

Sentry Tournament of Champions

Tuesday, January 5, 2021

Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA

Plantation Course at Kapalua

Stewart Cink

Press Conference



LAURA VESCOVI: Good morning, everyone, we would like to welcome Stewart Cink to the virtual interview room here this morning at the Sentry Tournament of Champions. You haven't been here since 2010 but that year you did have a top-10 finish. So talk about your excitement to be back here this week.

STEWART CINK: Well, really excited to be back. It's always great to start the year in Maui, because it's Maui, but also it means that you've done something that's worthy of an invite here and it's been 11 years, so my family's in a way different place now than we were then and I've got my son Reagan caddieing for me, he and Connor, they're in their 20s and so it's just a different experience, but we're definitely having a great time and looking forward to the week.

LAURA VESCOVI: Can you give us a snapshot about what you did over the break and the holiday.

STEWART CINK: Well, I haven't played in a tournament since November, so I've had a lot of time off from traveling for golf, but I live in Atlanta and the weather is marginal for a lot of play and practice, you kind of get your likes in here and there and so I really didn't do a whole lot of focusing on golf. Nothing really structured. Just tried to stay kind of in shape and keep my attitude fresh. I knew it was going to be a long year so one of the things with me this year is with Reagan caddieing he's never seen any of these courses, he's walked around a lot of them and he knows a lot with about them, but he's never seen them like from a strategy and playability type of a standpoint.

So my year's going to include more practice rounds than it did because of that and so I know that that's going to be an extra day that I pretty much had X'd off my calendar for the last several years, I just didn't play any practice rounds. So knowing that, I needed to pace myself a little bit more, I can't deny the fact that I'm 47 years old and I'm going to play a full schedule again this year, of course, and with Reagan caddieing it's going to be a little bit longer weeks. So we're going to try to build in a little bit more rest.

So a lot of the off season was kind of built around thinking about like how to schedule out the tournament season and what the weeks are going to look like, our travel, so I think we got a pretty decent plan in place.

LAURA VESCOVI: That's great. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. You just mentioned how you had to change practice, are you one of these guys with the Whoop system and can you walk me through how that works for you?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, I'm one of those guys with the Whoop. I think most everybody out on TOUR now's using it. I don't really highlight the numbers on it that much, there's a couple of things that I might just pay closer attention to, like the recovery is important nowadays. I'm still trying to figure out exactly the best way for me to recover. I mean it's so much more than just getting the eight hours of sleep, it's -- the Whoop we find out does not like alcohol, which is not a huge problem for me. But it's a little different and it's pretty accurate. So it's a neat little tool and I enjoy learning a little bit about myself and the way my body sort of physiologically goes through the day and recovers and exerts itself and all that stuff.

Q. Maui aside or even Oahu or Palm Springs or whatever, what would you say the level of optimism is like at the start of the year compared to the start of the season? January instead of October during this wrap around. Is it different?

STEWART CINK: Well I'm not sure exactly what you mean. You mean like the level, does it feel like a new schedule or are you talking about the virus?

Q. Let's, please leave the virus out of this. Please. All right.

STEWART CINK: Glad to.

Q. No, any year during the --



STEWART CINK: The level of enthusiasm at the start of the year?

Q. The new year versus the wrap --

STEWART CINK: It's probably a little bit higher, it's probably a little bit higher when you come into the new calendar year. The wraparound schedule is, I think it's worked well, it's got a lot of fall tournaments better fields and there's a lot more players playing in the fall, which is great. But the at Safeway -- I didn't play the TOUR Championship this year, but 30 players that played the TOUR Championship, if any of them had played at Safeway they would have just been a new year all that meant is a flight out west from Atlanta, Georgia.

So that's, it's hard to kind of like get your enthusiasm built up for a new season like that because it really doesn't, it doesn't feel like a new season. When you come here to Maui or to wherever you start the season, you haven't played in a long time, you've been at home and it's probably wintertime where you live, it feels like a new season. So your enthusiasm and your -- you got some question marks about, like how am I going to come out of the cold and how am I going to handle the, a new putter or a driver or something like that.

You got some different things in your mind and so it feels more like a new season, I think, in the middle of the year than it does in October.

Q. The other thing is, I wanted to test your 47-year-old memory. You played, your first time playing this event it was still at La Costa. What do you remember about that? In other words, what was the feeling like -- and I'm not talking about the sites or the venue or anything like that -- but the feeling of being there at La Costa compared to what it's been like now?

STEWART CINK: Well La Costa is nice and subsequently we played the Match Play there for a lot of years, so we continued to go there. But there's something about, like the arrival here in Maui and coming to Plantation Course and this beauty that we're surrounded by here just makes this feel like more of like sort of like a jewel in your crown that you want to hold on to.

I just don't think there's many more special places in the world than right here where we are. So it feels like a reward and you're reminded of it constantly as soon as you look out there and see whales and look over to Molokai and it just feels a lot different. So I think here has that impact on you.

Q. Wondering about the break and like specifically

how did you sit down and figure out how the weeks were going to work going forward now that Reagan needs to look a little bit more at the courses. Were you sitting down with your manager or sitting down with Reagan or how were you doing that. And then also as a follow-up to that, what was your most memorable present given or received?

STEWART CINK: Well, the second part of your question, I was, I'm not like really strong in the gift giving department, so I kind of struck out a little bit on the gifts this year and as it always happens like with I try to give my wife more than one gift and try to like hit home with one of them and it's usually the ones I think are the dumbest like tiniest little thing that she ends up loving the most and the one that I was like, I can't wait to give this to her, those are the ones that are like, You know, I think I might return that. And we had a little bit of that this year.

But probably the thing that I received that was, has been the most fun for our family has been this Furbo little device that you put -- it's kind of like a Ring doorbell for your dogs and except it flings treats at your dogs. It catapults treats through the air. So the dogs quickly learn like, that machine over there, there's treats that come out of that. And so when the dogs get close to it, they send your phone a notification and you can kind of see the video and you can talk to them. So that's been fun to -- because missing the dogs, being away from home that's part of the tough part of traveling. My kids are adults and Lisa travels with me most of the time and Reagan's caddieing and so we don't get to see the dogs. So that's been fun.

And you also asked me about the how we handled the schedule. No, it was just something we did in our family. It came across my mind, especially because RSM, Reagan caddied for me at RSM and with two courses there it really stuck out in my mind like, wow, we were just really busy and crammed and I had a lot of other things going on, we didn't get to see half of one of the courses and I played poorly and I felt like the week was just like really, really crowded.

So it just really highlighted to me that I needed to plan for this stuff in advance and so playing the tournaments that have more than one course this year are going to be really challenging and I think of Pebble with three courses, so it's just going to be something I have to adjust to. I've done it my whole life, had to adjust to things and playing game of golf out here, you know, and this is just going to be a new thing. It's well worth it for me to have Reagan caddieing, I think he's just done great job and he's, it's fun to have him and I'm relaxed, so if I have to add a few practice rounds I'm not worried about that.

Q. How many dogs do you have and was the gift made out to them? Was the card made out to the dogs or to you?

STEWART CINK: No, I think -- we have two dogs, but I think the, I think the gift was made out from the dogs.

Q. That was thoughtful of them. What kind are they?

STEWART CINK: Very thoughtful. One is a Kooikerhondje that almost nobody's ever heard of. It's kind of like a King Charles Cavalier but with a pointy snout and she's about 20 pounds. And then the other dog's a Vizsla, which more people have heard of. Hungarian pointer. He's about like a 60-pound dog. And they're both old, they're both 14. Well 14 and 13. And so they're, we're living on borrowed time so to speak with our dogs.

So it's good to get to see them like run around and sniff the Furbo and maybe fling a treat here and there.

Q. Distance was a kind of a big subject last year, especially what Bryson did and so forth. Do you think about trying to find a few more yards or are you too far along in your career to worry about it?

STEWART CINK: No, I think as long as you're playing golf you're trying to find distance. I don't care if you're playing on the PGA TOUR or if you're a 25 handicapper, everybody wants to hit it a little bit further. No, I did make some changes back in last year too and I don't know if it was really because of Bryson necessarily -- I mean I've been watching guys hit it farther and farther my whole career -- but I made some changes in my swing and my equipment that enabled me to pick up some distance. In fact, right before Safeway. And it gave me just that little extra boost of confidence and maybe statistically a little bit more of an advantage that it just kind of tells you how razor thin the edge is between like sort of languishing around where I was and then, boom, you pop up and win.

So no, everybody's wanting to hit it farther, the stats just -- you can almost look at any stat and it just tells you the root factor of that stat is driving distance. The farther you hit it, the easier golf is, on almost every step.

And so if you can add five yards, you're going to just improve your strokes gained and so why wouldn't you? And 47 years old, I'm not young like some of these players, but I'm, I've never had a problem with speed and I can, I have enough speed, but I wasn't very efficient until we made some changes and I got my attack a little bit more efficient with my driver and I picked up about 15 yards carry and that was just by making a little change.

And then I got to dial in my equipment from there and it added another probably like five yards of carry. So 20 yards of carry at 47 years old is, it was pretty impactful for me.

Q. You talked about making sure Reagan learns the courses, but it's been 11 years since you've played this event, not sure you've been here in between, but if I may, what, has there been a little bit of re-learning this course? There was 10 million dollars worth of refinements done last year, what are your impressions after maybe being out there a little bit this week and what you remembered from 2010?

STEWART CINK: Well that's a good question. I do remember a lot, I retain a lot of the what I learn about the courses when I play them, so it's been 11 years but I still have a lot of memories here. I think you'll have to go back and check the facts, but I believe this course got renovated after I was here last time and it got renovated again like last year. So there was about nine or 10 years of golf course that I never saw period. So one thing I noticed yesterday when I played here for the first time since then was that the greens don't have quite as much slope as they did and they have been re-grassed, obviously, so it's still pretty grainy, it's still, the green speeds aren't typical for the PGA TOUR because of the wind they get here, but the slopes in some of the areas are just not as severe as they used to be.

So that's one of the first things I noticed. I was telling Reagan, as we got to greens, like you can't be above this hole. And then we get up there and you can certainly be above this hole, because it's not as steep. So that's the biggest change I noticed.

There's a couple little changes here and there with new tees and a few bunkers in the driving areas that are, they're in play, but not a huge change. The biggest change to me has been the greens are just not quite as severe or sloping as they used to be.

Q. How do you like it? Do you like the way it is now?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, I like it just fine. I think it's more playable probably for every day. I know they have had a couple of years where they had wind here at such a high rate that they couldn't play. So this area's pretty exposed and they took a lot of the greens that were generally sloped back to front other side or whatever and they put little tiers in so that they have places where the ball will stop and you can put hole locations.

I think they did a great job with it and it's just, putting I think is maybe gotten a little bit easier here than it was back in

the day, just because the grass isn't quite as grainy and the slopes aren't quite as constant. So you got more of like levels and plateaus, you're putting to areas that are a little bit flatter. But hitting the ball to those areas is just as challenging, maybe more challenging. So overall I think maybe the course the greens probably play a little bit easier than they did, but it's still, I mean this is a great design and it's a fun course to play and it's a blast to be here.

Q. On the swing changes that led to more distance, are you working with someone or were you just experimenting yourself or how did they come about and what was your angle of attack before and then after?

STEWART CINK: Well I was working with my coaches on that. I work with Mike Lipnick back at TPC Sugarloaf and also with James Sieckmann. James, I work with more on short game and putting, but I asked him to take a look at my driver because I just felt like he wasn't really getting -- I felt like I was losing distance, but my ball speed and everything was just as high as ever.

So I felt like there's some other reason why I'm a little shorter than other players I've always been the same as or I just can't get my numbers to where they used to be. I just refused to believe it was because of the age number. (Laughing.)

So James just suggested after looking at a few of my shots, he said, All right, I want you to do a couple of things here. And he just made -- it was mainly a setup change and I wasn't trying to change my attack angle, but the setup change and the way I was using the bigger muscles in my body on my back swing I kind of accessed more of the power from stronger areas of my body and those two changes just resulted in a lot more ball speed and a lot better attack angle.

So my attack angle went from about say like minus two up to about plus two. Which is kind of a big deal in driving these days. So it wasn't what I was trying to go for, it was just a result of making a change that got a little bit more strength from a better power reserve in my frame.

The result was I could hit it higher and faster and I could take a little bit of loft off my driver, which means you get more of a direct blow instead of a glancing blow. The result was just like a better more efficient higher and farther carry and I mean it's been, driving has been nice.

Q. Then you mentioned even five yards impacting your strokes gained. How is strokes gained impacted the way players play the game, the way players look at

the game and what they do?

STEWART CINK: Everybody's a little bit different but I think that almost every player now looks at strokes gained statistics and tries to understand like how does that apply to me. Where am I losing strokes like compared to if you compare yourself to a set of players and the great thing to do is to really compare yourself to a set of players who are the same driving distance as you and then you can tell like okay, well I know Dustin Johnson's a lot longer than me and he's the No. 1 player in the world, but I can't just go and do everything he does, because that driving distance thing makes everything else irrelevant.

So you look at players that are very similar to you in driving distance and you can kind of start to understand like why did that guy have a great year and why did that guy not and why did I fit somewhere in between and you can start to understand what you need to do. Like do I need to make more bogeys or make more birdies, do I need to make less bogeys, am I like playing the par-5s too aggressively or it's a -- it's false to think that the players out here just go for broke on every shot and straight at the flags. It's just, statistically it's -- it's not realistic. I heard so many players say, the best players, all they do is attack flags and say the heck with and if they make bogeys and miss cuts they don't care, but it's just not true. It's not.

So you have to learn like where to pick your spots and the stats can tell you that stuff, if you know where to look and if you're disciplined about like throwing out the noise. There's a lot of noise too, but you find out what's relevant to you and you can really make a big change in the way you play and your decision making and it can add up to a few shots lower every week and that can be a really big deal.

Q. I was kind of curious about when you came out on TOUR which I think was '97 was probably your first full year and you probably only knew really people you had come through junior golf and college with, etcetera. Over the years you meet new people every year on TOUR. Has that dynamic changed as you've gotten older? In other words, as you're now approaching your 23rd year or so, do you find yourself seeking out some of the 21 year olds that you would have no idea who they are?

STEWART CINK: I do and like yesterday for instance I played a practice round with Sungjae. And he lives in my neighborhood and it's the first time I ever played with him. He just bought a house in our neighborhood. So we know each other, we see each other practicing all the time, but we never played golf together until yesterday. So he's younger than my youngest son by almost exactly a year we

determined yesterday.

So, yeah, but I remember when I first started out here my first couple tournaments I had like looked for like Curtis Strange and Paul Azinger and Tom Lehman and I wanted to sit down at lunch with those guys and figure out what makes them established champions on the PGA TOUR and what they're doing and how they handle the traveling life with familiar less and all that stuff. I had a family already when I started.

So 24 years later I am also looking to try to learn a little bit about -- not necessarily like how to live the traveling life from Sungjae, because we're vastly different from that now and I kind of figured that part out as best I'm going to -- but I look at the golf part of it, I look at like what the younger players do and what makes them good. Like Sungjae's a great example. Gosh, the guy's like a machine. It really is like he's not a human being when he hits the ball, he's just so consistent and his strike is so pure every time and he's just, he's a master at ball striking.

So, but now the tables are turned where I don't look for older guys, I'm now kind of like looking at the younger players and I'm just constantly trying to learn something from either age group. And the one thing that's changed though, since you asked me about the change is that now with the teams out here, everybody's got a team and you got the short game coach, the swing coach, the sports psychologist. I have all that too. It just, it seems like there's a little bit less time for social interaction, so the players that are younger kind of have their groups that they know, that they came up with.

And I'm one of very few players my age still playing -- I'm just going to hang out with Brian Gay, I think, the rest of this year (laughing.) But it's a little, I feel a little bit more alone out here than I did. I think that's one of the reasons that I love having Reagan caddieing for me is because I have Reagan. He's my son and we have just a tremendously close relationship already, so I think that it's a great time of my life to have Reagan caddie for me, because it's me and a bunch of young kids. And they don't want to interact too much with me because they're like, You're an old dude.

Q. Do you remember the first time in your career that a younger player sought you out the way you used to Curtis and Paul and was it flattering at all?

STEWART CINK: It is flattering when it happens, but to be honest it hasn't happened that much. Very few times. And in fact I can't even remember -- well Peter Malnati I remember asked me a bunch of questions, I mean, he's kind of an inquisitive dude and he's a friend, but really it

hasn't happened that much. I don't know, I just think more players kind of have the thing figured out when they come out here now and they don't really need to learn the ropes.

A lot of that is true. Players are ready when they come to the PGA TOUR nowadays because they have played a lot and they have got a lot more experience under their belt than they did when I started and so they don't need to ask the washed up players anything. (Laughing.)

LAURA VESCOVI: We appreciate your time, Stewart. Good luck this week.

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