

Honda Classic

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Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Resort

Kamaiu Johnson

Press Conference



MARK WILLIAMS: We'd like to welcome Kamaiu Johnson into the interview room here at the 2021 Honda Classic. You're making a start here as a sponsor exemption. Must be awfully nice to be here finally and ready to attack this PGA National course. How excited are you to be making your third PGA TOUR start but your debut here at the Honda Classic this week?

KAMAIU JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah, really excited. It's good to be here. Very blessed to be able to have the opportunity to play on the PGA TOUR. Ken Kennerly has been so awesome to me, the tournament director, in making me feel at home. The game is feeling better than it has in the past, past couple events. Body is feeling better. Been working out a lot and just getting the body in shape to play some golf.

MARK WILLIAMS: You've played two events, AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am and then the Arnold Palmer Invitational. Unfortunately missed the cut in both events, but what do you think the biggest thing is that you learned in those two PGA TOUR events?

KAMAIU JOHNSON: You know, I learned that I can get comfortable on the PGA TOUR. That's a big one. One was with fans, one without fans. I just learned that I can get comfortable and I've just got to -- what I did learn is you've got to have the mind, body and soul in the right place in order to play out here on the PGA TOUR, and that's what I've been really working hard on. In the past week or so after Bay Hill, I said, I need to get my body better in shape and just feel good out on the golf course because the swing can feel good, but if the body doesn't feel good, then you're not going to play well.

Just been working on breathing and just working on a lot of good things with my coaches that are here right now. I'm looking forward to a great week. I'm very, very confident in myself. There's no disbelief inside of me. There's still belief even though the scores that I have shot in the past couple events, but I'm still ready to go. I'm still excited and ready.

Q. How many times have you played this golf course, and what sort of strategy will you bring to this venue?

KAMAIU JOHNSON: Yeah, I've played it three times since I've been here, and I think it fits my eye pretty well. It's just a lot of drivers, which is good for me again. A lot of drivers off the tee, a lot of wind, and I think the way the golf course is playing now, the wind is up right now, I don't think the scores will be -- I don't think it's going to be a shootout here. It's just you've got to put yourself in good positions to attack pins around this golf course. Like for instance, on No. 3, the dogleg left, if you take it way left over there, it opens up the whole green.

It's just certain things you've got to know to get around this golf course. I've got a great guy on the bag this week, Andy Walker, who the Lynn University men's golf team coach, and he's played this golf course millions of times, so I'm excited to have him on the bag this week for sure.

Q. What's been the biggest adjustment for you in these few starts? Is it the courses? Is it preparation or maybe overpreparation, the mental aspect of it, physical aspect?

KAMAIU JOHNSON: Yeah, it's probably overpreparation, and like I said earlier, these are the hardest -- I'm playing the two hardest golf courses on the PGA TOUR my first two starts, so it's just really getting comfortable and really just believing in yourself and realizing that you can play out here. If you can hit a drive 300 yards at another golf course, you can hit it 300 yards here. If you can chip it close anywhere else, you can chip it close here. It's really just believing and being comfortable, honestly. That's why I've brought Andy Walker in who's been here before and really believes in my game, and I believe in my game, and I think this is going to be the best week that I have on the PGA TOUR, absolutely.

Q. What have been your expectations week to week in these starts, and has it been difficult in that regard when you maybe haven't played what you hoped was your best?

KAMAIU JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah, it's been very difficult,



honestly. It's been very -- how can I put it? Like I've just been -- I got down on myself, honestly, when I shot the scores that I shot at Bay Hill. I was really disappointed in myself because that's just not who I am. It's not who I am as a golfer.

So it's just been about just getting back to what I used to do last summer. I had one of the best summers I ever had in my golfing career. I only shot two rounds over par all summer in 25 events. It's just getting back to golf, putting the media, putting the zoo part of it to the side and just getting back to playing golf, and I think that's where my team is trying to get me back to, and that's where I'm trying to get back to, and I think that I'm back to that. I think this is absolutely going to be one of the best weeks that I've had, and I'm looking forward to it.

Q. Any idea what your year or maybe the next few months looks like for you schedule-wise?

KAMAIU JOHNSON: Yeah, I don't know. I think you can get up to seven exemptions on the PGA TOUR, and I know my team is working hard to get me four more exemptions, so it's just up in the air. But I mean, other than that, it's mini-Tour stuff, and I've got a Korn Ferry event April 1 through 4 over in Destin, kind of where I'm from. I'm looking forward to that event.

The thing about it is I've gotten so much support out here on the PGA TOUR and a lot of people have come out and watched me, so I'm just very grateful for the love and support that I'm getting, and I hope to play well to just add on to that.

Q. I want to ask you about the Advocates PGA Tour. You won the Tour Championship there last year and had a bunch of top-10 finishes. How does the APGA Tour help you and other players develop as players?

KAMAIU JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah, I mean, it's the golf courses we play on. When I first started playing the APGA Tour, we were playing muni style courses, and Ken Bentley and Cole Smith and Michael Cooper and Adrian Stills, they've done a tremendous job of getting us on championship-style golf courses, and I think that's the only way you can compete out here on the PGA TOUR.

The thing is we have numerous guys on that Tour that can play out here. It's just getting the opportunity, getting the access and everything like that to be able to play out here.

It's doing good. I mean, I wouldn't be here today playing at the Honda Classic if it wasn't for the APGA Tour and the notoriety that the APGA Tour is getting. Ken Bentley is doing a tremendous job with that. I wouldn't have a

Farmers Insurance sponsorship, I wouldn't have got the exemption to play in the Farmers Insurance Open. I'm a product of what the APGA Tour can be if we just continue to support it and continue to support diversity and inclusion in the game of golf. I'm happy and grateful to be a part of the change that the golf industry is making. It's really, really a blessing to just be a part of that, and I'm excited.

Q. You've talked a lot about falling in love with the sport at a young age. Today you get to work with some kids in the First Tee. What does that mean to you?

KAMAIU JOHNSON: Yeah, all I've ever wanted was to inspire the youth in my community or around the world, and it means a lot and I'm honored that these guys would even think of me to talk to these kids and just be an inspiration to these kids because at the end of the day it's bigger than golf. I told myself all I ever wanted to do was to be an inspiration, and I feel like I can do that now and I'm just excited to be able to maybe -- them talking to me would keep them playing golf or whatever it is or just give them some inspiration that no matter where you come from, no matter what you're doing that you can make it, and I'm just a product of that, and I'm excited to have that opportunity to talk to them.

Q. How would you kind of explain to somebody the pressure of somebody in your position having just the seven starts as you mentioned, the seven exemptions, dealing with everything being thrown at you, having to do more media, adjusting to courses you've never really seen before, to try to manage your expectations. How would you explain what that's like to somebody?

KAMAIU JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, I would explain it that it's -- I maybe shouldn't say it like this, but it's like a zoo. It's honestly getting used to just getting pulled different ways, but to whom much is given, much is required. You've got to adjust to it, and you've got to be ready for it.

I'm just grateful for the opportunity, honestly, and grateful to be able to speak to the media and be able to speak to kids from the First Tee. It's about adjustment, and you've got to figure out a way to adjust to all of this. I'll figure it out. I know I'm very confident, like I told someone the other day, when I first turned pro, playing on the mini-Tours of golf, I got punched in the face, I got knocked down. I turned pro way too early. So this is just similar to that, just getting knocked down. Every time you get knocked down you've got to get back up. Every time I get knocked down, every time I shoot a bad round, I'm going to get back up and tee it up the next day and continue to process what I'm doing and one day hopefully to be a member of the PGA TOUR and be one of the top players on the PGA TOUR.

I think these starts are just getting me ready for that.

Q. I know that you and your peers compete fiercely out on the Advocates PGA Tour, and Willie Mack was the player that replaced you at the Farmers Insurance Open. I know you're friends and I understand he came out to support you at the Arnold Palmer Invitational, among others, of course. Given that we have up to 10,000 people here on-site at this event, do you anticipate having more support, friends, family coming out and supporting you this week, and if so, who will be out here following you?

KAMAIU JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah, I've had plenty of people told me they were coming out. Jan Auger, man, she -- I owe her everything. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't even be playing golf. She gave me access to the golf course and charged me a dollar a day to play golf. So to her -- her friend Lynn is coming out. My mom is not going to come out this week just because all the travel and she's still getting over COVID and lupus and everything, but I've got support down here down south.

A lot of guys from the Ibis Country Club are going to come out and watch. I've been practicing over there, and people have been coming up to me and saying how inspired and how they just want to follow me and stuff like that. So I'm just grateful. I really am. I'm grateful for all the support, and it doesn't go unnoticed all the support that I'm getting, and I'm just happy to be here and happy to represent the APGA Tour, and just happy to represent change in the golf industry.

I think I'm a product of that, and I don't mind being a product of that. I love -- it took a village to raise me, whether it was Black people, White people, no matter who it was, it was a village who got me to the point where I am today, so I'm just grateful to be able to change so many people's lives and inspire people, and I'm just so happy to be here.

MARK WILLIAMS: We appreciate you making the time and enjoy the weekend. Hope you have a successful Honda Classic. Thanks for the time.

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