

# The American Express

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La Quinta, California, USA

PGA WEST Pete Dye Stadium Course

## Sepp Straka

### Press Conference

**THE MODERATOR:** We would like to welcome Sepp Straka to the interview room here at The American Express. Sepp, the defending champion, can we just get some opening comments on your favorite memory from the win last year and what it's like to be back in La Quinta.

**SEPP STRAKA:** My favorite memory, yeah, it's awesome to be back, for one. It's a great event. I liked it before I won. It's a lot of fun. It's perfect weather, it's like a dome out here. Great way to start the season, especially when Birmingham is about to be in an ice storm (laughing). So nice to be here.

Favorite memory? Oh, it was a special week. I think trying to battle leading a tournament, I never had a lead going into Sunday and trying to kind of battle that, trying to go to sleep on Saturday night. Kind of the stuff that you go through with all that, battling the nerves and being able to kind of handle that. That was a fun time.

**THE MODERATOR:** You're making your season debut this week. Can you share what your off-season has looked like and how your game feels heading into the week.

**SEPP STRAKA:** Yeah, off-season's been a lot of practice. Haven't played, haven't had a lot of tournament reps. I played in the Bahamas, obviously a small field, kind of a fun environment. But, yeah, haven't had a whole lot of tournament reps since the Ryder Cup. So it's been a lot of practice, a lot of trying to just get better at my game and it's been a great time to be home with the family. So, yeah, really looking forward to getting started again.

**THE MODERATOR:** Last season was your first season with multiple wins on TOUR. What are some of the goals and expectations you have for this week and the 2026 season?

**SEPP STRAKA:** I'm not a huge, like, results, goal setter, so I don't really -- I haven't set, like, I want to win this many tournaments or anything.

My goal is always to improve my golf game and continue

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my process. Especially in practice, just continue to do all the things that kind of improve my golf game, and that's going to be my goal again this year is to try to improve.

**THE MODERATOR:** We'll open it up to questions.

**Q. You say you didn't have the experience of leading on Sunday, how did you manage to keep that lead and win that tournament if that was a new experience for you?**

**SEPP STRAKA:** I made a lot of putts, so that helped (laughing). No, in golf every time you're in the hunt it's going to be a little bit of a different experience. You're chasing with one guy ahead of you is different than chasing with three or four guys ahead of you. Just so the whole outside experience is very different. I just kind of leaned on the fact that I wasn't going to feel very good out there, and just had to try to execute golf shots regardless of how I was feeling about 'em. So that's kind of what I leaned on going into the final round.

**Q. Two wins last year, Ryder Cup, really good performance down at the Hero, your best year clearly. You said at the media day that you had made some changes in your putting and that had kind of helped you last year. How do you get better now?**

**SEPP STRAKA:** I think just try to -- you know, last year in the off-season I had a lot, the putting was a glaring weakness, putting and chipping were pretty far below the rest of my golf game. So that was a pretty obvious one to tackle.

This off-season there wasn't like a very obvious thing to get better at, so really just tried to keep running the same process and keep trying to improve marginally in every area. So no huge change this is year.

**Q. What's your strongest memory from last year?**

**SEPP STRAKA:** Strongest memory? Trying to think. Probably honestly, I mean, probably not a great way to think, but 16. All I could remember was, was it William Mouw? I was struggling with my bunker game last year this week. I avoided the bunkers nicely, so that was good, hid that from my score. So I just remember on 16, I think I

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had a four-shot lead, at least a three-shot lead, and my only thought was just do not hit it in that bunker (laughing). I went ahead and blocked it right and then laid up a chip and made my bogey and carried on, yeah. So probably not the right way to think, but that was definitely my strongest.

**Q. A lot of negativity there.**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah.

**Q. One other thing. With four TOUR wins, do you feel like that's a lot or not enough from when you came out?**

SEPP STRAKA: Well a lot more than I thought that I would have when I came out. As you grow, as you get those, then all of a sudden you're thinking it's not enough. So it's never going to be enough, no matter where you are. So I'm just going to keep trying to improve my golf game and put myself in those situations, try to have some fun with it.

**Q. I've heard from time to time that it's hard to win out here.**

SEPP STRAKA: It's very hard.

**Q. Why? What makes it hard?**

SEPP STRAKA: I think the competition, the fact that you got to beat, you know, I mean, I guess there was 156 guys, and now it's 100-whatever guys. It's a lot of really, really, really good players that are all playing the same golf course. Yeah, they're all trying to win. If you have the lead, then everybody's trying to make birdies to try to beat you, and you can't make mistakes. So I think just the depth of the competition is what makes it really hard.

**Q. Does that make you nervous at all?**

SEPP STRAKA: Oh, yeah. Like, in the moment, absolutely.

**Q. What about when you look big picture? I mean, I was talking to Harris this week, who had a pretty good year last year, I would have thought. He's wondering about how much longer he can make it out here because of how competitive it's getting.**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah. I mean, every year you got new talent coming out, young guys coming out, there are unbelievably good at golf, and that are way better than I was when I was coming out of college or high school. So, yeah, it's really tough. And it's going to keep getting younger, and it's going to keep getting more athletic, faster.

You just don't know how much longer you got, but you got to just keep trying to get better at golf and hopefully it's good enough.

**Q. We're doing a profile, not just of the tournament, but also the local First Tee chapter, hanging out with the kids earlier this week. So for those kids or any other kids that are just starting their journey of golf, what advice do you have?**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, that's awesome. We got some notes in our locker this week from some of those kids.

**Q. There's going to be 20 out here doing markers all weekend.**

SEPP STRAKA: That's awesome. I appreciate that, that's great. Some advice would be, kind of to keep the big picture in mind. I would say, I know when I was a junior golfer I would place way too much emphasis on the next tournament, just trying to be better at the next tournament, the next shot, the next hole. Instead of kind of keeping a big picture of just trying to improve my golf game, trying to create a process to help me improve my golf game. I would say that's the best advice I would say in terms of golf that I could give.

**Q. You mentioned earlier you're not specific goal oriented. It's not the first time I've heard that from some of your fellow golfers this week. Is that a common thought amongst you guys out on TOUR?**

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, I would say everybody's a little bit different. You got guys that set specific goals of in specific tournaments they want to play however well. That's never really worked for me because most of my goals I don't end up achieving. My goals are more of daily. So daily I want to make sure I do my putting drills. I want to make sure I do my drills on the range. I do my Trackman combine. I go in the gym and do my swing drills, my technical drills. And hopefully those end up resulting in some good tournaments. Yeah I've never really been a huge, or, I guess I used to be a huge goal setter and it didn't really work out for me, so I kind of changed it.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you, Sepp. Good luck this week.

SEPP STRAKA: Thank you.

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