

PIF Saudi International powered by SoftBank Investment Advisers

Wednesday, 2 February, 2022

King Abdullah Economic City, Saudi Arabia
Royal Greens Golf and Country Club

Phil Mickelson

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Phil, thank you very much for joining us for the last of our pre-tournament press conferences ahead of the 2022 Public Investment Fund Saudi International powered by SoftBank Investment Advisers. It's always fantastic to have you here. Are you happy to be back?

PHIL MICKELSON: I am happy to be back. I've really enjoyed coming here, and I've enjoyed the golf course very much. My first year I finished third. I had a good tournament. I'm looking forward to getting back to competing and hopefully having a good chance on the weekend.

Like I said, it's a fun golf course to play, and I've really enjoyed my time here.

Q. As is always the case with the Saudi International, it's a pretty stacked field we've got this weekend. A field that type of quality, is that good to have early in the calendar year to almost set you up for 2022?

PHIL MICKELSON: It is, and I think it does a lot for the Asian Tour, and it's good to see a lot of the names and players that I've known a little bit that are developing their game on the Asian Tour. It really lifts the status of that event, that tour, and it's pretty impressive, the field.

Q. As you touched on, it's the first time it's been hosted as an Asian Tour event. That brings fresh investment into the Asian Tour. How pleased are you to see that type of investment coming in away from perhaps Europe and the U.S.?

PHIL MICKELSON: I think it creates some great opportunities to give players the opportunity, the chance to develop their game and become stars and ultimately help the tours and the game of golf. I think it's been a really good thing that gives opportunities to those in parts of the world that may not have opportunities.



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Q. On a more local level, Golf Saudi have very lofty ambitions. One of those is a target of introducing 3.5 million Saudis to golf by 2025. How impressed are you by that kind of scale and depth and the ambitions they have here for the game?

PHIL MICKELSON: I have been so appreciative of what the game of golf has done for me, and it was such a great place for me to grow up playing. I worked at a course since I was eight, and the people there would watch after me and they would take care of me and they would teach me to be on time and they would teach me work ethic and they would teach me the etiquette of the game and they would teach me respect for playing partners. It taught me so many of life's lessons through that process of growing up, and to be able to expose the game to anyone, I'm excited to see that.

Three and a half million people here would be incredible, but making the game more available to others is an awesome thing. It's meant so much to me, and I'm very appreciative of the efforts that everybody is making to introduce the game to so many.

Q. Yesterday you played a practice round with Bio Kim and Kevin Na and Othman, a Saudi player. I think that is a brilliant moment in golf because it's a U.S. person and Saudi person and Korean in there. How about that time, and what does that mean to you?

PHIL MICKELSON: I love the way golf is becoming more global and the level of play throughout the world is increasing. We're seeing some really high-level players come from so many different parts of the world now. It was fun for me to play yesterday. Kevin and I were able to play like a little match with Bio and Othman and we had a really fun time. It's obviously fun when you get to win and collect, too, but I really enjoyed spending time with them.

Kevin is a good person. I have a lot of great memories being around Kevin and his caddie Kenny, and we've had some fun moments. I played a practice round with him at the PGA. A lot of good vibes, so we had a lot of fun yesterday. It is interesting to see how many people from all over the world, how this game brings people together.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Q. I just wanted to ask you, you've had so many great victories in your career, PGA Championship, The Open, Masters. How impressed were with winning the PIP? I ask you because you were one of the -- you could have been on social media and other things for a long time. You have the flair for it as we all know. But you just took your time, you came on to it maybe just about a year ago. Why so late, and does that mean more to you that you came so late and yet you're just dominating like in golf?

PHIL MICKELSON: I did not understand what a powerful tool social media is. I didn't understand how it could unify and bring people closer together and show others glimpses into different sides of life. As I've gotten on to social media and I've followed other people, I've gotten to see different viewpoints on small parts of their lives, and it's been interesting. And then to share that, as well, has been interesting.

But what I didn't understand was how powerful of a tool it is to bring people together and unify and share fun moments and entertain.

It took me a while to really grasp that. It's been a really good thing because it allows a player like myself now to share something directly with an individual, with fans, what have you, as opposed to have to have an intermediary where sometimes the message can be distorted or not as clear as if it came direct from someone. It's a very powerful tool. I just wasn't smart enough to grasp it early on.

Q. I think all of us are really impressed also by the fact that it looks like you are the one typing out every Tweet, everything. I don't think anybody else does it for you. Is that the case?

PHIL MICKELSON: That's true. I'm a bit of a smart-aleck, so it's hard to have somebody else express that for me. So I just do it directly.

I have to be careful. I could easily get in trouble. I have gotten in trouble through social media, but I've also been able to identify, communicate and better understand people and they better understand me, as well.

Q. About the golf course, four years into the tournament now, what do you think of this golf course as it has matured a bit now?

PHIL MICKELSON: It's only gotten better as it's matured. I do think paspalum is a tremendous grass. I'm biased because Kiawah has it. But it grows so well. It allows you to have a 40 per cent mixture with salt water and fresh

water so it cuts down on a lot of the fresh water costs and usage. I think it's a brilliant grass, and as it's come in, it has really been healthy. It's a great turf to play off of, and the golf course, the character really has come through in the last few years as it's matured.

I think the players really enjoy playing it. It's got a great mixture of holes that are easy birdies and holes that are really tough pars, and that allows for separation in the field and amongst the top players, and I think it's a great golf course.

Q. I'm not sure how many courses you've played in Saudi, only this course or other courses? Please give me the information on the golf courses in Saudi generally.

PHIL MICKELSON: I haven't played other courses. I've seen some pictures of some of the American designers like Nicklaus and so forth, but I haven't had a chance to play other courses.

The 16th hole is kind of the epitome of on the water, spectacular view and just a great hard golf hole. There's a great mixture of that out here, and I think that the architects that are coming here and designing courses are really top-name courses, so they get introduced, the people that start playing golf here, they get introduced on some really nice architecture.

I think that's a really good thing in the long haul. We have a lot of really great designers, Crenshaw-Coore and Gil Hanse and Tom Doak and David Kidd and Nicklaus and Player and Norman and I'm trying to get in there. I think Crenshaw-Coore are just remarkable, but a lot of these guys are coming over here and showing what great golf is, and it's a great way to get started.

Q. Are there some differences between the U.S. and here, temperature-wise and turf-wise, everything? Did you notice some differences?

PHIL MICKELSON: So I played a lot of golf in Phoenix, in the desert, so there's a lot of similarities to that style of play where you have dirt off the fairway. What's different is we have the ocean here, and that allows for some incredible scenery and shots. It also makes the air a little heavier and it makes it harder for the ball to fly through there, so the wind affects it more, so it makes it a little bit more challenging than when you're at 1,500, 2,000 feet like in Phoenix and the air is a little bit thinner and the wind is not affecting it, so it's a little more demanding I would say.

I can really only speak about this course, and it's been a real treat to play.

Q. Please tell me a general comment on the Golf Saudi activity right now.

PHIL MICKELSON: I think as a player we're very appreciative of the support that they have shown in supporting the LET and the LPGA as well as creating some leverage for players to have a leg to stand on and try to make the work environment better on the PGA Tour, and we're very appreciative of everything they've done.

Q. It's the 25th anniversary of Tiger Woods's first win at the Masters this year. I just wondered if you had any abiding memories of that week, if you watched it when you went home after sadly missing the cut?

PHIL MICKELSON: Thank you for bringing it about that I missed the cut that week. I felt like that was a really critical part of the question. (Laughter).

What I get out of that week as I remember and look back on Tiger's first win in the '97 Masters is how he shot 40 on the front nine and he turned it around and shot 30 on the back nine on Thursday, and I thought that the way he fought, hung in there after a terrible start with expectations on him to perform and to win and he opens up with a 40 on the front nine, he didn't back down, he didn't wilt, he came out and brought his best golf on the back nine and shot 30 to open with a 70 and ultimately won by 12 shots or so. It was one of the most impressive performances ever in the game of golf.

I think the U.S. Open in 2000 was probably the greatest performance, but that was really impressive. I look back on that as a way to inspire me not to ever give up when I go through a tough spurt like he did on the front nine.

Q. As well as investing heavily obviously in the Asian Tour, Golf Saudi we understand have ambitions for a possible different circuit, a Super Golf League. Lee Westwood and Dustin Johnson talked a little bit about that this morning in their press conferences. Can you give us the latest from your point of view, whether you think it's a good concept, whether you've been approached? Whatever you can tell us about it, please.

PHIL MICKELSON: I think everybody is looking at it and seeing parts of it that can really help and benefit their situation, their life, their career, and then there's parts of it that they're probably concerned with. I'm appreciative of the fact that there is competition, and that leverage has allowed for a much better environment on the PGA Tour, meaning we would not have an incentive programme like the PIP for the top players without this type of competition.

We would not have the increase in the FedExCup money. We would not have the increase in THE PLAYERS Championship to \$20 million this year if it wasn't for this threat. It was projected to get there in a couple years. To have a season-long payout for the top 10 guys on the FedExCup list came about last year for the first time at 10 million, it's going to double to 20, I think, and that wouldn't be around.

I'm appreciative of the competition, and what my hopes are is that the biggest thing, which are media rights and the way the players have been used for so long, I hope that that changes through the competitive opportunity, as well.

Q. Are you able to tell us if you've had a direct offer to play in the Super League eventually?

PHIL MICKELSON: I think every player has been contacted. I don't think there's a player that hasn't been.

Q. So that's a yes?

PHIL MICKELSON: It's a softer way of saying, of answering your question directly. I'm just saying that pretty much every player that is in the top 100 I would say in the World Ranking has been contacted at some point, absolutely.

THE MODERATOR: Phil, thank you very much for your time and all the best this week.

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