

TOUR Championship

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Patrick Cantlay

Press Conference

STEWART MOORE: We'd like to welcome Patrick Cantlay here to the interview room at historic East Lake Golf Club. Just a fantastic season wrapped up today. You've got wins at the ZoZo championship, Memorial, BMW Championship and now THE TOUR Championship and you're the 2021 FedExCup Champion.

What a season, what a day here at East Lake. Maybe just some opening comments.

PATRICK CANTLAY: Yeah, it was fantastic. You know, as good as it felt to feel like I slept on the lead for two straight weeks darned near, it feels good to not necessarily have the lead anymore and be done and closed out.

It was a long year. I thought I could barely remember when it started. A lot of events, and I'm very tired after, it feels like, you know, just a ton of golf and a ton of pressure golf.

But I'm very grateful and happy to be here, and I'm really proud of myself for staying in the moment and delivering when it counted.

Q. You seemed to miss a lot of shots to the right today, and you come to 18 with a one-shot lead and deliver probably your best of the day. Can you talk about the pressure there, and the 6-iron to the 18th, which is another money shot. You trying to mute me already or what?

PATRICK CANTLAY: If I could, I would. I thought I played really well. I don't mind right misses. I mind left misses, and I don't feel like I had very many of those today. I thought I did a good job of keeping the ball in front of me. I drove the ball very well all day. Didn't hit a good shot on the tee on 17. But actually made a really nice bogey, to be honest.

Hit two absolutely perfect golf shots into the 18th hole and under the gun, I thought it was great.

Q. Secondly, you keep talking about how big it was to



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stay in the present. Why is that so hard?

PATRICK CANTLAY: Well, it's even harder this week given you start so ahead. And tournaments in general just don't feel like that. You don't feel like that on Thursday. And I think -- I mean, you can ask the guys, but I feel like if you have that idea that you are the person chasing, it's easy to stay in the moment; the sense of urgency is right there, I need to make birdies right now, so it makes it very easy to be in the moment because you have to be -- you can't get ahead because you're running out of holes.

And so given that I started ahead, it's just a totally different mindset. So being able to stay present and kind of give myself that sense of urgency or give myself a feeling like I need to make birdies or I need to hit quality shots now, I think that was really key for me. I try to do a good job of that every week, but this week it was even more important.

Q. Does it carry more weight, the fact that you beat Rahm and Thomas at Zozo, Morikawa at Memorial, DeChambeau last week or Rahm again; does that carry more weight with you?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I'm not sure. I mean, I beat everybody in the field those weeks. They just happened to be closest to me.

But they are obviously great players and it's no surprise that some of the battles I've had have been with some of the best players in the world this year.

I think it's really fun. It's exactly why I play golf. I play golf so I can be in those moments against the best players in the world. It's why I practice so hard. It's why I'm in love with the game because it's that great vehicle for competition.

It maybe makes it a little sweeter knowing that the guys I played against are the best players in the world.

Q. And what was the best putt you hit today, the most meaningful one, besides the last one for 15 million?

PATRICK CANTLAY: Thankfully, that one was short. I thought the bogey putt, given the situation I was in on 17, a putt that broke a decent amount, I thought that was maybe the best one I hit all day.

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I thought, you know, like I tried to all week, I tried to focus and lock in. You know, that was looking like it may be a bigger swing than just one shot, and so being able to take that one-shot advantage to the last hole was huge.

Q. On 18, what was the iron there and your thought process going in for your second shot?

PATRICK CANTLAY: That was a 6-iron, and you know, drove it down there in the perfect spot and it's sitting on a little bit of a downslope. I had 203 to the front, I think 218 to the hole. And I was really trying to get very close to that front number. I think we were trying to hit it about 205, which given the downhill lie and the downwind, it was maybe just a little off of a 6-iron.

Given where Jon was, I knew I had to hit a good one. I was expecting him to make a 3 from there. Felt like a match-play situation; you have to expect your opponent to make. It came off perfect. I hit a draw a little off the number, or off a full number, and it landed in the perfect spot. It was the best shot I hit all week.

Q. And I think Mike Tirico asked you in the ceremony, but everything you've gone through, the injuries, how has that impacted you as a player and a person?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I think the biggest thing is it's given me great perspective. I think for a long time, everything just went great. Growing up, I felt like I got better and better in golf and life got better and better, and then it got as bad as it could have been. I felt as low as it could have been for a little while.

Coming out on the other side of that, I feel like I am a better person having gone through those dark days. But it gives me great perspective and it makes me very grateful to be in the position I'm in today, because it wasn't always a sure thing. I was very close to going back to school and putting golf behind me.

And so I'm just very grateful to be where I am and I'm so satisfied with all the hard work paying off.

Q. Among the other awards you got is a Falcons jersey with "Patty Ice" across it. I was talking to Matt Ryan last week, and he mentioned the two of you have met in passing, but I don't know the circumstances of that. Could you tell me that, and I guess what that -- he's not going to sue you or trademark infringement, but can you tell me what that nickname means to you?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I met Matt at Shady Canyon, which is a place I practice in California, and our rounds started at

similar times, and we had lunch after. He was playing with a few buddies of mine.

The nickname kind of came out of nowhere from my seat. Nothing I expected. I heard it last week and it started to gain traction in the playoff, and by the end, lots of people were yelling it out in the playoff.

This week, right from the first day, it felt like everyone was in my corner and I heard it from all over. And so to me, it just means cool under pressure and I think that suits my personality really well.

And so I like it. I think it's a good nickname, and I appreciate everyone being in my corner. That means a lot.

Q. If you weren't thinking about the money, do you recall early in your career, maybe when you were aware of how much prize money you were playing for and how much that might have mattered at that time?

PATRICK CANTLAY: Yeah, definitely. When I didn't have status, I think we were still working off -- we may have even been working off money the first events I played. I can't remember when we went off FedExCup points. But yeah, I remember I made one of my first big checks on Tour as a pro, was a T-9 at Pebble Beach maybe in 2013 or 2014. And yeah, it meant a lot.

I came out as an amateur, or I didn't come out, but I was an amateur and played a bunch of TOUR events and I think somewhere along the line that summer, I had played well. Somewhere along the line that summer, I saw an article that said, if you were a pro this summer, you would have made \$400,000 or something like that. It felt very surreal at the time. People asked me if I felt like I missed out on that money, and I felt like I was still an amateur and wasn't playing for any money, so I didn't lose out on any money.

This week, as silly as it sounds, the money is not what's really important for me. The money is not what drives me to play this game. Winning golf tournaments, playing golf under pressure, and hitting quality golf shots under the gun, I mean, that's why I practice and that's why I practiced my whole life, and that's the best feeling in the world, is winning golf tournaments for me.

So the money is just a consequence of that. But I am fortunate. I have a really good partner in Goldman Sachs, and I'm sure we will find a good investment for it.

Q. I'm not sure if this question has been asked, but going back to the time when you were struggling with your back, you talked about the struggles, and I'm

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curious about your belief in those moments. Was there ever a moment --

PATRICK CANTLAY: Can you repeat that, sorry.

Q. I'm curious about your belief in those moments. Was there ever a moment or a stretch where you thought, hey, this actually isn't going to work, maybe I need to do something else?

PATRICK CANTLAY: You know, not really. I always had a lot of self-belief in my golfing ability. I feel like that carried me through that time.

I'll tell a funny story and maybe throw him under the bus in the process, but Dr. Greg Rose is a great friend of mine and he's helped me a ton and when I was dealing with my back injury. He definitely helped me find the right people and helped analyze my swing to get the right swing changes to put less stress on my back. He has done so much for me, Greg over at TPI.

But there was funny moment. I had gone to a spine doctor, and the spine doctor -- I had already been out two years, and the spine doctor told me, I think he said, "What hurts you back?"

And I said, it's the 15th time I've seen him, I said, "You know, Doc, golf hurts had my back."

And he goes, "What makes it feel better?"

I'm like, "If I don't play golf, I'm pretty okay. I could do a desk job."

And doc says, "I don't think you should play any golf for a while."

I had already been out 18 months or two years, and I said, "How long?"

He said, "Maybe a year." And.

He was dead serious. And that really shocked me and I was scared.

He said, "Take a year off from golf. See how you feel after a year. Don't touch a club, don't putt, don't do anything, if that's what hurts it, because I've already done all the things I can do to help you get through this while you're playing golf."

That was a tough pill to swallow. I went down to Greg Rose, and I said Greg, "What do you think? Dr. Watkins is saying to take a year off from golf completely."

Greg said, "Oh, no, I wouldn't do that if I were you. I wouldn't take that long off. You're going to lose your proprioception. You won't be able to come back and play golf."

I thought about it a long time with my team, and we ultimately came to the conclusion that we had tried everything under the sun so might as well listen to 'ole Dr. Watkins and take a year off.

I told Greg at the time. I said, "Doc, I'm going to take a year off from golf. I'm not going to do anything. If I can get my back healthy, I'm not worried about the golf. So don't worry about my proprioception, I'm going to be fine, I've just got to get healthy."

It worked out okay.

Q. I may be mistaken here, but is this your first win on bermuda? This course hasn't treated you that well, but what does it say about your game and how much satisfaction do you take in winning here?

PATRICK CANTLAY: Yeah, I think bermuda is a surface that I am still learning and still trying to get as comfortable as I feel on poa and bentgrass. This golf course is very difficult, especially if you are playing out of the rough and especially if you do get those cross-grain putts because there's so much slope.

It has taken me awhile to adjust, but I feel like living in Florida and exerting some patience has helped me on bermuda. And this week, I definitely felt way more comfortable around this golf course than I have in previous years because my record up until this year has been poor on this golf course.

Q. One last thing, you talked at the start of the Playoffs, even at the start of the week about not being a fan of this format and winning might not have changed your opinion and that's okay. Were you ever worried about opinions such as this affecting your attitude, maybe not this week but maybe at the start of it all?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I think that I'm still not a fan of this format. I don't think it's a good format. I don't like the fact that somebody else, you'll have to tell me who, somebody else shot the lowest score this week, and they would have won THE TOUR Championship in years past. I probably wouldn't have won, maybe Jon would have won or Kevin Na.

Q. Tied with Kevin Na. They would be in a playoff.

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PATRICK CANTLAY: So they would have played off, and if Jon wins the playoff, then I wouldn't have won. Fortunately that's not the case. Even in a format I don't like, it actually was to my benefit this week. For that I'm very thankful.

But I don't think it affects my ability to hit good golf shots. I mean, that's really what it is. It's me being able to be objective about whether I like the format or think the format's fair or whatever it is. It's still you've got to get the golf ball in the hole. And so when the gun goes off, it doesn't matter if I like the format, I don't like the format. I've just got to get the golf ball in the hole. And I did a great job of that this week, and that's how you count it at the end is just who got the ball in the hole.

Q. Just wondering, what's your plan for the next two weeks?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I am headed to California, and Xander and I are going to take a trip up to Napa for a couple days. Take some time off. Then I have a really good friend of mine is getting married in San Diego on the weekend, so I'll be there. And then I'll go back to Florida and get ready for The Ryder Cup.

Q. You're not going to go to Whistling Straits beforehand?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I think there's a team practice next weekend, I believe, and so I will go to that. That will be after the wedding.

Q. I know your mind wasn't on this at all, but what do you think today was like for the ordinary golf fans, switching back and forth between the Solheim Cup and what you guys were doing at East Lake?

PATRICK CANTLAY: You know, I think it was -- it had to be compelling stuff. I mean, it was close. It felt compelling to me being out there.

You know, Jon and I were very close all day. I don't know if we ever got more than a couple shots apart, and I wasn't able to really put the pedal down when maybe I could have. There were some putts that I didn't make in the middle of the round where I maybe could have separated myself, and so it was a nail biter all the way to the end.

I saw I think the ladies played a little better today. They are close. They are maybe within a couple points. And so I'll be rooting for them to hopefully pull it out.

Q. What subject were you going to major in if you

went back to school?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I went to two years at UCLA. I was going to be a history major, but I never got -- after turning pro, I didn't get down that road far enough. I'm sure I went back, and if I didn't switch over into business econ, I would have been a history major.

Q. Had it been a 72-hole aggregate tournament, how do you think today should help decide Player of the Year and honors such as that?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I try not to give an opinion unless I've thought much about it. If I gave you an opinion right now, it would be very off the cuff. I haven't thought about it. Jon has played very well this year. He's won a major, won it in a very exciting fashion, making putts on the last two holes. I'm not sure how you count the Memorial Tournament. He played amazing golf there.

Fortunately it's not up to me. I don't have to be the arbiter. We will see. I think this year was interesting because there wasn't necessarily a clear-cut person. There were so many guys that played -- that won tournaments, I think up until last week, nobody had won more than twice and there were seven people that had won twice. So, we'll see.

Q. Is too much placed on the majors when deciding those type of things?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I'm not sure. Golf places a lot of emphasis on the majors. And so we'll see. This year will be -- you know, whoever wins we'll find out the answer to that a little bit -- we'll see how much those majors really mean.

So it's not up to me. But we'll see how it goes.

Q. After the traumatic 17th, what was going through your head as you were on the tee on 18 before you hit your longest drive of the week, maybe your straightest drive of the week, I don't know.

PATRICK CANTLAY: Yeah, I thought, given the predicament I was in, still keeping a one-shot lead going into 18 was a small victory if you could call it that.

18 is a hole that I like. It's a right-to-left hole. I hit a draw most comfortably, and I timed up two really nice draws when it mattered. And then I hit a great drive, right in the middle of the fairway and I hit a great 6-iron, the perfect number; and under the gun to hit your irons the number that you want to is really indicative of being in control of your game.

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And so I am really proud of the way I played the 18th hole and I knew that if I gave my -- I knew that I needed to give myself a chance at eagle because Jon is such a good player that I kept telling myself that I needed to expect him to make three there, and that's what was going through my brain.

Q. I swear this isn't a good time to be asking you how many PIP points you got this week, but how much do you think your starpower has risen in the last month and have you noticed it yourself and does it mean anything to you?

PATRICK CANTLAY: It's a good question. No surprise from you, Doug.

I am not sure. I will tell you, I can tell after last week, after the playoff, that it felt like more people were on my side, and that feels great. And so maybe the nickname has helped me out with that a little bit because it lets me be who I am.

But I've always said that I'm going to let my golf clubs do the talking, and I'm going to put all my energy into playing the best golf I can and let everything else take care of itself. I did that this week. And so if I keep playing golf like this, I will be hard to ignore.

Q. Did you get any sense leading up to this month when you were playing that anyone knew who you were, beyond the obvious?

PATRICK CANTLAY: I think the guys that I play with; I think the guys on TOUR know who I am and I think they know the kind of golf that I play.

And so you know, the respect that I get from those guys and being able to compete against those guys, that's why I do what I do, and so I'm not going to get too caught up in all the other stuff but I will tell you I'm very excited to have a lot of those guys on my side in the next couple weeks in the next event I play. I'm very much looking forward to The Ryder Cup.

STEWART MOORE: Patrick Cantlay, 2021 FedExCup Champion, thank you for spending some time with us.

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