

# Hero Dubai Desert Classic

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Dubai, UAE

Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club

## Tommy Fleetwood

### Press Conference



A Rolex Series Event



CLARE BODEL: Welcome back to the Hero Dubai Desert Classic. I think maybe we'll start with last week; what a fantastic start to the season for you and the GB&I guys.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, it was. I think it was great to be part of the team. I think for us, as a team, we all played really, really well. So starting the year earning a trophy, I think was great.

The experience, myself personally, the experience of watching Justin lead a team and being around the captains and the vice captains of Ryder Cups was very good, very beneficial, and yeah, I felt like it was a good way to kick off the year. And myself, happy to have played well for the rest of the team and get some points.

Yeah, like I say, being able to hold a trophy first week of the year is always a nice feeling.

CLARE BODEL: Moving on to this week, you've won in the Middle East in the past. This is an event that you love to play; how much would it mean to win this trophy?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, I love the look of the trophy for this tournament, and I've never actually -- I've played it every year since my first year on tour. Always love coming back here. I absolutely love the golf course. I just haven't managed to put myself in a position to contend for this tournament yet but I will continue to try. And I think everybody loves this time of year here. I think everybody starts out feeling fresh, with a really positive attitude. I think the course, like I say, is great, and I think Dubai as a city, everybody just loves coming back and they just feel very familiar with the place because it's played such a role over the years in tour life.

So yeah, I look at everybody with pictures holding the trophy and always want to be in one, but I just haven't gotten close enough yet.

**Q. How often do you come here and play, practise, and when you do, do you normally put up a few good scores?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: We played on New Year's Eve, actually, me, Oscar and Mo. So me and the two older boys, we played as like the final round of golf of the year. We decided to play and that's the first time I played since the tournament was on.

I was winning, and then I hooked my tee shot on 14 and lost my ball and didn't play another one. So that was me out of the running.

**Q. You just seem so comfortable at this time of year. Obviously you started last year with a win and unbeaten last week. Do you feel that you're close to actually bringing that form into this event, as well?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I hope so. Last week for different reasons, I didn't have the chance to practise much when I really wanted to in and December and the start of the year.

So I started, I think the first time I hit golf balls properly for a while was just a couple of days before we went over to Abu Dhabi, played a couple of nine holes and actually played terrible in the Pro-Am last week and I felt really rusty. But I ended up growing into the week, and then I played some really, really good golf. I was happy with that.

Yeah, I have actually played well at the start of the season quite often over the last few years. I try not to put too much emphasis on how I play or the results at the start of the year. It's always preferable that you play well; of course it is. But you know, just because you have a great week at the start of the year doesn't mean it's going to be a great season, and just because you have one doesn't mean it's going to be a bad season. I try not to look too much into it.

But I think going on the present moment, I gained a lot of confidence from how my swing felt, how I played, a lot of shots I hit under pressure, I think start of the year, especially in a team environment, I think you start off with quite a lot of pressure because you're playing for more than yourself, if you like. So you're much more responsible that week.



So I'll take a lot of good from last week and hopefully I can put up a good fight this week. I think my swing felt in a good place. We'll see if that reflects on this week, as well.

**Q. Talking about the Team Cup, you just mentioned Justin Rose, also. Is that a sneak preview into the future of Justin being a captain in the Ryder Cup, and Francesco has also been there.**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I think both of them have amazing leadership qualities. I think both, major champions, and both have had some epic Ryder Cup performances.

So I do think that the Team Cup is going to continue to play a huge role in the ecosystem of Team Europe, if you like. I think you are definitely going to see future Ryder Cup captains being the captain of those respective teams.

I look at those guys, I know I captained the team last time it was out but in a completely different situation in my career.

I think you look at the natural leadership that Justin has and that Fran has and the wisdom in how they see situations in that team environment, I think it's great to watch and learn from; and I think both of those are obviously contenders over the next few years for Ryder Cup captains, which you know, they should be.

**Q. Tyrrell showed his commitment to the European cause by playing in the Team Cup, and Jon Rahm was just in here speaking about how he intends to be at Bethpage Black. Can you imagine a scenario where they are not involved in the Ryder Cup this year?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: There's always a scenario where anybody cannot be involved, whether that be how people play, whether people are injured. You obviously have to look at all those different scenarios.

I think over the last few Ryder Cup, those guys in particular, both of them are definitely in the prime of their careers and they are playing great golf.

So they are obviously, you know, a big part of what the team has been over the past few years. Yeah, of course, it's hard to see when you have players like that; it's hard to see them not being part of the Ryder Cup.

But, who knows. Any of us are a few problems away, which can always happen, you know, making it difficult to be on the team and things like that. But at the moment, they are still such a huge part of what Team Europe has been.

**Q. To try and win here, what do you think you need, the strength of your game, to win around here?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I actually think there's been times over the years where I've actually played very well and I've struggled on these greens. I haven't putted particularly well at this venue. I think that I can definitely improve, particularly on the weekend here. It's a really strong driving golf course, and you have to play the par 5s very, very well.

I don't think I've been far away. Like I say, I think my game has actually held up pretty well most of the time and I haven't putted well enough around here. So I'll be looking at that this week. And like I say, certain elements of this golf course are so important. I've actually -- I know it sounds daft a bit, but the doglegs left on that back nine, can definitely do a better job on those. I actually don't hit those tee shots as well as I would like to to give myself the opportunities on what is the slightly scorable back nine if you like.

Yeah, I don't think I've been miles away. I just have to try and put it all together out here.

**Q. One of the things that this tournament does really well is add new things for the players and for the fans, and one of the additions this year, I don't know if you have had a chance to go there and see, is a mental wellness zone that Simon and his team have put together, and I think this is the first time that the tournament is having a dedicated spot for something like that. Can you just tell me how important do you think that is in professional golf, and how will the players benefit from it?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, I think it's an important part of sport and life, is mental wellness. I think, yeah, it's cool to see this tournament being proactive about things like that, and I think it's definitely something that we would welcome more in Tour events throughout the year. I think it's important to -- we probably all need a bit of advice on how to switch off at times, and yeah, I think it's a great addition.

We obviously have -- the Tour is amazing, at the physical facilities we always get from the physios and the trainers, the gyms, I think that's constantly growing out on the Tour, and I think both tours actually do an amazing job of that. We have unbelievable facilities.

But that mental aspect of it is something that's probably a little bit behind. We haven't done anything like that before but this tournament is. It will be interesting to see how many people feel like they want to use that and how many people want a bit of guidance on that.

For us, as golfers, if you like, I think we are always chasing our own expectations in dealing with the disappointments in that way. Some people find it easier than others to be accepting or deal with that, and some find it harder. I think having that around will be really good, and I'm sure it will probably be more of an addition throughout the year as tournaments go on.

**Q. You are such a chilled out guy and you look like in a great space all the time, but have you ever faced any such situation where you thought that you needed extra help, outside help?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Well, yeah, of course. I've had my definitely times in my career for sure. I've had times where I thought that I couldn't do it anymore or needed to look at doing something else when I was at my worst.

I remember back in 2016 where I started to get my game back, as my game started to improve, obviously my mental space and how the massive lack of confidence I had was going to be an issue. Like you know, I always think when you've struggled, which everybody goes through at a time in their career where they struggle, but I always think your physical abilities probably come back before your mental side does.

At that time I really had to work with a psychologist and I started meditating at that time to try and help me, you know, just bring my game back to a place where I wanted it to be. And yeah, with experience, you know, you go through many, many different situations.

So I'm not old by any means but I've been out here quite a long time, and I think I'm in a very fortunate place where I have an amazing family. I have an amazing wife. I have great kids. I've had a decent career so far. There's still so much I want to do in the game, and there will be certain things when I look back, if I haven't achieved, I'll be disappointed with. But at the same time, whatever happens, I realise that I'm going to be fine and there's plenty of things that are great outside of my golf.

So I am in a lucky position where I have that kind of thing where I can look to and deal with. But yeah, I've had to work on different aspects over time to get myself in a good place.

**Q. Last week we saw, or heard, you were saying, using the loudspeakers a little bit in the Team Cup. Does that help or is there any way you can prepare for a raucous New York crowd?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Look, there's no way you can replicate what a Ryder Cup is like, that's for sure. But you

can definitely try your best and create different environments that will help us come the time where we do need to handle that, and I think Luke has been great and very on task, if you like, at certain challenges that we will face; that the team will face come September playing in an away Ryder Cup.

I think it's more about being aware and trying to develop certain skills that will help you best deal with those situations, and then being able to practise that.

So there's no way you can replicate what the first tee is like at a Ryder Cup or different scenarios there. But you can definitely put your -- create sort of minor situations, if you like, that will help you work on the things that you need when it comes to that time, and I think last week was a great example of that where I've definitely never, you know, done things like that before, and I think it can only help.

**Q. Just on TGL, the launch last week, just your thoughts on that and have you spoken to the guys in L.A. about tonight's match?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: No, Justin is playing in that match, and he was excited to go and play and represent the team. I think it was a really positive start by the looks of it.

It's definitely a different aspect of golf, if you like, that seemed to have positive feedback from everything that I saw and that I heard. So we'll see how it continues to grow. I've read a few articles where they are already talking of expansions. Who knows where it's going to go over time.

I know Justin was excited to go over and play. He's playing on Tiger's team, so of course he's excited. And then I've got my match to look forward to in a couple of weeks.

Yeah, it's a different experience for all of us, and like a different side of golf. Any time you're trying something new, I think it can only be a good thing. Whether things go well or poorly, and in this case I feel like it's gone well, but any time you're trying something new is only a positive thing.

**Q. It seems that obviously golf is about getting more and more about physical size and power, and no offence --**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I see where you're going with this (laughter).

**Q. But do you see yourself as an inspiration to, like,**

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## normal-size people?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Normal-size people? That's very politely put. Rory told me I look skinny yesterday.

Look, there's a big element of size and power and strength in the game at the moment. I still believe that when you -- look, I think to compete at the very highest end of the game, I definitely think there is a sort of lower limit, if you like, on how far you need to hit it or how powerful you need to be.

But after that, I think everybody has their super strengths, and I think there's some unbelievable golfers that are strong at so many things, and I'm constantly trying to be one of those. I think yeah, for me, I'm one of those guys that's not particularly gifted with size and strength, if you like, so I have to use different aspects to try and compete.

But I think, you know, the luxury of golf is that there's so many different skills that are required every time you step out on to the golf course. I know that there's certain things that I probably -- unless I went full time into trying to be a long drive guy, I'm never going to hit it as far as Rory or certain people. I could build my game around different areas. Don't know whether I see myself as an inspiration just yet but maybe if I can have a bit more success for normal-size people, that would be great (smiling).

But yeah, for sure, the game is in a certain area right now, and we don't know what's going to happen when -- you know, technology is changing. It's getting held back over the next few years. I think golf course setup plays a huge part in how the game plays.

But I think I've always tried to be very aware of -- well, I don't hit it miles, but I feel like when I'm at my strongest, I hit it far enough. Like I'm -- when I talk about the lower limits, I feel like my length and speed is at a place where it's still possible for me to be one of the best players in the world and compete on every golf course.

So I've always been aware that, you know, even for major courses, a course like this, so many aspects are important. You have to drive it well. You have to keep it in play. Your approach game has to be strong. You're not going to hit every game. Your short game is important. You have to hole out well. There are so many things involved in the game, and I've always tried to look at the game like that and tried to have a well-rounded game, because yeah, I obviously can't rely on being a massive hitter out there.

**Q. In the last couple of years, we have seen you play in Madrid in front of the Spanish crowd. What memories can you share from that experience, and**

## another question is, growing as a player, if any, are there any Spanish players that have inspired you?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I actually genuinely, one of my biggest inspirations as a person and as a golfer is José Maria. I always look to him for advice. He's always been so great with me from my early days on tour when he gave me -- say, I played with him in The Italian Open and a couple of events, and he gave me really good advice about where my game was at. I remember playing with him, you know, I can't remember where, but it was about six or seven months later and he shook my hand at the end of the round, and he said I had improved on what he told me I should improve on.

You still look at now, one of my favourite moments of the Ryder Cup in Rome was when we embraced each other on the 17th hole, and he had some really kind words to say about me.

You look at last week, how he captivates the team room when he talks about Seve. I think he's someone that I really look up to and aspire to be as a person and as a golfer.

You know, I've had great friends on tour. I think Sergio is someone that was always so great with me when I came out. Spent a lot of time with him. Played with him at Zurich, that pairs event, and we had success there. I think more recently, Jon reaching world No. 1 and being part of our generation as somebody to chase, if you like, and try and keep up with in terms of how good he is at golf.

Yeah, I think Madrid, over the last few years, I've played it twice in the last three years. I think it's one of the best events we've played on tour from the whole setup, the food, the course. I think it's so important for this tour to be in those major cities, those amazing cities, with like a strong history of a golf course and golf, of what European golf is all about. I think it's played a big role on the calendar over the last few years.

Yeah, always been very lucky with the support I get, once again in, those areas, and I'm sure I'll be back at some point.

CLARE BODEL: Thank you, everyone. Thank you, Tommy.

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