

# THE PLAYERS Championship

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Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

## Brooks Koepka

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Brooks Koepka to the interview room here at the 2026 PLAYERS Championship. Brooks this will mark your seventh start in this event with your best finish being T11. If we could open it up with some remarks on what you're looking forward to this week.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, it feels good to be back. Played the back nine yesterday. I thought the greens were a little bit firmer than what I remember. A couple changes. But it was good to see the course in great shape, and it's going to be a good test this week.

THE MODERATOR: Fourth start of the season, coming off your first top 10 of the year. I guess confidence level in your game heading into this week, how are you feeling?

BROOKS KOEPKA: It's obviously a lot better. I think the first week was just trying to get that out of the way. Then the second week, I felt like it was very disappointing. Made a few changes, new putter; just working on a few different mechanical things in the putting. Felt like it started to click, I guess, Thursday afternoon after the round on at Cognizant. Feel good, hitting it good. Like I said, just building momentum.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll open it up to questions.

**Q. You talk about Sunday in Cognizant. You said you got a little more confidence out of that weekend. What did you do the last couple of weeks, and was there more work on the putting at that time?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, yeah. Played Seminole pro-member on Monday, then took Tuesday off. Then actually came up to Orlando Thursday, Friday and was working with Ricky and Mike on putting. So just trying to fine-tune everything, make sure it feels good, make sure I'm still on the right track. Everything's felt pretty good, so, yeah, I mean it's only one week, but it was a busy week.

**Q. As the first participant in the PGA TOUR's returning member program, are you planning on being or open**



**to being a resource for any other players that have questions about what it's been like for you or potentially coming back in the future?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I mean, everybody knows I'm pretty open. They can come up to me and talk to me about anything. I just changed my phone number, so they're going to have a hard time reaching out on that. But, yeah, anybody, and they know that. I still text guys pretty consistently, whether it be on LIV or on TOUR, so anybody can reach out. They know that.

**Q. Now that you're a few events in, has the reception from your fellow players here on the PGA TOUR and the fans been about what you expected?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I didn't know what to expect, but the fans have been great. I'm still getting "welcome back" as of yesterday, so I mean, it's a good feeling. It feels good to be back. I'm enjoying it. It's a lot of fun. And the players have been great too.

**Q. I know early in the reentry here, so to speak, but I'm curious how much you missed the use of the big tournaments against the best players in the world, and as you're getting back into form, how much are you fired up to kind of be back into that fire again, you know, big tournaments like this and whatnot?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I think THE PLAYERS always kind of was the kickoff to a big tournament every month, right. You've got this, when they moved it to March; April you get the Masters. Then so on. I mean there's a big event every month.

So this is kind of right where I feel like you needed to know where your game was at. Every time when you come to THE PLAYERS you get a good idea of, hey, you've got a couple more weeks right before Augusta; if you got to make any changes, this is where it needs to happen. This is kind of, I don't know, in my eyes, the kickoff of the real heat of the golf season. And it's a lot of fun, it's exciting, and just need to be on top of things.

**Q. I'm curious, when switching to the Spider putter after using a blade for so long, what's been the biggest challenge or the biggest thing that you've kind of had**



**to overcome, whether it's visually, mentally, or what have you learned over the last month?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I mean, I think with that change there's been a lot of mechanical changes as well. I would say it's definitely more of the mechanical issues are the tougher parts of it. But I mean, if you look at it, the face rotation on the Spider is a little less than it was with the blade. Just looking for a little bit more consistency. Then obviously the changes that I've made in the stroke, whether it be from taking a little bit more hands out of it and not swaying as much. Just got into a bunch of bad habits. I've always played it off the toe, and some of those habits were created just to fix that, to go hit it off the center.

Then being able to -- the putter's a little bit smaller, so I don't have that -- I can't exactly putt it off the toe when there's a longer line. I think it's easier to line up as well. Yeah, just starting it more off the actual center of the ball, not having it off the toe, has been a huge thing as well.

**Q. What's your schedule like leading up to Augusta, and are you someone who likes to go up there and take a look before you get there?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I've not really done it in the past. I have no plans on it. But, I mean, I would be open to it. I was kind of just focusing on this week and then kind of thinking about it maybe later after this week. I'm busy. I've got Tampa next week. Houston, I helped design that golf course. So hopefully, I mean you've only got one week off, so it's really would be kind of fast track. But I don't know, I think it plays so different sometimes when you go up there early versus when you're there week of.

**Q. You might have thought obviously a lot of different things on how the return would be and how it would be going and whatnot. What's the most unexpected thing that's happened to you in terms of either your own preparation for being back out on TOUR, the reception from players, from other people? What's the most unexpected thing that's happened over the course of the last few weeks?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Maybe just how great the fans have been. I think that's kind of been the big thing. I didn't know how the reception was going to be. Obviously you can sit in bed and just kind of lay there and think about a million different things of how it's going to go. I mean, right? You have all these scenarios that play out, but it never really comes to fruition of exactly what you think. I think that's been the big thing. It's been exciting, it's been fun, and it makes it enjoyable to be out there.

**Q. You're in a unique position coming back from LIV**

**after being on the PGA TOUR. Can you assess now the difference in competition on that side versus this side?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I mean, there's good players everywhere, and there's a lot of great players out here. There's good players out there. I mean, I think everybody in this room knows that Jon Rahm's a hell of a player. I mean, there's good players everywhere. DP World Tour, same thing. I mean this field's pretty good; I'll put it that way.

**Q. Changing the phone number, did it just get overwhelming, too many people?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I do it probably more often than I should. Yeah, I think after Phoenix just wanted a little bit of a reset. Then my phone was blowing up. So just wanted to really focus in on preparation and dialing into golf. I thought that was the best way to just kind of come unglued from the world for a half second and where basically it was only my family and anybody that's golf related really has my number right now, which is -- it's been kind of nice.

**Q. Your previous stint out here you had a certain rhythm of tournaments that you played. This year you cannot play certain events. Has it been easier or more difficult to kind of set your schedule and set a rhythm to get ready for this stretch?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: That's a good question. In some ways a bit of both. I think it's very easy because I'm not allowed to play certain events, so the other events I've got to play if I want to make sure I'm sharp and ready for the big events.

Yeah, I mean, you would like to be there last week, but I understand those are the consequences of my decisions. I'm a big boy, I understand that. So I got to sit at home and watch, and the answer to everything is play good golf and everything will take care of itself.

**Q. You mentioned a few minutes ago that you're trying to figure out where your game is at this particular juncture. On LIV was it as easy to figure out where your game was when you get to the middle of March?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I don't know -- I mean, when you play, you always know where your game's at. I've won events and I've not won events, and I feel like I've played pretty good. I guess it all kind of depends on how you feel. Do you feel like your game's -- there's always one part that's never quite where you want it. I don't care if you're Scottie Scheffler right now; there's always one piece that you feel like you can get better at.



That's what makes golf so much fun. I think it's never -- even when you're at your peak or the top of your game, it's just never -- there's always something you can improve on or you feel like you can get better at. So, yeah, I mean you know where you're at and you just got to make those adjustments.

**Q. I know you're a few weeks in or a couple tournaments in from getting back out here, but I'm curious how taken aback you were at how emotional you were at that first week with the fan response and whatnot. We kind of all saw it, how it hit you a little bit. How surprising was that to you?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I mean, I didn't think it was going to be maybe as emotional for me, but it was. It was great. It was honestly a great feeling. Sometimes I can be very good at burying my emotions, and I just look at it as this is a job; just be robotic and go about your process. I'm pretty sure everybody sees that when I'm on the golf course.

But when I get away from it, I'm very chill, very relaxed and enjoying life, and sometimes -- I was just taking in the moment and appreciating where I was. I think that was something I haven't done in maybe my professional career, and it was just enjoyable.

**Q. You said you change your phone number a lot; when was the last time you had done that?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Probably two years ago. Yeah, usually I'm about every year, year and a half.

**Q. If you were to win THE PLAYERS this week, how many majors would you feel like you've won?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I mean, going off the record, it would be four, wouldn't it? Or five, I guess. Yeah. Five.

**Q. How do you view this tournament?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: As THE PLAYERS Championship. That's what I view it as. I think you've got to have one big event on the PGA TOUR, and it's their staple, and I think it's a good thing. I think anytime you can have an event where the best players on the PGA TOUR come together, you look at that, you got the BMW on the DP, every tour has one big event where their main -- everybody comes together, everybody plays that event, and you've got the best players on that TOUR playing at the same time.

I think that's what makes this event so cool. I think it's awesome that we come back to the same golf course

every year. I think that's really, really fun and makes it enjoyable. I mean, I know what you're trying to bait me into saying, but listen, it's the PLAYERS Championship. Everybody knows it's a tournament you want to win. It's a tournament that's, like I said earlier, the kickoff of the big season of the golf, and that's what makes this fun.

**Q. Did any of the LIV events feel more special the way this does?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Every tournament feels special, man. It's very, I'm going out there, I want to win. I think maybe sometimes there's more build-up in the hype going to Monday to Wednesday of the tournament, but I think every player probably would say that from the second that you get there from Thursday morning, it's just very -- there's no difference. You get into your routine. You get into your routine and then you're not thinking, wow, this is a huge event or this is a small event or this is just something I'm prepping for for two, three weeks for a major or anything like that. It's just you go about your process, and sometimes when you get in your process, you shut your mind off and everything becomes very easy.

**Q. Has anyone, whether it's a Lanto Griffin or Carson Young ever publicly thanked you for playing a tournament because it got them into the field?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, there's been a few guys.

**Q. What's the best?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I think every week somebody's thanked me, which has been kind of -- it's weird. I don't know. Just never been thanked for playing an event before. So it was cool. I mean, it's kind of nice. I mean, it's a good opportunity for those guys to get in and play, and if they play good, you know, hopefully keep it running for the rest of the year because pretty much I would say going to be between the same, you know, 15 to 20 guys that are pretty much going to get in, it's a good opportunity.

**Q. I mean in fairness, and I'm not trying to make fun here, when they thanked you, did you even know who they were?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah.

**Q. There's a lot of new people.**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, there was definitely some I didn't know. I mean, I don't know if this is a guess, but 30 percent of this TOUR I don't know right now. I mean, I'm knowing more guys just being out here, but it's going to take me a few more weeks.

**Q. And they can't text you to introduce themselves now.**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, it would be kind of hard to get that number.

**Q. You talked a lot about your putting. Was last year's struggles just -- could you just put it down it that? Is that why you struggled in the majors and obviously you didn't win all year? Was it as simple as saying you didn't putt very well, or was there more to it?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah I think it was a lot of putting. I think it's been going on longer than a year though. I think it's been pushing two. Just where I haven't, the consistency of speed hasn't been there. I felt like every time I hit a good putt, it just kind of hit the lip or would miss it by a foot and, you know, you don't want to ever question what's going on. But when you feel like you did something right and you look up and it's not even close, you know that there's a problem. And that was just kind of my breaking point in Phoenix.

**Q. Did you find yourself putting pressure on yourself to hit it closer?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Oh, yeah.

**Q. That happens when guys don't make putts; it filters into the rest of their game.**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I felt like I had to make birdie from my approach play. I think that sometimes, if you're not doing something well it can cost you, just because you try to be maybe a little bit more aggressive or take on a pin that you normally wouldn't have. Then somehow you end up in a horrible spot, and you're looking at bogey with a wedge and you're just sitting back in the middle of the fairway going, on the next hole, like what was I doing; how did I just turn a birdie hole or a birdie opportunity into a bogey.

That was something that was just kind of eating at me, and I felt like the only thing I was really birdieing -- you would have to look at statistics. I haven't looked at them, but it felt like for a while there the only thing I was birdieing was a par-5 I was reaching in two or a par-4 that I was driving it pretty close to. I don't know what my make percentage was outside of 10 feet, but it wasn't very good.

**Q. You've experienced many different phases since you turned pro: European Challenge Tour, European Tour, PGA TOUR, LIV Golf, back to the PGA TOUR. Could you identify which of those phases gave you the**

**most beneficial learning curve?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I could say each one of those gave me a different -- it was different parts of my career, and I think each one of those made me learn something different that made me what I think is a better player sitting here today. I've learned a lot over the years, and I think, you know, coming from the start on the Challenge Tour was arguably the most fun I've had playing golf, touring the world as a 21-, 22-year-old kid. Being over there was a lot of fun. I really did enjoy that.

**Q. You're known as one of the best big-game players of your era. This is the one tournament where you might not have had the success than those other tournaments. Have you seen kind of a thread through your past appearances here why you maybe haven't done as well as you would have liked?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: The 17th hole. (Smiling.) I think, I don't know if there's stats on it, but I guarantee there are. One year I made an 8 and a 7. Yeah, that wasn't very good. But that 17th hole has gotten me over the years. I've played good rounds here; that's just kind of the one bugaboo that always gets me.

There's a couple tee shots, too, I think that are quite tough. 4 seems to be quite tough. And then I played the back yesterday and I think -- I don't know if it's just I'm getting older and not hitting it as far, but there's a couple holes I swear they have lengthened. Obviously not being here in four years, so it's tough if you're watching on TV to really grasp where it's at. But I think 12 they might have lengthened a little bit. 15 it feels like they did. But, yeah, and 16 it feels like they might have maybe a hair. I don't know, the tee box was way back yesterday. So I don't know, but the 17th hole has got my number.

**Q. Is that something that you've worked on like even yesterday, or have you kind of even just going back to the years of why you made an 8 one year, one 7? Is there anything?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: I mean, we know why, but it's in the past. Nothing I can do about it. But I hit the green yesterday, so I was pretty pumped about that.

**Q. Average golfers would like when you kind of have a hole that you're on a course and that you've had high scores on, it's kind of like, oh, know I messed up here before. For someone at your level how do you approach that mentally? Do you even think about it when you get to 17?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: No, I don't think about it. It doesn't

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

haunt me. I mean my friends, they give me a bunch of crap about it. Between 17 and 12 at Augusta, it seems to be the par-3s. But then again, I've hit -- I think the last time we played here, I think I hit 5-iron on the hole. It was the year it was blowing like crazy. We stopped I think we were on 16 green. I want to say I was playing with Scottie or maybe Rory, one of the two. Somebody hit 6-iron I think came up short, so I hit 5, then it went over. I mean, it's kind of tough to argue when it's blowing 35.

But yeah, my friends bust my chops about it pretty good. So I mean, it's all fun and games. Then just got to go out and go do it.

**Q. You mentioned Valspar and Houston as places you'll play. I think you played each of them maybe once in the past, Houston a long time ago. Have you ever felt like you've had a consistent schedule heading into the Masters, because it seems like you've tried a different a lot of different ways to get prepared for that and is this possibly something that could work?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: Well, hopefully next year I'm in the Signature Events, so that might change the schedule a little bit. But I like Houston; I helped design that golf course, so it's a fun place to go back to. I enjoy that city. And having a good relationship with Jim and Giles has always been -- they've always been people I've leaned on through the years. So I like to support that event.

Tampa, yeah. Tampa I haven't played obviously in the last four years, but I think before that maybe once in four years. I like the golf course; it's just hard to play every week.

But now not being in certain events I've got to play those weeks if I want to, first off, play my way into competitive form, and then also, I mean, you got to look long-term and at the end of the year too. I want to try to make it as far as I can.

**Q. In your previous incarnation, if you like, as a PGA TOUR player, you always had the reputation of really elevating yourself in the majors compared with performances in rank-and-file PGA TOUR events, if I can put it that way. Have the events that you've played since you've come back felt bigger than they used to?**

BROOKS KOEPKA: No.

**Q. I mean to you.**

BROOKS KOEPKA: No, I think every tournament's important. I think sometimes I've never -- I've always been a slow starter. I think if we looked at everything going, we usually kind of lined it up where there was always two in a

row or three, and there was a break. Sometimes that first week I'm not exactly sharp. I don't know why. Just feeling a little bit of the flow wasn't always there.

Then the second and third week I just got better. So a lot of those were teed up for majors. Then this was kind of the start of where we always felt like I could really test my game and know where I'm at. So this week was always kind of an, all right, you'd better be sharp here, and I've just been a notoriously slow starter. I don't know why. It's kind of the one thing that annoys me because I don't really have an answer for it.

THE MODERATOR: All right, Brooks, thank you for the time. Hopefully get a good start this week.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Thanks.

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