

Genesis Scottish Open

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North Berwick, Scotland

The Renaissance Club

Aaron Rai

Press Conference



CLARE BODEL: Welcome back to the Genesis Scottish Open, delighted to see you here. Obviously you won here back in 2020, and you've gone on to have some incredible wins, especially this year, but can you just tell us how this event sort of helped kick start all of that.

AARON RAI: Firstly, thank you for having me and great to be here this week. I think The Scottish Open in 2020 was definitely a kick start in my career on the back end of winning, I got into four events the following year on the PGA TOUR, two WGCs at the time, two major championships, and played well in most of those, which qualified me to the Korn Ferry finals. Was fortunate enough to DO well the Korn Ferry Finals to get a PGA TOUR card.

Yeah, Scottish Open in 2020 definitely opened the doors to those things happening.

CLARE BODEL: If you can give us insight into this year has been like, the first major, and what things have been like since then.

AARON RAI: It was incredible. It was quite a mixed start is the continue, started to play well around the period of the PGA.

Since then, yeah, it's been great, really enjoyed the events that I've played since then. A few extra commitments outside that have but it's been really good overall. Really enjoyed it.

Q. You'll be aware of the phrase, the quiet ones are often the most dangerous. You're obviously very humble, quiet, modest away from the course but was it here in 2020 that you realized there was an assassin in there as a golfer, a stone cold killer?

AARON RAI: I'm not quite sure about that. Growing up I tried to play the game and approach the game a certain way. My first win on the DP World Tour, which is in Hong Kong in 2018, I think being able to compete at this level and have that validation that I was able to win at this level,

again narcotics very strong field, that was a huge thing for me.

The COVID break was a great opportunity for me to work on certain parts of the game that needed work, and then to have a good period after COVID was massive.

So I think it was a consistent build up until that point. I think winning The Scottish Open definitely showed that certain things that I'd been working on during that year ask during the COVID break really started to help and made me a more all-around player.

So I don't think it really kind of made me realise certain things within myself. I think it was just validation of what I'm doing as a golfer, and also the way that I play, can compete at the highest level.

Q. I would sense that you haven't changed at all since winning a major but have you sensed people's feelings toward you change, looking at you differently?

AARON RAI: I don't feel a huge difference within the players, really. I think everyone has a huge amount of respect for one another.

I think outside of that, with fans, definitely noticed more people knowing my name, I guess, and following me in some of the rounds, which has been great, and a few extra kind of media requests.

So I think outside of the game, a little bit different. But inside of the game, not massively.

Q. We've had an impressive list of winners here; the likes of Rory and Xander speak for themselves. But maybe and you Chris Gotterup last year, what you've gone on to achieve, was it the stature of this event that gave you the confidence? Was it winning on this DP World Tour Championship? Can you talk a little bit about that?

AARON RAI: Yeah, for me personally, the Rolex Series Events always attract some of the best fields that we have on the DP World Tour. I think this golf course demands a



number of different things, and I think it can play a lot of different ways. We've had years where there have been a couple of days where it's been extremely scorable. Other days, like for instance in 2020, there were two days that were extremely difficult. I think it demands a lot. It sometimes demands the scoring side of your game and sometimes asks the more difficult questions, as well, when the conditions get difficult.

So I think kind of mixing together how strong the field is, the stature of the event, the history of the event, and also what the golf course requires, I think when you kind of come through that and are fortunate enough to win the tournament, it definitely -- yeah, it definitely gives you an extra layer of confidence and belief moving forwards.

Q. I noticed you were at Gullane yesterday and you always had a great relationship with Alasdair through the Wee Wonders. How important is that to you still now?

AARON RAI: Yeah, massively important. He's played a huge role in my development as a junior golfer, and we've stayed in touch ever since I'd finished playing in we wonders which is almost 20 years ago. Coming back to this tournament and seeing him each year is really nice for me and my family, as well. He's become a family friend over time.

Q. You mentioned after the PGA that you were recognised in the supermarket in Jacksonville and your dad's reaction brought it home to you. Has there been anything similar at home?

AARON RAI: I got back to Wolverhampton last week for the first time which was great. I spend a lot of time really with family, and I went to the golf course a couple of days last week. Not massively different if I'm honest.

Yeah, it's actually felt pretty quiet over the last week or so since being back in the U.K., which has been quite nice.

Q. Totally different tack. I asked Viktor about the match on Saturday. How much are you looking forward to it, and is there going to be a little bit of needle, do you think, with the Norwegian players before the game?

AARON RAI: I'm sure there will be a little bit of needle. I saw Viktor very briefly yesterday and congratulated him on the Travelers, and I said he's looking forward to Saturday. I think it's already started.

But I think it will be a very good match. Hopefully get a chance to watch it. I think it will be very close. Norway

have played great this year. Yeah, looking forward to seeing how that goes.

Q. As an Englishman abroad, how closely have you followed it before coming home?

AARON RAI: I've been following the results and been trying to catch up with the highlights. I haven't actually watched a live match yet on TV.

We were actually quite close to the England/Ghana game during the week of the Travelers. My caddie managed to go and watch live, which is great but I haven't quite managed to do that just yet.

Q. Just to be clear, you have not been to the grocery store in Wolverhampton?

AARON RAI: Once but no recognition there.

Q. Golf can be such an emotional game; how do you cope? How do you keep even keel without getting too high or too low?

AARON RAI: I think away from the course, the support system is absolutely crucial. To have an amazing wife, to have an amazing family, as well, and they help massively during those hard weeks or during those hard periods that you can have.

On the golf course, I think it also comes with a little bit of time. I'm not sure it gets any easier because I think no matter what you achieve in the game, the care and the love and wanting to do as well as you can is always there.

So I don't think it gets any easier. I think you just learn how to deal with it a little bit better over time, and yeah, I think trying to have as much perspective as I can during those periods within myself when I'm on the course when things are a little bit more difficult.

Q. (No mic.)

AARON RAI: I've definitely been pretty frustrated. It's probably been more so around like you're around the edge of making cuts. That definitely feels like one of the more frustrating things in golf. Mainly because if you're not in the tournament, you have no chance to get anything out of the week that comes after it.

There have been a couple of times where I felt like I've been close or kind of stuck in there well but hit a couple of bad shots towards the end which felt a little bit frustrating.

Q. You talked about confidence the win here gave you,

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but at that time, you also said that majors felt like a step away. How did you bridge that gap?

AARON RAI: I think it's definitely been a bit of a process of kind of trying progress step by step. At that time, winning The Scottish Open in 2020, I think I had only competed in one major before that.

So kind of the experience of what is required in major golf, what the golf courses are like, the level that is needed and the patient and discipline that is required is something that I had hoped to learn but something I couldn't really understand at that time.

But I think since then, since getting to the PGA TOUR at the end of 2021, playing fuller seasons over there, continuing to compete on the DP World Tour and in some of the biggest events over here, it started to bridge the gaps that were in my development before that stage and started to qualify for majors more regularly from 2024.

So building that side of the experience, what is required, I think it all just culminated to feel a little bit more comfortable on that stage and just knowing what is needed during that week, what is needed before that weeks in preparing yourself.

Q. How would your preparation have changed?

AARON RAI: Some of it definitely lies in scheduling and what the weeks look like moving into those tournaments. This year, for all of the majors except the Masters, I've tried to get there a couple of weeks early and spend one or two days at the venue.

I think, also, understanding how busy those weeks are, even from the Monday to Wednesday, there's a lot going on, a lot of crowds around, sometimes additional requests. So to learn an extremely difficult course in a very busy environment with more time demands is a lot to ask from the Monday to Wednesday, and then to try and keep your energy high from the Thursday to Sunday, feels like it was almost impossible.

I think planning, getting there early, seeing the course, scheduling well moving into it has definitely helped just protect energy and feel prepared, or more prepared going into those weeks.

Q. How does a week like this, then, do for that preparation The Open, and have you played Birkdale already?

AARON RAI: Yeah, we played Birkdale last Thursday, which is the first time that I had seen the course.

The Scottish Open is a huge event in its own right, even before my personal history with the tournament. It's an event I've always hoped that I would play, and so to be here and to compete in this tournament is great.

Looking ahead to next week, it's a great first week back into links golf, as well. It's a very different style to what we play for the majority of the year. So just kind of getting a feel for what is needed, adapting the game to the challenges that it requires, definitely lays a good foundation for next week.

Q. Before you first came to Scotland, what did you find out about it golf-wise?

AARON RAI: I actually started playing in Scotland as a junior golfer. I think I was probably ten years old the first time that I came here. Probably too young to remember what -- kind of what came just before that. Obviously controlling ball flight was massive. I could see that straightaway, and keeping it below the wind. I think adapting to the versatility that is required around the greens, a lot more chip-and-run, 9-iron, 8-irons, etc.

But found that even at a very young age that I really like the style of golf and felt like it started to suit how I played the game, even as a junior. Yeah, that I think lays a kind of good foundation for me to play here as a professional as I got into my early 20s.

Q. Can you just explain the junior tournaments you played up here? What were they?

AARON RAI: It was the Wee Wonders. That's a junior event that's actually run by Alasdair Good, who is the head professional at Gullane.

Q. Along the coast --

AARON RAI: Yeah, it's moved, but back then, those were the first couple of years that it had moved to St Andrews. So it was very cool as a junior golfer to experience being in that area. It wasn't played at St Andrews golf course. It was the par 3 course called the Balgove, but nonetheless it was great to just experience that style and be around that area as a young golfer.

Q. And do you find that a lot of young Wee Wonders, golfers, are now on the pro tour? Do you meet a lot of them or do they all give up?

AARON RAI: There's a lot of them. At that stage, the Wee Wonders had just started in the late '90s, and I would have start playing it in 2000. So it was very early on into the

Wee Wonders being formed that I would have started playing. To name a few, I think Tyrrell Hatton played in a couple, Tommy Fleetwood, Grant Forrest.

There are definitely a couple of others which are skipping my mind now, but guys that are currently on tour now with great careers to this point that would have started to playing those tournaments.

Q. You talked about playing a lot here as a junior. We know we tend to find you on the driving range or putting green a lot but will you give yourself a chance to warm up at any of the other courses out here while you're here?

AARON RAI: Unfortunately, not. I think just getting reacquainted to this golf course, also the grass, the speeds, I'll be spending a lot of time here over the next couple of days.

Q. A lot of talk about national opens in the moment even with the new PGA TOUR schedule, as somebody that's played a lot of National Opens, can you talk about what they mean to players and maybe specific Opens that have a meaning to you?

AARON RAI: Yeah, I think national opens are extremely important in the game plan. Obviously to the players of the nationality of where the Open is being held but even outside that have, there's so much history that comes alongside with them, which sometimes isn't there as much with some of the other events.

So I think it's extremely important those are still a part. The decisions are away from my pay grade, so I can't really comment too much on that.

For me personally, as I said, every Open has extreme meaning. But for me, the British Open is definitely up there. And I would say the Indian Open and the Kenyan Open just because of my background, they all have a little bit more significance to where I come from. So those are probably the three.

Q. Just looking ahead to next week at The Open, having won a major this year, does it change your expectation going into these big events?

AARON RAI: I wouldn't say it really changes my expectation. It certainly a belief that it's incredible to have been able to come through some of the challenges of what a major presents.

But I think expectations are something that can be very -- it's a fine line between using experiences to give

confidence and to give belief, but trying not to cross over that line where you take anything for granted because whether it's the The Open Championship or whether it's the Scottish Open or any other week, it's a clean slate. Doesn't really matter what you've done in the past and doesn't really matter what you do in the future. You have to really give yourself to that week and do as best as you can.

I think finding that balance is crucial next week but for any week in general, so yeah.

Q. Do you think a lot of that comes from the outside rather than you yourself?

AARON RAI: I think more of it does. I think on the inside, there's always that search for balance to try to find what that sweet spot is within. Yeah, I think probably a little bit more of it comes from the outside, but that's also part of the game. That comes with it.

CLARE BODEL: Thank you, everyone.

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