand up. I'm sure someone must have mentioned it to you from the green jacket side. Could you tell us what that was all about?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, we looked at it when we got back in. GW and Butchie had no idea what we were hitting; they didn't even know because -- I know that fact because GW asked me what we hit walking off, when we were walking down. So that's all I can give you.

Q. What hole was it?

BROOKS KOEPKA: 15.

Q. Looks like a lot of great athletes, you've used doubts or slights on your chips on your shoulder to reach the pinnacle of the sport. What's your motivation now?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Honestly, I just think of all those hard times. I think of the lady, Heather, that was doing my rehab; just to play Augusta in '21 -- Ricky was with me, I just remember biting down on a towel and tears were coming out of my eyes and she was trying to bend the knee. I figure if I can go through that, I can go through anything.

Q. 13's been a lot of focus this week. What exactly happened on 13?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I just pulled my drive. I hit it a little off the toe, so it turned over instead of going straight or slightly fading. We got lucky; we found the ball, to be honest quite honest with you, and from there, there's no other option. Take an unplayable, go back online, and at that point we were just trying to play to hopefully make bogey if we could squeak out a par. But yeah, just a terrible tee shot.

Q. Are you disappointed? Usually par 5s you score very well?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I'm not disappointed with 7-under.

Q. Preparing for a tournament, like a regular tournament, doesn't matter if it's PGA TOUR or LIV Tour and Masters, or majors, mentally, is there any difference for you particularly? Everybody said you're, like, you know, big events player.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I think there's definitely a difference. There's a difference in kind of my demeanor. Everybody on my team behind the scenes says they can see from the moment we land at a major, here at Augusta, I get kind of quiet. I'm very -- I'm not talking. I'm very focused, disciplined, driven.

There's only really a couple things I care about, is going to work out and going to play golf and that's it when we're here, and nothing else really matters. It's full focus on this and trying to walk out of here with a green jacket.

Q. You said you missed a couple short putts. If not, it could be lower, right, today?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, for sure. I just thought about it walking off 10. I just figured I had missed so many short ones and I just want to make the next few short ones. So worked on 12.

Q. Being 100 percent now means something different than what it does probably eight years ago. What does it mean to you to feel good these days?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Wake up pain-free. Being able to move. Not having to get shot up to play. Not having to do anything. It's been nice just to -- I mean, normal, it's a new normal, but it's definitely pretty close to what it was.

Q. Just curious if there's a post-round recovery process?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, do it every day. Work with Marc before, work with Marc after. Work with A.C. in the gym in the morning. And then we get done, we get to -- I forget what it's called -- anyway, it's like a cold thing that goes over my knee, I sit on it for like 30 minutes and do that about two, three times a night to make sure the swelling is down and make sure everything -- if it swells up, it's tough to move because there's still quite a bit of -- some fluid in there that -- we've been able to flush out a lot of it, but there's still some in it.

It will never -- my knee modeling days are over. It's not a good-looking knee, but it looks about as good as it's going to look.

Q. The Netflix series was so intense, and you were so vulnerable. Do you feel like it changed you in any way doing it and having that part of your life exposed?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I think it was good. I think it was good to see. People probably don't think I'm as open as what I really am. I'll tell you exactly how I'm feeling at the time, how I'm feeling in the moment, and that's -- I'm pretty vulnerable, too, away from the golf course. I've always said what you see on the golf course isn't what you get behind closed doors.

Yeah, hopefully people were able to take that from it.

Q. What was the thought behind going logo-free? You have Nike, of course, but what was the thought behind going logo-free on your shirt and cap and stuff?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I've got a big 'Swoosh' on me.

Q. Of course you do, but you're not carrying your team logo, so I was wondering.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, because I'm sponsored by Nike.

Q. But you also have a team on LIV.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I have a team, but I'm also sponsored by Nike.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your knee and the rehab you say you still go through. Tiger talks about concerns of walking and the undulation here and the topography at this course. Do you have those -- obviously different injury, but do you have those same type of concerns of dampness and wet and slippery and so forth?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Not as much, because I think his injury is a lot worse than mine. But definitely three weeks after when we played in '21, it was all about -- I was just trying to figure out the best areas to talk because this place is quite hilly.

For me, it was downhill was a killer because my knee would get in front of my heel and that's where the MPFL that's stitched is still in there would just tighten, and everything was quite painful.

But I don't have to worry about that anymore, which has been great. It's nice not having to think about where to walk around this place.

Q. Can you just talk about the injury itself, was it one thing or was it just repetitive swinging and a lot of torque on your knee?

BROOKS KOEPKA: No. I just slipped. I was at home. I dislocated my knee and then I tried to put it back in and that's when I shattered my kneecap and during the process tore my MPFL.

So the next time I tried to -- you know, my leg was sideways and out. My foot was turned out, and when I snapped it back in, because the kneecap had already shattered, it went in pretty good. It went in a lot easier (big grin).

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for sharing those thoughts with us, a fantastic round of golf today and we wish you all the best for the future.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Appreciate it.