

The Senior Open Presented by Rolex

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PGA Centenary at Gleneagles

Ernie Els

Press Conference

MATT JOULE: Thanks for joining us, you've just gone to play the golf course. What are your main takeaways from it?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I'm trying to remember golf holes, and I played Sunday and I remember only the first and the 18th. Since then, I've played Sunday and today, so they are two good rounds and it's coming back to me. The last time we were here in 1993. So it's been a good 30 years.

So I've played a lot of golf in between but nice to be back. The course is in wonderful shape. You know, I can't say it's in front of you; it's in front of you, but you can't see much because there are a lot of blind shots. It is in good shape and I enjoy the course.

I always enjoy playing in Scotland. It's a wonderful place to come. American guys ask me what kind of a course is it. Well, it's hard to explain. You're in the Highlands, well, at the start of the Highlands, and it could play like a links course but not quite there but it's got that find of feel on some of the holes. Rough is quite heavy but just enjoying the wedge.

MATT JOULE: St Andrews last week, Gleneagles this week, what is it about Scotland that people enjoy so much, coming and playing here?

ERNIE ELS: There's so much different golf but the game was born here and started here and everywhere you go, it's just a wonderful experience. St Andrews last week, the Old Course, very different experience to here.

But this is special because everything is old here, all the courses are old here. It's really played with the lay of the land in mind and same with this one. You've got greens up on the hill, and you go down and there's a lot of elevation change and it's wonderful golf and very different from St Andrews but still playing in Scotland.

Q. A couple new tees, 7 beside the green and then 12



coming back. What difference have they made?

ERNIE ELS: As I said, I can't remember much but I can see they are new tees, as you tee the ball in, you can feel the new turf. I guess the one is much more of a dogleg, I think No. 6, blind tee shot which goes left, and the other one is 7, and the par 3 No. 5 got a new tee. A lot of new tees.

But as I say, I can't remember much. I remember the par 4 which you can drive, you can still do that. Whatever it is, it's in great shape and it's a good test.

Q. Do you have much of a record here?

ERNIE ELS: I don't really remember that I did anything really good here.

Q. You were very young back then.

ERNIE ELS: I played '92 and '93. I was more worried about the Guinness then (laughter). But it was a good warmup. This was the week before The Open and I finished fifth at the 92 Open and then sixth at '93 Open. So whatever I found here was good for the next week at The Open Championship. It was good preparation.

Q. You won twice at Loch Lomond. What would it mean at this stage of your career to win again in Scotland?

ERNIE ELS: Great. I mean, I'm still relatively young on this circuit and I feel I've got a lot of opportunity to do good things. There's a lot of good players that's coming through but I still feel if I play good golf, I can win tournaments.

Saying that, I've only won twice but I feel I can do good things and I feel comfortable around here. As I say, I've always felt comfortable playing in Scotland and winning The Open here and The Scottish Open. I've always enjoyed it so hopefully I can enjoy this week and play good golf.

Q. Inevitably going to ask, but what's going on in the world, what's your view from a distance?



ERNIE ELS: It's crazy at the moment. Yeah, it's just a shame how it's split up and players and so forth.

You know, my view, back then and I've discussed it with the Saudi people back then when there was still the discussion, when they came to players, my view was always to do it with the major tours, everybody partnered up in this team/individual event competition, and play it in the dead season.

You know, the U.S. have got a very tough time setting golf when you have college football and all the college sport, and that's a huge TV expense. Play in that time from after the FedEx championship in Atlanta to December. It's a good three months. Everybody gets together, bang, do this thing. That could be very exciting, and it's not interfering with any of the main tours. It's not interfering with real golf as we know it. That whole thing wasn't -- obviously I didn't get through to anybody at the high level.

Q. It's become very adversarial.

ERNIE ELS: Now it's 54 holes of golf and that would have been great for an IPL format, IPL kind of thing that they do in cricket, but you still come back and play test cricket and play for your country and so forth.

But this thing is really split now, and it seems like there on the left side, they have dug their heels in, they have endless money and they are going to keep funding this thing. I can't see it work as a 54-hole entity. It's not -- in my view, it's not golf the way it's supposed to be. 48-man field, it's wonderful for a special event, three-month thing. You know, big money, there could be huge betting going in. You can imagine, it could be like a Formula 1 series of golf.

But three months of that, I think that's enough of that. Then come back to play real golf. And that's still my view. I think it's gone too far now obviously, and who knows where it's going to end now. I don't know.

Q. There's a fair number of your compatriots have signed up. Does that surprise you?

ERNIE ELS: No. They never spoke to me. I think they would have known what I would have said. You know, I still don't see how they are going to get ranking points, and I don't see them playing all the majors. I just don't see it. You can't have a 48-man tour playing no-cut golf and that type of thing and expect the world to take you seriously.

You know, it's just not going to happen, and I don't care how much money you throw at it. It's just not going to

happen.

And they are going to keep pushing for that and probably go to court and all of that, which is going to split up the game even more and I totally don't get that. If you had a 72-hole tournament entity, I can get you getting really serious. But 54 holes, I can't see it. And that means the players are going to lose ranking points. They are going to have to play The Asian Tour, which they are really going to bump up, I'm sure it's going to be \$5, \$6, \$7 million in no time. That's where they are going to have to play to get they are ranking points. This thing, who knows where it's going to go. But that's just the way I see it, and you know, it's unfortunate that golf has come to this point.

I do get international golf. I was one of the guys, being an international player, South African Tour player. South African Tour member, member of the PGA TOUR. 15 events was the minimum events I could play. If I wanted to play more overseas, I needed to play more in the US. I thought it was unfair. We had that talk with Tim Finchem almost 25 years ago. We came to a solution. I could play a schedule that I was comfortable with in the US and across the globe, which I did. I played 30, 32 events for the bulk of my prime. I got to play around the world.

So there were concessions made by the U.S. tour. You know, myself, Nick Price didn't play as much as me overseas but Greg Norman did, Fred Couples did also. So there's a way of playing worldwide golf. You can work with the system.

Q. There's enough room, isn't there.

ERNIE ELS: So if anybody understands getting a little screwed by the U.S. tour, it's me. But I just don't feel like the way the game is -- is the right way in the long run.

Q. Big implications for the Presidents Cup, especially on the International Team side. You must be saddened to see that. Half the team seems to have gone already.

ERNIE ELS: Yeah. But we had that conversation with Jay last time. I said to him, we are going to be more in control of how we pick our side. They wanted to keep it under the U.S. control, PGA control, and this is where we are at today.

So that will have to change if they want to have any kind of field from the international point of view. Because now, our players have gone to LIV and obviously there's a big -- they don't see eye-to-eye, so we can't use those players on LIV Tour, but it's going to affect the Presidents Cup in a big way.

Hopefully in years to come, the Internationals can choose their own side on their own merit.

Q. Won't be too competitive this year as it stands?

ERNIE ELS: Not now. They are going to lose six players, if Cam Smith goes, he's the No. 1 player now. Louis was on the side. Carlos Ortiz was on the side. Ancer was on the side. There's so many guys on the side. It's going to be tougher for Trevor. He might have to be playing captain.

Q. Can people sit down and start negotiating? They seem determined not to.

ERNIE ELS: I think if you read what you guys have written, and this is quotable stuff that you guys have written, it's hard to have a conversation.

Q. With?

ERNIE ELS: Either of them. Greg keeps stirring from his side, and then seems like Jay has got to defend himself. And then some of the players speak out, and then on the other side -- it's just a tug of war a little bit at the moment. It's really very uncomfortable.

Surely there's got to be some kind of negotiation that has to come. Because surely LIV wants World Ranking points. They want to be regarded as a tour. It's not going to happen the way it's happening. You can't have 48 players and expect to have ranking points playing against each other every week with no cut. You know, it's not going to work.

So they need to negotiate with the tour and the Tour needs to talk to them and see if there's some compromise, and I don't know if they become partners in it or -- I don't want to go too far, but who knows.

Q. It's a different time but when you won The Open twice, a few years later, could you ever imagine leaving the Tour that you made your name?

ERNIE ELS: Well, in that position where Cam is now, he's in a great position. He's right entering his prime. Prime years. He's 28. He's got time now to win majors and I wouldn't want to put that under any danger of not happening.

So I would not at this stage go on any other tour where I might not play in a major again, or be in a position to have to defend myself to play in a major. I would like to just play my golf and put myself up the history books as far as I can go. You know, there's guys who have won one major, two,

three, four, start separating yourself at four, five, six, seven majors, and there's no reason why he shouldn't go that far, and why put that under jeopardy. You know, I would stay exactly where I am, do what I do, and the money's there. It's already there.

The way he's playing, you know, the level of golf he's at, and that he might give up. So I'd stay exactly where I am in my lane and try and win majors.

Q. Mentioned the idea -- also created a different sense of teams and actually change the nature of the game --

ERNIE ELS: Cricket. Even in test match cricket, they go after it. They are running --

Q. Some of the players have actually become worse than what they were and some have actually become -- I mean, they are playing all three formats but when they have their ranking, they are separate ranking, but would it change the nature in golf if there's no cut, no tension of the second round?

ERNIE ELS: If the rest of the world is playing under a 72-hole stroke play, you make a cut after 36 holes and that's how you get your ranking, that's how you make your money.

LIV Golf doesn't do that. So now why would you be under the same brush as the rest of the world? You know, it doesn't make any sense. It's a different format of golf. That's what we do on the Champions Tour. We've played 30, 40 years of golf. This is kind of what we do now at the age of 50, you know, and that's why we don't have any ranking points. We are not regarded as a main tour. It's like the other tours, The Asian Tour, Australian Tour, South African, all those tours play 72 holes. Just because you're playing for 20 million a week doesn't change anything. You're still 54 holes. There's no basis to it. There's no substance to it.

But, you could play that for three months. The whole world will be watching. I mean, my gosh, everybody will watch it.

Can you imagine the guys trying to buy teams who have people, principals of teams? It will be like the Formula 1. You'll have major people, billionaire people and they will come in and have fun with the teams and the sport, and the guys can have fun and the world can have fun with this format because it's different. And you have the team and the individual format.

But don't put that up against what we've been doing for many, many years. I just don't see that. Anyway, I've said enough.

