

LIV Golf Jeddah

Wednesday, 28 February, 2024

KAEC, Saudi Arabia

Royal Greens Golf Club

Smash GC

Brooks Koepka

Graeme McDowell

Talor Gooch

Jason Kokrak

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the first press conference of LIV Golf Jeddah 2024. Delighted to welcome Smash GC. We have 2022 and 2023 LIV Golf Jeddah champion Brooks Koepka; we have returning Smash GC player Jason Kokrak; we have new Smash GC member Graeme McDowell; and our 2023 individual season champion, Talor Gooch. Welcome, guys.

Start with Brooks and Talor. About four or five months ago you guys had quite an epic playoff out there, different teams. Brooks, you won your second LIV Golf Jeddah championship, and you also claimed your individual season championship here last year. Positive memories coming back for you both?

BROOKS KOEPKA: For me, yeah. Maybe not as much Talor. But coming here back-to-back champ feels good. I like this golf course. I've obviously played well, so some familiarity, I guess. The golf course hasn't changed over the last six years, so I'll be ready to play this week.

TALOR GOOCH: Yeah, it was obviously a good week, and the final round that I had here is probably one of the best rounds of my life, circumstantially speaking.

It could have turned out a little bit better if it wasn't for that dude over there. But no, it was a great week, and very fond memories, and glad to be back.

THE MODERATOR: Nice to be on the same team this year?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, it's a lot better.

THE MODERATOR: Also coming off of a team win in Vegas. Jason, Graeme, how much confidence does that



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give you coming into this week and the whole year ahead?

JASON KOKRAK: I think we knew what we were expected to do, but I think the group of guys standing here are ready to play golf. We're ready to win multiple times this year.

Nice to shake the rust off in Mexico and then get a team win in Vegas. Super excited with these guys, and looking forward to the rest of the year.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Totally agree. I think there's a high expectation level on the team. There's guys here that are going to compete individually every week, and as a group I think we really feel like we can compete as a team every week, as well.

Certainly not resting on our laurels of Vegas. We're looking to the season and trying to be the best we can be every week and keep working hard, and we've all had some reasonably good success around this golf course. This is a week that we feel like as a team we can certainly compete.

Q. Brooks, you've obviously won back-to-back majors twice; have you ever at any point since taking up golf had a three-peat?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I don't think so. It's hard to win alone, and then to back it up is pretty tough, but to have a chance at a three-peat -- I'm 0 for 2, so hopefully change it this week.

Q. How much different do you think the course will play in February as opposed to October?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I only played the back nine today. It seems like it's in very good shape for this time of year. I don't think I've seen it in better shape.

The fairways are phenomenal. Maybe a little bit softer than what it's been probably in October. It'll be interesting. The wind direction is still the same.

Q. You won here in February; have you noticed any difference since playing in October?

GRAEME McDOWELL: To Brooks' point, I think it's slightly



softer this time of year. I think coming off the back of a hot summer, September, October conditioning can be a little challenging with water issues, and this part of the world gets awfully hot.

It was quite firm and crusty I think last October. I think it's definitely a little softer, kind of a bit lush. I think it's in phenomenal condition.

Like Brooks said, the wind direction is about the only thing that doesn't change around here. It always blows out of the west, northwest, and the guys that have been here multiple times, the golf course is pretty much there in front of you and plays very similar.

But the conditioning this week is probably the best I've seen this golf course.

Q. Brooks, I think you've played the 18th 11 times in the last two years, obviously birdied it every time on Sunday. You're very familiar with that hole. What do you think of it?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I'd prefer to play it a little bit less. I did all right in the playoff. I just would like to not go to a playoff again. It would be nice to win one outright.

JASON KOKRAK: Clutch birdies, though.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Listen, hey, Talor kind of forced my hand last year, made a good putt there. I had to make one.

Like I said, I don't want to do it in a playoff again. I'm tired of that hole.

Q. Talor, in the playoff last year, you figured you were going to have to birdie every time just to stay even, right?

TALOR GOOCH: Yeah, I mean, in the playoff hole that I lost, I had a really good number on the second shot, and I kind of knew that birdies were going to drag this thing out. I knew I had already won \$18 million, so I said, let's send it. I got aggressive and just overcooked it a couple yards too much and ended up losing because of it.

But like you said, I saw the putt he made in regulation to send it to a playoff and the putt he made in the playoff, and just knowing him, he's not going to let you win it with a birdie. I was trying to make an eagle and close the thing out.

Unfortunately it didn't happen, but he likes that 18th hole out here.

Q. Obviously Barry Sanders, you probably grew up idolizing him, you got an autographed jersey from him. What's that like?

TALOR GOOCH: Yeah, he's one of the GOATs without a doubt. He's a living legend in Oklahoma, and like you said, everybody back home knows him. He's an incredible individual and one of the greatest NFL players of all time. Super, super cool, and that will be going in the man cave immediately.

Q. Jason, can you speak to the change in the team dynamic from last year to this year, new team members? How is that feeling?

JASON KOKRAK: The feeling is good. I've been with Brooks for a couple years now, but adding G-Mac and Talor has been nice. The four of us mesh well. We go out there, and we don't necessarily need to play practice rounds together. We know how to take care of business, and we know what we need to do individually to play well. I think collectively that puts our captain's mind at ease, and he can go out and do what he needs to do instead of kind of looking after some other people and making sure that we're doing the right things.

I think the four of us are comfortable together, and I think you saw that in Vegas, and I think you're going to see more.

Q. Brooks and Jason, it appears you got to be a member of the team and own a franchise outside of your golf interests with the bull riding and the horses. What are we expecting Jason to take on as an alternative sports investment?

BROOKS KOEPKA: We were actually just talking about this. I don't know, we'll figure out something. We'll figure out something to get J in. Yeah, G-Mac, it was here last year when G-Mac talked about the horse. He's like, do you want in? I said, sure. Might as well.

We'll find something, don't worry.

JASON KOKRAK: We've got a couple ideas.

Q. G-Mac is alluding to a few more being added to your stable, so opportunity for Jason to get on some more horses?

JASON KOKRAK: I'm in.

Q. Brooks, you've won here twice; are you going for the hat trick?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, that would be the goal. I'd like to be able to win individually or somebody up here win, and then we win as a team. I think that's the whole goal.

Everybody did their job in Vegas, and just need to continue that rhythm and that play, and we'll be just fine.

Q. Graeme and Talor, basically you guys are the new additions to the team. What are your ambitions? What are your hopes? What are you trying to achieve here at Smash?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I think certainly speaking for myself, very excited to be part of this group. World-class players. I think obviously as a team, we have the expectation level to compete every week, and individually I think the momentum, the work ethic, everything that we're doing as a group I think just drives everybody forward to compete well individually, as well.

I think that was my best finish of my LIV career in Vegas, and I just want to try and take that confidence and belief forward and continue contributing to this team.

TALOR GOOCH: Yeah, we just want to win. Very simply put, that's part of why I came over here is just to win.

We have that capability every given week, and it might not happen each week, but I know each week that's going to be the goal is to go win the tournament.

Q. Jason, we've seen you earlier being involved in the visit from the Association from Nidal Amal (phonetic). How important was it for you to be part of that year after year and to be out there with the kids and do what you did earlier?

JASON KOKRAK: I think the four of us, not just the four of us, I think each team, each individual gives back to their communities. Talor has got his foundation. G-Mac gives back. I've been to Brooks' foundation. I give back to my community.

I think each place that we can come to and give back in any way we can, that was just a small form of what we can do individually. Anytime you can do it for kids is a great benefit for not only this area, for anywhere we go, and any chance I get to give back with kids involved, I'm definitely all for it.

Q. Brooks, in terms of the LIV Jeddah tournament being held here year after year, how do you think this is going to be more beneficial to the community? How can the kids here pick up the sport more?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Obviously I think if you look at the group of guys that are here just as part of this league is what's going to draw kids. I'm pretty sure that's how each one of us got involved. You find your idol or a guy you like and you follow them and continue to watch them throughout the year, or you come out and you get a chance to see them live, and you come out and you fall in love with the game and you fall in love with a guy, and you get to play a golf course that we've played, I think that's pretty special, and I think you can see the involvement since I first came here in I think 2018. A lot more kids are getting involved. So that's a good thing.

Q. Brooks, building on the previous question of you winning here previously in Jeddah, what would be the difference this year in order for you to continue winning?

BROOKS KOEPKA: A lot of it comes down to luck. Obviously playing good is a huge thing. Like I said, this golf course, the way the wind blows, you can get out of position pretty quickly.

You've just got to understand where to miss it, I think, around here is a huge thing, and always making sure you're either chipping into the wind or putting back into the wind. Got to control your ball flight, control where you put it, and make sure you miss it on the correct side.

Q. Brooks and Graeme and Talor, what does it mean having such great talent coming to the team and adding to the team, and what are you guys going to add to the team in your opinion?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I think it's pretty simple. Like Talor said, we wanted to put a group of guys that, first off, know how to win. I think that's important. You've got to be able to cross that finish line. You've got guys that have been in those spots, won major championships, guys that are going to compete for them for years and years, and guys that aren't afraid. I think that's a huge thing.

You look at this whole team, and I don't think anybody is going to back down. They've got a chance to -- if they've got a chance to win, they're going to put their foot on the pedal and go. That's what we want.

It's also just a very easy group of guys to be around, sitting around even for lunch just talking about random stuff. Life, whatever it is. I feel like we're all very close. I've gotten with J over the last four of five years. I've known G-Mac for 10 years now, been pretty close. Talor, obviously just getting to know him even better more recently. It's been the perfect addition. I'm beyond thrilled, and I'm happy to

have them.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I think exactly what Brooks said. It's that winning mentality. It's that work ethic, the preparation, the competitive spirit that all four of us have, guys that know how to win. Talor won three times last year; Jason has won some great events; Brooks' record stands for itself. I think the way he's played the last 10 years, it's contagious when you're around guys that want to win that have high expectation levels that they want to achieve things. It just kind of -- the rising tide kind of lifts all ships, and I'm excited to be around that winning mentality this season.

TALOR GOOCH: Yeah, just the competitive nature of these three dudes is fun to be around, and from the get-go, when talking with Brooks about the possibility of this, that was a huge draw for me. I'm a pretty serious individual. I take my craft seriously. I like to compete, and I want to win. Knowing that I was joining three guys that are cut from that same cloth, I knew it was going to be a natural fit, and we were all going to benefit from each other.

Like he said, we're going to continue to push each other to be better week after week and tournament after tournament. It's going to be a fun journey.

Q. Jason, Smash in terms of the team, what are you guys hoping to achieve in this tournament apart from obviously playing well and winning? What are you trying to achieve on an individual level and as a team?

JASON KOKRAK: Well, I think individually we're all going out there, and none of us are going to tee it up without the intention of winning. I think collectively if we do that, I think we'll be at the top of the leaderboard at the end of the week.

Anything we can do to push Brooks a little bit and maybe knock him off that top spot might be beneficial. We don't want to ruin his confidence moving into major season, either.

Q. What are you guys hoping to really do in terms of performing at the highest level, and in terms of you guys doing something that you've not done in the previous year as a Smash team?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I mean, I think it's the same thing; our goal is to win. The best thing these guys can do is to go out and try to play the best they can.

I think the way that even the format has changed this year where we've got to count four scores on Sunday, I think that plays right into our hand because I know these guys

aren't afraid. They're got to go out there and fire a low one. G-Mac did it Sunday in Vegas. I think that was pretty obvious how great he played.

That's what we need. I kind of even laugh at it; we were sitting around after Vegas even for a half second realizing, man, it could have been even a whole lot better. That's what we want to do every week is have a chance individually to win on the back nine and then as a team just compete with nine holes to play, give ourselves a chance and see where it ends up. That's all you can ask for.

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