

The Memorial Tournament Presented By Nationwide

Tuesday, July 14, 2020

Dublin, Ohio, USA

Muirfield Village

Tiger Woods

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started here with five-time winner Tiger Woods. We'd like to welcome him into the interview room at the Memorial Tournament presented by Nationwide. Tiger is making his first start on the PGA TOUR since the season was suspended in March. If we could please just get an opening comment on the state of your game and how it feels to be back.

TIGER WOODS: It feels great to be back. I hadn't played on a tournament venue in a while, and it's been since February, so it's been a long time for me. Then to get out there and to play with J.T. today was a bunch of fun. It's certainly a different world, different environment that we're in. To play practice rounds like this and to watch as the TOUR has evolved and started back and to see no fans, it's just a very different world out here.

Q. Tiger, what is your level of concern, now you're going to start going out and traveling amidst COVID and the spiking cases. What is your level of concern dealing with COVID?

TIGER WOODS: That's the risk that I'm taking. That's the risk that all of us are now taking. I know the TOUR has done a fantastic job of setting up the safety and trying to ensure that all of us are protected and are safe, but it is a risk that we are now undertaking when we walk on the property and are around individuals that you don't know where they've been or what they've been doing.

But the screening, the testing we've done, the protections that we've tried to implement on the TOUR have shown that we've had to make adjustments, but it's a risk that I'm willing to take.

Q. Last week Justin Thomas said he was giving you a hard time that you were scared to come out and play the guys. Did you get a bunch of other calls from other players during that time?

TIGER WOODS: I got a bunch of texts and a bunch of calls when he said that, and hence I'm out here. So I'm not

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afraid of J.T. anymore. I've gotten over that, and here we go.

Q. You talked about how things are going to be different. I assume that you have talked to enough guys that give you a little bit of -- have filled you in on what it is like to have no fans, everything from the rough not being trampled down to the loss of energy. What are your expectations and what have you picked up from them?

TIGER WOODS: Most of the venues that we've been playing at really haven't had that much rough. The guys have -- except for Hilton Head where you can possibly lose a ball in the trees, there really hasn't been a whole lot of rough. Obviously the rough is up here, but the guys have said that it's -- more than anything it's not really the trampled down lies or anything like that, it's just the energy is different. There's nothing to feed off of energy-wise. You make a big putt or make a big par or make a big chip or hit a hell of a shot, there's no one there. That's one of the more interesting things that it'll be going forward. I think this is going to set up for not just in the short-term but for the foreseeable future for sure.

Q. You're a guy that's had more cameras on you than anyone in the history of golf. How did you learn to deal with that, to adjust to that? Was it immediate? Did it take some time? That's been a hot topic the last couple folks, how long they stay on you.

TIGER WOODS: Well, I've had cameras on me since I turned pro, so it's been over 20-some-odd years that virtually almost every one of my shots that I've hit on the TOUR has been documented. That is something that I've been accustomed to. That's something I've known for decades. But this is a different world and one we're going to have to get used to.

Q. I'm curious kind of building on that, when would you say is the last time you played a full tournament in the United States without a gallery?

TIGER WOODS: Not a full tournament. I don't think that's ever happened for me. But I've played a round in D.C. when I won, that Saturday we had a derecho come through there on that Friday night, and it was hazardous in the morning and we went out there with no spectators, no

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

volunteers and just played. That was the quietest round I've ever been involved with in a tournament setting. That's what the guys are saying now, that it's a very different world out here, not to have the distractions, the noise, the excitement, the energy, the people that the fans bring. It's just a silent and different world.

Q. Would you have to go back to your college days to maybe find a round that it was just you and a competitor or two?

TIGER WOODS: Well, even in college I had a few people following. (Laughter.)

Q. Given that it's a compacted TOUR, how much urgency does that place to maximize every tournament or just approach it the way you would any other year?

TIGER WOODS: Well, for me, I've had to try and maximize every tournament start since I've had my last procedure, back procedure. I've had to manage that. My levels of play -- I really haven't played that much since then. I think that unfortunately over the last few years that I've been used to taking long breaks, long time off and having to build my game and build it to a level where it's at a TOUR level at home and then come out and play and play a few tournaments here and there, so that's something I have unfortunately been accustomed to. This was a forced break for all of us but also one that I'm excited to get back into playing again.

Q. When you watch -- if you watched the Workday, you saw all these young players. What's your impression of guys like Collin and Viktor Hovland and those guys?

TIGER WOODS: Man, those two in particular have just such bright futures ahead of them. They both hit the ball great. Short game is only going to get better. Their putting is only going to get better over time. And don't forget, when you're a rook like those two were last year, it's trying to get to know the golf courses. That takes a couple years here and there, and before that starts kicking in, generally you see guys start playing a little better in the second, third, fourth year after it's gone around the rotation and they've seen these venues.

Q. Given how you played at The Match you seemed to be in mid-season form, and I know it's a very serious event, but clearly you were ready to come out. Did you consider playing before this week after the restart, and if not, why not?

TIGER WOODS: I did. I did consider playing, trying to figure out if I should play or not. But I just felt it was better

to stay at home and be safe. I'm used to playing with lots of people around me or having lots of people have a direct line to me, and that puts not only myself in danger but my friends and family, and just been at home practicing and social distancing and being away from a lot of people. Coming back and playing the TOUR, in my case over the 20-some-odd years I've been out here, that's really hard to say, that I'm used to having so many people around me or even touch me, going from green to tee. That's something that I looked at and said, well, I'm really not quite comfortable with that, that whole idea. Let's see how it plays out first and let's see how the TOUR has played out, how they've started, and I feel that I'm comfortable enough to come back out here and play again, and I'm excited to do it.

Q. Assuming you were watching golf on TV for the last five weeks or so, did you find yourself watching golf like you would, or were you observing other things in terms of the Schoop of the tournament, and kind of as a sidekick to that, if you've had any conversations with any of your friends on TOUR, what kind of questions were you asking them about what it was like?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I think that watching like I normally would, no, I have not. It was more of watching golf to see how it is now, see what our near future, our reality is and our foreseeable future is going to be. Some of the guys when they first played the first couple weeks, it was very different. To have no one yelling, no one screaming, no energy, the social distancing, no handshakes. Some guys are used to taking the cap off after every round and doing handshakes. That's just part of the traditions of the game. That changed. Contacts, how close can I be to my caddie. Those are all different questions that the players are trying to figure out on the fly as we're trying to get back into our season and participate in our sport at a high level again. These are -- some of the guys feel weird about it, other guys acclimated to it very quickly. Not having family around out here, when you're at the golf course, what kind of contact are you going to have. Some of the players -- where are you going to go work out, are you going to be able to go work out at a gym? No, you can't go to the gyms. What are you going to do here? Face masks? We're trying to figure out all the guidelines and the guys are trying to figure it out on the fly and also compete. So it was very complicated trying to get a routine, well, for most of the players.

Q. You've been in this situation before, too, but I'm sure you saw on Sunday J.T. holes a 50-footer. If there's a crowd around like Memorial usually gets and they react to it, how much harder is it for Collin to make his putt?

TIGER WOODS: A lot more difficult. I just think that the energy -- even it felt weird as I was watching on my computer at home, like 14, when Collin hit the ball on the green there, and granted, they've never had the tees up there during the Memorial event, but if they were and had that same situation during a Memorial event, to have someone drive the ball on the green that close to the hole, I mean, that whole hillside would have been going nuts.

So to see J.T. make that putt, he's screaming, but no one else is screaming. And then when Collin makes it, normally -- he didn't have that much of a reaction, but the whole hillside on 18 would have been just erupted. I've been there when they're throwing drinks towards the greens and people screaming, high fiving, people running around, running through bunkers. That's all gone. That's our new reality that we're facing. Those guys, J.T. and Collin, both how they played down the stretch and separating themselves and the shots they hit, they got into the world of playing against each other and got into that world.

But it's so different not having the energy of the crowd, and for me watching at home as a spectator and one that has played this golf course and have heard the energy that the fans bring to these holes and these situations, not to have that is very different, very stark really.

Q. ZOZO proved that after a long break you can win out of the gate; should we take that as a way people should be expecting your chances being good this week or should they be more tempered?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I would like to say that I'm going to win the event. That's my intent. That's my intent coming in here. That's my intent going into every event. That's certainly the intentions. Whether that plays out over the next four -- well, come Sunday, hopefully that will be the case. It was that one particular week -- well, three tournaments ago at ZOZO. There's no reason why I can't do it again this week. I've just got to go out there and do my work and make that happen.

Q. Do you have a plan to counteract what you've been talking about with this no fans and no energy, because you've fed off that your entire career clearly. Do you have a plan to sort of counter it?

TIGER WOODS: I think for me in particular, I'm going to have to just put my head down and play. But it's going to be different, there's no doubt about it. For most of my career, pretty much almost every competitive playing round that I've been involved in, I've had people around me, spectators yelling, a lot of movement inside the gallery with camera crews and media. Watching the players play over

the last few weeks, that hasn't been the case, and that's very different, and for the players that are a little bit older and that have played out here for a long time and have experienced it, it is very different. For some of the younger guys it's probably not particularly different. They're not too far removed from college or they've only been out here for a year or two, but for some of the older guys it's very eye-opening really.

Q. When you played your last competitive round in mid-February, how would you describe where you were physically and where you are now after these five months? And then just on the back end of that, just what it felt to be back out there today.

TIGER WOODS: Well, physically I was very stiff at LA. I was not moving that well. Back was just not quite loose. It was cold. I wasn't hitting the ball very far, wasn't playing very well, and consequently I finished dead last. Fast forward five months later, I've been able to train a lot. I've been able to do a lot of things that I hadn't done in a very long time, which is spend a lot of time with my kids and be around with them. It's been very different not to have sports, but we've been lucky enough to have had Medalist open at home for most of this quarantine period. So it's been nice to get out on the golf course and be able to play and keep active that way.

But as far as physically, I feel so much better than I did then. I've been able to train and concentrate on getting back up to speed and back up to tournament speed, so how I was moving at The Match and being able to progress since then, being out here today and being able to play with J.T. today, it was a lot of fun for both of us. We play like this at home a lot, so it's different being on the road, but we've played so many practice rounds together and have played so many rounds together in the last few years that it's been -- it was quite normal.

Q. I'm trying to start a movement with this question. The bunker rake is a relatively new thing in golf. It's only been around for 60 years or so. In the pandemic a lot of courses have gotten rid of bunker rakes. I'm wondering how you feel about that; could that be part of the game's future playing without bunker rakes?

TIGER WOODS: I don't know. That certainly has been at my home course up at Medalist, if the guys happen to be in a footprint or previous hole explosion that one of the groups ahead of them had been in, we just kick it over and move it out of there and move on and play. Whether that works at the elite level, I don't know what that's going to be like for golf course maintenance, what it's going to be like habitually, we as players like you who play the game, we're used to raking the bunkers. It's very different.

Q. Do you view golf as a fundamentally fair game or unfair game?

TIGER WOODS: I don't think any sport is fair.

Q. Tiger, so much has changed in society in general since we last saw you. Can I please ask what you made of the development of the Black Lives Matter movement and the reaction to the George Floyd incident, and maybe more importantly, what positive difference you hope that all makes going forward?

TIGER WOODS: I think change is fantastic. As long as we make changes without hurting the innocent, and unfortunately that has happened, hopefully it doesn't happen in the future, but a movement and change is fantastic. That's how society develops. That's how we grow. That's how we move forward. That's how we have fairness. Unfortunately we've lost innocent lives along the way, and hopefully we don't lose any more in the future as we move to a much better place socially.

Q. I was wondering, people have been spending all kinds of different time at home during quarantine and lockdown. I was wondering if there's anything that you've been able to do, one or two things that you ordinarily wouldn't be able to just because you've been stuck at home during this time?

TIGER WOODS: Well, there's a lot of things that I hadn't done in a long time, and one was sport-wise and physically is that we were playing quite a bit of tennis. That was very different and something I hadn't done in a very long period of time because I hadn't been able to do it physically. The kids enjoyed it. We were able to do that in the backyard.

Again, at the time to have the social distancing and be away from one another, from each other, soccer has been gone, as I've said, for us we've been lucky enough to have Medalist open and been able to play and practice social distancing and still enjoy being active and being outside. But as far as a lot of things inside the house, well, watched a lot of TV, read a lot of books and just tried and passed the time at times.

Q. What's the best book you've read?

TIGER WOODS: One of my favorite authors, Dean Koontz, California guy, horror novels. So I read a few of those.

Q. Tiger, I wanted to get your thoughts on the postponement of the Ryder Cup. Two-part question: One, do you agree with it, and two, with everything

now skipping forward a year, Italy will be a few months before your 48th birthday. Is that the one you're targeting to be captain at?

TIGER WOODS: As far as captaining, we haven't looked that far. The world has changed so fast. The fact that we were going to play the Ryder Cup, we were in position -- what we were going to do as far as the vice captains, the team, how we were going to play practice rounds going forward and gelling as a team this year, all of a sudden the TOUR is suspended, we're not playing, and we still haven't come up with a plan going forward how we're going to figure out the points for not this year but next year, how many picks Strick is going to get. Is that going to change or is it still going to be the same, where is the points cutoff going to be, are we going to be accumulating points at all through this. None of that's been figured out yet.

Quite frankly, a Ryder Cup without fans is not the Ryder Cup. As it is now, okay. When the Ryder Cup first started there weren't that many people involved in the game or whether it was GB&I versus the U.S., but the world has expanded, the event has expanded, and as far as I can remember, I've always seen people involved in a Ryder Cup and the chanting and screaming and the participation, the bipartisanship that has been part of the sport and part of the event. I think what they did with suspending it for the year and moving it to next year was the right thing.

We couldn't have an environment in which we could protect all the fans that were going to be involved and have that type of insurance. Obviously if that's the case, you can't have the fans. Well, if you can't have the fans, then it's not the Ryder Cup.

We did the right thing of holding off for the year, and now from the U.S. side, we're going to have to figure out how we're going to accumulate points, how many players Strick is going to be able to pick and figure that out, and build our team from there.

Q. You must have given some thought to whether you'd like to captain on U.S. soil or on European soil?

TIGER WOODS: I did my captaincy last year, and it was a lot of work, and I'm sure that I'll look into that in the future.

Q. Tiger, you've touched on this a little bit already: Just curious as you've watched on TV what have been your observations from a golf standpoint in terms of low scoring, in terms of course setup and that sort of thing?

TIGER WOODS: Well, the courses have been set up a little on the easier side, lack of rough, the guys have

noticed that the pins have been slightly easier. The greens have been more watered. Trying to force pace of play to kind of move around better. But the guys have just absolutely played unbelievably well, considering the fact that we've been suspended for a while. And to see the guys come out in that good a shape, you've seen players -- well, initially you saw one of two things, either guys that have come out rusty and not played well at all and have not played well, or you've seen guys that have taken off and run away with it and have gone low.

The low scores have been low and cumulative. To see the cuts at 3-, 4-under par each and every week on the venues that I know are traditionally very hard, to see the scores last week here, Muirfield, I mean, I've never seen anything like that, to see that many guys that low on a golf course that I know has always been very hard and very difficult.

I think that what the players have started to figure out as they've come back and started to get into the rhythm of playing again, understanding the new environment that we're now in, it's been fun to watch and will be even better to be a part of this week.

Q. What do you make of what Bryson has been doing, more from the standpoint of what do you think the future of the sport looks like in terms of distance?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, he's figured out a way to increase distance and maximize his efficiency with not only his driver but all of his clubs, but in particular the driver. If I just look back at when I first started playing the TOUR or right before I started playing the TOUR, we didn't have TrackMans, we didn't have launch monitors. Guys were learning how to bend clubs on their knee to try and take loft off of it. That's now changed. Now you go into -- you have all these different launch monitor technologies and you can send up a whole bunch of balls, figure out the shafts, the conditions that you want to optimize carry. What Bryson has done is no easy task. He's got to put in the time and has put in the reps, and he's figured it out. He's gotten stronger, faster, bigger, and has created more speed. But more importantly, he's hitting it further, but let's look at the fact that he's hitting it as straight as he is. That's part of the most difficult thing to do. The further you hit it, the more the tangent goes more crooked, more along this line. So the fact that he's figured that out and has been able to rein in the foul balls to me has been equally as impressive as his gains off the tee distance-wise.

THE MODERATOR: We appreciate the time. Best of luck this week.

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