

John Deere Classic

Tuesday, June 30, 2026

TPC Deere Run

Silvis, Illinois, USA

Zach Johnson

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome Zach Johnson here into the John Deere Classic Media Center. You're making your 24th appearance here at the John Deere Classic. Can you tell us what's so special about coming back to this tournament every year?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I don't know how much time we have. There's so many -- so many factors, so many elements involved. I mean, in my profession this is like another home for me for so many reasons. I relish just -- usually it's six, seven days, but I relish those days.

It all starts with the people and ends with the people. I've served on their, if you want to call it serving, on the John Deere Classic Board, if you will, which really just means I give a little bit of insight into the golf world to help them navigate some decisions potentially. Oftentimes I'm asking questions, but I enjoy that and the people there.

I love the golf course. I certainly admire the roots of this tournament and why they have this tournament here. Clearly having the headquarters close by is an asset, but it's more about the community and the giving, which kind of gets lost in the fruckus of the PGA TOUR world as of late, but I think that's the core of what every week is about.

Certainly what this week is about is helping the Quad City community. That's terrific. Partnering with John Deere on and off the golf course in my profession, in my world, in my business is something I don't take for granted and am very grateful for.

There's a lot of reasons. Competitively speaking, this place gave me two starts. It's a long time ago. Two starts when I didn't have status, and I don't take that for granted either. Amazing opportunity there as a young pro trying to make his way onto the big tour, so there's that, as well.

This place is a highlighted pit stop for me, and I wish I could stay here longer.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned loving the golf course. Have you had a chance to get out there,



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especially so you can see number 4?

ZACH JOHNSON: No, I haven't yet. I am going to play the back today. I play the front tomorrow, yeah, in the pro-am tomorrow.

I'm excited to see it, and that tree, it's kind of like a Dikembe Mutombo in a lot of respects. It was placed strategically. Unfortunate, that was kind of the character of the hole, and maybe it had a little bit of -- I'm not nostalgic or anything like that -- sentimentality, but there's something to be said on that tree on 4.

Now, all that to be said, I received some pictures from a couple of rules officials who are buddies out here, and they showed me where the tee was and what the hole looks like, and it looks amazing. Excited to see it.

It's not going to change the integrity of the golf course, by any means. It sounds like it made the hole harder. I still have to walk, but there's a cart now from 3 to 4, so I'm excited about that.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Zach, quick question about your feelings about the tournament beyond what you said. Long before you were sponsored by John Deere or won this event, you never saw this as a second-tier event. With the changes that have taken place, is it going to be mixed emotions to think of it as "less than?" I'll leave it at that.

ZACH JOHNSON: For me, personally?

Q. In general for you, for your colleagues, for the players.

ZACH JOHNSON: I can't speak on behalf of anybody else. I think there are a lot of things that still need to be ironed out.

I listened to, I don't know, one-third to a half of -- I forgot it was going to happen this past week -- of the press conference at Travelers. I understand. I understand what's going on.

I mean, I think if you are in these circles or if you are part of



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the PGA TOUR, you would be naive to think that something like this wasn't coming. With change and the evolution of the PGA TOUR, you know, I don't think there's negatives. I just think we just got to find the opportunity.

What this tournament has done throughout the years has -- well, locally we all know that. We know the impact it has. We know what it's done and continues to do. Talking to the people, I know their motivations in that regard does not want to stop. That should not cease.

I mean, for the most part even with Clair, when he was a tournament director, I would get a text, Hey, we're going to hand out checks today. That's months from now, but that's what it's about.

I hope that doesn't stop. Whatever the tournament looks like going forward, you know, I know the people behind it, and I know their motivations are pure. That's what they're going to keep it at.

I think it's too, I don't want to say, irresponsible, but too premature to guess on what it is going to look like because we don't know. I know that their contracts are through 2030, both the title sponsor and the tournament contract. Contracts are contracts. What that looks like next year or two years from now, I have no idea. You could probably ask me that a year from now, if I'm welcome back (smiling).

But, yeah, you know, now to be more specific with your question, I would say the last two or three, three or four years it's kind of felt like there was two tiers anyway. I mean, I don't need to elaborate on that. There's been elevated events, and there's been other events.

The beauty of the PGA TOUR is those other events still have phenomenal athletes playing and opportunity galore. My guess is it's exactly what we're going to have going forward. It's just a matter of how you -- what lens you look through, you know?

I'll just say, you know, personally speaking, and I say this -- this is my 24th start? I have no idea what the purse is. I have never looked at one in my entire tenure. I don't know. I've had to look on the Champions Tour because they've asked me, but I honestly don't know, and I don't care.

Personally speaking, money is not the motivation. It's about winning championships. It's about making myself better each and every week for the next week, and I hope my peers see it that way.

Q. Taking what you said in totality, isn't it just about the PGA TOUR clearly defining its future?

ZACH JOHNSON: Is what now? I'm sorry. Say that one more time.

Q. Isn't it about the PGA TOUR clearly defining its sports business model? You made the comment a moment ago that there's always been two tiers.

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I don't know if there's always been two tiers, but it seems like there's been -- the last three or four years there's been kind of -- yeah, you've had the elevated events and the other events. Yeah, I guess you'd call it a tier system in some respects.

The beauty of those two tiers is still a meritocracy. It's still earn what you get, get what you get. You put your work in the dirt, and you get what you get. If you want to play in the elevated events, back in the day you had opportunity to do. You're going to have opportunity to do so going forward.

I appreciate, from a 30,000-foot view, which is kind of how I operate because I'm pretty simple-minded, but it seems like we've got a pretty decent architecture. We've maintained meritocracy both in an annual, yearly construct, but then also on the weekly construct. There's going to be cuts in both sections.

So, again, you earn what you get -- or you get what you earn. I think the opportunity is still there. You're talking about -- I think they said kind of plus or minus 120 to 130 guys in the Championship Series. You're talking about, depending on the day, probably 132 to 144 in the other series. I mean, we're talking 300 guys that are going to have opportunities still.

Furthermore, this is the maybe family side of me, which those that know me well, that dictates my schedule. Wives are probably pretty ecstatic because you're either in the event or you're not. What are you playing this year? Well, if I get into that, I might play. Hopefully I get into that. Now it's black and white. You either are in this series or in the other one, and you have the opportunity to plan your schedule, plan your off weeks, et cetera, et cetera.

So there's positives in that, and I guess there's probably some negatives. I mean, change is never overly welcomed, but when it comes to -- I appreciate the posture the tour is trying to make and those that are making it when you are trying to add clarity to the fans, certainly add clarity and a better product for our media constituents, because that's big. Obviously that's why we're -- that's how we're playing, and then obviously our title sponsors too and our members.

There's clarity. There's clear-cut -- sounds like there's



going to be clear-cut dos and don'ts. You're going to know where you are and what you can and can't do.

Q. You addressed the reasons why you're here. Probably this year more than ever there are reasons why maybe you shouldn't be here. You're second in the Schwab Cup, and you're missing the Senior U.S. Open. That's a commitment. Can you address why you made that choice --

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure.

Q. -- and how that speaks to your commitment here?

ZACH JOHNSON: Again, I'm pretty simple-minded. It's pretty simple. If JDC wants me back, I'm going to come back. I know I got in on my number. I get that. At the same time, I still feel like I can -- I'm not going to enter a tournament just to, you know, show up. I mean, I feel like I can do well this week. That's kind of what my team has said.

I know this golf course, with the exception of the 4th tee shot, really, really well. My game is in a place that I feel like I can compete still at a high level. Why not?

Now, all that to say I've tried, and it fell on deaf ears. I wanted a golf cart, but they said, no. That's okay. My legs operate. It was a very short discussion. I'll just say that.

I mean, I know I'm missing the Senior Open, but there will be more of those. God willing, there will be more of those.

Q. Can you talk about the transition to the Champions Tour this year and how refreshing it is to be able to go back out and be Zach Johnson on that tour?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, it's been -- I mean, you really don't know what to expect. I guess I didn't have a ton of expectation. I mean, I had some guys give me a little bit of nuggets here and there as to what to expect and what to see.

If anything, any expectation, I probably exceeded them, especially off the golf course. You're talking about all my buddies that are out there that I'm hanging out with, going to dinner with, playing with, et cetera. So that's been very welcomed.

I think the beauty of the Champions Tour is it's maybe two-fold. Once you get to the first tee, it's still competition. You still got to go, and I'm grateful for that, because that's what I am. I'm a competitor before anything else.

Then I would say, secondly, is it's just a welcomed

opportunity after the age of 50. If you were to ask me 24 years ago -- I didn't have a press conference 24 years ago, but if I did, you would have been speaking in a different language. I would not have understood anything you said as far as, as I like to say, the graduation from the PGA TOUR to PGA TOUR Champions. It wasn't on my radar. Probably shouldn't have been.

You know, some have said it's probably the hardest tour to get on and stay on, and knowing what I know, I think there's probably a little bit of accuracy. It's a small tour. There's not that many guys each and every week, so it's hard to get in the field. Then once you're in the field, you got to maintain it.

There's some nuance to that, I get that, but it's almost like you've graduated and you're in greener pastures. If you want a cart, great. Tee times are, like, 10:30 to 12:30. Sleep in every day. Work out at night because you might be in a cart. Lunch is difficult. That's the only difficulty I've found is you're usually playing right through lunch. That's a good problem.

Q. Going back to the Champions-Challenger situation in the future, the way it's set up it sounds like you're on one tour or the other, no crossover. As a Champions Tour player, where does that leave you? In two years when that kicks in, you may not have the opportunity to come back and play the John Deere Classic by the sounds of things. How does that resonate with you?

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't think they know that entirely. I know there's no sponsor exemptions in the Championship Series. I got to get my verbiage down. I don't think they've really fully expanded on a potential sponsor exemption into the challenge -- Challenger Series. There's still things that need to be ironed out, but I understand your sentiment.

I'll say this, and I don't mind voicing it. I told the people here, specifically Andrew Lehman and his team, and even some of the John Deere folks, like, I mean, I know I got in on my number, and I'm grateful for that. Had they needed to use a sponsor exemption on me -- full transparency, they've done that twice (laughing) -- and if it's for the betterment of the tour and the tournament to have a young guy come in that you feel like needs to be here, well, you're not going to offend me.

I am an ambassador of this company and of this tournament regardless of if I play or don't play. So going forward, I'll let things fall where they fall. I mean, I love to compete here, and I've cherished every second of that with family, with friends, and with the people in this community. At the same time, I'm also I think old enough to understand

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that it's bigger than -- certainly bigger than me, but it's bigger than any one person, and I'm okay with that. Whatever transpires here on out, I know that I've had an amazing opportunity here in the Quad Cities.

Hopefully it continues, but at the same time, I'm okay whenever that time stops because it's going to happen at some point. It's just a matter of when. But my hope and I would say my affinity goes further than just the competition.

It's what I'm able to do off the golf course with John Deere, whether you are talking about their stewardship or mine, in particular in my foundation. That's what makes this relationship special. It's not just the golf. It's helping other people.

So I don't know if that answers your question, but...

Q. It does potentially set up a unique situation, though, because it seems like all of you past champs really relish coming back to this event, especially after you win. It's meaningful. That is potentially going to go away if things play out the way they might where no past champs will be in the field.

ZACH JOHNSON: It's possible. Yeah, it's possible, but I also think you're bringing opportunity across the board there. I mean, number one, if this event is in the Challenger Series, the champion might be in the Championship Series the next year.

So, you know, I get it. I understand that's just the way things are built. They were kind of like that on the PGA TOUR with the World Golf Championships in some respects too. They were kind of like opposite-field events. There are some parallels.

The bottom line is I'm not going to speak on other past champions. I just know that as a competitor, if I have the ability to play against the best in the world on a consistent basis, you want to do that, whatever that looks like. But I'm not going to lose sight of why this tournament is here, what it's about, whether it's this week or the other 51 weeks. There's a lot of weight to it and a massive impact.

I may not be competing here, but I feel like I can still somehow have a presence, you know, whether I'm still on the board or not. I still feel like, you know, who knows what the future may hold with our relationship and our partnership? I just know that I relish it. Full circle for me, I don't live in the Midwest. It brings me back home in a lot of respects. Candidly and selfishly, that's pretty gratifying.

Q. A bit of a topic change here. Just curious, I saw last week that Jim Furyk and Luke Donald were touring

Adare Manor. There's been a lot of talk about the U.S. changing strategies, maybe bringing some analytics people in to help kind of close the gap, so to say. Have you had any conversations with them? Have you been consulted by Jim or Stewart or Justin or any of those guys about 2027?

ZACH JOHNSON: The short answer would be no, I have not. Now, I've communicated with Jim briefly on some things, but I'm sure we'll probably talk maybe as time goes forward maybe a little bit more. That's up to him.

We're good friends. I mean, he and Tabitha, we're good friends. So what I do know is I'm grateful that he wanted to take the reins again. I was not a part of that process. I don't know what took place in that regard. I have been a part of that obviously in years prior, but you're talking about one of the most respected individuals in our game, certainly in my tenure, in my time, and I would say one of the most fierce competitors in my time.

Then you couple that with a guy that certainly loves his country, but loves that format, loves that tournament. I think whatever change that you were alluding to may or may not be happening, I'm sure they're doing it for the better good of the team.

You're always going to diagnose, dice it up as to how to get better. Obviously the European teams have the best of us as of late, so you don't want to be fully reactionary, but you also don't want to be naive to think that you can't get better.

Whatever that looks like, I'm sure the individuals -- I mean, those are three of my dear friends right there: Jim, Justin, and Stewart. Utmost respect, and I know that the posture they'll present will be one of selflessness.

They're going to do it for the betterment of the team and whatever that looks like. Stats, analytics, however they formulate things, they're going to do it for the betterment of the USA team.

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