

THE PLAYERS Championship

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Collin Morikawa

Press Conference

JACK RYAN: We'd like to welcome Collin Morikawa into the interview room at the 2022 PLAYERS Championship. You've won five times on the PGA TOUR, including two major championships. Does it feel weird with what you've accomplished in your career that this is only your second appearance here at THE PLAYERS?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Well, you know, five Cheetos is better than two Doritos. (Laughter).

I don't even know what you asked.

Look, second time at THE PLAYERS, I feel like I've been here forever. I feel like even with what happened with COVID in 2020, I still did all my prep. Last year obviously I got four rounds in. I'd been here years before for the Junior Players, and there's just a lot of good memories.

I think I played decently in Junior Players, but I feel like it's a course that fits my eye and I feel comfortable with. I think a lot of guys can feel comfortable on this course, but you've got to come out here prepared to play some really good golf, and thankfully after LA after a couple weeks off to get things dialed in a little bit more, it feels good.

JACK RYAN: Four starts on TOUR this season, four top-10s, including a runner-up in your last start at the Genesis Invitational. After two weeks off, how does your game feel coming into this week?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Feels great. It's in a spot where I'm just -- during these practice rounds, I'm just ready to go play golf. You're going out trying to figure out how you're going to play the best golf, how you're going to make the most amount of birdies and just figure out this course.

Some weeks you show up on a Monday and you're grinding and you're trying to work on something, whether it's your swing or your putting or whatever it may be, and this week like I'm not doing a ton on the range, I'm not doing a ton out on the practice area, I'm just going to go out and play golf and just try to get more reps in on the holes to be as comfortable as possible for Thursday.



Q. Two years ago you were here as a first timer together with Scottie Scheffler, together with Viktor Hovland, and now you all have the chance to be No. 1 in the world. How do you explain that?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I can't. We all -- I'll say it since day one: We all believed in ourselves. I go back to that press conference, Viktor, Matt and Justin at Travelers, the four of us were sitting together, and I said the same thing, and I'm going to say the same thing again. We just truly believed in ourselves, and that's the number one thing is that you absolutely have to trust yourself that you can do it, not just make it to the PGA TOUR, not just make it to the top 100, top 50 in the world but to be No. 1.

I think that just shows how good the young guys are coming out, how good this kinda young pile is.

Obviously we've seen this young group of Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas and Rickie and Xander and Cantlay, like kind of bunch that group together, right, and I think everyone is kind of bunching us together because we are within a year or two apart.

But from year one I think it's just all belief knowing that we'd get here. Even if you had asked us when we were 13, 14 years old, it was the same answer.

Q. Kind of a funky tournament for you last year. I think you made the cut on the number, shot 4-over on Saturday and then 6-under on Sunday. Did something click on Saturday night? Was it a strategy thing where you just felt, I'm going to go at pins, or what was behind that 66 on Sunday?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I had J.J. reads my putts for me. Yeah, I think this was like a week after Concession, so my game felt really good. Obviously it was still really new with the claw putting grip or the saw putting grip.

You know, it was just one of those weeks where it wasn't clicking and couldn't put together a round, and the last day I had him come in for a couple reads, help me out with a little bit of grain, and you just started seeing them go in the hole. To be honest, I remember not finishing well on the leaderboard. I remember that final round. I could not tell



you a shot from the first three rounds of what I did last year. That's just kind of what happened.

Show up this week, obviously good memories from the last round and just kind of pull that forward for the next few days.

Q. On a separate note, it feels like this tournament has sort of grown in stature the last 10 years with the purse going up. For someone like you who's only been out here for a couple years, how do you feel like you and the guys your age think about this tournament in relation to other tournaments?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, I never thought about it. You always hear when you're growing up, this is golf's fifth major, but you don't understand really what a major even is when you're not a professional. When you show up to the rounds of a major championship, people breathe differently. People are so much more focused and so much -- they treat it way differently, and that's not how I approach it.

Like I show up every week trying to win, and I show up to play my best and keep the same routine. But you can tell when you step out here like guys are showing up a lot more on a Monday, guys are showing up a lot earlier on a Tuesday. There's a lot more people out here because they're putting in that extra little prep because they view this tournament that largely, as this big tournament, it's the players' tournament and it's for us, it's for the PGA TOUR players.

Yeah, absolutely, the past couple years when you show up, you can feel the weight of what THE PLAYERS means to everyone, and I think that's the coolest thing. I remember showing up to Harding Park, that was my second major, and there were no fans, and you could still tell that people were walking on ice, knowing that this is what this week represents.

And that's the same thing you feel this week is you see some guys out here -- you just see more guys slowly taking their deep breaths because they understand what THE PLAYERS means, and I think I've understood over the past couple years what it would mean to me hopefully to hoist a trophy one day.

Q. As a result do you feel like your talents are suited well to this course?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I think there's so many different ways to play this golf course, which is why when people ask me what my favorite golf course is out on TOUR, this doesn't really stick out immediately, but when you actually

think about it, it should because it is that good of a golf course.

Because anyone can play. You can play it a million different ways. It tests every aspect of your game, and you can't get away with just hitting some bad shots and getting away with a par or getting away with a birdie even. Like you have to play really good golf. That's what makes a great golf course.

Riviera is one of my favorite courses out on TOUR because you have to golf your ball. You have to be able to like step up to the tee, hit good tee shots, but also hit good approach shots, make great putts, hit great lag putts, and that's what TPC Sawgrass provides. Does it fit my game? From what I see, yeah, but I think it fits a lot of other people's, as well.

Q. Do you have a favorite hole out here?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No. The ones I birdie.

Q. A lot of guys got their teeth kicked in the last two weeks. I'm just curious process-wise, how did you spend the last two weeks? How did you prepare for this?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Just kind of -- I mean, I like to play a lot of golf like on the golf course. I don't really like to hit balls on the range. But when I do or I take a little short practice, I just play the holes in my head. That's how I've always grown up practicing. If I've played the golf course before, I'll literally step on the range, tee up driver like I would on 1 here, hit a pitching wedge, 9-iron, then go on to the next hole and hit a draw 3-wood or a draw driver and then hit a 5-wood. I just play the course nonstop.

The best times when you play well throughout a week, Thursday through Sunday, is when you feel the most comfortable. Like you set up to a tee and you're like, I know what to do.

That's why Summit this year for CJ CUP in the fall was weird because like I'd play it every day, but like I had to put myself in a tournament setting but I knew what to do. I knew where every hazard -- not hazard, where every rock was, desert, where I needed to miss, whatever, and it's just like, how do you make that every single week? It's time sometimes.

Q. What do you think it is about your personality that allows you to breathe normally at these big events?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I think I just understand and I've grasped the nature of where I am in life and what is



important, and for me it's winning, and I feel comfortable in that position. I mean, some people you have to train yourself to be comfortable, and it's very trainable, but I just love being in these moments.

Like I love -- not necessarily the spotlight, like if we had a million people in here, yeah, that would be awkward, but I love winning and I love putting myself in contention, and you love -- like that's what you are when you're a kid. I was always -- I always told my dad, just one more shot. Let me just make one more. Even if it was basketball, like forget about golf, whatever it was, it was just let me stay out here one more time, let me make that last shot, let me do this one last thing.

And that's just who I am. Like I don't know how it was implemented or put in me or whatever it may be, but that's just who I am. I'm pretty calm and I go out there and I just want to be in those situations. I think that's when I thrive the most.

Q. Going all the way back, what's that first memory of winning that you have?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: That's a great question. Probably like golf-wise, the biggest event was the Western Junior in 2013. That one was you finally step into a pretty big national junior event and I go out and win by a handful or something, and I played some really great golf. And that was the first time I was like, okay, we can win big now. Like not just win at the local level.

I had never won an AJGA, I still never have, but like that was my one tournament that was like, okay, I can win tournaments. And everyone always tells you, especially as you get older, you need to learn how to win. You have to. You have to learn how to win, but how do you -- I can't sit you down and be like, this is the steps to win. Sometimes you just need to see results, and you need to see improvement and you need to see that, and that was the first one that was really like, okay, let's stop me.

Q. If you could recall back to maybe some of your teenage years, do you remember how you would have regarded THE PLAYERS, any memories of it in relation to the landscape of the four majors, and how might that have changed in the time that you've been a pro?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, I think I briefed that earlier. The only memory I really have is Tiger making the putt on the back of 17 and that just being played and is still played every single day.

But no, like the landscape of how I viewed THE PLAYERS was like, okay, everyone says it's big, but I don't know how

big it is, and really all you cared about was okay -- I wasn't practicing to make my last putt on 18 at THE PLAYERS. That's how it was as a kid, right, because we viewed the majors -- like I viewed the majors as there were four majors. You can say there's this, there's that, but there's an asterisk right there.

But since I've turned pro, I've viewed it very differently, and I appreciate everything that's put into this tournament because it is amazing. The scope, the landscape of everything out here when we show up, it's all for us, it's all for the PGA TOUR players, and it's really cool to see and it's great to be a part of, and that's why you want to win this tournament.

Q. Obviously you're one of the world premier players. Do you see yourself as a role model for all youngsters, particularly of Asian backgrounds? And a number of players have foundations, like the Tiger Woods Foundation, Tony has one, several of the other guys have one. Do you see yourself with a foundation and reaching back into the community that gave you what you are today?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah. No, I hope I am a role model for a lot of young kids and a lot of kids looking up to me and hopefully playing golf, whether it's golf or anything else. If they just see me on the golf course and how I project myself and how I act, right, I think that's the biggest thing is learn these life lessons of maybe they don't have a parent, maybe they don't have a good role model around them, can I be that role model at 25 now and be like, okay, yeah, I look like this kid, I look like this guy up here.

It's funny because when people call me by my last name, it's like, I feel weird when they call me Mr. Morikawa, and they're like 15 years old or 18 even. It's weird because I'm still a kid -- to me I'm still a kid.

Yeah, I hope I'm a role model, and I hope I'm able to be that gap in a sense of like, okay, I'm not older where it's awkward to talk to me, where if they want to talk, I'll be there.

As of right now I don't have a foundation because I think everything has come so quickly, and I don't -- a foundation is a long-term goal, but I want to make sure I do it right and I want to make sure I put the right things forward and I'm pushing all my efforts into what I believe in, not something just to say, I have a foundation today, let's go help out, because that's what every athlete or the big athletes have done in the past.

I'd rather help out and slowly understand every little point I want to give towards and then create a foundation after

that if that makes sense.

Q. Defender Race to Dubai is really a goal for you this year, or since you won last year, is it less important for you?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No, it's still important. I'm still a member of the DP World Tour, and I set myself a little back on the two starts I've had so far through the year, but there's still the majors, there's still a couple events out there that I'm going to add to the schedule.

Yeah, look, people can complain or not, whatever, that I played only so many events last year, but I played the minimum, and I was able to maximize the amount of minimum tournaments I had to play to win.

The biggest thing is that's how I have to do it if I want to play both Tours, especially when I want to play on the PGA TOUR, I've got to maximize how well I play in the minimum tournaments I play, as well.

Is it nice to go over there and play those events? Absolutely, they treat us amazing. It's a great time over there. It's a great time for me to see the world and to travel and experience a lot of good food, but like we said earlier, I've played four events this year and this season and I want to start adding a few more and just get into a little more of a rhythm, but absolutely, it is still a goal.

Q. How has Tiger influenced your career, and can you give a real good story about him?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, he's everything, right. I grew up watching him. I wanted to compete against him. You wanted to be No. 1 in the world. You wanted -- I just wanted to meet him. I think that's every little kid's -- even now kids that grow up playing golf, you just want to meet Tiger Woods, and I will always remember when I first met him in the back of the ZOZO Championship locker room, just some kid getting introduced to him, and then we've been able to play a few times or a handful of times. I've been able to talk to him here and there.

He's amazing. A lot of the stories that I've -- the few interactions, the stories I would tell you, I'm not going to tell you because I think they're meaningful to me and I don't think anyone needs to know. But I'm getting a lot more friendly with him now where I can like make a joke and I don't feel uncomfortable. Like I would not have joked with him two years ago, I'll tell you that.

Now I feel like I'm in a place where if I make a joke, he'll get it and he'll laugh, and might be a little mad, but it's funny.

Q. Does he have a nickname for you?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No. No. I don't think. Does he?

Q. Obviously you're not friends then if he doesn't have a nickname for you.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Well, no one has a nickname for me. Other than Collin with two, two ones.

JACK RYAN: Thank you very much for your time, Collin.

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