

# Men's Olympic Golf Competition

Wednesday, 31 July 2024

Paris, France

Le Golf National

USA

Wyndham Clark

Collin Morikawa

Press Conference

MICHAEL BALIKER: We welcome from Team USA, Collin Morikawa and Wyndham Clark.

What's the experience been like and the team camaraderie been like playing practise rounds together the past few days?

WYNDHAM CLARK: It's been amazing. You know, it's a dream -- let me rephrase that.

Growing up, I never dreamt I would be an Olympian because I always wanted to play golf and it wasn't in the Olympics when I was growing up.

But I grew up watching the Olympics and I've always enjoyed the games and I think it's kind of the pinnacle of sports in our world and to be part of it is only a huge honour. And to play with good buddies of mine that are on my team, it's been really fun. It's been an amazing experience so far and I'm looking forward to the next four days.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Obviously your second appearance, having played in Japan in 2021, curious, this being a little more special, different feel this time, given the run you went on and what you had to do to qualify for the team, such a big task and the feel this time around?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Obviously COVID, very, very different three years ago, and being able to go to other events and watch other events, that's been the fun part.

At the beginning of the week, we're here to do a job and win medals for Team USA but look at the beginning of the year, definitely where my ranking was, I don't think I was even sniffing making the team and I added a couple events, make sure the game kind of got steady and been on a decent little stretch of golf. But at the end of the day,



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I'm still looking for the wins and wins are kind of what you remember.

So hopefully we can kind of close one out somehow this week.

MICHAEL BALIKER: For the both of you quickly, thoughts on the golf course, Le Golf National, how do you think it's going to play and how it fits both of your games?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I think it's actually a great golf course. I watched a little bit of coverage, the Ryder Cup and saw how things played and they talked about how the rough is and I'd say it's still pretty penal. Not a lot of drivers. A lot of placement tee shots and then you get your mixed bag of seven irons, 6-irons, even 5-irons and 4-irons off par 3s and you have short holes where you might be hitting 3-iron, 5-wood and a wedge.

I think the wind is going to be down. I would say we're probably going to see low scores the way greens are playing. If you get a little bit out of focus, then big numbers can add up pretty quickly.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Wyndham, what do you think so far?

WYNDHAM CLARK: It's very demanding off the tee. If you do miss the fairway, the rough is very challenging and not many of us were hitting the greens in our two or three practise rounds from the rough. If you find yourself in the middle of the fairway or in the least in the short grass a lot, you're going to have a really good chance. That's one of the biggest keys here, at least for me.

The course is in amazing shape and the greens are super pure. It's a very likable golf course. I really enjoy it.

**Q. Was there a grudge match today between the two teams?**

WYNDHAM CLARK: Yeah, and I would love to say Scottie and I are victorious.

**Q. Curious, the American Team is the only team with four players. You guys have played a bunch of these**

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**together. Does it help seeing the same players play different shots to different holes on repetitive days? I guess preparing for this tournament, it's definitely different than you would prepare for other ones through your teammates.**

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, I played a few practise rounds with Xander a little bit but I rarely play with Scottie because he's always with Mr. Sand Burns; we call him Wyndham "Sand Burns" this week because he went off after the practise rounds.

Look, those two guys are playing some of the best golf in our entire sport, if not the two best golfers right now. To watch them play and just watch them how they go about their business and hit their shots, it's very simple, and you want to make it that simple but it's obviously not that much and they put a lot of work into it.

It is nice to see, you get in a rhythm, and we all get in a rhythm when we are playing really well and to watch these guys do what they do and do what they have been doing, you hope to have that feed off to you a little bit and use some of that into this week.

**Q. My other question for Collin was just outside of Scottie and Xander, you've played some incredible golf this year but you haven't notched the victory column. Not to say that it's all about winning but sometimes in our sport, it can feel that way. Do you reach a sense of antsy-ness or anxiousness towards the end of the season when you haven't checked that box?**

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No, I did it for a couple years in that span where I didn't feel like I was playing great. Honestly we still have four more, I guess this plus Playoffs, so four more events to close it out through the season, and whatever is left in the fall.

I can look at it both ways. I mean, at the end of the day, when I look back at my career, I'm only going to remember the wins for the most part. You know, you're not going to kind of nitpick every season and talk about the 20-something events you've played. But when I look at it and compare right where I am now to where I was in January and February and March, there's been a lot of big wins.

Like I said, I've worked my ass off to get here and just because I made it doesn't mean it's over and doesn't mean I'm getting my paddles back. I've been here before, and I know what it feels like to honestly lose in a playoff for Bronze and that sucks. There's a lot of motivation just pushing yourself to come out and play some really good golf.

**Q. Just wonder if you can assess your last several months, obviously after the players, I guess maybe it's up-and-down or how you would describe it. You've had several high finishes but then the majors not so great. I just wonder where your game is and how you feel about how it's progressed this year after winning early in the year.**

WYNDHAM CLARK: Yeah, it's been a unique year. I started out fantastic and in previous years on tour, I typically have kind of played better at the end or the year.

But I kind of have some injuries I've been dealing with, happened right before Houston leading into the Masters, and I haven't been the same. I feel like I'm finally getting to where I can swing at the level that I know I can swing, and so that's kind of been an ongoing issue and it's been frustrating for me. So that's kind of one thing.

Then I've got to be honest, I've been very frustrated with how I played at the majors. I believe that I wasn't showing how good of a player I know I can be, and especially at highest level in the majors. But I've also got to look at how far I've come in two years. I'm fifth on the FedEx in back-to-back year and I've won multiple times and I have a lot of top finishes and I'm here at the Olympics.

So I've got to make sure I don't let the outside people put too much pressure on myself because I've grown so much in these two years. You know, it's not where I want to be in the future, but years like this, I've learned a lot and I'm hoping I take all the things I learned and play better in the majors next year.

**Q. Did the injury linger longer than you expected? Sometimes you go down that way and trying to play through something and think you should have waited. What were your thoughts?**

WYNDHAM CLARK: I went to Houston, played fine, decent event for especially being hurt. Went to the Masters, felt great at the Masters; and ever since the Masters, I haven't been able to get up to the speed that I normally have with driver and I've been hitting it a lot shorter.

It's been a lot of things where it led me down a path of, is it something in my swing, is it equipment, and then come full circle, we just realise now I'm a lot healthier, and maybe there was a couple equipment things. But you start going down rabbit holes that maybe I shouldn't have gone down and next thing you know, I'm missing cuts by a little bit and not playing at the level that I was earlier in the year or some parts of last year.

**Q. Just made me think of something, you've delivered some stretches that are super hot, whether it's last year or the 60 at Pebble stretch in March. How hard is it when healthy and things are going great to get to that level that Scottie and Xander and Collin has again of steadiness, of consistency, is that a hard thing to achieve?**

WYNDHAM CLARK: Yeah, that's probably -- if I were to look at the area I need to improve the most to try to get to that level, and to surpass where I'm at now is probably that consistency. I fully believe in my game when I'm playing good, and I believe I can beat anyone when I feel good -- healthy and playing good.

But the things those guys do and Collin do when they are maybe playing not as good and they still have a Top-10 or top five finish, that's impressive and something I've got to get better at.

**Q. How do you get there?**

WYNDHAM CLARK: I think one thing I notice especially with Xander and Scottie because I've played with them so much this year is they are really consistent in everything they do, and any time that they do have maybe days that it doesn't look as good, they don't waver. They don't change anything. They don't think anything. They just go, yeah, bad day, wash it off, wake up and go about it the next day and they turn around and play good. That's one thing.

And then I think both those guys hit it so good. You know, there's really no question of why they are amazing. They both are probably top 10 in strokes gained approach, and if not one or two, and that's I think one of the biggest things in our game is if you hit it good, and makes golf pretty easy.

**Q. I might have missed this earlier. What events have you attended this week?**

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I've gone to -- I went to gymnastics and water polo on Sunday.

WYNDHAM CLARK: I've seen a lot. My first Olympics; I've gone to a lot.

**Q. When you watch the other sports, is there any part of you that appreciates what those other sports and athletes have had to do to get to this one moment, as opposed to one moment every four years, as opposed to four opportunities in one year, does it make you appreciate being an Olympian even more?**

WYNDHAM CLARK: Yeah, for me, a hundred percent. It's amazing that they go for four years just to have one event or multiple events but just in this one- or two-week stretch. Really makes me appreciate that we have a bunch of big events every year.

For me it only inspires you to see how hard they work, and they come to this moment. It's amazing that they excel under the lights when they have to. So I've been -- I really appreciate what they do and inspired, to be honest.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Winning at East Lake, winning an open Gold Medal for golf, above the majors, below the majors, between the major, it's one of the biggest honours you can ever have and that can't be taken lightly. When you are representing your country, it's the biggest thing you can have.

You look at team events, you look at this, you can always say you're going to be an Olympian once you tee off. I think when you look at other athletes, like Wyndham said, and you just see the effort and the dedication that goes in, and just the sheer pressure. I mean, we do this weekend. Essentially there's a lot of different things happening around us but when we tee it up on the first hole, I honestly think for a lot of us, it will probably be -- we'll go back to that tournament mode.

But for these other athletes, it's the biggest event of their life and it happens once every four years. I think that's going to bleed into golf hopefully later on. We're still in the early stages and we'll see where it goes. We've had two great Gold Medalists previously, and people are going to want to keep playing this, whether the field grows or whatever it may be, it's one of the biggest honours of our lives so far.

**Q. You've had some tough losses in your young career, playoff losses, you name it. What was Tokyo like?**

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It sucked. I want to say there was like seven of us, and I made it to the last hole, only to plug in the hole and lose with a bogey.

I didn't really -- I don't think I understood the weight because it felt like a normal -- another playoff that you just grind through and see if you can beat everyone and stay afloat, essentially. And to go out like that, you kind of -- you live with it.

People, all my sponsors want to say, you finished T-3. I don't, any I didn't know issue tied for third. I finished tied for fourth. There's no medal. There's nothing you can get on and you live with that. I think that's what's really cool --

we hear Xander get announced on the tee, reigning Gold Medalist, you hear that for four years. As a Major Champion, you hear it for a year but this, you hear it for four. It's a pretty cool thing to have.

**Q. Not to continue belaboring Collin's good golf this year, but looking at the stats, it feels like a different version to you. I don't know if that checks out to you, but the short game stats are putting, the putting, the driving is really good. But the golfer we knew you could be a couple years ago was like one or two in pretty much, and you're still very good but not leading the Tour. Does this feel like a better version of your game than even when you were winning majors?**

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It's definitely becoming a more well-rounded golfer. The way I hit it this year, early in the year, there's no way I was going to catch up to finishing. I'd have to absolutely hit it stone cold like right next to the hole every event to kind of makeup for what I think I did early in the year.

Honestly, forget about the stats. Look, I do pay attention to them and it's nice, but I think when I look back at my wins and I look back at when I first turned pro, you look for those hot weeks. I think when you are consistent and you're able to put together more chances, sometimes you're able to close them out and sometimes you're not. If I keep knocking at the door, and seriously, just keep doing what I'm doing, hopefully it's going to fall. It's not about hoping. It's about making it happen. You can't get frustrated at solid performances when you know it's not like the best golf.

When I was winning those tournaments, there was a piece of those events that I can point out, like that was really, really good. I haven't found that like hot spark where the putter has been insanely hot for four rounds or the ball-striking is just where I want it to be.

So to put together these finishes and then knowing the overall golfer of who I am is getting better, that's obviously a positive to look at. But just keep teeing it up and see how it goes.

**Q. Normal people like me would find that frustrating but it sounds like you don't.**

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Look, the goal at the end of the week is to win, right. A lot of us are going to come out of that week not happy.

But there's another side to it where you've just got to keep learning, and thankfully with the way our kind of season works is you always get another chance and there's always

going to be another tournament and you're always going to tee it up. Like I'm never going to be scared to tee it up and I'm never going to worry about what I did in the past. Just going to show up and let everything go.

**Q. This might be a slightly daft question. Perhaps particularly. When you go and watch a few events during this week, if you're feeling good, will you go into town and watch some more swimming or athletics later in the week?**

WYNDHAM CLARK: No. I watched -- we both did the Opening Ceremonies Friday and I've seen an event pretty much every day, Saturday till last night, was at the gymnastics. Now I'm going to shut it down and focus on the golf, and then potentially something Sunday night after, but I'm here, I have a purpose, and that's to try to get on that podium, and if not, win Gold or something. I'm focused and locked in to do my best.

**Q. During the Opening Ceremonies, the athletes you intermingled with, how many of them liked golf?**

COLLIN MORIKAWA: More than I thought. Way more than I thought.

**Q. What surprised you, the number that it did?**

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, it surprised me. I don't know about you.

WYNDHAM CLARK: Yeah, we had people asking for our pictures.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Me?

WYNDHAM CLARK: It was like, okay, yeah, sure. Track athletes. It was a total -- all over the board, the people who wanted to take pictures and knew who we were. It was cool for us. We felt like mini-celebrities.

**Q. I don't mean this as an ego thing, but does it make you feel good outside of a golf tournament?**

WYNDHAM CLARK: Makes us feel good and it shows that golf is going in a great spot. People in other sports are watching what we do and are wanting to do what we do or play golf. I looked at it as a lot of positives. It was pretty cool.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Wyndham, Collin, thanks for the time. Best of luck this week.

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