

THE PLAYERS Championship

Thursday, March 10, 2022

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Tommy Fleetwood

Press Conference

HALEY PETERSON: Good afternoon, or I guess evening, everyone. We would like to welcome Tommy Fleetwood here at the media center at THE PLAYERS Championship.

Tommy, opening round 6-under 66. Just get some general comments about the first day.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: It's a great first day. I'm chuffed to be in on that score. I felt like I drove the ball well aside from a couple, and I felt like I chipped and putted great. For sure, like that was the most I could have got out of the round. So days like that are very, very pleasing.

I think there's things that I can do better. So I'll try to do that over the next few days. Again, I'm not going to complain about the day or anything. I'll just move on and be happy with a 66.

Q. Tommy, you were actually quite close to not qualifying for this championship. I think you were 50th in the world with the top 50 getting in.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Close enough.

Q. Close enough. What's been the issue the last year or so? Why have you dropped to where you are?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I haven't played well. I think there's been certain things in my swing, if you like, that I haven't quite understood, and I would say feelings and shots that I have seen haven't quite matched up with what I've always felt and thought like. So then your confidence takes a hit because you're not quite comfortable out on the golf course.

I would say that, if you're not playing very well, especially out here, the standard is so, so high and it keeps getting higher, when you're off the pace and you're lacking confidence, the game becomes very, very difficult.

I haven't sort of played terrible. My results haven't been terrible, but I've lacked obviously very good results. And then I think especially from a World Ranking standpoint, that makes it very, very difficult. So I've just sort of been



gradually declining.

So, yeah, it's been difficult. I just haven't played like I can or how I expect to play. But you know, things change. Let's see.

Q. When you're not playing your best, does it make it harder to play such a global schedule like you do, going back and forth?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, definitely, because you're playing minimal events on both tours. Even in my best years, if you say my best years, I was always starting -- like a lot of the guys, I was way behind the 8-ball when I started and just played very consistently throughout those years.

So it's difficult when you need -- you obviously always need good results, or very good results to then make headway, and when you don't get them, it obviously becomes very difficult. Again, when you're not seeing good scores and the shots aren't quite there, it just becomes harder and harder for it to change that momentum.

Q. Tommy, the years you played well here, the two years, what about this course matches up well to your game or vice versa? And extending into today, what clicks when you're playing this course well?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I would say it's very much a ball striker's golf course. I think my strengths over the years have always been hitting it in play off the tee. Very consistent, hit a lot of greens with my irons and never really put myself in too much trouble and have a very sort of patient attitude and mindset.

It's very much -- I love this golf course. I really, really do. If you play well, you get rewarded, and if you play poorly, you're going to struggle to make a score. I think it's major-like in that sense.

Again, when I'm playing well, I'm obviously going to drive it well and put the ball in play a lot and then not make too many mistakes. So the years that I did play well, I obviously did that particularly well.

Q. Burning question: Why did you shave the beard, and are you growing it back?



TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I was in a really bad mood. It was like break some golf clubs or shave my beard, then I went for the beard.

Q. How difficult has been this stretch since you last won, getting through it and keep going on forward?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I think all of us live and breathe the game. So when it's not going your way, it's always -- but I would say that without high expectations, then none of the players out here would be who they are, and they wouldn't get to where they are. So everybody has to have high expectations, but then there's a balance between how you're actually playing and what you're doing.

So there's like sometimes this contrast when you're not playing too well. It's been fine. I still have one of the best jobs in the world. I've just not been performing to the level that I want to perform at. Again, I'm not going to sit here and moan or complain about playing poorly for a couple of years. That's down to me and people around me to improve and get better and do the right things. I feel like we're doing that.

You just focus on day by day and try and build confidence and try to shoot low scores like today.

Q. A couple of things. Did the stoppage come at the worst possible time for you when you're going for a hat trick of birdies and got a nine-footer? Did you feel like you found something last week over the weekend? Probably felt like you might miss the cut.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Well, I probably should have missed the cut. It's funny how golf goes really. It's like the week before, I felt really good about my game, turn up and play shocking on Friday and miss the cut by one.

Last week I played dreadful for two days really, and I hit a terrible bunker shot on 8, which was my 17th hole on Friday, that was practically going in the water, hits the pin, goes in, and make the cut on the mark and finish all right.

It's just a strange game that you never seem to be able to understand or that makes no sense.

Yeah, I feel like things that can build momentum. I was quite happy when the delay came. You knew the delay was going to come at some point, especially when we were playing those holes. I hadn't particularly played the 2nd that well, and if there was ever a place to walk off, I had a 10-foot putt 20 yards from the putting green that I was going to come back to.

It worked out really well; to be able to practice sort of a similar putt and then walk straight over to the green and then hit it was lucky in a way. That putt kind of was a great way to start the day by holing that and then getting going again.

Q. Was that a serious point about the beard and the bad mood? That's when you did it?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: It's kind of semi-serious.

Q. Sounds like it requires expansion.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: It was partly true, partly I just -- it was kind of in a mess, and I was going to shave it. Then I was sort of in a bad enough mood where I couldn't be bothered putting the clipper on, like on number nine, so I just took it. It will grow back.

Q. Just following on from this, it looks like tomorrow could be a bit messy as well, another delay. The forecast looks dodgy. Are you okay with a disrupted tournament like that? Do you think you have the experience to get on with it, or will it concern you in any way?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Whenever we play until and whatever it takes we're here to -- you're walking off? I'm answering your question. You just know that you're here hopefully until the very end, and you just get on with it.

Everybody's in the same circumstances. When it's your turn to play, play, and I think just make sure you stay ready throughout the week. It's easy to get caught off guard when you're hanging around for a long time to then all of a sudden have to try to switch it back on.

It's almost like relax as much as you can and save your energy but always kind of stay ready and in that mindset that you might be going out at any time.

Look, it's an amazing event. Dan said I was the last person into the event pretty much. So it's great being here. I've had a great first round. So try and make the most of it now and be grateful whenever we do get to play to go out and challenge yourself.

Q. Tommy, it looked like things almost got away from you there on 6 and 7 and you made that big save on 7. How much in a week like this, when you might even have all day tomorrow off, does a save like that and turning the round back around?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Sure, it was one of those days where I got the most out of the round and played 5

amazing and then hit a terrible shot on 6. 7, absolutely, I completely stole a 4. Like that could have been any number, like gouge one out of the rough and it goes six feet and knock it in. But almost like the next hole, it lines in the middle of the green and make a birdie on one of the hardest holes on the course.

So it was just one of those rounds where things went right for me. You've still got to make the shots, but it was nice to -- you have plenty of rounds where you don't get the most out of it. So when you do, take that and run really.

Yeah, 7 was kind of an amazing par, and then to birdie the one after it was really, really good.

Q. Tommy, when you say that playing professional golf is one of the best jobs in the world, what could you possibly rank ahead of it?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: There's a few things. I don't know, like golf -- without being kind of comical about it, golf is -- for all of us that are here, golf has been what we've done from a very young age and we've dreamt about.

Of course for us we're chasing our dreams every day, which is an amazing thing. There's probably no better job. But at the same time, perspective can get thrown out the window quite often, and you don't like it too much.

But in reality, we're very lucky. We work hard at what we do, but we're very lucky to get the chance to do it every week.

Q. Tommy, you mentioned the last two weeks. You're one of the few who played both weeks. Does that prepare you for playing a third week in a row in Florida?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, I think, for me personally, I think the more I can keep playing, which hasn't always been the case in my career, I always played better in my first or second week after a break, after a couple of weeks off. But at the moment, I think the more I can keep playing, get myself into a rhythm of what I'm doing is better for me. Whether the course is easy, hard, whatever the conditions are, it's amazing the contrast from, like you say, the weekend last week to coming out today and playing.

I think, yeah, conditions change, but at the same time, golf is golf, a good shot is a good shot. You prepare yourself for whatever the course demands, and there is a flow to that and a rhythm to that, and I think the more I play at the moment is a good thing for me in that sense.

Q. During the last couple years here where you've had

these issues or struggled a bit, has the difficulty of playing both tours been a factor in that at all and trying to juggle that? And obviously with the pandemic, there was going to be some struggles also, the travel and such.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, of course. I think there's always a combination of -- especially for us, myself and my family are based in the UK, so travel hasn't been the same. It's not as easy as it always has been. Playing two tours is -- well, it is tough. You see the guys that actually play two tours, they're a very high standard of golfer that do it year in and year out, the ones that manage to juggle both.

So, yeah, there's things that haven't made it any easier when I've not been playing well, but at the same time, I wouldn't sit here and make excuses. It's just that golf is golf. I feel like you do the right things, hit good golf shots, you're going to be fine wherever you're playing, and the results will come. For me that hasn't been the case.

It can go either way. Everybody keeps talking about the last two years. I might still be in that two years. It might be three years, who knows? But also I might be coming out the other side of it. We'll wait and see. I feel like I'm starting to play better. I still wouldn't come in today and say I feel like I played great. I don't think I hit my irons well at all. I feel like I can practice that and improve it.

The two years have been what they've been. I feel like I could have had better results this year so far, but I feel like I'm showing some signs of consistency.

This day's been a great day. I might have a day of waiting, and then I might turn up on Saturday or whenever it is, and I might play terrible, I might play great, and I might roll with it and have an amazing year, but we'll see. The game is strange, but I do think I'm doing enough good things now that I can push on.

Q. Given the forecast that you just talked about and beyond your score, is there part of you that's happy that you just got finished today?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Oh, yeah, definitely. I think I've got a full round in today. I don't know when I'll play next, but I'm happy. I'm done, and I'll sit. I'll rest. Spend time with the family tonight. Like I can go into tomorrow knowing that I'm really definitely not going to be out until pretty late, but I have enough time to sort of plan.

Today I turned up at the golf course at 5:00, and that can turn into very long days. So you don't want too many of them as you go on throughout the week.

I've had a really good day. I can sit on that. I can feel happy with my work and go from there for sure. So I feel very comfy being in, and we'll see what happens.

Q. Tommy, what sort of comments did you get when you shaved? And does your wife have a preference?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: She definitely has a preference, and it's not this one. Definitely my favorite comment, it was my 31st birthday in Abu Dhabi this year, and I was playing with Viktor Hovland, and obviously we're very close, and he was like -- in fact, I was playing with him and Collin, and both of them were looking at me like, we had to Google your age. I thought you were 37, 38. That's a pretty harsh comment, to be fair.

When I shaved it off, I think it took about 15 years off me. Everyone kind of noticed that I look a lot younger without the beard. That's a positive. Clare definitely prefers me with a beard, so I'll definitely grow it back. As long as I can keep my temper and keep smiling, then I won't have to shave it off again.

Q. What was the club you used to chip in on 18?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Just a lob wedge. It was just a 60-degree, like came out of a 7-iron, and I could have pulled a lob wedge out as it was mid-air and knowing it was going to be in the rough. There was only ever going to be one club.

HALEY PETERSON: As always, thank you for taking the time to join us. Wish you luck the rest of the week.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports