

# 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: Tommy, welcome back to the Hero Dubai Desert Classic. It's a place that you like to start your year. You've had two weeks in Dubai. What's it like to come back here as a Dubai resident and have all the family around?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: It's always a treat to stay in your own bed. Living where we do, I'm fortunate that I get the events at the end of the calendar year where I'm staying at home and then the events at the start of the year, as well.

So it's an amazing period for me. This tournament itself, like I think it's one of the best tournaments of the year and I think it's one of the best golf courses, as well. I would love to have done better here over the years. I've just never quite figured it out and just haven't contended as much as I'd like.

But I love the challenge of coming here. I love the atmosphere. I always stay, like the start of every year and every season, I always enjoy like the mindset that everyone has, the freshness of it. I think it's a beautiful place to play golf at the start of the year.

Yeah, I love starting the year out here, and I've done it for a long time now. It's always one of my favourites.

CLARE BODEL: You obviously had a fantastic end of the season and had a DP World Tour win in India. Do you feel like that momentum is continuing over into January?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Well, I struggled last week a bit.

You know, I did. I had an amazing second half of the year last year, and I felt like I did so many good things, and I contended a lot and I played at a really consistently high level, which I was really, really pleased with. I was happy for the break.

It's one of those things, when you're playing like that at the end of the year, part of you wants to keep on playing but equally, that break is so important. I came here last week, there was some sloppy golf. I made some poor errors and

played some poor golf but I played some good stuff, as well.

I always say I try not to put too much emphasis on start of the year. It's always better to play well but good or bad, it doesn't mean that's how your year is going to go. I try not to put too much emphasis on it, and make sure I can just keep learning from each week and getting better.

I don't think it was far away, and hopefully I can find my feet a bit better this week and play better and see how we do.

**Q. Obviously starting the season third in the world, how proud are you of that to start on that base, and what do you need to do this year to maybe close the gap on Scott and Rory?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, it's really, really exciting. I think to start the year, to finish the year in a place I've never been before -- I've never been that high in the World Rankings. So then you're starting the year in that place, as well.

I think for me, it's been very, very exciting to, as everybody did, you recap over the year. You look at what you've done well and things you can improve. The process stays the same. It's just that I think the opportunity is there now to try and maintain the level I reached last year, I think that's a really exciting prospect to see what work I can put in and how I can maintain that level first.

And then yeah, of course, like you're looking at two of the -- when it's all said and done, Scottie and Rory will be two of the best of all time without question. So to be sort of the guy below them at the moment and the closest one to chasing them right now, I love that.

Yeah, I will continue to strive and to try and go as far as I can, get as close as I can or get up with them. Whether that happens or not is a different story but I think it's very, very cool being in a position where I can look towards you've reached one of the three and you're at this level now as a golfer. How do I continue to get better and see where I can go to.



I think that's just very, very exciting, like I say, enjoy putting the work in in every aspect of the game and sort of try and push on and improve on what we've got.

**Q. An absolute fantastic 2025, especially FedEx, India. Are you the kind of person who sets goals for the next season, and if so, any thoughts on majors? That seems to be the only box which is now not ticked.**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, of course. I'm a big believer in goals and dreams. I think you have, for me, I have my lifetime dreams in the game from when I was a kid, and they are still going.

Then, yeah, goals, I just think they set up the direction in what you work to every single day. You know, I think you should set goals high. I don't necessarily think it's that important to achieve them. I think it's more the process of setting those goals and striving for those and seeing where you get to.

I don't live and die by whether I achieve what I want to or not. I love having those things to aim for, and every now and again, you get -- like moments come through the year that you can picture and that you can go for. I think, you know, in India, I think it was a perfect example when I got to win with Frankie running on to the 18th green. That was a moment we can envision when we talk about it, and it's one of those things that I happened to live and achieve it. I think things like that come up and you work towards them. There's a level of your golf game I think is very important to work towards.

I think the best players in the world obviously play at a very consistently high level. It's not just about winning one tournament or two tournaments. They work towards making their game as good as they possibly can, and you know, see where you go from there and see what you achieve from there. I enjoy doing that. I enjoy that standard and working towards that.

A hundred percent, majors are there, and everybody that plays the game would love one of them, two of them, three of them, whatever it is, you (want to) put them on your resumé, and I always look towards that.

One of the disappointing things of 2025, as good as my year was and finishing the year at world No. 3 and so much good stuff, my major performances were not what I would want, really. I didn't feel like I contended in any, and I didn't play how I wanted to in those events.

So that's something I can look towards how maybe I can do something different preparation-wise or play better in

those to see if I can get to Sundays in a major in contention a little bit more.

**Q. Obviously got a lot of LIV players in the field this week, including Dustin Johnson making his debut here. Do you see what tournament promoters look at in terms of getting added value?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: The rules, the guys can play on the DP World Tour if they are a member, or if they can get an invite, they can play on this tour. I think, for sure, there's players that play on the LIV Tour that add to tournaments for sure.

Personally, it's great to see some of the guys. Like Dustin, I'm close with Dustin or a few of the guys. It's always nice to see them at the tournaments.

Yeah, golf is a global game and I think it's always nice to see some of those faces, whether they are familiar faces or faces that have been at the top of the game playing the tournaments.

**Q. Back a few years ago, there was a lot of bad blood in the game after LIV started up. Where do you feel we are now? Have we moved on a little bit or a big bit?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, it was interesting. I look back at it, I was never one of those that had any bad blood in particular.

I think another option to play golf came up, and some guys felt like they wanted to play over there. They wanted to do something different. I think that's absolutely fine.

I think the ecosystem of golf and the world of golf, there's traditions in the game that are always going to be there I think and that's really important, but I also think the game is constantly sort of changing as well, and new things come up and new opportunities come up.

It's always interesting to see where it goes. I'm very happy just that I am a player and that I can play the events that I want to play, and I'm still chasing my dreams where I want to chase them. I think, as a player, I'm one of the lucky ones, I can play where I want to play, and I'm glad that I'm not part of any of the decision-making process.

Where does it go from here? I don't know. But I think it's constantly changing and new things always come up.

**Q. You mentioned before your record here is nothing like as good as you'd like it to be. How many times have you played since last year, and any closer to solving the puzzle?**

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TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I played it a couple of times, the course, a couple of weeks ago, actually. It's amazing how they get the course in this condition. Like two weeks ago, the rough wasn't that thick, like it was juicy-ish, but it wasn't that thick. And obviously there's plenty of grass on the course, so it's healthy and it was a lot softer.

I went and chipped and putted yesterday, and I couldn't believe the rough that's on the golf course and how firm and fast the greens play.

I know how to play the course. Like I can see the shots and I can see -- you see how the winners played in the past and how they scored. It's just doing it that's the issue.

I think there are times -- I've played very well around this course, and I just haven't put the all-around game together. There's times where maybe I've let myself down on the greens or haven't scored as well, or times where I've not played the par 5s as well. It's just putting everything together where you can't contend.

I think I've been in the last group once or twice on Sunday and fallen back. I just haven't quite put it all together around here. I love the challenge, and I really do enjoy playing around here. And there's a lot of aspects about the course that suit the way I see golf.

There's been tournaments in the past where I've missed five cuts in a row at that venue, and then you have a great result. So stranger things have happened. And like being in contention this week for me -- I'm looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to getting ready for it and playing.

Like I say, I feel like it's a course that I can play well around. I just haven't put it quite well around.

**Q. France is one of those, all-or-nothing, wasn't it?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah.

**Q. What's your best score here outside the competition?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I played really good the other week, albeit different conditions. I think I ended up shooting -- I shot quite a few under par. I can't remember what it was but I had a really good round.

Yeah, you know, albeit different conditions. I do feel like you get to this golf course in the tournament conditions, and I think if you're breaking par around here, you're playing solid golf.

I know there's chances on the back nine, there's the par 5s and everything, but you've still got to hit the golf shots. And it can still go either way. You've got that tough stretch around the front nine. I feel like you've got to play very solid to shoot under par rounds around here.

**Q. Congratulations ON a fantastic 2025, and good to see you again. Dubai Invitational, the main challenge was the wind and a lot of water. Where is the challenge other than the juicy rough, as you mentioned?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, I think it's not an easy golf course tee-to-green for the most part. I think fairways are pretty narrow, and then you have the juicy rough. I think the big dispersion in your scores is are you going to hit the fairways on the par 5s and two or three of those par 4s.

I always think golf courses that seem like a second-shot golf course and approach-shot golf course, it all stems from being in the fairway. It's, I think, a really, really good driving golf course.

On top of that, the greens, I always felt like as the week goes on -- the greens are already firm and fast already with a lot of rough around the greens. I think scrambling generally is pretty tough around here. I think you have to be really on your game in terms of the feel around the greens and how sharp you are.

And then putting. Like I haven't really holed out as well as I can around here. They are tough to read and very, very fast. It's a different challenge, different grass, different rough this week. So it is, it's a different challenge than last week.

**Q. You mentioned the ecosystem before. A lot of the talk is PGA TOUR up against LIV, but then we have got an event this week where all the guys come together. In that ecosystem, what position do you see the DP World Tour having?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: That's a great question. Obviously you see where the DP World Tour is at the moment, and you have to -- I mean, at the moment, it's a tour that plays all around the world.

I think you have chances from other tours to qualify for the DP World Tour or co-sanction events and play this tour. And I think you have the Top 10 cards, or the Top 10 on the DP World Tour at the end of the year can go and play the PGA TOUR. You see at both ends, there's tours that feed into this tour, and I think this tour has players that can then go to the PGA TOUR.

There's no question, at the moment, PGA TOUR is where, generally, the best players play all year round. We have plenty of events on this tour where we all come together as well. The PGA TOUR is where a lot of the players playing, there's big events and there's a lot of money over there. So people kind of want to have the opportunity to play over there.

And I think this tour is amazing. I wouldn't say it's middle ground. I have kids that are striving to make it in the game. I dreamt all my life as a junior to make it on the DP World Tour and be a winner here. I think it's where so many of us have dreamt of playing all our lives. I think it gives opportunities from people all over the world to qualify for this tour, and I also think this tour is a big part in people chasing their dreams elsewhere, as well.

It's an amazing tour with amazing people that play and work on the Tour. And I think it's been around for a long, long time, and amazing players and amazing tournaments, and it continues to do that.

**Q. After the situation with Brooks a week or two years ago, what do you think is more likely next: Big name players quitting LIV or big name players joining LIV?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Who knows? I think that's very hard to ask. I think you would have to ask individual players on which -- obviously you're asking me, but how they feel about it.

I always said, I think people -- I think in general, people want to play where their goals or dreams are aligned. You know, they want to play in the place where they feel they can chase them.

Personally, I'm playing where I feel like I can still chase my dreams, and I'm in the best place to be the best golfer I can be. Other people may feel differently.

I think Brooks -- I think that's what Brooks is doing. He wants to play where he feels like he can get the most out of himself and play his best golf, and that's obviously where he's made his decisions is there and he's ended up coming back.

What the future holds, I don't know. I saw the interview with the guys, Jon and Bryson and Cameron, and they are obviously well set on playing LIV Golf and that's where they want to play.

Who knows? I think nobody has actually really known what's going to happen next. It's kind of the same situation everybody's in.

Like I say, if I speak for myself, I will always make my decisions for as long as I want to be the best I can be at golf, I'll make my decisions to play where I feel like I can do that. So that's what I'm doing. Anybody else, I don't know.

**Q. From an elite golfer's perspective, does it feel like momentum is very much back on the PGA TOUR side now?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I honestly never really -- I try not to pay attention too much on that.

You know, the Tour is in a great place. We play some unbelievable events for a ridiculous amount of money on the PGA TOUR, and I think it's been in a great place and I'm very grateful to get to play where I do.

Yeah, it's a great thing for the PGA TOUR that Brooks has come back and he's playing. You know, where it stands after that, I really don't know. I honestly don't -- it sounds daft and it sounds like I'm sitting on the fence, but I really don't pay attention to that stuff that much.

I just know what my schedule is. I plan my schedule and I go and play, and I'm lucky I get to play the tournaments that I can play. What the future holds, we don't know. But I think Brooks coming back is only a good thing for the (PGA) TOUR.

**Q. One last one on that strand. Can you give an insight into what it's actually like now in that kind of postseason environment? Are they still sniffing around the big-name players such as yourself? Because it feels very much like it's drifted from that since Tyrrell, really.**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, they haven't sniffed around me in this postseason. Yeah, I don't know.

We don't really talk about it that much. I haven't heard of that. I think you definitely see changes, and I think some very good golfers have gone over to LIV and have chose to go to LIV. It's probably going to cost a lot of money, right, to get some big-name players.

You know, I don't know what their strategy will be or who they will be looking at to go or how they want to go about it, but they don't talk to me.

**Q. Two questions. The first one is, the PGA TOUR plans of having 20 to 24, whatever number of events going forward, shortening the schedule. What are your thoughts on that, and does it play to European Tour getting better fields if that happens?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I don't know. I haven't heard anything about the schedule changing, except for one thing I heard was that Harris did an interview and he mentioned the smaller number of events.

Hopefully I can play where I want to play. I always say that. In a selfish way, like I've been lucky for many years where I have had the option of playing where I want to play, and that's all I kind of think about and focus on. So I'm very lucky that I get to do that.

Like before, like I've always said, I never make any decisions and I never worry about it. I thought the Tour was great before the changes were made and before Elevated events came in and all of that, and then when Elevated events came in and I've been able to play in them and it's an amazing opportunity.

Where the schedule goes and where the Tour goes, I don't know. I hope I'm always playing well enough to pick-and-choose the event I want to play on both tours. I think the last -- what.

I will say, I think the last two, three years, for us that have played both tours, if you have played well, it's worked out great. Because I've always started the year here in January and played in the Middle East, played the PGA TOUR, the season finishes in August. I've played nicely, and I've had the chance to play this tour as well through to the end of year in November. That's always worked amazing for me, to know what a schedule will look like. If it changes, I'll have to see that and then decide on that.

Some of us that have played both tours, I think the schedules have worked out great recently.

**Q. You have done a lot for junior golf in this country where you are now living. Over the past couple of years, you have had Tommy Fleetwood junior academy, the tournament. In these two, three years, what have you seen among the juniors here? What have you seen amateur and junior golf here, and where is it heading?**

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I think the game is growing constantly, and the enthusiasm for golf is massive. I think we're very lucky in this region that we have so many tournaments.

When I was a young kid, I went to maybe one or two tour events, and it was the best thing ever to go and see the professionals play and then create my dreams from there. And I think we're very lucky in the region that we have so much professional golf, so much tour golf to watch and to go to.

I think the elite end of the game is constantly improving. I think we have some amazing coaches in the region, and I think the talent pool is growing, just simply numbers game as well. The game is growing. So then you find better players from that, and I think the coaching system, you know, it's constantly evolving and constantly improving.

I've enjoyed being a part of it, and I think the region still has so much more it can give and so much more to go. But from both ends of the spectrum, from the amount of golf that's being played and amount of kids taking the game up to the elite amateur level, and the opportunities of playing big amateur events on good golf courses, and some professional events that come here as well, I think is great, and I think it will continue to grow.

CLARE BODEL: On that note, thank you, Tommy.

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