

KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship

Harbor Shores

Benton Harbor, Michigan, USA

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

Padraig Harrington

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, Padraig Harrington is here with us at the 84th KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship. Welcome to Harbor Shores. How are you feeling about your game heading into Thursday's opening round?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, I've kind of had an interesting year. Hasn't quite gone my way at this stage. Had pneumonia during the winter so very slow start to the year. I seem to be coming out of it the last couple weeks, but I tweaked my neck last week and had a poor week last week.

It hasn't fully recovered. Interesting last week it was more joint. Now it's the same place but it's more muscle. So I'm surprised it hasn't recovered in the time. Obviously going to have physio in the next couple of days. But it was very playable today; whereas it wasn't great, say, last Thursday.

If it didn't get any worse than this -- I would like it to be better, but hopefully it's not worse than this and I should be okay.

Q. When healthy this year what is it in your game you would like to see a small uptick?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, I think I focused on my focus, my mental side of my game, which is usually a good sign that I'm pretty happy with the rest of it.

As I said, with the pneumonia the speed drops off. Your central nervous system is kind of shot for a while. That seems to be coming back, so I'm very much -- I'm quite comfortable with my game. It's just getting my head in the right place.

I've been trying to do that for a few weeks, but I just haven't got a good run at it. As I said, hopefully that pays fruition this week and I got my head in the right place.

This golf course is quite a tricky course for me because a lot of -- a bit of risk-reward in it. Got to hit it pretty straight.



A lot of the 3-woods off the tee and not a lot of drivers.

So, yeah, you don't want to lose focus too often out here. There is trouble out there. If you are hitting good shots there are plenty of opportunities, especially with the way the greens are designed. There is a lot of collection areas, so if you're hitting good shots the ball moves towards the flag and if you're hitting bad shots, you're leaving yourself in trouble.

Q. And you Steve Stricker had such a great shootout a year ago. What was your biggest takeaway from Frisco?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, you know, you lose -- I didn't do a lot -- you know, it's not one of those tournaments that I didn't feel like, hey, I left a lot out there. You know, you can look back at a couple shots. Hit a nice shot into 17 that went over the back of the green. You look back at things like that.

But I didn't feel bad about finishing second. I finished second at times where I felt like I messed up. Steve seemed to play very well and was a deserved winner.

Q. Talk about this game, where it suits you. You've played the last couple weeks been playing majors. Physically how do you feel?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, as I said, I have a neck issue. I used to get a neck issue nearly every second week of my career, but I sorted that problem out. This is only the second time I've had this problem in 18 months.

It was very commonplace for most of my career, but unusual at the moment. So that's a little disappointing, but I know it's only in the moment, so not too worried about that.

As I said. I was very worried about the pneumonia, but I seem to be coming back out of that. Yeah, even though we're four months into the season I really don't feel like I've had a good run at it yet.

So prior to the injury I feel like I have prepared well for this

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week, so we'll see how -- as long as that doesn't interfere I think I can't ask any more of myself, put it like that.

Q. I am from South Bend, home of Notre Dame, the Fighting Irish.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah.

Q. Wondering, did you get a chance to see them play their football game last fall in Dublin?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I didn't. I was on the road. I played with Kirby Smart a couple weeks ago, so he kind of persuaded me to be a Georgia fan now at this stage.

Yeah, there is a lot of -- yeah, haven't quite nailed down the college yet. I should be a Notre Dame fan, but just haven't quite nailed down college sports yet. It's so much easier as an outsider to follow professional sports in the States; it's really hard to follow college if you haven't gone to one of them. You got to have that affinity.

I should have it with Notre Dame. If it was on TV and flicked on a Notre Dame wherever it would be I would have more interest.

But I think you got to know somebody or a player, being there or something like that. So it's still a little bit -- it's amazing, and this is all the way through my career. You can be a real outsider over here if you don't talk about college sport.

Like amongst the professional golfers is dominates so much more than any of the professionals. Like I suppose we don't play as much during the football season obviously, but they talk all day about college sports. All day. They just love their college sports and you see them traveling off to them.

Of course from where we come from, we just don't get it. We just don't get the idea. A professional golfer can go to this college for three months and he carries their colors for the rest of their life. If you flunk out of college in Ireland you just deny that part of your life ever existed. Over here it doesn't to work like that.

Q. Well, you're only 40 minutes from down there and they have a pretty good golf course.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: There you go. Maybe, yeah. Very nice. Yeah, hopefully won't have the time this week. Hopefully be busy on the main track here.

Q. Even where you grew up did it pique your interest that there was a team over here, the Irish?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: We knew about Notre Dame, but more from movies. We've seen it in movies and things like that. Wouldn't have -- just wasn't -- the college thing isn't a thing.

Like when I was turning 18 going to college, I went to night school, but at that stage there was -- there was no golf scholarship in Ireland, so if I wanted to go golf scholarship, the nearest I could go -- there was one available in St Andrews and one in Stirling university in Scotland. There are none in Ireland.

There are now so might put 120 kids through golf scholarships with scholarship foundations, so there are availability now. Back in my day there just wasn't that sort of there. The college thing was a different -- yeah, just a different sort of lifestyle in Ireland.

But I will say that to go to college in Ireland is like the fees are three grand a year, three and a half grand a year, so not quite like the U.S. either.

Q. That's okay. We don't get hurling, so we're square. Notre Dame is playing hockey over there in Belfast in November.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: The fact you said Belfast I assume you mean ice hockey.

Q. Yep.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah. As I said, I would be aware of them and I knew the football match was going on, but it was more from movies. Yeah, movies and things like that.

We would have no idea of the passion that people have for their colleges over here. You know, just wouldn't have -- but then we do have, as you said, hurling and football and people have a passion for their club and their county in Ireland that's second to none.

You go across the water for soccer and you would have people who have a passion for their soccer club like it's their life. I suppose every country has it. You guys just seem to have it for the colleges.

Q. I loved The Quiet Man. Good movie.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: There you go.

Q. Any thoughts on Xander's week and him as a player?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, it was coming obviously. He really was the man -- well, not the man in form; obviously there's others. But you could see he was playing great. There might have been talk about other people, but he definitely had to be one of the favorites going in. His game was in great shape. He's a nice -- I can't -- I shouldn't nice kid. He's a nice man, a nice young man with a fine game. Really, really strong game. Works hard.

You know, if anything, you would say he's had a very nice progression in his golf game. It doesn't always work like that. He's worked hard and has slowly got better and better and better to the stage he's at.

And that might mean he sustains it longer. Sometimes when you get there quickly you leave quickly; whereas he's worked hard to get there, so you might see him be this player four five, ten years.

Q. You have kept yourself in good shape, kept your speed high, so you have a lot of length. Is this a great window for you to compete and win some majors?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah -- yeah, no doubt about it. I actually put on at least ten pounds or more from the pneumonia because I couldn't get to the gym for three, four months. I am back in the gym and been putting on a bit of muscle. I will need to cut at some stage. I can't keep going in this direction.

Yeah, it's nice to have an advantage. It's nice to be the -- there is nothing I'm going to face this week -- if I am complaining about it, I can tell you everybody else is going to be complaining about it. There is nothing I am going to face this week that I can't handle.

Like you try and win any golf tournament, you still got to hit the shots and hole the putts. But I'm in a good place for -- and my game is probably protected for a good few years. I'll still be -- they won't be producing golf courses -- like even playing last week, you know, was plenty comfortable length with the young guys last week.

I had given up to the very long hitters, but I was certainly better than average. So I didn't find last week's golf course long, put it like that. So I think I'm protected for a while to come yet.

But in 20 years' time or 10 years' -- well, 20 doesn't matter too much, but certainly the younger guys -- like if you asked a guy out here on the Champions Tour how far they hit it, they would tell you the yardage that they hit the ball.

They might tell you the carry or the final distance.

Whereas if you asked a young person how far they hit it they'll tell you are their ball speed or their club head speed. You can trial that out yourself.

If you ask a young person it's all about, okay, I'm 185 ball speed, 123 club head speed. If I ask the older guys, yeah, I hit it 282 in the air. It's just a distinctly different way of looking at it.

The young guys are going to get longer and longer, and if you were starting your career now, it would be tough to go out on TOUR unless you got 180 ball speed or more. In time -- like it was fascinating watching Bryson last week. Great viewing.

But there is going to be 30 like Bryson in ten years' time who hit it further than him. You want to be in that 30. At the moment I'm in that 30 on the Champions Tour, so I'm okay.

Q. Going from this tour to that tour back to this tour, is there a tangible difference how you feel confidence-wise?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, when you go to the main TOUR you're on edge and you don't quite play your own game. You don't play as well. You feel like you need everything to go right and you miss a 10-footer for par and you bogey the hole and it knocks you back.

Whereas when you come out here, you know, hang on a second, stay patient. If I stay in here I can make some birdies, I can get back into this. You feel like you have a little bit more time, and because you feel like that, you tend not to miss that 10-footer or you tend to make a few more birdies.

Yeah, there is no doubt when you're on the main TOUR absolutely on the limit. When you're on the limit you don't play as well. I will say that the big thing about the Champions Tour is there is a rhythm to the Champions Tour. You have to get going very quickly on the Champions Tour.

You start out shoot 2-under par the first day, it's probably the end of your tournament. If you're going to get to the 15-under par for three rounds, 16-under par, you got to shoot 6-under par -- you got to get going.

So playing a lot of main TOUR events probably is not good for the Champions Tour. You're getting into this grinding mode when you go to play the main TOUR, whereas that's no use -- we see it all the time. We see good players coming out, and took me a few months. It takes everybody three months to get going on the Champions Tour just to

get the rhythm of, hang on a second, you got to shoot the score and keep going.

It's a rhythm of its own. So switching back and forth is not ideal. Look, I still hope to catch lightning in a bottle when I go play with the young guys and hit that week where everything works. Yeah, wouldn't want many weeks like last week. That could certainly soften my cuff.

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