

The Memorial Tournament Presented By Workday

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Dublin, Ohio, USA

Muirfield Village

Aaron Rai

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome the 2026 PGA Championship winner Aaron Rai to the interview room here at The Memorial Tournament Presented By Workday.

Welcome. You're coming in here, your first start after two or three weeks ago winning the PGA Championship. What a highlight. Just talk about what you've been doing the last couple of weeks, what's different in your life, before coming into this room.

AARON RAI: First, thanks for having me. Not a huge amount has changed, if I'm honest. The first week or so after the PGA was pretty busy with a few extra requests here and there. My dad flew out to Jacksonville as well, which was great. But it's not been too crazy really. I've definitely tried to sit with it a little bit just to get my head around it a little bit more and think about the best kind of things to move forward with. But other than that, not a huge amount, really.

THE MODERATOR: Do you feel like that's affected your preparation in any way or are you coming in here ready and prepared as normal?

AARON RAI: The first probably four or five days after the tournament I didn't do a huge amount golf-wise, but over the last nine to ten days tried to get back into some pretty normal habits and routines and feel like I've done that pretty well. Obviously you never know quite how the game feels or how it's going to go when Thursday begins but, yeah, practice overall for the practice week and a half has been pretty good.

THE MODERATOR: This is your fourth start here. You finished T-26 in your first appearance at this golf course and then a couple missed cuts. But what have you learned about Muirfield Village and your visits here in the past?

AARON RAI: One, that it's really hard. I think two, certainly after playing it a little bit more, it definitely requires a little bit more understanding, and I probably haven't done

as good of a job as I could in terms of my preparation, especially last year. So I think just trying to approach it a little bit better. Got here slightly earlier this week as well in order to do so. And to just learn from a couple of the mistakes that I've made in previous years. But it's an amazing golf course, one of my favorites on TOUR.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take some questions.

Q. The 18th hole is statistically the hardest hole here. What is the strategy from tee to green and can that change by the day?

AARON RAI: Yeah, it can definitely change a little bit based on wind conditions. I mean, it's definitely a driver off the tee for the most part. Maybe if it gets downwind and firm, you can consider 3-wood. But I think it's such a demanding hole. The second shot it's a real premium just to really be on the green. I think it's quite hard to be aggressive to any of the front pins. Possible to get at the back right pin, but again, even the back left pin, you've just got to be really smart. But as you said, definitely one of the hardest holes on the course and you take par there all four days.

Q. You closed really impressively at the PGA. Is there a secret to closing? I know you talked about it a little bit after you won, but I'm sure you've been in situations where it maybe didn't go well. What changed and what did you learn from that in terms of really dropping the hammer?

AARON RAI: That's a great question. I think as cliché as it sounds just a huge amount of patience and a lot of just presence to the moment. I've sometimes done that very well at other tournaments in the past, but I've sometimes done the opposite and got a little bit ahead of myself and got a little bit too involved in what could happen or what I need to do, what I don't need to do, and focused on the situation rather than the golf course.

So I think that was probably the biggest thing, which, firstly, I was aware of in the closing stretch of the PGA, but

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secondly, I did that really well.

Q. Did you realize how heavy that trophy was before you picked it up?

AARON RAI: (Laughing.) I had heard stories about it, but I still wasn't prepared for quite how heavy that it was. I was pretty comfortable for probably the first minute or so and then after that I definitely started to feel it burning.

Q. I know they're going to send you one, but did you actually take that home with you?

AARON RAI: No. As you said, they are just going to send one to the house.

Q. So usually you wake up the next morning as a major champion and you see the trophy and it all starts to sink in. How did it sink in for you the next morning?

AARON RAI: I think it took a good few days, I think, for me to really get my head around it. I mean, I don't think I still have fully. But the following morning it was just more of an excitement really. I only slept for four hours on the Sunday night. I slept really late and then I just couldn't sleep in the morning either after I woke up. So I think just a lot of excitement. It was only really when my dad came to my house a few days later that we started to speak about it a little bit more that I started to kind of embrace it and let it sink in a little bit more. Yeah, it definitely took a few days to kind of get into that.

Q. I'm not sure I understand. What was that conversation like with your dad? What kind of questions? How did that go that allowed you to kind of grasp all the great things you did?

AARON RAI: So my dad, he's a very proud man. He doesn't show a huge amount of emotions. But the first evening that I saw him his hug was a little bit different. His smile was a little bit different. We sat and we spoke for probably a good couple of hours or so. And again, probably just how big of an achievement that was. I could probably hear it more from what I associate with how he is normally and how he was during those first couple of days. So I think, yeah, that definitely held a lot of weight for me internally.

THE MODERATOR: I wanted to ask you, the week before the PGA Championship you played at the ONEflight Myrtle Beach Classic. You were a 54-hole leader and you went into that last day and you didn't have a particularly good day. Did you take anything from that to carry you into the following week when you went on and won?

AARON RAI: Yeah, massively. That experience at Myrtle Beach was absolutely invaluable for the PGA, and I'm not sure I would have handled the situation as well as I did at the PGA if I hadn't experienced it the week before at Myrtle Beach. Two reasons, really. One, I hadn't really been in the last group for probably a good five months, six months previous to that. So to get that feel of what it's like again was huge.

There were a couple of small things that kind of happened during that round on Sunday. Bits from the crowd, bits from a couple of mistakes that I made in the mid section of the round. I think I made four bogeys in a row around the turn. I think just kind of where my mind went, certain things that I could have dealt with better, I was very aware of even on the Saturday of the PGA. And I think when you've had that experience so recently before, it's a lot fresher in the mind and it's a lot easier to make those adjustments. So, yeah, that was crucial, really.

Q. In terms of this week, just overall thoughts about playing here at Muirfield Village and what are your priorities for success this week.

AARON RAI: Firstly, it's a real privilege to be here this week. It's an absolutely incredible event, a course that I absolutely love. Very demanding. I think it requires a complete game no matter what your skill set is, whether you're a little shorter, whether you're a little longer, whether you're straight, whether the short game is good. It requires everything to be successful around this event.

And in terms of approach, I think just really trying to prepare as well as I can, first and foremost, between now and Thursday. But just trying to do all the little things as well as I can from Thursday to Sunday, whether that's decision-making, whether that's execution, whether that's recovery, whether that's planning, because it truly demands all of it, and, yeah, it's like a major championship setup really.

Q. Did you hear from anybody in the days after Aronimink that surprised you? Someone you hadn't heard from in awhile or someone of great importance. Hard to beat your dad, I realize.

AARON RAI: I think the royal family in England had posted on Twitter about the PGA Championship, which was a real surprise. So that definitely stood out. People that I've known in the past would have reached out and messaged, but no one in particular that really comes to mind.

Q. Schumacher? No?

AARON RAI: Unfortunately not, no.

Q. Who is your guy when were you a kid and wanted to be an F1 driver?

AARON RAI: Michael Schumacher.

Q. All right. We'll get in touch with him.

And then in any of your -- did you make it home that night, by the way?

AARON RAI: We stayed in Philadelphia Sunday night, stayed there Monday, then flew back on Tuesday morning.

Q. From the times you kind of got back to normalcy or to work, were you recognized more than you might have been before? Did you have any moments where someone recognized you?

AARON RAI: It was more -- I went to the supermarket on, I think, Tuesday evening, and I wasn't even in golf clothes, and it happened a couple of times, which never normally happens. And then when I got to the golf course on Wednesday, it took me awhile to get from the parking lot to the practice area. So, yeah, that definitely felt a little bit different.

Q. Give us details from the grocery store.

AARON RAI: I mean, just a couple of customers that were just doing their regular grocery shopping just came over and just congratulated on the PGA and the performance. So, yeah, that was very unexpected.

Q. And different.

AARON RAI: And different. Yeah.

Q. The last one, which is a little bit off a different thread. In your mind, what makes a great tournament?

AARON RAI: In terms of the golf course setup or in terms of --

Q. Everything. From the time you show up at any stop and you leave, regardless of your performance, obviously, but what, in your eye, is required to make a really great tournament?

AARON RAI: For me personally the biggest thing is the golf course, how well it's designed, how well it sets up, the questions that it asks of you. Outside of that, just the facilities, good healthy food, access to a gym and recovery facilities.

And in terms of actually how the tournament plays out, I think whenever you have a leaderboard that's pretty close and a mix of obviously some top players, other players who are performing extremely well that week, and you have some good stories that are around, whoever that might be, I think that's always a great thing for the tournament. And it's always a great thing for golf. There are so many great stories from pretty much every player on TOUR. They have such a unique journey, and I think when those come to the forefront, it's a great thing because I think those stories are not always highlighted. I think they're only highlighted when someone has a lot of success, which is great, but it's great when sometimes that doesn't happen, but their stories still get out there a little bit more.

Q. How many of those stories do you know? Because I think you're right. I think there's great stories no matter where you look, but how many of them -- and are you ever pleased or surprised when you've learned something?

AARON RAI: Yeah, that's a great question. I mean, there's a few. I feel like it would be wrong to kind of highlight one or two or three of them. But I think there are just -- yeah, there are so many things that are out there and it would be great if -- yeah, if they were just exposed a little bit more.

Q. Do you feel different as a golfer now that you're a major champion? And if so, how?

AARON RAI: Not particularly. I think my experience of playing the next few events, I'm sure there will be things that come up for me that they might not have come up as much before, and it's hard for me to know what those will be. I think a little bit of time will tell.

But in terms of the last two weeks and being at this point, stood in front of you, I haven't felt that different. There are definitely times where it's crossed my mind of winning a major and what that means to me and other times where I haven't thought about it for a few hours whilst I'm practicing, and then it hits me, and it's like, wow, that's incredible.

So kind of those internal thoughts have definitely happened, but I haven't felt any different as a golfer. I think that's more of the process of it just sinking in and realizing it a little bit more.

Q. Do you get any sense that people look at you differently?

AARON RAI: I think because it's still only been just over

two weeks, it's a relatively short amount of time since the PGA, so definitely been more congratulatory messages from players, even over the last couple of days it's been great seeing some of the players for the first time since then. But I don't think that's a shift in overall view. I think it's more of an appreciation of the achievement. So, no, I don't think I'm viewed that differently, but again, I think a little bit of time will tell and kind of the experience of playing in a few events will probably give me a better sense of how that looks really. I've not quite done that yet with this being the first start since.

Q. Do you always do the shopping?

AARON RAI: (Laughing.) I think me and my wife generally take it in turns. It's pretty balanced.

THE MODERATOR: All right, Aaron, we appreciate your time. Thank you. But before you leave, we do have a little surprise for you from some friends in Philadelphia. So we just want you to take a look at that and unpack.

AARON RAI: Oh, brilliant. I'm going to have to put this on then. There we go.

(Putting on Eagles hat.)

No, that's absolutely awesome.

Q. Do you have a favorite football team?

AARON RAI: It's the Eagles now (laughing).

Q. Have you been to a football game?

AARON RAI: I haven't. I haven't really got into the American sports as much as I should over the last few years, but yeah, I'll definitely have to start following them.

Q. Which American sport do you know the best, do you think?

AARON RAI: I would say I probably know a little bit more about basketball. But I haven't really watched too many live games, whether it's on TV or whether it's in person.

THE MODERATOR: Well, the folks at the Eagles heard you on an interview said that you were looking around for a hat and you couldn't find one, so they wanted to send you something and surprise you. So welcome. Thanks again.

AARON RAI: Thank you.

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