

The Sentry

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Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA
Plantation Course at Kapalua

Chris Kirk

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Chris Kirk to the interview room here, our defending champion. Chris, welcome back, if we can get some thoughts on being back.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, an incredible place to be to start the year, for sure, and defending champion makes it just even a little bit more sweet, I guess. But it's hard to beat the experience here this week. The Sentry does a great job of running the tournament, and just the whole family-friendly environment that they create for the players is incredible, and just to be in 80 degrees and sunshine is pretty hard to beat.

THE MODERATOR: What's your off-season been like, and then what are your goals for the upcoming season?

CHRIS KIRK: Off-season was great. I haven't played a whole lot of golf. I only played two events since the TOUR Championship, but really enjoyed my fall, enjoyed my time at home with my wife and kids and, yeah, it was just having that like bulk time at home with my family was really an incredible experience and definitely made a lot of memories that we'll have for a long time.

As far as 2025, goals are very similar to what they are every year. I am a 100 percent process person. My goals are to really just sort of stick to my routines of what I like to do to prepare each week, and then I have a lot of things that I like to do at home. My time at home is more work on my physical fitness and strength and stuff in the gym, and then get the golf stuff in when I feel like I need to. But really just want to focus on just being present, being where I'm at each day, each week, each month, and just really living for each moment, whether I'm at a tournament or whether I'm at home. That's kind of my philosophy in life, I guess, and that's how I play the game of golf. It's like, you know, just be where your feet are and focus on what's in front of you today and do the best that you can.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll start with questions.

Q. Any left-handed golf this off-season?

CHRIS KIRK: I played, I didn't play as much as I thought I might. I did not break 80. I shot 80 once, but did not break 80, unfortunately. I probably only played four or five times, not nearly as much as I thought that I would. Just kind of got busy and had a little tweak of my back, but nothing serious, but that held me back on my left-handed game a little bit.

Q. I heard a lot of guys use the, Be where my feet are phrase. Scottie says it, a bunch of other guys. Is there somewhere that you all are getting it or is it just good universal advice that people ascribe to?

CHRIS KIRK: For me personally it's probably different than others. Mine sort of comes from my program of recovery is where mine comes from. Just sort of living for each moment and taking one day at a time. And so that's kind of where it comes from for me personally, but it applies to every aspect of my life.

Q. If someone were to ask you, and I guess that's me right now, how different is the TOUR now than it was 10 years ago? How would you best describe that?

CHRIS KIRK: It's different in so many ways it's hard to really sum it up, I guess. The level of play and the consistency of players is really high. I feel so fortunate that I've been able to kind of keep up and progress, and I feel like my game is a lot better now than it was 10 years ago when I was also, I was in the top 50 in the world at that time too, and I feel like I'm so much a better player now than I was then, but everybody else is too.

The golf courses, that's one thing that I say a lot is that the PGA TOUR agronomy is just insane these days. From my first couple years on TOUR I remember there were a couple places where the greens would maybe be a little thin or fairways were a little thin or maybe someplace lost the greens or something. Like, we show up every single week and the golf course is absolutely immaculate every single week. So I don't know what's different with PGA TOUR agronomy, but they have made some huge advances.



Obviously we're playing for a whole lot more money, and I've been amazed, I think that a lot of us were kind of worried about what would the TOUR be like when Tiger was not out here every single week. I've been, you know, really pleasantly surprised, I guess, that the TOUR has flourished, and we have a ton of great young stars, and there's great stories each week. So I just am so happy with where -- I know there are a lot of things that people want to see changed still, and things that could be better, but professional golf is just in such a great place, I think.

Q. Who do you know more about now than you wouldn't of a year ago, when you talk about new people coming out?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, you see there's a lot of really, really good young players. Matt McCarty is an example. He won three times on the Korn Ferry Tour, and then won in the desert in the fall. I think he'll have a great year this year. Players like Austin Eckroat, who is, it's amazing that there are guys like that that I hadn't really heard a whole lot about him, but I played with him a few times this past year, and it's just like, wow, I mean, this guy is just incredible at every aspect of the game. So there's just so much players like that coming up.

Then the star players have continued to establish themselves as well.

Q. Crowded.

CHRIS KIRK: It is very crowded, yeah. I know there's a ton of other guys that I'm just not thinking of right now that are emerging in the game, and it's just about, I think what -- going back to your question about the difference in the TOUR, like you can look at a guy that's hanging around 80th on the FedExCup list and nobody really knows a whole lot about him. But you go watch him hit balls or play golf with him, you would be blown away by how good they are.

Q. Last year obviously it was much closer to the devastating fire. Now we're a year past that. Impressions as the vibe maybe around the players and just knowing where we are now as Lahaina and West Maui slowly recovers?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, it's amazing to see, there's still such an incredibly strong sense of unity here within the community, the Lahaina Strong, and just it's just, Hawaiian culture is an awesome thing to take in and learn about in general, but after the tragedy of the fires, it's been really cool to see the -- obviously the Sentry and the tournament has gotten behind the local community -- but really the community itself more so than anything, just, you know, not

sure I've ever seen a group of people band together quite like this in support of each other. So we are happy to do anything that we can to help, but it's amazing to see a community that's that strong.

Q. How cool is it to see your peers and yourself, and I don't need any specifics, but how cool is it that a lot of you guys, if not all of you guys, are doing what you can to help?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, this is a special place for us. Anybody that's played this tournament is going to have some incredible memories from this week. Whether it's golf or otherwise with your family or whatever it may be. Just getting the opportunity to come here to Maui and experience it and play in this golf tournament is so amazing. So I think that that's, that probably has a lot to do with it, why people want to help so much, and why players want to support this community that's been so good to us.

Q. You got to do the tree planting yesterday?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah.

Q. And when this tournament very -- it's very conscious of the conservation, the watershed -- how cool is it for you to be a little bit of a part of that yesterday and maybe in the future?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, it was a really cool event doing the tree planting. And again, like I was saying, getting a little glimpse into Hawaiian culture there with things like that is really cool. Just getting to see the way that the people take care of, not only take care of each other, but take care of the environment here in their homeland and their local environment is really inspiring to see.

Q. Following up, what was an example of something you've seen of how the community here has banded together since the fires?

CHRIS KIRK: I think it's just, I just feel this like general sense of community of everybody coming together. You see it everywhere with the way people speak to each other, and whether it's billboards or signs or stuff on TV or whatever it may be, you just, it's more of a feeling, I guess, than any specific events that I'm talking about. Obviously people are donating, people are getting out and helping to, helping others rebuild, and that type of thing, but it's really just that feeling and that sense of unity that is very obvious, I'm sure you've seen it too.

Q. Having won here last year to kick off the season, how do you view the whole season for yourself? How do you look at it?

CHRIS KIRK: There were a lot of really great things that I did last year, and there were a lot of things that I would have liked to have been a lot better at. I think that if you had told me starting off the year that I was going to win a Signature Event and make the TOUR Championship, and have a solid, you know, a solid year in the majors, I would have been really happy with that. Looking forward to this year, it's much of the same process that got me into a good year last year. I think that when I look at it statistically, I had a really great year last year and didn't putt very well. I had some weeks where my putting was great, but that's something that I'm still working on, trying to find is a little bit more consistency with the putting. I think that if I can take care of that and continue on the path that I am with the rest of my game, it should be another great year.

Q. When is the last year you've felt happy with your putting?

CHRIS KIRK: That's a good question. For the whole entire year? Maybe never, I don't know. I mean, it's been an interesting thing for me, because I've had, when I do putt well, I putt extremely well. So the weeks where I have good putting weeks, the stats will show that they're through the roof good. It's just a matter of how often those come. So, I try to look at it less of like the overall statistical year, and just try to see okay, how many weeks was I able to have those great putting weeks, and then what can I do -- and it's always, you know, every aspect of this game can be a mystery, for sure, of how to get better at it. Sometimes you can be working your butt off to try to get better and it makes you worse, I mean, you never know. So, yeah, obviously I would love to bring up some of those weeks where it's not very good to at least mediocre, you know, but it's a constant process, and as soon as I get done here I'm going to the putting green to go work on it, so it's just plugging away.

Q. I'm going to rephrase, because I think your answer is very honest and perfect, actually, but what year, what was the last year where you felt like, Well, my putting is not the biggest thing I need to work on, it's something, some other part of the game.

CHRIS KIRK: I mean, I putted pretty good in 2023, I think. I don't remember what my stats were there. They probably weren't in the top 20 or anything like that, but they were pretty solid. I don't know. I would have to look back at the numbers, but I don't feel like it's been like a glaring thing until 2024 was when I had, statistically, it looked a lot worse than some of the other years.

Q. Have you changed putters or gotten a putting coach, done anything to try to rectify it?

CHRIS KIRK: This fall or actually this summer, it was kind of in the spring when I started really struggling I started working with David Angelotti this summer, he's at Sea Island. So we have made some changes, mostly to see -- if you look at my putting from years past, I had very poor posture. So now my, he's improved my posture a ton, and a few other mechanics of my stroke. So now it's just kind of the mechanics side of it is so much better. Now the main focus is on, Okay, how do I take these better mechanics and work that into better green reading and working on speed and all those type of things to kind of tie it all together. So, it feels like there's been some really good -- for example, in the BMW in Colorado, to finish 9th that week, to make it into the TOUR Championship, I putted amazing that week. So I keep having these weeks where it's like, okay, I've got it now, you know, and then it will be not so good for a few weeks after that. So, I'm seeing more and more glimpses of really good, I feel like, so I think it's one of those things where I just need to stay patient and just keep working on what I've been working on, keep plugging away, plugging away, plugging away, and it's just gradually going to get better and better, because I feel like I'm on a really good path as far as that was concerned.

Q. What was your favorite win last year that wasn't your own?

CHRIS KIRK: Good question. I don't watch a whole lot of golf, so I would say probably the most impressive win I probably would give that to Xander at the Open Championship. Just, you know, being -- I know that watching it on TV that I'm sure it looked miserable. It was cold, it was rainy, it was awful. You cannot accurately describe how horrible it is to play golf in that conditions. So, to play as well as he did was just, I mean, I didn't, that was the one where I, you know, obviously I have a lot of confidence in myself, I believe in my game, I'm a top-50 player in the world, I watched that and was like, there's no chance in hell I could do that. I mean, that was insane. To play that -- and Scottie played pretty much just as good, but to play that well in those conditions was mind blowing.

Q. Curious, on another parallel level to this, changing TOUR, and there's great stories it feels like a lot during the year. When we shrink the cards, when we almost kind of shrink some of the fields, is there a chance the TOUR is going to be losing some feel-good stories, out-of-nowhere stories, and are they not part of the fabric of golf, your Schefflers and your Rafa Campos or whatever.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, I guess that's possible, I haven't really thought about it that way. I mean, I don't think that

changing that -- from one perspective it's like the great players make it, you know. You look at all the stories of missing at Q-School, making it at Q-School. I have some times where -- I remember a year at second stage where I was four or five outside the number and I shot 8-under the last day to make it through second stage, to get to finals, to get to the Korn Ferry Tour, and then won twice that year. And you think, okay, would I, maybe if I don't shoot 8-under that day, maybe I never make it to the PGA TOUR, but I think I do, you know. I think that the guys that are really, really good make it, and that's just kind of the way that it works out. So I think that there's going to be, obviously, fewer cards and I don't even know if I agree with it or disagree with it, I just try to not worry about it, but the great players make it.

Q. What year was that?

CHRIS KIRK: That was 2009. Yeah, so funny, so side note to that, so you look at how important those -- I remember I played that final round, I played with Jason Kokrak and Chris Nallen, you remember Chris Nallen? He played at Arizona. Chris Nallen shot 7-under and I shot 8-under, and we both made it. And it felt like just this, here-we-go kind of moment. Jason Kokrak shot like even or something like that and missed. And so you think that, you know, if you follow the story of like, okay, that was the thing that changed your career, you would think that Chris and I both make it and Jason Kokrak doesn't. But those two end up flipping. Chris Nallen didn't end up making it as a pro and Jason Kokrak, it just took him an extra year or whatever. So, yeah, the good players find a way.

Q. Curious, did you have a course that you would sneak on to as a kid?

CHRIS KIRK: No. No. Growing up playing there was a golf course that was a public course in my neighborhood, Eagle Watch, and my parents didn't really play golf, my dad plays occasionally, but not much. But I'm pretty sure -- I was trying to remember this, somebody was asking me about this a month ago or so, I think that my junior membership for the year was \$300. So my parents forked that over, so I didn't have to sneak on anywhere. It was in my neighborhood, Eagle Watch, I went there every single day. 300 bucks for the year, that was it.

Q. You always started at 1, or could you sneak, or was your house closer to the 4th hole or 4th tee?

CHRIS KIRK: No, we didn't live on the course, so, yeah, I had to get a ride to the clubhouse anyway, so I was starting on 1 or 10, anyway.

Q. When is the last time you paid a greens fee?

CHRIS KIRK: Paid a greens fee? I feel like it might have -- I think it might have been on Oahu a few years ago, because Sepp and Michael, my caddie, and I, went and played some course, I can't even remember the name of it, and we just booked a tee time online and we went. And I can't remember if they, I can't remember if we even told 'em that we were PGA TOUR players or not, and, but if we did, they didn't care. So, but I can't, I'm not, you know, don't quote me on that, I don't remember exactly. But we were over here a few days early and we wanted to play with Michael, and so we went over and played -- gosh, I wish I could remember. It's over west of the airport over there. I can't remember what it's called. Even if you said it I'm not going to remember.

Q. Was it nice?

CHRIS KIRK: It wasn't Ko Olina, because I stayed there before.

Q. It wasn't high end?

CHRIS KIRK: It was different, yeah. It was great. It was fun. But, yeah, I'm pretty sure I paid to play that day. But I can't think of any other ones in awhile.

Q. Would it shocked you if I told you Cantlay couldn't think of one?

CHRIS KIRK: No.

Q. Are you a destination guy? I mean, some guys go, are you a --

CHRIS KIRK: No, I like going on trips and vacation, but not to play golf. I do remember -- so I came here, we came on vacation to Maui when I was 12, and I remember at the time I think the greens fee here at Plantation Course may have been more than my junior membership for the year. So I was 12, and I was really, really getting into golf, and so my parents paid for my dad and I to play at the Plantation Course. And as I've seen with some of my amateur partners today, this course, if you don't fly the ball really far, which I didn't when I was 12, it will eat your lunch. I think I shot like 95 and cried when I was done because I was so sad, because I was, you know, I wasn't shooting 95.

Q. What were you shooting back then?

CHRIS KIRK: 75 or under. I would shoot under par every now and then, that kind of thing.

Q. Trying to think your first year back here would have



been 2011, 2014, something like that?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, my rookie year -- I won my first event in 2011, so 2012 would have been the first year.

Q. Did you have any flashbacks when you got here?

CHRIS KIRK: Thankfully not. It was kind of funny to come here and play as a pro remembering, like, I couldn't carry that ditch right there, you know, or the canyon or whatever.

Yeah, it's not exactly in play for me anymore. But, yeah, I guess I would have been probably around 1997, maybe '98 when we came, when I was a kid.

Q. That was pretournament days.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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