

# The American Express

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La Quinta, California, USA

La Quinta Country Club

## Chris Kirk

### Press Conference

MARK WILLIAMS: We're joined by Chris Kirk here in the virtual media center at the American Express. This is your 8th start here, I was looking at your stats, the first time you played was 2011 and you had your best finish that year, tie for 7th. That was 10 years ago. What do you recall of playing in the event back then when you first came here and what was your impression of this event.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, I remember that well. I remember playing I would say my main memory is playing the final round with Bill Haas and watching him, I don't think that he won that year, I think he had won the year before, and he probably finished second or something that year and watching him shoot 7- or 8-under the final round in my eyes like it was nothing and being pretty amazed.

It was my second tournament in my rookie year on the PGA TOUR and it was a pretty eye opening thing for me, obviously I played well, finished 7th, but it was just like watching him and how just calm he looked trying to win the tournament, I was just like, Okay, I've still got a ways to go here (laughing.)

MARK WILLIAMS: Yeah, this year it's a little bit different, no amateurs and obviously missing La Quinta, just the two golf courses. How do you think that, if any, will change the strategy or the way you approach this event this year.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, definitely scoring on Stadium is the last few years has been by far the most difficult of the three golf courses, so we'll just kind of have to see how it goes with the weather, we have had a little bit cooler temperatures the last few days, I think it's supposed to be pretty nice tomorrow. So Stadium to me is a very weather-dependent course, if you can get it on a nice warm, calm day, it's still a difficult golf course, but with the par-5s and you get some wedges in your hand you can kind of shoot a pretty good score out there. But I played it some days and relatively high winds and man it can be a real beast. So I think that will depend a lot on how it goes, but it's certainly playing in the Stadium three times you really got to play out there, you can't kind of scrape it around and still shoot a good number on that golf course.



MARK WILLIAMS: For sure. Coming off the Sony Open in Hawaii last week, a T-2 finish there which was huge for you, obviously securing your full status after playing on a medical extension, you're a four-time winner on the PGA TOUR and I'm sure each of those wins is unique and special in each way, but knowing that you needed to perform the way that you did last week to secure your job, basically, for the rest of the season, how is that feeling different from a victory, I guess? It must be a different feeling, but is there some similarities is what I'm asking you.

CHRIS KIRK: Very similar, yeah. It certainly felt like a win to me. It just totally kind of changed my year to say the least. To go from I mean I was about to sign up for some Monday qualifiers and definitely had already looked at the Korn Ferry schedule when I would be playing out there and going from that to now being where I'll most likely get into Bay Hill and going to be able to play THE PLAYERS and just a completely kind of back to the schedule that I've enjoyed the last 10 years is pretty nice, I certainly won't be taking it for granted, that's for sure.

And, yeah, obviously winning the tournament would have been a real bonus, but I kind of won my tournament, I guess you could say.

MARK WILLIAMS: Absolutely. That's terrific. We'll take questions, please.

**Q. I know you said something along the lines of, you can only get so nervous, so I know in that situation you probably weren't thinking about your situation, but when you do get it done on Sunday like that, given the fact I'm sure it was on your mind, can you compare it to a victory? Was it the same nerves that you had in your four victories and all the experiences that you had along the way?**

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, I mean I was incredibly nervous. Thanks for the cup, Rex. Before I get further into your question.

**Q. You're welcome.**

CHRIS KIRK: Yes, it was certainly different and things are,



I would say the last couple years have been obviously wildly different for me. So I felt like I was starting to make some progress in the fall, I finished 18th at RSM which was my best finish on TOUR since I came back from my leave, if you will. And that was the first time where like on Sunday I was a little bit nervous, but I felt okay, I felt like, all right, I can still do this.

Then on this past Sunday, Saturday and Sunday at Sony, it was definitely an enhanced feeling of that. Feeling like, okay, I'm really nervous but that's not going to hold me back from playing great, I can still hit great shots, I can still make putts, which is, you know, it felt incredible, it felt a lot like I felt in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, those years where I was playing really great I would get in these situations coming down the stretch on Sunday where I had a chance to win and I felt so nervous, but I knew that everybody else did too and I felt like I'm really good at handling this situation when I'm really nervous and when I feel under the gun, like I know that I can still do it.

It doesn't make me feel any less nervous, but I had this kind of sense of peace and calm that, like I can handle this situation and I can handle it maybe better than some of these other guys can handle it. And so that was, maybe it didn't have that much confidence this past week on Sunday, but it definitely, it felt like, all right, my nerves and my mental game are not going to hold me back, which is something I haven't felt in quite awhile. So that was a huge relief.

And then, getting done playing and knowing that I had done what I needed to do to secure my card for the rest of the season was just a huge relief and definitely some disbelief there, to be honest, in that I just was shocked that going into a week knowing that you need to finish top-3 and doing it, I mean that's the, whatever, that's just kind of silly, it's not like -- I think a lot of people have -- it's been great hearing all the congratulations, oh, it was so clutch, it was awesome. It's just like, to me it feels like, you know what, it just happened, I just was kind of there and playing golf and that was the way it all played out, it wasn't like I -- it didn't feel anyways like, Oh, I really dug deep and made it happen when it had to happen, it just kind of worked out. So I'm very thankful that it did.

**Q. Do you enjoy feeling nervous, maybe opposed to how you would have felt in that position, three, four years ago?**

CHRIS KIRK: Yes, that has definitely changed. I definitely got, for awhile there, I would say probably more so in like maybe late 2017, 2018, beginning of 2019, where whenever I got in a situation where I was starting to feel nervous I hated it. And I don't know how that related to the

personal issues that I was going through, I think they probably went hand in hand more than I realized at the time, but I just, I just hated it.

So I got to the point where I was kind of like, why am I doing this? Like whenever I'm -- because obviously you're the most nervous when you're playing well and you're having success. So it's like, I'm out here playing every week and I want to do well, but then when I do well I just feel like I'm going to throw up. It just feels awful.

So that's something that's been awesome to have that come back, where obviously being really nervous it's never going to be like a comfortable feeling, but you can still like it. And I'm back to where now when I start to feel a little bit nervous, no, it's not comfortable, but I love it, I love that that's where I'm at, because that's why I really want to play, I really want to compete and I really want to see how good I can be again. So it's a sign, obviously, that I'm doing some things the right way.

**Q. I wanted to ask if you think there was anything from your win at the King and Bear Classic last year that you were able to draw from I guess this weekend at Sony as you got that top-3 after feeling the vibes being in contention and pulling it off at the King and Bear.**

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, thanks for the question. Yeah, there was definitely some parallels. I had my buddy Michael Cromie that was on the bag at the King and Bear as well that was with me this past week at Sony and here in Palm Springs as well. So that was some familiarity there. And just to kind of that same feeling like I was talking about of being nervous coming down the stretch but having some of that belief again that I can handle this and I can do this.

Obviously it didn't work out last week to a win, but it felt like, especially on that back nine, I kind of did everything that I could do. So I'm definitely happy with the way I played and happy with the outcome, for sure.

**Q. And then were you like had you let your mind think that you might have to go back to the Korn Ferry TOUR a little bit if it didn't work out last week or had you not considered that fully, I guess?**

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, absolutely. I was planning, this year I was planning on playing kind of a mixed schedule of some PGA TOUR events, some Korn Ferry events, playing some Monday qualifiers for the PGA TOUR also.

And I got to think that one of the things that made what I did last week possible is that I was perfectly okay with that. I was completely content with just playing whenever I got to play. I was really happy with where my game was at

and I felt like I was really finally starting to play good and really put it all together and feeling good about all aspects of my game.

So I felt like in my mind, whether it was -- fulfilling my medical like I did last week was the least likely way for me to get back to the PGA TOUR. I was, at 40 something on the Korn Ferry TOUR Money List, going into last week I think I was about 130th on the PGA TOUR FedExCup list, and then I also had the possibility of the Korn Ferry TOUR Finals.

So the current year FedExCup, current year Korn Ferry list or the Korn Ferry Finals, I had those, those three different avenues were how I saw myself getting back to good status on the PGA TOUR next fall.

The way that it worked out, like I said, was probably the least likely option. The best option, but the least likely option. So I was very content though to be chasing those other three avenues and just trying to go play well. And I was very confident that I was going to get back on to the PGA TOUR by this fall one way or the other. But obviously couldn't be happier with the way that it turned out.

**Q. Just want to ask you, how would you compare your game now versus when you were top-20 in the world?**

CHRIS KIRK: I would say it feels pretty similar. I think if anything there are times lately when my ball striking has felt a little bit better. I feel like I've become a much better driver of the ball over the past few years. My putting the last couple years has been what's really held me back. This past fall I started working with Ramon Bescansa on my putting and I'm going to actually see him in a little bit this afternoon, and he has been a huge, huge game changer for me, just night and day as far as my confidence in my putting, being able to have a really great consistent practice routine.

I don't feel like I'm going to go out and make 30 footers all day or anything, some days I might, but I feel like I'm going to show up every day and I'm going to roll the ball well and then what happens beyond that is kind of out of my control. But he's given me a ton of confidence in a part of my game that I was really struggling with. So that's been what's kind of allowed me to put together a week like last week and hopefully we'll be able to continue some consistent play as we go through this year.

**Q. And now that you do have the card, what are your goals, what do you still hope to accomplish in your career?**

CHRIS KIRK: To be honest, I've never really been

someone that's set a whole lot of goals for myself. Obviously winning out here is what all of us want to do, but I am really just enjoying being back in the process again and spending the time, putting the work in to try to feel like I can be as competitive as possible and just enjoying working on it every day. I am definitely a big process person versus a goal and goal-oriented person, so I love getting out there and putting the work in, practicing and just kind of seeing what it gives me.

**Q. Lastly, just to kind of understand the life-style change you've made. What's something you did in the past where you look back and you go, man, I can't believe I did that and how do you really spend your time now differently?**

CHRIS KIRK: Oh, there's a lot of things that I can't believe I did and most of them I don't really want to talk about to be honest with you. But I would say the big, the big thing is just how delusional my mind became for awhile there and how I let my kind of anxiety run rampant, which was fueled by the life-style that I was living and just completely irrational thoughts that I got to that felt very, very real and reasonable to me. So that's one of the best gifts of sobriety and recovery is that I can kind of, I'm able to see things for what they are now, which is great and gives me a great sense of peace that no matter what comes my way, as long as I stay sober and stay in my program and do things the right way, then I can deal with whatever.

MARK WILLIAMS: That's all we got. Just before we let you go I just, like many, noticed on television last week on Sunday there was a couple of your colleagues I think Brendon Todd, maybe Harris English, were out there to welcome you when you finished. That's something that's typically for winners, but it's not something that typically happens for runner-ups, and now that you've had a few days to process that and reflect on that, how meaningful was that for your colleagues and friends to come out and see you finish in that way.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, it was incredible. That's some of my best friends that I stayed in the house with last week, Brendon, Harris, Sepp Straka, Keith Mitchell, we just, we had a great time last week. And they knew how big that was to be able to get it done and, yeah, so to see all those guys when I got done playing, I mean I know that those guys are, just to feel how genuinely happy they were for me is, it's a cool thing that we have in golf that other sports don't really have. That they're obviously my competitors and my adversaries, if you will, but we all really want to help each other out and really pull for each other and are really close.

And it's kind of become a great support group and these



are people that care a lot about me personally probably more so than professionally. So to kind of see that on Sunday, when you know it's there, I mean obviously Brendon and I have been really close for a long, long time and have kind of seen the ups and downs of both of our careers, but just to see how genuine that caring was from them is something that's really special.

MARK WILLIAMS: We really appreciate you making the time to speak with us and offering some great insight into last week and your career as well. So thanks again and have a great week this week at the American Express.

CHRIS KIRK: Absolutely. Thanks a lot.

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