

Honda Classic

Wednesday, February 22, 2023

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Resort

Billy Horschel

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Billy Horschel to the interview room at the Honda Classic. Billy is making his seventh start of the season. If we can just get an opening comment on being back at the Honda Classic and the state of your game.

BILLY HORSCHTEL: It's always nice to come back to the Honda. I've played here, I think, 10 times. This is my 11th year playing. I grew up not far from here, 90 miles up the road. Being born and raised in the state of Florida, it's one of those things where you want to play Florida events. You want to represent your state. You want to represent where you're born and raised and hopefully play well. It's no different than anybody who from Texas or California or even like Jon Rahm playing the Spanish Open representing his country when they have tournaments over there.

I make it a priority to make these Florida events a big deal. I haven't won one in my career. I haven't won in the state of Florida before. So that's one thing I want to check off before my time is done on the PGA TOUR.

State of the game? Yeah, it's been a slow start to the year. It hasn't been the way I wanted. Todd Anderson and I, we're always trying to make improvements and get better in the game of golf, as everyone is. We made some changes this off-season to try and do that, and at home it's been really good and on the range and in practice it's been really good, it just hasn't translated to the course.

So this past week we sort of abandoned what we've been doing the last couple months, realizing it was more of an effort; it wasn't as easy to do. Went back to some of the older stuff, and what's nice is some of the stuff that we were trying to fix, that we did, going to what we were trying to do this past off-season has sort of translated into going back to the old swing.

So my tendency has always been to move off the ball with the upper half and we've been trying to stay centered a little bit more, and that's why we made some of the changes in the swing we did, and then just going back to

an old setup and a few other things, my upper half stayed centered because of what we've done.

It's nothing new. It's just in the game of golf you're always trying to make improvements, trying to get better, and sometimes you've got to take chances and understand you may fail sometimes, and we failed, and we're back to what we've been doing the majority of last year and end of '21.

Yeah, it's been nice to see some better golf shots, and it's been a little bit easier to make the golf swing this week than it has been the last few weeks.

Q. Tiger and Rory had the groundbreaking yesterday over at Palm Beach College. I'm curious, what appealed to you about the whole TGL concept?

BILLY HORSCHTEL: Yeah, it's pretty amazing to see the groundbreaking, where it's going to be, here in a great golf fanatic area.

When it came to me last summer, when we had meetings last summer talking about it, I thought it was pretty cool in the sense that it was off the golf course. It was something different than what we're normally used to seeing.

It's in a two-hour window, so it's very fast and easy. It's on a simulator. A lot of people are practicing on simulators, whether they have them in their own home or whether their golf club up in the northeast or somewhere else where the weather is not as nice, they're hitting the simulators. So I think it's a really cool concept.

I think the concept of having it be live betting there and it's in a small arena, small teams, little sweet competitions over three months, I think it's just something different in the game of golf, and I'm excited about it.

I think when we look at trying to get people into the game of golf, and I heard someone talk about this the other day, it's a little daunting sometimes to go out to the driving range, to go out to the golf course and know all the etiquette and know all the rules and know everything. It's a little daunting sometimes.



I think that's why TopGolf has been so successful. People going to TopGolf, having some drinks, having some food with their friends, hitting the golf ball, doing it in a fun, relaxing atmosphere instead of a golf course that can be, as we all know, sort of scary at times.

I think this concept is just adding on to that of another way to hopefully get -- reach a different generation, reach the different fans of the game of golf and hopefully get them into the game of golf.

Q. Speaking of how the golf course can be scary, this one out here is not particularly --

BILLY HORSCHTEL: This one is not easy. It never is.

Q. Yet it's never scared you off. I know it is a challenge with the schedule. Why have you been so committed to it, other than just the aura of being close to home and obviously your Florida ties? Is there something else that keeps bringing you back?

BILLY HORSCHTEL: Yeah, when I look at my schedule every year, I pick -- the tournaments I play, the first criteria is the golf course; do I like the golf course; do I enjoy playing the golf course; is it something that fits my game; is it something that gives me an advantage over everybody else. This is a golf course that is right there -- fits my game. I like challenging golf courses. I like that you've got to hit the ball solid. You've got to control your golf ball. You can't get away with hitting it off line or you get penalized here. It fits right into the way I've always loved playing the game of golf.

Yes, I understand you can be playing really well and just make one little bit of a mistake and make a big number and sort of shoot yourself out of a tournament or even wind up missing the cut. So it is a challenge. It is a mental challenge.

But I've been playing this golf course since my junior days when we had the Optimist International down here. I've always enjoyed and loved coming down here. First and foremost, it's the golf course that attracts me, but then you think about the fans, big support for Gator Nation here. Ken Kennerly and his staff has been unbelievable to me, and just the way the tournament is run is awesome.

There's so many different things that lends itself to being such a great event that that's why I continue to keep coming back.

Q. Shane Lowry was saying he's playing seven straight weeks. He's playing these five, the two elevated and the two more after this. Do you have a

similar grinding mentality where you don't have to circle a tournament like this as a rest week leading into Bay Hill and THE PLAYERS?

BILLY HORSCHTEL: Yeah, my schedule has been pretty much the same for the last X amount of years. If you look at this year, I think I didn't play Farmers, played LA because of the status and everything. It can be a grind. Playing five weeks in a row can be a grind. Playing seven weeks in a row can be a grind. Playing these golf courses here especially in the state of Florida that we play can be a little bit of a grind.

But I think if you go about it the right way, you manage your energy levels, then I think the rest sort of takes care of itself a little bit, as long as you don't get sick like I've been the last two weeks. It's been a little bit of a challenge. Finally I decided to go into the doctor yesterday, and my wife was very proud of me to go see a doctor and get medication.

Yeah, not a lot of guys like to play five weeks in a row. Shane playing seven weeks is really unheard of, especially from a top player. But I think if you get on a good momentum and get on a good roll, the game can be pretty -- I can't say easy, but those weeks go by quicker. You're not always grinding away with it if your game is in a good spot and you're playing well.

Q. Did you play the course?

BILLY HORSCHTEL: I did.

Q. Shane said something -- is the rough a little bit more forgiving than it's been in the past?

BILLY HORSCHTEL: Yeah, the rough is a lot more forgiving than it has been in the past. I'm guessing it's sort of similar like we had at TPC Summerlin and the Phoenix Open this year. They cut the rough down to about two inches instead of three, three and a half inches that it was the year before. They wanted more fliers out of the rough.

I think sometimes it's a good thing and it's a bad thing. Sometimes you're trying to get fliers and the ball doesn't really fly. This week it is because there is a lot of Bermuda in the rough. The ryegrass overseed isn't nearly as strong as it normally is, so you will see some fliers.

I think it is more playable. Sometimes I go back and forth; do I want to see longer rough, be more penalized if you miss the fairway versus if you don't. Maybe this is one of those weeks where it's nice that it's a little shorter than it has been in the past.

Q. Did you go back to what you were doing before after LA and use the weekend and the last couple days -- you were talking about how you kind of scrapped the new. Is that when you decided to scrap everything?

BILLY HORSCHEL: We sort of scrapped it Thursday night of LA. Talking with TA, we just tried to get back into a little bit of a similar posture that we were for the majority of last year. Really we were just looking back at swings of 2013 and 2014, trying to get back to that.

Felt a little bit better on Friday, and then the weekend I didn't do anything. I was at my daughter's cheerleading competition. First one I've ever been to; that was an eye-opening experience.

Then Todd and I got to work on Monday, and really within 15, 20 minutes it was -- I can't say it's automatic, but it was very similar and very comfortable with what I needed to do for the rest of the week. Now it's just more or less getting the reps and feeling more comfortable with what we're trying to do.

Q. You seem to be a player that pays attention to what's going on in golf a little bit more than maybe others. How aware are you of the current lawsuit and your understanding of where the TOUR is and where LIV is in those proceedings?

BILLY HORSCHEL: Yeah, I've been aware of it probably more last year than it has this year. I know something happened this week where I think Saudi Arabia was trying to say they were a sovereign immunity and they didn't have to do a deposition and do all that, and I've realized that their claim was dismissed so now they're going to have to supposedly do a deposition. Whether they do or not is a different story.

I'm not really up to date on everything. I know there's a lawsuit over in the UK. I don't think that's been decided on. I know that started over in Phoenix week, so it's been two weeks now of that going on, and I think that's going to be a big ruling in the way things play out.

I think if LIV Golf loses that, I would be hard-pressed to see them winning this lawsuit here in the U.S. Whether they continue to go forward with that if they lose that one in the UK would be an interesting play.

But it will all play out the way it's supposed to. I think I've come to the realization, and I've always been at this realization, that I think I said in Scotland, I have no problem with competition. I think competition makes people play better. I think it makes businesses improve what they do. I think as we've seen, because of LIV, the PGA TOUR has

finally made changes to their product model, and what's going to come in '24 is going to be really exciting I think not only for the players but for the golf fans and for the sponsors and partners of the PGA TOUR.

I'm fine with LIV doing their thing and PGA TOUR doing their thing and let's compete at it and let's see who's going to be the best at it. I'm pretty confident the PGA TOUR's product model and the players that we have that we're always going to be on top no matter what happens.

Q. I heard you mention a few times over the past few weeks, winning in Florida, can you just in your own words explain to us why that's such a special point of emphasis for you and why you want to get that done?

BILLY HORSCHEL: You know, the state of Florida is very similar to me to an international player representing their country. I'm born and raised here. My family has been here since the 1920s. Very few people have roots that are 100 years plus in the state of Florida. I've always loved this state. I've always love the people of this state. I've always loved the people that have moved to this state.

I think Florida is such a beautiful state with so many different cultures and different people in here, and I wear -- I say I wear the colors. I'm a proud Floridian. I haven't won in the state of Florida, at the amateur level, at the college level, at the professional level. It'll be nice when that does finally happen, to finally say I've won in the state of Florida. There's so many great events, whether it's Honda, Bay Hill, PLAYERS, Valspar. I'll take any one of them. Whichever one wants to come sooner would be nice.

Yeah, I think the pride I have for the state of Florida is no different than the pride someone would have for their country in the sense of an international player.

Q. Speaking of the Honda, obviously this is the last Honda Classic under that name. I know you've missed very few. What are your thoughts about the future of this event? I know obviously they're looking for another sponsor, but do you hope it stays here? How special do you think this stop is?

BILLY HORSCHEL: Yeah, it's sad to see the Honda go, the longest sponsorship on the PGA TOUR event, 42 years, I believe. It's disappointing on many aspects of it. I'm sort of disappointed in the PGA TOUR in the sense that -- I'm not going to say they didn't prioritize the Honda Classic; they prioritize every sponsor that we have. It's always tough when you've got 47 different sponsors on the PGA TOUR and you have X amount of partners on the PGA TOUR to always please every one of them. But when



I was out on TOUR early in my career, this was a hot event. You had top 20, all top 20 players in the world playing here. This was an event to play at.

Then eventually over the years it's sort of been relegated to not as strong of a field anymore, due to reasons -- scheduling being the biggest thing, where the tournament fell.

But speaking with the PGA TOUR in emphasizing that we need to make sure that we keep a foothold down in South Florida. We used to have two tournaments down in South Florida, here and at Doral. Now we only have one. We're not going to lose this one. I've been told that we're going to stay here.

Now we've just got to find who that sponsor is going to be for the future, and at the same time, we need to make sure that the date itself is in a better spot. You've got 30 to 40 PGA TOUR pros that live within a couple miles of this place, and I think you've only got a handful of them playing this week, and that's disappointing. It really is.

The TOUR needs to understand that, that when you have 40 guys here that could stay in their bed, hop in their car and drive 10, 15 minutes to a tournament, they need to make sure that they're putting this in the right spot so they get all those top players playing here on a regular basis.

Like I said, PGA TOUR has -- I can't speak too much in depth on it, but they've guaranteed me that we're going to be here, and I'm excited about that.

Q. They announced the mixed team event down in Naples. You've played in the same group with Lexi. Just sort of your thoughts on men and women getting back together again like they did at the old JC Penney?

BILLY HORSCHER: I think it's really cool. Sorry, my voice is raspy. Like I said, I'm dealing with a sinus infection. I think it's really cool. It really is. I think it's something that's been talked about for a handful of years, and it was just a matter of time until something was done about it.

I think it's awesome that we're playing Tiburón. The LPGA finale is held there every year, and we played there obviously in the QB Shootout the last several years, or for many years now, and now it's going to become a mixed team event. I think it's going to be awesome to get the men and women together.

I was talking to Andrea Lee. The week after QB actually, we were doing a photo shoot together for Ralph Lauren. I sort of said it would be pretty cool if maybe we'd play together, Ralph Lauren sponsor ambassadors, and we can

wear similar outfits together. I'm not really big on wearing similar outfits and matching anybody ever, but in that aspect, it would be really cool with Andrea to do that.

I think it would be really cool that that's going to happen. I think it's going to be great with the fans, and I think the LPGA product right now is really strong.

You've seen the growth they've had over the last several years. Mike Whan did an unbelievable job at the LPGA Tour, and I think talking with a lot of girls, they're sad that he left, but he left it in a good spot, and now it's on to I believe Mollie who's commissioner to continue to grow that product because, like I said, they've got an unbelievable product.

I watch a lot of golf. I've talked about it regularly how much golf I watch, and I watch LPGA, I watch European Tour, I watch Champions Tour. I watch a lot of LPGA Tour coverage, and they've got some impressive girls out there playing right now.

THE MODERATOR: Billy, thank you very much for your time, and best of luck this week.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.