

TOUR Championship

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Scottie Scheffler

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Scottie Scheffler into the interview room here at the TOUR Championship. Scottie, for the third consecutive year enters the TOUR Championship at No. 1 in the FedExCup standings. Obviously a great year this year with six victories and the addition of the gold medal at the Olympic Games. Can we get an opening comment from you on your return here to East Lake.

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Yeah, it's good to be back. It's good to be back. In a nice position going into the week. Yeah, it's good to be back here at East Lake. It's obviously everybody's goal at the beginning of the year to have a chance, and going in the first spot, no better opportunity than where I'm sitting. Looking forward to the week.

Q. What are your thoughts on the renovation? What do you like about it, or not?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: It's definitely interesting. It's basically a new golf course from what it was before. It's not really at all the same. The greens, since they're new, are extremely firm, which I think makes it more challenging. It'll be tough to access some of the hole locations. I think we'll have a bit to learn in terms of golf course setup.

But overall we'll see how it plays. It's so new right now that it's really hard to tell exactly how -- all I know is it's way different.

Q. Do some of the new grasses and the fact that it is a completely different test now benefit you a little bit over what it's been in the past?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Yeah, well, this was a golf course I always really liked. I felt like I hadn't played my best golf here. So coming here this year, seeing a fresh golf course that I think is going to be really challenging I think will suit me pretty well out there.

Q. Having left here the last two years in the same position without winning it, what were your emotions and feelings at the end of otherwise very successful

seasons, and what might you do differently now to flip the switch?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Hopefully just make a few more birdies. More birdies than bogeys typically helps low scores. As far as the tournament goes, treating it like every other event. Not focusing on starting strokes or anything like that, just going out there and trying to execute and do my best. Not really thinking too much about the results.

Q. Andrew Green obviously revamped Oak Hill, PGA Championship last year. Do you see any similarities to Oak Hill from a year ago to what you've seen on the course?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Yeah, I think with the contours of the greens and they way he shapes the greens. A little bit more boxy, and definitely the way he shapes some of the bunkers around the greens, too. You can definitely see a lot of the similarities. I felt like I could have looked at the yardage book from this golf course and known exactly who did the redo.

Q. What was the most surprising -- anything stand out to you as far as the golf course goes when you saw it for the first time?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Really the thing that was most different is the firmness of the greens. Just typically most of the greens out here slope back to front and you were all into the grain, so you weren't really playing for a lot of bounce on many of these holes, unless you're hitting a really, really long club in.

Now they're extremely firm, especially the par-3s. The par-3s, I think, provide the most challenge because the run-ups to the short of the greens are still fairly soft, and so if you land it short it's probably not going to be bouncing up, and if you land it on the green it kind of just hits and goes.

So there's going to be a real challenge to that. You're going to have to hit some shots that are going to be pretty extraordinarily high in order to hit these greens.

Q. We talked last week about Hideki having to withdraw with injury. Can you talk about how difficult



it is coming to the end of a long season. It seems like everyone is dealing with something.

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Yeah, I would agree with that. I think everybody is dealing with a little something at the end of the year. It's been a long season. Especially now with the way the new schedule is, it really is a sprint to get here.

There's not really places in the schedule to take large breaks. You have the beginning of the year where you're kind of getting warmed up in a sense, even though you've pretty much got to start the year ready to go. Then March you have THE PLAYERS; April, Masters; May, PGA; June, U.S. Open; July you have The Open Championship; and then you come to Augusta and you've got the FedExCup Playoffs.

There's not really a time of year where you're taking a break for us until after the Presidents Cup or the Ryder Cup. It definitely is a little bit of a sprint, and I'm sure people got little aches and pains. But didn't play all year to just get tired at East Lake and kind of just throw in the towel. It's good competition this week.

I think the golf course is going to be pretty challenging, and it should be a fun week.

Q. In terms of the staggered format this week, I wanted to know your thoughts on that. Do you think it's the right approach to this event, this season finale?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: It depends how you want to describe it. If you want to just have a player that's playing the best at the end of the year, I think the Playoffs will definitely identify that player.

In terms of the season-long race, it's maybe not always going to be the guy that plays the best the whole season; it's going to be the guy that plays the best in these playoff events. That's really what you're identifying is the guy that plays the best in these last three events.

It's a format that's changed a bunch or a few times over the past few years. In terms of when it first got started you had a year where I think it was Pádraig Harrington won two majors and maybe didn't make the BMW, and I know he didn't make this tournament. So arguably it wasn't really a great setup then.

And then you change the points to be a little bit less valuable in the Playoffs, but you still see a lot of volatility. You look at a guy like Keegan Bradley who shows last week and has a great week and wins the tournament, and now all of a sudden he goes from not being in East Lake to having a really, really great chance to win the FedExCup.

So I think it provides a little bit of volatility, which is good for the fans, and I think it's also good for some players that are at -- didn't have their best years leading up to get into the Playoffs, and all of a sudden turn a year that's not their best into somewhat of a career year in terms of winning the FedExCup.

A lot of volatility, but at the end of the day, golf is golf. The easiest way to solve an issue that you don't like in the game of golf is to play better. That's really all it comes down to in our game. At the end of the day, if you play good enough golf, it will take care of itself.

Q. Along those lines, do you feel any differently going into Thursday than you did at Memphis, at Phoenix, Palm Springs, Augusta?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Just like in terms of the tournament?

Q. Yeah, just your outlook toward it. Are you feeling any differently?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: I'm trying not to treat it any differently. Like I said, the starting strokes format is a bit different. It's not a traditional golf tournament.

But at the end of the day, the format is what it is. I'm going to try to approach it the same way I approach other tournaments, and that's stepping up on the first tee and doing my best to execute, just like I would at the Masters, at the RBC Heritage, at Palm Springs. Every tournament I am stepping up on the first tee seeing my shot and trying to hit that shot, and then going from there.

Q. If you could go back to the start of the year, and I'm using this because it was an Olympic year, would you have done anything differently schedule-wise?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Yeah, I think some of my prep going into a few of the majors was a bit different than it has been in years past. There's two majors where I took long breaks going into, one because of the birth of our child. We had a long break going into the PGA.

And then one because of the Olympics, I had a longer break going into The Open Championship because I didn't really want to be overseas that long away from my family. That would have been a pretty tough month stretch for us, figuring out whether or not we could take our son or not take our son.

When we planned out the beginning of the year, I think it would have been real challenging to have our son over in Europe for a month. You never really know what a baby is

going to be like, but it would have been challenging.

Then I played Memorial the week before the U.S. Open, and Memorial is basically as close to a U.S. Open test as we see on TOUR, and I think it kind of wore me down going into that major championship.

As far as prep work for the major tournaments, I think I have a better idea of what I want to do going forward, but outside of that, I set my schedule at the beginning of the year, and I pretty much stuck exactly to it.

Q. What kind of clubs do you find yourself hitting into the greens after the renovation, restoration, whatever? Do you find yourself hitting a longer club?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: The par-3s I think I'm hitting slightly longer clubs. Besides 15. I think 15, it looks like the rules officials kind of X'd that back tee box, which I think this year would've been a bit excessive.

So I think we're going to play the up tee most of the week, if not every day, because I think the back tee might be a bit much just with the firmness of the greens.

But outside of that, I think the par-3s I'm hitting slightly longer clubs, and then I don't think he made it much longer. I think there's some really good changes. Like I think 14 going back to a par-5 I think is interesting. I think it's a fun hole.

Like I said, the firmness of the greens is something that we're definitely not used to around this golf course, and with Bermuda rough, anytime you see somebody in the rough, it's going to be extremely challenging for them to be able to land the ball on the green and hold the green almost no matter what club they're hitting. Even the wedges at times I think are going to be challenging to hold the greens. Fairways are definitely going to be at a premium this week.

Q. Are you taking a long vacation after this season?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Well, we have Presidents Cup in three weeks, but after that I'll certainly be taking a break, doing some other stuff for a little bit. Start ramping up a little bit in the fall. But yeah, I'll definitely take some time.

Q. Going back to the format, would you make any changes to how the Playoffs are laid out as they are, or would you kind of just rebrand it to not being a season-long race, because it seems like that's kind of the problem you have with it.

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: You know, I think we need a

season-long race. I think the FedExCup has been really good for our tour and for the game. I think it's something exciting to finish off the year.

Personally, I thought the old format, I didn't have a ton of issues with. Personally when I watched it I found it kind who was going to end up where, and I didn't necessarily mind that the winner of the TOUR Championship wasn't the winner of the FedExCup. It provides a little less volatility, which is the negative.

So really, it comes down to the guys putting up the money for us to play with. At the end of the day, we have sponsors for our tournaments, and they're going to want it a certain way, and if FedEx putting up the kind of money they're putting up at this event, we're going to have to play it the way they want to play it. It's just as simple as that.

If you look at it in the old format, I don't think they would necessarily want a guy that -- like let's say hypothetically I had the year that I had four years ago when it was the old -- four or five years ago when it was the old format and I won the first playoff event. I think Xander would have to win the next two playoff events in order to catch me.

And in terms of the season-long race, I think, yeah, I would have deserved to win the season-long race with winning the amount of times I did and winning a playoff event, but at the end of the day then we get here and it would be like, well, the thing we worked all year to have a great finish on TV for is now over.

We'd still have a great tournament that's the TOUR Championship, but I'm not sure if that's what the sponsors want, what the TOUR would want. At the end of the day, this is more of an entertainment product and we have a lot of other traditional events throughout the year that we play. Coming into this event it's just something that's a bit different.

That's how it is. It's just, I would say, different than what we do throughout the rest of the year. But at the end of the day, it's fun, it's exciting. I would use Keegan Bradley as a great example of what the Playoffs is where you can have somebody who has had not their best year, and then all of a sudden he turns it into what could be his best year or one of his best years on TOUR.

Winning a playoff and then if he has a great week this week, he has a chance to win the FedExCup. And then on the negative side of it, you've got a guy like Will Zalatoris a couple years ago who wins the first playoff event, puts himself in it, gets injured at East Lake, and all of a sudden he's 30th in the FedExCup.



That's kind of the good and the bad of the format. But at the end of the day, it is what it is.

Q. Is there a small part of you that almost wished you were second instead of first for a third year in a row, just to see a different perspective?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. I want every stroke that I can get this week. I've experienced it on the other side, and I would much rather start a tournament with a lead than start it behind. It's as simple as that.

Q. Because of the format and maybe building on what was asked before, does the first round of this event take on more importance than any other or the regular tour because guys are coming out and they know they've got to chase you and they're going to be aggressive? Does it sort of set up the week a little differently?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Well, it definitely sets up the week a little bit differently, just because there's only one tournament I'm going to play my entire professional career where there's a starting strokes format. We're not going to do this at any other tournament besides this one. In terms of that, it's different than any other tournament we play.

But at the end of the day, I want to be leading the golf tournament.

It's funny, I feel like a lot of times you get asked in the tournament halfway point like at a major when the cut happens, and it happened at the Olympics and some people were asking, well, do you like the position you're in kind of being the chaser? I was like, no. I want to be winning.

You know, this is the best opportunity that I'll have in my career probably to win a golf tournament. I'm starting two strokes ahead of second place. That's a pretty cool place to be, really.

Q. It looked like you were toying with playing down or up the 10th hole on 18. Is that a strategy we might see from you or other players this week?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Yeah. The way they reshaped the fairway there, the fairway crowns like this and it's a very difficult fairway to hit, and if your ball goes into the right rough and you don't get a good lie, you have to chip it 10 yards down the fairway because there's nowhere really to lay up.

Before there used to be some opportunity there, where

now there's not. You're now hitting it across the Lake. If you hit it into the left rough basically like -- I'll describe it this way: If you hit it into the right rough, you're now hitting it over a pond to a fairway that's pretty narrow. If you hit it in the left rough you probably can't hold the green from there, and if you don't get it to the fairway, you're going to be in the water.

It seems like a safer play to take all that out of play, hit it down 10. The green is going to be pretty extraordinarily hard to hold anyways with it being a downslope and having a long club in there. It's more you're playing for birdies. There is less opportunity I think for eagle than there was before.

You've got three bunkers in front of the green now, and with how firm the greens are -- I saw Rory hold 18 green today, but he landed in the fringe over the bunker. The fringe is soft; the greens are firm. It's very challenging to hold the green in two.

If you don't hit the 18th fairway you're in a heap of trouble. That's something I'm still going to toy around with tomorrow, but I think it's likely you'll see some guys hitting it down the 10th because it's a safer play.

Q. When you do take some time off, do you actually put the clubs away completely, or do you play leisure golf at all? And is leisure golf really leisure golf for you? Can you just enjoy it and not worry about the outcome?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: I would say that's a bit of a battle. But I do love social golf.

If I'm going to take a month off, if we're not on vacation, I'm probably still going to play once or twice a week with my buddies because it's just a heck of a lot of fun. I love being at home and I love cutting up, and if I'm not really in peak shape I am sure my buddies are going to be calling me more often to play than when it's during the year and I'm playing really good, because they would arguably have a better chance to beat me when I haven't really been practicing.

Yeah, I'll probably play a little bit just to stay in shape and enjoy more of the game than -- during the season I really am -- you do kind of flip a switch. When I'm practicing, I'm really very focused on what I'm doing, and when we're going out, if I go out after the Presidents Cup and play golf with my buddies, I'm just going to be having fun, cutting it up. I can do a pretty decent job of just going out there and having a good time.

Q. Is there anything interesting you do to make it



equitable when you play with your friends, whether it be having to play your worst ball?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: No, most of it's just strokes. Just like the handicap system. I think that's one of the great parts about our game, is I can go out there with whoever it is and we can come up with some sort of a fair match just based on the handicap system.

Q. So what are you giving typically?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Depends on the game, but at home I'm typically playing to a plus 7. I used to be a plus 5. They moved me to a plus 7. So now we've got guys in the group that are getting like two strokes a hole. I typically still will win more often than not, I feel like, but it's just fun. It's just entertaining.

If you're going out there with a 12, 13 handicap you don't know what the heck is going to happen. If we're playing Wolf there is a lot of volatility there and it's fun.

Q. You might even be playing single digit handicap guys.

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Yeah, yeah. If I'm at home, pretty much either Friday or Saturday, I'm playing with somebody that I'm giving 20 strokes. I think we're up to 20 strokes now. And he takes them all. I think if we kept my handicap throughout the year -- it's tough. It's a tough thing to figure out.

Q. Have you and Xander run out of things to talk about yet?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: No. Me and Kaiser have run out of things to talk about. I'm just kidding.

Q. Is there anything different that you've learned about him or appreciate about his game?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: One of the things I appreciate about him as a person in terms of his golf is how hard of a worker he is. It's one of the things I admire about him. Those are the types of guys you love seeing have success because after I won the Masters this year, he's one of the first people when you see him in the training room the next week, big old hug, smile on his face, and it's genuine. He's not just sitting there saying, congratulations. He's genuinely happy for me to be able to accomplish something I've dreamed of accomplishing.

So when I see Xander winning a golf tournament and winning multiple majors in one year, I just look at him as a person that has really earned that. He's put in the work,

he's made the right sacrifices, and he's earned those wins and played good at the right time.

I'm typically not one of the guys that's there after the tournament. Once the tournament ends I usually leave. But like this year after The Open I wanted to make it a point to stay inside scoring and congratulate him when he got in because first of all he's a great guy, and second of all really happy for him to be able to accomplish what he is accomplishing.

I think sometimes I get a touch frustrated with the questions people ask because like, oh, whose year would you rather have? Would you rather have Xander's year or Scottie's year? It's like, can't we just enjoy some great golf that's been played this year?

You had a guy win multiple major championships and you had a season like mine where I was able to win a good amount of times. I think it's one of those things where we should just sit back and enjoy it.

And I'm just grateful for the year that I've had. I'm grateful for Xander's year. I'm looking forward to competing for the FedExCup with 28 other guys. I think it's something that we should just enjoy instead of focusing on the comparisons all the time.

Q. If the TOUR came to you -- you said you'll play how the sponsors want it. If the sponsors or Strategic Sports Group came in and wanted to completely change things up and make it a match play event or under the lights, how open do you think TOUR players would be to deviating from 72-hole stroke play? Obviously not every week, but in something like if they made the Playoffs and they went way outside the box?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Well, it's a really in-depth conversation. At the end of the day in terms of sponsors, I would play a lot of the tournaments I play throughout the year if the purses were significantly less. I would pick and choose a bit more, but if it was -- if it's the Masters, I'm going to play the Masters. I want a chance to win a major championship.

I do not care what you pay me for winning the Masters. I really don't.

But at the end of the day in terms of a lot of those tournaments you just want to get paid what you think would be fair. And then in terms of what sponsor wants, if you've got FedEx putting up the kind of money they're putting up for this event, people are going to show up to play.

It's a business at the end of the day. It's part of the game.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

This is a product that appeals to a lot of people. Sports is entertainment, but at the end of the day I still stand on the side of the fence of my golf clubs will always be my entertainment. If you want to come watch me play golf, that's what we're going to see.

If you're showing up you're going to watch me play golf. I'm not going to go out on the first tee and do dances and celebrate like crazy. I am going to do my best to compete in a golf tournament. Wherever the best players are competing I am showing up to those tournaments because I love the competition. That's really what I enjoy the most.

As far as the format goes, golf is a funny game. You're not always going to -- there's no perfect system in order to play a golf tournament that's the most entertaining product and also the product that gets the best player each time.

A lot of times in golf the guy that plays the best may not even win that week. In terms of little bounces, it's a fickle game. It's a challenging sport. I'm open to suggestions. I do still think that 72 holes of stroke play is the best format for a golf tournament, but if a sponsor wants to come in and change it up a little bit, I love competing, and I want to win when we go home and play Wolf for four hours, and I'm giving 20 strokes to a guy.

I do not want to be giving him money at the end of the day whether it's \$5 or \$500. I do not want to take out my wallet and hand him money at the end of the day. That's just not in my blood. I want to win, whether we're playing ping-pong or whatever it is.

Whatever the format, I'm going to show up and try and do my best. That's really all it is.

Q. You talked about the regular season. You did win the regular season title. Did you celebrate your Comcast Business top 10 victory?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: No, but I enjoyed it. I think that was a cool thing that the TOUR did and that Comcast did.

Q. No one talks about it.

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: How amazing is it that you can play for the whole year and they're going to reward guys -- we make a great living out here playing golf, and they are going to reward us on top of that for having a great regular season. Pretty awesome.

Q. Hardly anyone talks about it. Can they be doing something different to highlight what a guy did in the regular season before going into this one?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: Well, then you get into the discussion about other sports. It's like the Cowboys have had great regular seasons the last few years and left me heartbroken in the playoffs. But golf is a different sport. There's so many different voices and ways that you can do it. I'm not sitting here saying I have the crystal ball and I know what's best.

All I can do is show up and compete and give my input where it's necessary. Sometimes sitting up here giving my input can get blown out of proportion. I think from now on I'll probably do it behind closed doors because there's a balance between rewarding season-long excellence and having an opportunity for guys in the Playoffs.

I think it's -- I can't speak enough about the Keegan Bradley example. It's awesome that he now has put himself in a position where he can truly win the FedExCup. It's a cool system in that sense. It goes a lot more in depth than just identifying the best player for the entire season, and in a lot of other major sports, the best team doesn't always win.

Golden State Warriors, best regular season ever and they lose in the Finals. It happens.

I don't know if the FedExCup is the equivalent of our Super Bowl, but financially I would say yes, but in terms of history in the game, maybe, maybe not. You'll have to ask the players. But at the end of the day, I want to win the golf tournament we're playing, and right now I have a two-stroke lead, and that's pretty cool.

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