

The American Express

Wednesday, January 20, 2021

La Quinta, California, USA

La Quinta Country Club

Tony Finau

Press Conference

MARK WILLIAMS: We would like to welcome Tony Finau into the virtual interview room here at the American Express.

Tony, this is your fourth start in the tournament. Finished 14th last year. But this year's tournament looks a little bit different, just two courses instead of three and no pro-am participants and no fans. Just, what's that like? What's that been like for you in coming to this event with this different look as well.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, well, I think, first of all, I'm happy to be here and compete in this tournament. It's one that I enjoy. And while I'm making my fourth appearance, I really just enjoy the area, the golf course. And after last year, I thought American Express did great job hosting their first American Express championship here in Palm Springs, so I was happy to be back and looking forward to a pro-am.

But I think as last year kind of taught all of us, you just kind of sometimes just expect the unexpected. You just never know on any given day what could change with the schedule. As we have seen this year, both pro-ams have been cancelled. The amateurs are not playing in the AT&T and not playing in this American Express.

But I think you kind of just roll with the punches as a player and I'm looking forward to competing against the best in the world here this week, and we're playing the two golf courses. It's nice to have to just study two of them and not three, kind of looking at the bright side, right? It's nice to just study and prepare on two golf courses instead of three.

But we will miss the amateurs playing this week. It's a tournament that I think that a lot of us look forward to, either getting with our sponsors, playing with them, those who sponsor the tournament, I mean, being on TOUR seven years now, you recognize what it takes to run a golf tournament, and so you like to play with the amateurs and you enjoy their company and we don't get to do it that often in this type of format, so we are going to miss them this year and miss the fans, but it's been unique times and just, I look forward to just competing in a different stage this year than it was in the past.



MARK WILLIAMS: All right. We'll go straight into questions.

Q. You just talked about rolling with the punches. I'm curious if you had to pick one lesson that you think you learned in 2020, what would it be?

TONY FINAU: Oh, one lesson? When it comes to golf and our schedule, I would probably say just patience and learning that nothing really happens without just staying patient with the scheduling, I think is probably an easy way to put it. I don't know if -- we didn't know how many tournaments we were going to play last year. I enjoyed the time away from the game to be with my family, but I kind of had to be patient on the scheduling and knowing when I was going to play, when I wasn't going to play.

So I would say patience, along with just preparation. We didn't know what tournaments we were going to play in, but when the time came, we had to be prepared. So I guess you can call it my two P's, patience and preparation from 2020.

Q. Kind of unrelated, but you posted stuff on social media kind of tracking how hard you hit your ball when it comes to clubhead speed, ball speed, those types of things and obviously Bryson has kind of made this a talking point. When you sit down and you come up with goals, do you use those numbers? Let's say, golf ball speed, for example, have you ever looked at 200 miles an hour golf ball speed and that's where I want to be six months from now or do you look at something different more esoteric?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I have dialed back on my tone when it comes to distance, just in that I feel like I've, I'm going to get better and I need to put more emphasis on my short game than any other part of my game. It's nice to have the speed and I do have the speed, but it's not really a goal of mine to, like Bryson, to try to get to, let's average 195 or 200 and see where that takes us on the TOUR.

I think at first being someone that did have speed, Bryson kind of proved my theory wrong right out of quarantine, just in that he was able to average in the low- to mid-190s ball speed and hit it straight. I didn't think that was possible.



So seeing him do that, it did, I think, changed my tune a bit. But after tinkering around with it a bit, I knew that it wasn't for me and I'm going to get better and put more emphasis on my short game as have I been and I think that's where I'm going to excel and get better.

So I don't really have ball speed goals. If I want to jump on one and hit one harder, I just do that. I don't really know what the numbers are going to be. I know they're going to be pretty high for me. But my emphasis for me is just going back to short game and trying to make more putts.

Q. Kind of thinking back to your days without status on mini-tours, kind of a trip down memory lane, if you could kind of reflect on the unique struggles of those times when you don't really know what your schedule's looking like and kind of just what that vibe's like overall and kind of the challenges of that.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it's a crazy world, that mini-tour life. I think, as I think about it, they're the same. We're all afraid of the unknown and I think that's how that life is, how I remember my mini-tour days was just, you have one shot four game to be at a high level during the fall, and that's for Q-School, but before that, it's all just trying to get by, financially, emotionally, physically, just trying to stay a float, trying to make sure your game is ready, that, you want to strike hot in the fall, and Q-School is just -- Q-School is King. Q-School's our major championship when you're playing mini-tour golf and when you don't have any status, Q-School is absolutely everything. That's your golden opportunity to take your life and your game to the next level.

For me it took seven years of that and continue to try and believe in myself and convince myself that I was good enough to do it. So it was, it wasn't easy times, a lot of struggles, both financially and sometimes emotionally, but at the end of the road, I saw the light at the end of the tunnel and here I am with, just entering my 7th year on the PGA TOUR.

And I actually have a pretty cool story here at TPC Stadium. I played on the National Pro Golf Tour, which is a mini-tour event in 2011, and I made my biggest check here. It was \$21,000 to the winner. And so I, and that was my biggest check I had made in my mini-tour days. And it ended up being like my second biggest check overall that I've ever made in my mini-tour days, but at that time, that was the most money I had ever made in a week's work.

So I've got pretty good vibes out here on the Nicklaus and Stadium golf course and hopefully bring some of those winning vibes later this week.

Q. With this year, kind of the combined season on the Korn Ferry TOUR and no Q-School last year, there's going to be a lot of players that kind of don't have the status and are going to be chasing Mondays and sponsors invite. What would be kind of your general advice to them as they attempt to get status through that kind of uncertain method?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it's a great time for them to learn who they are as a player and as a person because if you are good enough, your game will shine through at the proper time and you'll become a star or you'll become an elite player and it's a lot harder to figure out who you are when the lights are shining the brightest on you. Learn who you are, how you do it, learn the strengths of your game so when it's time for your opportunity and it's time to step up you've got what it takes and you know who you are as a person and as a player.

Q. Do you remember what you might have bought with that winner's check at the time, the 21,000?

TONY FINAU: Well, I'm pretty sure I gave a lot of it to my parents. And then I never really, I never owned a car until I was married, so, wasn't married at that time, but I just remember that being a big deal for me, a lot of stress off my shoulders moving forward. I was able to take care of my Q-School that year and then just line up some tournaments from that. That's kind of, you live on a week-to-week, day-to-day basis in the mini-tour life and that was able to get me into, really take care of me for the year.

I did a pretty, I was pretty frugal with my money in those years and you have to be, every penny, every dollar is accounted for. And so there's a lot of great lessons that I learned during that time, but I think probably learning how to budget your money is probably near the top of the list.

Q. I hope you are doing well. I wanted to ask you about the Charity Challenge today. Why did you want to participate?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, well, I love being an ambassador for American Express. I think that's an authentic thing for me and when they brought forth the, had some ideas a few months ago of potentially having a celebrity matchup or, really, anything, I told them, I'm all in. Whatever, however you guys set it up, I'm there and I would love to participate.

So this is what we have come up with as a way to not only give back to these charitable donations here in California, and specifically here Coachella and Palm Springs, but it's an opportunity, I think, to continue to give the fans some viewership and just some great entertainment.

So I look forward to competing with Landon. I've never met him, big fan, so I'm looking forward to this event later today.

Q. Jumping off of that, how important is the charitable aspect of this tournament to you?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I mean, it's everything. Charity is everything, I think, in our game. The PGA TOUR has done a tremendous job on the amount and the impact I think that we have on communities. I think that's why we continue to play, continue to try and do, continue to just play and give back to these communities, and so really it's everything. We're going to have great time out there, but it's even better when you know that the money that's being raised is for a great cause and is going to help others, and in our situation, help the Coachella area and people in this community. So I love being a part of that and having the foundation myself, I know what it means.

Q. I might have this wrong, but kind of another long drive question, are you having a long drive competition today with Phil?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, we're having a long drive competition on number 11, and I think there's, yeah, there's some good money on the line. You have to hit the fairway, I think, to win. But I know for a fact my ball's going to be further than Phil's, whether it's going to be in the fairway or not, that's yet to be determined, but I will hit it further than him.

Q. But you feel pretty good about your chances as well? That's what I'm curious about.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I feel great about them.

Q. I want to talk a little bit about the Charity Challenge today. So you'll be playing for Youth Development and Education and with the Tony Finau Foundation. That kind of coincides with what you believe in, so were you able to choose that or does this mean a little bit more to you?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I wasn't able to choose it, but since it does go right alongside what I like to do and what I support through my Tony Finau Foundation, it was just a very authentic thing to do. I'm looking forward to it. I hope some day I'm able to meet some of those that are affected through these charitable donations in the years to come. I'll be playing this tournament for many years. I love being here. And again, the impact that I hope that we make through these charitable donations is going to be a big one and very helpful in this community.

So I, again, just having a foundation, I know how much you can do with these type of funds and it's going to be fun to play for it, but it's going to be even better to see the physical evidence that comes from participating in something like this. So I hope that at some point in my career I'm able to see the good that it does and in the years to come. Since you guys aren't allowed to have those youth out here this year, hopefully we can have them here in the years to come.

Q. I've spoken to a few local charities and they just express so much gratitude for you guys in doing what you do. And, you know, this is the second tournament of 2021. You're coming off the Sentry tournament. After everything was halted last year due to the pandemic, are you feeling anxious, excited about getting started this year? What's kind of, what was your mindset going into 2021?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, well I think 2020 gave me a great perspective just on life in general and I think for most of us I think it did. I had an opportunity to spend a lot of time with my kids I would have never otherwise had without the pandemic and just without having the opportunity to play.

So I was able to spend a lot of time with my family, reflect on our life, how I gave. Through my foundation we had a lot of charitable donations that were being made to try and help others through the pandemic. So a lot of my efforts and thoughts I think were involved in that.

I think I'm always going to -- I'm a competitor, I grind, I work, and golf is a big part of my life, but honestly, this year I'm grateful for what I have, the perspective that I have, the foundation that I have, to have helped some in need through 2020. And that's really what I have to offer in 2021. I'm grateful to be in the position I am and whatever happens this year, there's still going to be a lot of help needed throughout our country and hopefully we continue to do that, not only through playing and being able to maybe distract some of others from, from giving them some entertainment and some source of relief from whatever they're going through. That's what I love about sports, but hopefully I can do that as well as continue to contribute through my foundation.

MARK WILLIAMS: All right, thank you. Before you go I need to ask you about the news that broke yesterday about Tiger Woods having another surgery, just your reaction to that, were you surprised, just if you could share that with us.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I was just surprised because I thought he was, he looked pretty healthy during Augusta National, having seen him around and everything, so I was

surprised that he had another surgery.

But I think one thing that we learn from Tiger is how resilient he is. I know he'll do everything that he can to get back and play at the highest level he can. And our game's going to miss him, there's no question about it, there's no player like him in the history of our game. And so we're going to miss him, miss competing against him, but just miss who he is for the game of golf and hopefully he returns asap. Of course when he's healthy.

MARK WILLIAMS: Absolutely. Well we appreciate your time, Tony, thanks for spending it with us and good luck this week and enjoy the American Express Charity Challenge this afternoon.

TONY FINAU: All right. Thanks, Mark.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports