

Sentry Tournament of Champions

Wednesday, January 5, 2022

Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA
Plantation Course at Kapalua

Tony Finau

Press Conference

RACHEL NOBLE: We would like to welcome Tony Finau to the 2022 Sentry Tournament of Champions interview room. Tony, just how happy are you to be back here to start the year off?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, this is where you want to be seen. This is where you want to be. It's great to be back. I was here last year under different circumstances. I didn't win, but with COVID they allowed the guys that got to the TOUR Championship to be here.

It was a different feel for me. Being a champion and being here feels great. And, again, this is one of those tournaments, when you win a golf tournament you look so forward to this week. It's such a special feeling, and just teeing it up here this week with all the guys, you know, that have won and it's a special feel.

So it's nice to be back here and I love Hawaii, so it's all just good vibes.

RACHEL NOBLE: A win, a couple runner-up finishes, eight Top-10s, just recap your season for us last year.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it was a solid season. It was my best season in my career up to this point. And I think the crowning win, the crowning moment was the win, but I had a lot of solid moments throughout the year.

Probably had the best month stretch of golf I've had in my career in February of last year. I wasn't able to cap off a win on any of those weeks, but I had a bunch of runner-ups kind of back to back to back, and so I was playing some really nice golf. So there's a couple things that stand out.

Then I would say the coolest moment was just being on that Ryder Cup team and being able to win that Ryder Cup at home at Whistling Straights. That was quite a special time and a cool way to kind of seal a great season for me.

RACHEL NOBLE: We'll open it up to questions.



Q. I'm wondering, is there a special connection for you here with your connection to Hawaii, Maui, Polynesian people, is there a special place in your heart for this tournament this week, this place?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, no doubt, a special, like I mentioned before, I think special feelings but just the aloha spirit I think is so strong, and to be Polynesian and be on an island where there's so many Polynesians. I've got a lot of family here and on Oahu. It's definitely a special place to me. And I haven't played in Oahu for the last couple years, so this tournament I think means extra, is extra special just in that I haven't played the PGA TOUR event in Oahu for a couple years.

So this one kind of carries all the way to being in Hawaii for me and no doubt it's a special vibe just being Polynesian and being here.

Q. Could you talk about the, I don't know if balance is the right word, but when you break through and you win at Liberty National and confidence breeds confidence and all that good stuff, but there's also the reminder that you would know as well as anyone that winning's not easy out here. How do you kind of mix the two of momentum and realization that it's really hard?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, a hundred percent. I think it's important for me to not take anything for granted. I've got two wins on the PGA TOUR and seeking many more.

But also, like you said, I think it is a balance. You got to, you have to enjoy the win when you -- wins when you get them because they are rare. I mean, outside of Tiger Woods. So you got to enjoy it.

But it's actually made me more hungry to get better and try and do it again, and so that's, I think that's the ultimate test. There's so many different levels and barriers to break through on the PGA TOUR. Getting to multiple wins was a big deal for me and now my eyes are set on getting number three, a third win, and so that's where my focus is.



But I definitely don't take it for granted. I know how hard that second one came and I put a lot of work into just getting better, and so that's where my attention will be.

And I just, every week just trying to put myself in position to get number three, and whenever that time comes, none of us know when we're going to win. I think a lot of us know when we're going to play well, but winning, there's so many things that go into winning. You got to get the right bounces it seems like down the stretch. There's some luck involved when you need it.

And so you never know when your week is going to be, but being properly prepared every week is the most important thing and that's all I can do each week and I would like to notch off that third one here this week. That would be a nice way to do it.

Q. What's your objective each week that you play?

TONY FINAU: To win. I think just like any -- if you talk to most of the top players.

Q. I know that, but, I mean, I guess, do you think about winning on Thursday?

TONY FINAU: No, you don't think about winning on Thursday. I think, it's such a process, and for me, I feel like I have a pretty good process on how I should be going about weeks.

Winning is like the ultimate goal, but there's so many little things I think that it takes throughout a week to get to that ultimate goal and to even put yourself in that position. So for me, I've done some proper work this week to be properly prepared and I feel good about my game going into this week and that's how I want to feel each week and just be properly prepared myself to take on whatever task is at hand.

And for me, I've done that this week and I'm done for the day and I look forward to tomorrow and for the week.

Q. When did you get here? Like, September or something like that?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I wish. I've been here, I've been here for like almost three weeks. I was on Oahu for over a couple weeks and then I got here on Sunday. So I've only been here in Maui since Sunday, but I have been in Hawaii for almost three weeks.

Q. What did you do on Oahu?

TONY FINAU: I was just with my wife's family and, just

visiting family and just playing a lot of golf. I played at Turtle Bay, which is a place I'm very familiar with and a place that I love. So I was just there practicing and preparing for the start of the season, keeping my game sharp.

Played in a lot of wind, a lot of rain, so dealing with all those elements over the last couple weeks. But, yeah, just playing a lot of golf and being with family.

Q. What is your relationship with Turtle Bay?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, so I had a sponsorship with Turtle Bay in 2009 and 2010, which was a really cool thing at that time in my career where I didn't have any status anywhere.

But being from Utah, they gave me a couple, a place to play, a place to practice, and so that place will always be a special place for me.

And any time I'm back, my wife is from the North Shore and so it's perfect for me. She gets to visit family and I get to play golf at one of my favorite places.

Q. Is Kahuku your favorite high school football team in the nation?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it was cool. I had an opportunity to actually speak to the young men on that team and to the coaches. One of their assistant coaches is my good friend and he asked me if I would say a few words to the team before they played the state championship.

And so I did that, and I'm not taking any credit for it, but it was nice talking to those young men and I could tell that he were they were hungry to win a state championship. So I've converted myself to a Red Raider mostly because of my wife, but I'm a Panther through and through, just, I, West High School in Salt Lake City. Your alma mater will always be your top school, but I guess you could say I'm an adopted Red Raider.

Q. What does a golfer tell the football team ahead of the state championship?

TONY FINAU: Well, I definitely don't, and I made that clear when I talked to them. I said I'm definitely not going to tell you guys how to play football because I would be way out of my lane.

But I just shared some life experiences. A lot of these young men made it known to me that they look up to me as a Polynesian athlete and how I've conducted myself. They made it known that they like it.



So I just tried to explain to them some of the things that, my life experiences that have helped me to stay humble and to stay hungry throughout my career. And so I shared some of my stories with them and I think they have enjoyed it and hopefully some of them take it with them as they kind of go throughout their life and throughout their careers.

Q. You had some really blunt and fresh comments I thought after Northern Trust and going into BMW about criticism you've taken for not winning and other things. And the short version of one of your answers was: This is what I signed up for. You take everything with it. Is that something you carry with you today and anything that you can --

TONY FINAU: Yeah. No doubt. I love the saying, if it doesn't kill you it makes you stronger, and so that's something that I always had to tell myself kind of throughout that five-year drought and that stretch is, I had so many expectations put on me to win and not getting it done made me more hungry and just made me a stronger and better player.

So the media, the critics, the social media, all that, it's what we sign up for as professional athletes. It stings that we didn't really know we signed up for it when we were kids. We just wanted to play golf. But this is what comes with it. There's expectations when you get to a certain level. There's expectations that come with trying to become a great player and trying to become a great winner, and so you take 'em when they come and in stride and just keep going no matter what.

Q. To which critique do you pay attention? I'm not saying react to it necessarily, but clearly you read or see or hear or --

TONY FINAU: Yeah, sports is about winning. I've known that since I was a kid. So when you're not winning, you're losing, and in this sport that's a blunt statement just because you're not going to win a lot.

But at the end of the day, sports is about winning, and every time I tee it up I'm trying to win, so when it's not happening I understand the critique.

But in this game I also have to understand that it's a process to becoming a great player and you're not going to win all the time, so you got to take the small victories when they come and hopefully enough small victories will build up into a big victory and that's kind of how I look at it.

Q. Before you joined the TOUR, have you ever found yourself or did you ever find yourself watching a golf tournament and thinking to yourself, man, that guy

really blew it?

TONY FINAU: (Laughing.) Yeah, I mean, I watched a lot of tournaments I feel like growing up where guys, I said that, I just watched guys and say, golly, how did he do that?

Now, you know, you look at it a little bit different. You're in those shoes and you're in those moments, and the thing about these days, I don't, not a lot of guys choke. What I mean by that is if a guy's got a two-shot lead with three holes to go either somebody has to do something miraculous to win or that person is going to win. There's not a lot of making bogeys down the stretch or, there's always someone that plays great on Sunday to win the tournaments, and I love that the level of play is high to where that's the case, because it doesn't matter where you are on the leaderboard, on Sunday you got to play great or you're going to get lapped and somebody's going to beat you.

So that's at least what I've learned. This is now my eighth season on TOUR that guys. So many guys are prepared to win and so many guys want to win on Sunday that there's always going to be one or two guys that pull away from the field or that just play great on Sunday and puts together a magical week and wins.

So you just, every time you tee it up on Sunday, you want to be that guy that's the hottest and playing the best.

Q. Have you ever found it hard to congratulate somebody who beat you?

TONY FINAU: No, I've never found it hard to congratulate someone that's beat me because, man, I know what it takes to win and I'm happy for guys' success. I know that sound like there's no way that, there's no way Tony can truly be happy for somebody else. I truly am because I know the work that it takes and I know what it feels like being on that side.

So I am truly happy for the guys that have the success, that work their tails off, that get the wins, because, you know, guys congratulate me when I win as well and it feels great.

So I have always been that type of player and I have shown that type of sportsmanship from the beginning because I just think that's the right way to go about it. And you got to truly, you got to want to win, but you got to truly be happy for the guys that are playing well, that are pushing the game forward, that deserve their wins, and all those different things. They're all earned out here, and so I'm generally happy when guys win, even if they're beating

me, because that means they just played a little bit better and they did what it took to win that week.

Q. A couple other things. A, how much golf you watch on TV?

TONY FINAU: Very, very little. Yeah, very, very little.

Q. You're not going to lose any PIP points for this, by the way?

TONY FINAU: No. Yeah, I watch very little golf.

Q. Did you watch the PNC?

TONY FINAU: I followed it on my phone. I was practicing but I did follow it on my phone, yeah. So I just tracked. I didn't watch any shots live. I thought I was going to, but I wasn't able to but.

But, man, watching Tiger -- Charlie's swing is unbelievable. Like, it truly is. The positions he can put his club into. And, I mean, we all saw the his mannerisms, just like Tiger. So many of us that grew up watching Tiger, so some of our mannerisms are like him because we watched him so often, but none of us look like Tiger like Charlie does, you know, if that makes sense.

I mean, it's his son, it's his blood, and it's crazy. You know, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree with that one and we're going to be watching a lot of Charlie and it's quite something. It's something pretty special to have, to have Charlie kind of right off the back of Tiger.

Q. Your early schedule, you're heading over to Saudi which you've been both years, last year?

TONY FINAU: Just last year, yeah.

Q. Just last year.

TONY FINAU: Yeah.

Q. What did you think of the TOUR's policy on granting the release?

TONY FINAU: The TOUR has a history of granting releases to us to play, really on any TOUR, so I thought it was just a pretty standard, yeah, I expected it and thought it was pretty standard for them to do that and so I'll be playing in my second Saudi International.

Q. I guess there's strings attached on this one, too. If you haven't played, to play Pebble. You're kind of a quasi-regular at Pebble, aren't you.

TONY FINAU: I haven't played Pebble very much in the past. I think it's been since 2017 since I played Pebble, so it's been a little bit. But I'll be back at Pebble in the next couple years and looking forward to it. Pebble's a special place, a golf course that I think we all love. Great champions come off Pebble, it's a place where you want to win. So I would love to have the opportunity again and I will in the coming years.

Q. On a broader sense, on the proposed Saudi League wherever that stands, where do you stand on that, have you been approached, are you interested in it or is this just a one-off?

TONY FINAU: I mean, yeah, I've been approached just like I think most top guys, as you would expect. I don't have a stance on it yet. I think we're just like everyone, don't really know what's going on with that.

But I'm grateful to be on the PGA TOUR, it's been an honor for me to have an opportunity to play and display my talent in front of the world on a TOUR like the PGA TOUR, so much history there.

Again, I watch guys like Tiger, like Phil, all these guys play PGA TOUR evens and win PGA TOUR events. That's all I know since I was a kid, I didn't know any other tours and I didn't think any of the other tours had what the PGA TOUR had to offer and up to this point in my career very happy I'm on the PGA TOUR and having won a couple times I would like to win more this year.

Q. Collin Morikawa's great grandparents had a restaurant right down the street on Front Street in Lahaina and I was just wondering, did you, do you talk to Collin at all about, you know, kind of being maybe the hometown, you know, guys for this event? Have you done that at all?

TONY FINAU: I haven't talked to him, no, not being like the home town guys, but I know we both love poke, I know that's for sure. Collin and I got together and ate some poke back in Vegas. I would say Vegas probably has some of the best Hawaiian food on the main land. Outside of Hawaii I would say Vegas is probably the next best.

And he knows it, he lives in Vegas, he knows a couple great Hawaiian restaurants, so any time I'm down there we connect and eat some Hawaiian food. So there's definitely I think a special tie there and it seems like we like -- Hawaiian food's kind of our favorite food, so we get together for poke and so I definitely think that there's a tie there. We've never really talked about that tie that he has here, but now that you mention it maybe I'll bring it up to

him.

Q. Do you feel like you're the hometown guy or a hometown guy when you're in this tournament? I know you talked a little bit about it, but do you feel a connection with the fans at all?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, there's no question. I feel like I get, you know, a lot of fans cheering for me this week, any time I go to the Sony I feel the same way, and I think it's just that aloha spirit, that Polynesian following kind of here on the islands and I love it, I embrace it. And, you know, I like speaking my Pidgin when I can, so I'm out in the mix to making them feel like I'm local. So I love, I love that that's the case and I will never shy away from that. I like being in Hawaii.

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