

Travelers Championship

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

TPC River Highlands

Cromwell, Connecticut, USA

Stewart Cink

Press Conference



TRAVELERS CHAMPIONSHIP

THE MODERATOR: Okay, go ahead and get started here.

We'd like to welcome Stewart Cink to the virtual media center here at the 2021 Travelers Championship. Stewart, you're a two-time winner of this event having won in 1997 and 2008. Just some opening comments on what's it's like to be back here.

STEWART CINK: Travelers is a great event to come back to. I know all players that come through here say that, and we all mean that. I think we all speak for everybody. It just feels a lot like everybody's hometown being here. The fans are numerous and friendly, and they're supportive and the golf course is really fun to play.

Travelers has been a tremendous sponsor for a long time now, and I understand they extended out to like 2030, which is with mind blowing. It's a great event to come to, and it's one that we certainly circle in the calendar as a very important event.

I think you see that too with the strength of the field strength. The field strength has continued to increase here. Despite the times when right around the U.S. Open and players might be want to go take a breather, they still show up and play here. It's really a good testament to how nicely run and well sponsored the event is.

THE MODERATOR: And do you have any stand-out memories from either of those wins?

STEWART CINK: Well, stand-out memories? Is there anything in a 48 year old's mind that stands out from 1997? Not really. But I know my son Reagan, who now is my caddie for the rest of the season, he was born that year so he was only about three or four months old my first win here.

The one moment I remember from that is the shot I hit on 17 on the Sunday round. I was in the left rough up on the bank and I had a really thick lie and nothing but water between me and the hole. I remember debating, do I go for this, so I layup, what do we do? I was at our tied -- in the lead or tied and right at the top of the leaderboard and

decided to go for it thinking, How many times you going to get a chance to win a PGA TOUR event?

I remember somehow mustering it out of the rough and up onto the front of the green and two-putting, and one by one everybody else fell back and I was left to be the winner. That's actually my greatest memory from this tournament ever. That one moment where I had to make a decision whether to go for it or not and it paid off and got my first win and kind of set me on the right track in my career.

THE MODERATOR: And you mentioned play and the course in your first answer. On top of your two wins here you have a couple runner-up finishes, six top 10s. What specifically do you like about this place that helps you perform so well?

STEWART CINK: I don't know. It's not a super long course, but that really doesn't fit into my style of game. I would actually prefer long and big courses over this type of course.

Here I think the lines off the tee feel comfortable to me. I almost never have to figure out which tree to aim for. It's just like to just jumps out. Those kind of courses are the courses you feel comfortable playing on.

Also, I think reading the greens, I'm comfortable reading the greens, and that also means a lot. Putting is such an important part of the game towards winning anyway. We know that hitting is really important for consistency over the whole season, but putting is where you have your peaks and your valleys.

So I feel comfortable on these greens, and it's just a course I feel comfortable playing in a lot of ways.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. First of all, how are you feeling after last week?

STEWART CINK: I think the biggest impact on me was the time change coming over on the charter flight yesterday. Really great for Travelers to organize a flight for us, but you can't avoid that three-hour time change. West coast to



east coast always takes a day or two and I feel a little sluggish today, but I just got out of the gym where I performed moderate to average, so it'll feel good tomorrow, but today we're dragging a little bit.

Q. And have you noticed that your season-opening win ended a drought of eleven and a half, twelve years. You hadn't won heritage I think in 17 years; hadn't won this tournament now in 13 years. If you were to win it would be 13 years. Is there some type of goofy symmetry going on there?

STEWART CINK: Well, if you count all the tournaments I didn't win or that I've never won there is a lot bigger gaps, so those continue to grow.

I don't know if there is any symmetry or not. People ask you, What are your favorite places to go on the TOUR? I always say that Hartford and Harbour Town is one. They say, of course, you have multiple wins at those. But that's not really the reason. I think the reason I have multiple wins at those is I enjoy being in those places so much.

That feels like a homey place to me right around this area and there is such great fans and support here. I've gotten to know the people from Travelers, and so I would love to have another win here. It would be awesome. Of course any win on the PGA TOUR means so much these days. But to repeat yourself and win venues where you've won before is even more special because you get to relive some of those old memories with relationships you've been building.

Q. How much is the Ryder Cup on your radar these days?

STEWART CINK: Well, the Ryder Cup is definitely like a reward instead of a goal. I feel like the way to get on the Ryder Cup team is to do all the little things I have to do to compete well every day on every shot.

And so I don't feel like when I tee up my first tee ball here on 1 or 10 I'm going to be hitting that shot in order to make the Ryder Cup team. You know what I mean? That's a reward that's so far out there removed from each individual stroke that I have to play here and every decision I have to make that I just try to make my goals more closely tied to stuff that is controllable and feasible, like make the right decisions every day, keep my mistakes limited, thing like that. You know, be ready to hit every shot. Little intangibles, because I can control those. I can't control what other players do, and that has so much to do with whether you like the Ryder Cup team. Plus I'm like in, I don't know, 30th place or worse.

Q. 28.

STEWART CINK: 28th place. So I've got two wins and I'm in 28th place. What does that tell you about the kind of golf I played in the other seasons that counted towards qualifying.

Q. Follow up to that, having played on five consecutive Ryder Cup teams, what's your favorite thing that a captain did, whether it was a gift or a guest speaker they brought in?

STEWART CINK: Well, I have to say that Zinger, the first time he introduced the pod system to us, which wasn't at the Ryder Cup, it was before, but he got us all invested in that right way. It was amazing the way the whole team rallied behind that and got into it. And look what happened, we won. It was amazing.

I think the pod system probably was related to us winning and probably is responsible, but I can't say for sure at it wasn't. Just the fact that we all rallied behind something. Somebody could have said, All of your favorite colors are green this week and we could've been like, Yes, let's go, and we might have won. We would've got behind something, and we got behind that pod system.

As far as the gifts go, without question my favorite gift was Tom Lehman and it was a mountain bike. I still use it. It was awesome. She he give us the catalog to this mountain bike company and said, Pick. I was like, I think I'm going a with that one. It's amazing. It's held up great. It's still like just this tremendous like high tech, even though that was 15 years ago.

So those are some cool memories from the Ryder Cup. The pod system was a year later, that was the neatest captain move I've seen from here is how we're going to win this thing.

Q. We kind of touched on this already, six 10 top finishes here, the scene of your very first PGA TOUR win. Of course many of us will not forget the monstrous drive in 2008 when you won again here on the 18th. That was incredible. But without putting words in your mouth, is it fair to say that the TPC in Cromwell is one of your favorite stops on TOUR and will be special throughout your life?

STEWART CINK: It definitely is. I got my first win on the PGA TOUR here, so I think that definitely qualifies as a special place for me. I also made my first start her on the PGA TOUR as a pro. I had qualified for one as an amateur in college, but as a pro this tournament gave me my start and I made the cut and I finished 18th. I got to play with

Mark O'Meara on Sunday, who was right at the very top of the game. This was 1995.

So it wasn't just my first win. It was my first start on the PGA TOUR when it counted, and I'll be forever indebted to them for giving me that start. They saw something in me coming out of college that they thought deserved a spot here, and I know there are a lot of players that didn't get a spot.

So that meant a lot to me. I got a win here. I second win here. I've experienced so much really great stuff here. My wife has, too. We just feel quite at home in the Cromwell/Hartford area.

Q. One last one. You recently turned 48 and you last won this tournament when you were 35. Over that 13-year stretch, have you significantly changed the way you prepare for tournaments as far as your fitness is concerned?

STEWART CINK: Not really. I have changed trainers a couple times. Trainers, some guys, it's a tough life out here to be a trainer on the PGA TOUR. Guys do it for a while and sometimes they find other vocations or they move their business elsewhere. I have used different trainers and focused on different things.

The biggest change in my the fitness is I went through an injury in '19, and so I had to tweak my fitness to sort of deal with that and get through that injury. The base of it stayed the same, but I think the focus on the areas that needed to improve to prevent more injury helped me be a better golfer.

Just strengthening certain areas, identifying where I was weak or I was a little bit tight and working on those areas has helped me to achieve different things in my golf swing at 48. I'm 20 yards longer than I was even last year.

So it's just really helped me focus in the right ways. We want to practice smart, make our good decisions, but I think training smart is really, really important out here.

You've not just doing squats in order to hit the ball 15, 20 yards further. Everybody would like that, but you're, working out to try to give yourself the best position to stay healthy and achieve the kinds of position in your swing on a repeated basis without hurting yourself and being efficient and being effective with your delivery of the club to the ball the most often.

Golf is all about repeatability. Bryson is pounding it, but we can't all do that. He's learned how to be successful in one way and it's not the only way to do it.

Q. Since you came here in 1995 this tournament has changed. How have you seen this tournament develop and grow in the 20 plus years you've been coming here, and what do you like about the direction it's going?

STEWART CINK: What I like about it is the continuity that Travelers has brought here. With Andy and Nathan, they're two faces you know right away when you see them on the range that they are for the Travelers Championship and they have put everything into it.

They listen to suggestions. There is not a lot you can suggest how to run a better golf tournament than they do here, but when you do have something that you see is maybe a concern or something that could be improved, they do it. They don't just say, Okay, we'll look into it. It gets done.

It's really amazing. It shows their commitment to this event and to the charities they support. It's fabulous just to be a part of it. I know there is few tournaments on the PGA TOUR that when players talk amongst each other that we don't refer to by the city, that we refer to it by the sponsor. Travelers is one and John Deere is one.

Certainly used to be Hartford, the GHO, and now it's Travelers. That's just been an organic change. I've noticed that change in the last ten or fifteen years since Travelers has been here, and it's so great to see that they've committed all the way through 2030. That's just amazing.

Q. Going off that, you mentioned this is one of your favorites stops on the TOUR. What about this course sets up well for you with where your game is at now?

STEWART CINK: Honestly, don't really know that this course sets up great for anybody's game, or poorly. It's a course that has a lot of variety. You don't have to be super long, but length definitely helps on some holes. You don't have to be super accurate because the fairways are pretty generous.

Then again, there is also water and some pretty thick rough. The course in not know for rough, but there is thick rough out there.

So it helps to be long, to be straight, and to be smart. If you play good, quality golf here, any style of play can be successful. Reminds me a lot of Harbour Town actually. The courses themselves are not alike at all, but the way they don't really favor any specific style of play I think is one similarity between here and Harbour Town, and may

be the reason I've got two wins at both of those.

Q. I know you alluded to the fact that a lot of players love coming to the Travelers Championship for a variety of reasons and the feedback that Andy Bessette and his team takes. Can you detail some of the other reasons why this place stands out and why it's a staple in continuing its partnership until 2030? I know the 15 and a half hole is one of the staples here. What other things do you think of when you think of the Travelers Championship?

STEWART CINK: I think on the course the thing most players think of is the actual 15th hole, not the 15th and a half. It's a fun hole to lay. Everybody in the field can reach it. In fact, more players won't hit driver because it's not long enough it contain most drivers out here. You really have to figure out where you'll leave the golf ball on that hole. There is almost endless variety.

It's the one hole this jumps out at all the players and caddies when think about playing here, and it's just a fun position in the tournament, in the round, the 15th hole as you wind your way around that big lake. It's a lot of fun to play.

And then as far as just being in this area, I think the fans here are so supportive of us. We go to places like -- well, I'm not going to name any names, but we go to other places where the fans can get a little bit -- they're negative. You probably heard a little bit of that lately in some of the social media stuff.

Here I don't feel like you hear that much. You don't get that. You get support, a lot of people. A lot of them -- now last year we had nobody. This year we'll have a little bit more. In normal years before the pandemic struck us this crowd was just amazing here. The golf course just echoes with all these roars and there are so many people out there supporting.

It's just a really good environment to compete.

Q. Follow up with one more. When it comes to the philanthropic efforts, including the Hole in the Wall Gang camp and Operation Shower, what are your thoughts on that? Any stories?

STEWART CINK: The only thing I know about the charities is that Hole in the Wall Gang is the one charity I know a little bit about. I played with the tournament chairman here I think might have been the year after I won in '09. I got a little bit more information about some of the charities.

That means a lot to us that the tournament is so behind the local community and what they have been able to do. This tournament generates a lot of money. It's just amazing that they can support the local community like they do. There are so many people out there in need. It's easy to forget out here being a golfer on the PGA TOUR we're at the pinnacle of a sport and it's a pretty good life, and if you play well the rewards are amazing.

It's easy for us to forget that not far from here, not from all the venues we go to that there are people hurting and struggling. I'm proud myself, and I know I speak for a lot of players, we're proud to be part of a game that has such a great connection and such a natural vehicle that can be such a natural vehicle to help others in need.

Q. Hoping to tap into your memory. I'm assuming you're going to play the Open.

STEWART CINK: Yes.

Q. What do you remember? You tied for 30th in 2011. What do you remember about Royal St. George's?

STEWART CINK: I played there twice. I believe St. George's to be the most quirky of all the layouts. And they're all great courses, all fabulous. But St. George's has the most unexpected bounces, the potential for the most weird bounces because of the -- especially on the back nine, some holes where the ridges run not quite at a 45 degree angle, but they're just angled off to one side or the other. You can hit great shots off the tee that end up getting kicked one way or the other.

You just got to be ready for some of that. It's a great course. There are some really cool shots you're going to hit on that course. It's really close to London, so hopefully the population base will be able to come out and make it an Open Championship that feels like the Open Championship should, even in these circumstances.

Q. First off, what will you attribute your kind of recent renaissance to? Obviously two wins and you're one of only three guys that have two wins so far this year. How much does that kid on the bag mean to it, and how much do you really interchange with him?

STEWART CINK: Well, you answered my question with your question. I mean, certainly, I mean Reagan, having Reagan, my youngest Reagan is my caddie now, and he's going to caddie for me through the rest of the season. Having him on my bag has been just a blast this year.

Two wins with him this season has just been like -- to say it's like the cherry on the top doesn't do it justice. It's been

really, really fun and quite a lot of memories we made this year. It's been a big part of my success, because Reagan has grown up playing golf and he knows golf like I do.

His skill level in golf is not quite as high, but the way he thinks about the game and the way he understands the shots and the lies, it's like TOUR players think about it. So having him caddie has been like operationally excellent because he's very good and could caddie for anybody in the world right now, but just the relationship we have, it's been -- it's allowed me to be totally myself on the golf course.

That's something that is very important, and intangible when you're out there competing just because your decision making and all that is very important. Having Reagan is like a mini me out there. We make decisions almost the same way. When we don't agree, we always can find a place of common ground. Sometimes that's me, sometimes it's him. There is just a really good comfort level out there. Both of us have figured out a good way to approach the rounds.

So it's been a big part of my success this year. I've had a great year really for a 48 year old, and Reagan has been a big part of that. I also made some changes right before the season started. Everybody on the PGA TOUR, everybody in this tournament this week, has made some changes, so I'm nothing new.

But I made a couple changes. Found a little bit of extra distance right before last year before Safeway in 2020 and just made a couple setup changes in my game. Picked up some ball speed. I was able to make my driving a lot more efficient, and therefore picked up a lot of yardage.

It made a big difference. There is such a close margin out here between winning and 20th place or even finishing Top 10 and missing the cut. It's a very close margin.

When you can give yourself a little bit of a boost in your performance you can pass a lot of people fast, and that's what I was able to do with Reagan caddieing and making those adjustments.

Q. How long has Reagan caddied for you? You won twice here. Is there any two or three memories that stand out to you?

STEWART CINK: Reagan, he caddied for me from the very beginning of the season, and then became my -- we decided that -- we all decided as a family decided that he would keep caddying through this year's FedExCup Playoffs.

He's about to get married next month, so we don't think that's a really good way to start a marriage, so he will caddie for me through this year and then I will be back on the caddie market.

Then any particular memories, certainly in '97 was my first win on the PGA TOUR, and I have more memories from that than 2008. But in '97 I remember finishing just ahead of about third group maybe from the last group and one by one seeing everybody come through and not make a birdie or make a bogey when they didn't need one, or something. A lot of things went right for me and I ended up the last guy standing.

I remember giving my wife and our kids a big group hug and Reagan was about three or four months old we squished his head between us to the point where I think he was almost injured.

And so that was a memory that we all laugh at nowadays, seeing Reagan's little baby face getting smushed between mom and dad.

Q. How about the shot off the hill on 17?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, shot off the hill was something. That was a dicey decision, but it was the right one as it turned out. You know, the way the PGA TOUR rewards winning above all else, I think was the right decision even if I dumped that in the lake.

I was trying to win the tournament, and you play by the percentages until the last couple holes on Sunday and you decide at that point when you need to take chances.

That was a chance I needed to take. If it had come up short and gone into the water I still would feel very comfortable with that decision. Turned you out it didn't. It popped up on to the green, two-putted, and went on to win.

THE MODERATOR: Stewart, appreciate the time. As always, good luck this week.

STEWART CINK: See ya.

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