

# The Northern Trust

Monday, August 23, 2021

Jersey City, New Jersey, USA

Liberty National Golf Club

## Tony Finau

### Press Conference

RACHEL NOBLE: I'd like to welcome the 2021 Northern Trust champion into the virtual interview room. Congratulations, Tony.

TONY FINAU: Thank you, Rachel.

RACHEL NOBLE: This is your second career PGA TOUR win and first since the 2016 Puerto Rico Open.

Tell us about your emotions and how special this win is, especially having Sunday off due to postponed play, and wrapping up here on Monday after a playoff.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it's extremely special. It seems like I was a totally different player in 2016 than I am now. So there's a lot of good things I think that have transpired. I worked my tail off to put myself in this position again, and it's really nice to have -- you know, I turned in my lowest nine on the back nine today and that's going to give me a lot of confidence moving forward in contention.

That was the goal on the day was to get to 20-under, and we thought that was going to have a legitimate chance to win the golf tournament. And 21-under would have done it outright, but I was able to hit some clutch shots in the playoff and win the tournament.

So this is extremely special, and I'm excited to be a champion again on the PGA TOUR.

RACHEL NOBLE: You touched upon it briefly in your answer there, but this victory moves you to the No. 1 spot in the FedExCup standings for the first time in your career, and as you head to next week's BMW Championship and great position heading into THE TOUR Championship. How much confidence does that give you getting closer to the season finale?

TONY FINAU: It means a lot. I've never been in this situation. I had a chance in 2018 and played great in the Playoffs and was in the top five going into THE TOUR Championship and had a chance to win the FedExCup then.



This is obviously going to be my best position going into the BMW, and then on to THE TOUR Championship. I'm excited about that opportunity. I've never played that golf course next week, so we're back at work tomorrow, and you know, to try and get ourselves in position to win another golf tournament, the BMW and then on to THE TOUR Championship from there.

It's exciting to be in this position. I've played great all season. No W throughout the season, but in the Playoffs, this is what makes the Playoffs, immense pressure, and a lot of things riding on these three events, and I'm happy to win this first one.

#### **Q. How much does it feel like a burden is lifted, and with so many close calls, what was it like watching Cam finish his round?**

TONY FINAU: Obviously I was hoping to get in a playoff. When he hit a great drive and a great second shot, I was there by the green. You know, it's hard to explain. You don't want to cheer against somebody, but I just would have loved for me to have another chance to go up 18. You know, he just left the putt a little bit short.

So I knew in the playoff I was going to have a chance. I was playing great and a tried not to get too far ahead of myself. I thought that putt on 18 was huge for me and just my confidence, it was a big up-and-down, I knew what was going to be for. Worst case scenario for me, a playoff. I hit some really clutch shots what I needed to, and I think it's going to be huge for my confidence moving forward.

I've played really nicely in big tournaments, but to turn in a 30 on the back nine of a Playoff event, trying to chase down the best player in the world, those are all things that will go in the memory bank and hopefully I'll continue with the success moving forward.

#### **Q. Does it feel massive, how many times you've been questioned by people like me?**

TONY FINAU: (Laughs) well, you know, I continue to believe in myself. That's the bottom line. It's more massive I think for just my sense of accomplishment for myself. I've worked extremely hard, not only on my game; on my body to put myself in these type of positions and



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eventually I knew it was going to happen.

It's hard losing and it's hard losing in front of the world. I've done it already a couple times this year; in playoffs it's happened to me. That made me more hungry. That's what it does. If it doesn't discourage you, it makes you more hungry. You guys keep telling me, when are you going to win again, it makes me more hungry. It all equals to know, it's time for me to win again, and I hope I don't have to wait another five years for the next one.

**Q. You've answered our questions about not winning with grace and a smile, and you said that you were playing well and that's all you can control. Beneath that, was there a moment where you thought, what do I have to do differently? Was there one that hit harder than the rest?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, well, I would say the toughest loss I had was against Webb at the 2020 Waste Management. Yeah, I would say that's the toughest one. Played so beautifully all week. I had the lead with a couple holes to go and he birdied the last couple, birdied the playoff hole and only a few weeks later we had COVID and I had to think about that loss.

So for that specific reason, that one was the toughest on me throughout COVID thinking about what I could have done different; should I have closed and all those different things.

I have an extreme belief in myself, and I have to. This game is hard as it is. These guys are so good as it is. If you can't believe you can beat them, man, it's just an uphill battle, and I just continue to believe. I believe in myself. I believe in my team.

I haven't had the wins to maybe have that type of confidence and belief, but you just have to. I have to believe I can go out there and beat J.T. today, and I can beat Jon Rahm. I have to believe that, and I did, and I continue to do that, and that's the only reason why I'm sitting here today as the champion. I continue to believe in myself no matter where the chips fall and try and do my best.

**Q. What club was that on 13?**

TONY FINAU: 13, I hit a 6-iron. I was about 218 or something like that. It was a perfect number for me. I hit a great shot.

**Q. Tell me how do you describe your putting grip and what was the decision to change to it this week? It was this week; right?**

TONY FINAU: No, I didn't change the grip this week. I changed a couple months ago. I had some success early in the year -- early in the year I had my greatest-month-of-golf stretch putting conventionally. I went away from it for a few months and now I'm back to it. Obviously there's something there, and I was able to make some clutch putts today, so that's going to give me some great confidence with this grip and with this putter.

I actually changed putter heads. I've been using this new PING putter head for, I would say, that time same, about a couple months. It's been a big part.

**Q. Did you feel pressure to do something like this to make The Ryder Cup Team? Did you feel like you needed to do this?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, no question about it. Starting the year and every week that has gone by, for me my case is that I have to win. If I put that in the back of my head and I told myself: If you didn't win, you're not going to make the team. We are coming down to the nitty-gritty.

Although I've always been high in the rankings and things, I wanted this validation more I think for myself to be a part of a team like that as a winner this season and playing good golf going into The Ryder Cup.

So you know, I don't know how high I jumped in the rankings, but I've got a great chance to make the team on points and I'm proud of that with this win.

**Q. So you had one of those awesome ball-striking rounds on Saturday where just kind of nothing went in. Then you said you were going to go putt on your carpet in the hotel room, and then you came out today and you made some really big putts, especially on 18 where you had to have it. What was the difference? Did you figure something out in the hotel room or what happened there?**

TONY FINAU: No, not really. You know, I hit a lot of putts. I would say I putted for maybe an hour and a half total. Just kind of five, ten minutes here and there throughout the day. I didn't really leave my room all day.

I wouldn't say I found something but I knew I was putting it nicely. You don't put yourself in this position only a couple shots off the lead going into a Sunday if you're not making putts already. I knew I was putting well and tried not to complicate it.

You know, it's just nice to see good putts go in. Just because you hit good putts, that doesn't mean they are



going to go in. That's the crazy thing about the game. Today, I got the breaks. There was a couple putts that I thought were 50/50 as they were approaching the hole and they grabbed the hole. I still missed one on 9 that I thought I made but for the most part the ones that were 50/50 going towards the hole they went in. Sometimes that's what you need; that type of rub of the green that you need to win, and I was able to get those bounces today.

**Q. When did you go back to a conventional grip?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it's been a couple months. I'm trying to remember. I think right around the U.S. Open, something like that, I switched back to conventional, and actually switched the putter heads as well. I went to a PING putter.

**Q. I'm just thinking, you really turned it on to hit that eagle on 13. How did that feel being that, like you said, you said that you had to put in your best back nine at that point and really came through there, and then you just turned it on for the rest of the way and you went into first place. How did it feel to really take control at that point in the match?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah it felt great. Started with my drive. I hit a great drive. I was coming off a great birdie on 12. Hit a great wedge shot to a couple feet. I made a great birdie on 12 and I knew 13 was downwind and I was going to, with a good drive, I was going to have a look for eagle and it started with a drive. I hit the fairway, and then had a perfect number with a 6-iron and I flushed it. I didn't want to shy away from that pin and I flushed it and then I was kind of on my way.

For all that momentum, I birdied 14 and made a 25-footer there, and I think a big turning point was No. 15. I pulled my tee shot and I actually pulled it so far left that it just went over to No. 6 fairway and I had a clear shot straight to the green.

So little things like that, I think are big. You've got to get the bounces when you need them. I needed that on 15. I needed to get away with that swing, and making par on 15, I think is picking up shots. That little sequence there at 13, 14, 15 I thought was huge to kind of keep me on top of the leaderboard and then I was able to play nice golf all the way through and right through the playoff.

**Q. Obviously it's unconventional to have the day off. How did you keep yourself mentally sharp going into this knowing that you had a shot to win today?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, just relaxed. I didn't really do much. It was a little bit of an odd feeling. You're relaxed but

you're still -- since I'm in contention, I know I'm still kind of looking forward to Monday and making sure my mind is mentally ready. I don't totally want to clock out. It was it was kind of a strange thing but I was able to chill out and rest up and I was ready to go, and I knew when it was time it play today.

**Q. Most of your close calls have not come because of losing a lead or shooting a high final round score, though perhaps people believe that. Do you think the criticism of your drought was a bit unfair, painted with a broad brush?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, no question, I think a little bit of it. But that's how it is in sports, when you don't seal the deal, as time goes on, they don't give you the benefit of the doubt. So I knew for me, I needed to prove people wrong by winning. That's the bottom line and that's what sports is all about.

I knew that I was a closer; the way that I play on Sundays tell me that I'm a closer and when I look at my scores, I've made clutch putts. Just sometimes this game is funny. The guys get away with shots or whatever the case. I feel like I've got the short end of the stick for the most part coming down the stretch and having a chance to win a golf tournament.

This time, I was able to capitalize when I needed to and I got the breaks when I needed them, so I ended up on top this type.

But as far as a little bit of unfairness, I feel like for sure when it comes to looking at my record because I've played really nicely on Sunday for the most part. We don't have to look too far from other than my last playoff. I shot 64 at Riviera. Say what you want but that sounds like a pretty good player to me and a closer to me when you're in contention shooting 64 on a golf course like that.

I've had a lot of great rounds on Sunday. It's nice to have this one and be able to capitalize on it with a W.

**Q. Real quick, trying to get a sense of what kind of bunker save that was on 18. Could you see over the lip, and if you couldn't, are there many bunkers that you can't?**

TONY FINAU: Most of the bunkers I can't say out of are on the other side of the pond. Most of the ones in the States I have no problem.

But yeah, I couldn't see where the ball was landing or the bottom of the cup. But obviously I could see the flag. But it was pretty steep. The one mistake I didn't want to make



there was getting too cute. You knew it was into the wind a little, it wasn't that hard -- it wasn't as hard as a bunker shot as maybe it looked because of how deep it was, but I didn't want to get too cute there.

I wanted to give it a chance to bounce in the hole, and if it doesn't, give me the 6-, 7-footer to make par. You have to make those types of decisions in those situations and that's the one I made. But it was huge, not only to hit a good bunker shot, but to make that putt was huge for me.

**Q. You talked about the break you got on 15 but was there a single shot, single putt, anything starting on 10 that really unlocked things for you?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I thought my wedge shot I hit on 12, when you can hit it to kick-in on any hole when you're trying to chase someone; that's a great feeling and gives you a lot of momentum when you don't really have to look at a putt.

And then I pretty much hit it to kick-in on 13. Not quite kick-in, three and a half feet, but it was a straight putt, straight downhill. So those two really got me going, 12 and 13.

I had a great save on 11 I have to throw out there as well that I thought was big, about a 7-footer left-to-right slider. So that little sequence, 11, 12, 13, I think really opened it up for me, and every putt, I hit I thought I was going to make. So that's a great feeling to have when you're trying to win a golf tournament.

**Q. I wanted to build on the bunker play, did you have a plugged lie on 8?**

TONY FINAU: No, I didn't have a plugged lie. But there was a lot more sand in there than the other bunkers I had hit out of all week, and unfortunately I flubbed the first one because of misjudging how much sand there was underneath that golf ball. I went straight underneath it. It wasn't a plugged lie. It was a poor bunker shot.

**Q. How do you then take that out of your mind that you had this flub shot and now you've got the same club, the same sort of type of shot at the biggest moment of the tournament.**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, you know, I just -- I was able to learn from that shot; you know that there was less sand -- or more sand than I think there is.

Luckily for me it was pretty much the same shot and I almost hit that one in. But I thought that was a huge save making bogeys when you're trying to catch someone, it's

tough, making doubles is really, really hard to win golf tournaments, I feel like on Sunday when you're trying to chase and catch somebody. That was a huge up-and-down the second time around, no question.

**Q. How are you going to celebrate?**

TONY FINAU: We have a short week ahead of us. So I'm going to have a great feel tonight. Not a drinker, so not going to get crazy drinking. But you know, this is really cool for me. It been a long time, five years. Everybody knows it. So I'm just going to really enjoy this.

Hopefully I'm able to piggyback and just pick it up right where I left off this coming week. The game feels great and you know going to have some supreme confidence going into these next couple weeks.

**Q. What's the victory meal?**

TONY FINAU: Sushi most likely, yeah. I love sushi. That's kind of my go-to.

RACHEL NOBLE: How important was this win for all the support you get in Utah?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I thought this one was huge. It was huge for me. It's huge for my family. Huge for all my supporters back home in Utah. I have so many people that reach out to me telling me that they are fans and I really feel it. Utah is a great place. Utah is always home for me and to be able to share this with so many people, I think is what is so cool about this is that so many people have helped my career and have supported me through my PGA TOUR career, my upbringing. I have so many family, friends, supporters back home in Utah and really, I feel like throughout the nation.

So this is for all of them and I'm excited that we can share this together.

RACHEL NOBLE: Awesome. With that, we'll let you go, Tony. Congrats, between, and thanks for the time.

TONY FINAU: Thanks, Rachel. Thank you, guys.

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