

Honda Classic

Sunday, February 26, 2023

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Resort

Chris Kirk

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome the winner of the 2023 Honda Classic, Chris Kirk. Chris, congratulations on your fifth career PGA TOUR win, first since 2015; is that right?

CHRIS KIRK: That is right.

THE MODERATOR: It took a little bit of extra time on the job today, but you got the job done with that approach into 18 in the playoff, was pretty much the exclamation point. You move to No. 6 in the FedExCup. I know there's a lot going on in your head, but if you could sum it all up and tell us how you're feeling initially.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, definitely still trying to wrap my head around it for sure, but I'm just so thankful to be able to do what I do for a living. I'm very thankful to have the life that I have, and to have the opportunity to compete on a stage like this, in a tournament like this, and to be able to pull it off is a huge bonus for me.

Yeah, I mean, unbelievable, like I said. I don't have the words yet.

Q. You've talked a couple of different times outside, and you really credited your sobriety as what's made just a tremendous difference. If you could just touch on that, that would be fantastic.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, I owe everything that I have in my entire life to my sobriety. I wouldn't be doing this for a living anymore. I probably wouldn't have the family that I have currently anymore.

I came really close to losing everything that I cared about.

For that to have happened and worked out for me, obviously there was some decisions that I made, but mostly the grace of God and a lot of other people that really helped me along the way. But yeah, it's something that's constantly on my mind, so it's pretty easy for me to see that winning the Honda Classic is kind of a bonus when literally every good thing I have in my life I owe to

that.

Q. There's so many parts and perks to winning, what's the best one?

CHRIS KIRK: I'm not going to lie to you. I came into this week at 47th in the world golf ranking, and that's usually not something I care a whole lot about, but I have not played the Masters since 2016, I think, and growing up in Georgia, that kind of means everything to me. So I've been watching that World Ranking closely, trying to stay in the top 50.

But to take care of it this week, that's going to be something that's incredibly special.

Last time I played, my two older sons, Sawyer and Foster were maybe two, just turned two, and like four months old. Now to be able to go back, they'll be 11 and 9, and then wilder, my third son, will be five. That par-3 contest can't come soon enough. I'm really looking forward to that. The whole week, but just to be able to make those memories with my wife and my kids will be awesome.

Q. You carry a reputation as a pretty cool, level customer. What was the wave of emotions like on 18 as you hit the water, hit the great shot at the end? What was that whole wave like?

CHRIS KIRK: You know, I didn't really feel that much until after it was over. Obviously I was pissed when I hit it in the water. I was just trying to stick with my game plan of what I was doing and stay aggressive and hit that right in the middle of the green, and pushed it a little bit, but if I had really flushed that one, it still would have covered and probably been right next to the hole.

You know, it was a miscue for sure and one that I almost got away with and didn't.

But then after making a huge mistake like that, to still have a chance and go back there in the playoff felt great. When I missed the fairway on 18, I would have liked to have piped one down the middle, but I almost liked my chances better with a wedge into that pin than some of those shots



from left or -- everybody saw how difficult Eric's bunker shot was, and he hit a great second shot.

I liked the position I was in there, and then to be able to hit that great of a wedge shot under those circumstances felt amazing, and I was definitely glad that that was a 6-inch putt and not a 4-footer.

Q. How well did you know Eric Cole going into today and talk about the way you went back and forth.

CHRIS KIRK: I did not know Eric at all until today. He was great to play with. I was very impressed with his game. I was very impressed with his demeanor. We had good conversation out there. It was as relaxed as it can be in that scenario.

It was pretty cool. I was talking to him, being a rookie on the TOUR and as young looking as he is, I just kind of assumed he was 24 like every other rookie on TOUR. He's actually 34 and has had quite a journey, it sounds like, to get to this level. I think he'll stick for quite a while. He's got a really great game. I was impressed by the way he hit it. He putted incredible. He was just really solid all around.

Q. I remember talking to you a couple years ago here about your life's journey, and you said then that you've been very open about it, but you weren't open -- you didn't think about sending a message to other people. Now you have a platform. You're on a stage, and when you talk about it, how much do you think it can help people when they hear someone like you having gone through what you went through and where you've come now?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, I've gotten to see it firsthand thankfully. It's been amazing getting to connect with people and meet people that have -- I couldn't really put a number on it, but it's been a lot of people that have reached out to me directly and said, I read your story or I heard your story and that made me decide that it was time.

When I first came back to playing and was very open and honest about it, that was not in my mind at all. It was more -- it was for me because I felt I had lived this life for a number of years where I was just lying to myself, lying to my family, lying to -- hiding a lot of things. So the honesty of the process that I went through to get better just felt so good that I had nothing to hide, and so it was just the natural thing for me to do.

But now on the back end a little bit, it's been amazing. Like I said, it's not something that I really saw happening, but to be able to connect with people and hear people that -- for somebody to say, I got sober because of you, and my life

has changed because of you, you can't really describe how unreal that is with words.

Q. That's back-to-back wins by Georgia Bulldogs at this place, four in the last ten years. What is it about the Dawgs at this venue?

CHRIS KIRK: I think you'll definitely see a lot of guys -- with the sort of grainy Bermuda greens and the wind, you'll see a lot of guys that grew up in the south and are familiar with playing in the south, just like you see a lot of California guys win at Riv. It's just sort of what we're comfortable on.

I would say it's probably not a whole lot more than that other than there's a lot of really good Georgia players, too.

Q. I know you like to mix up your caddies every now and then. How important was Michael down the stretch for you through that roller coaster over the last couple holes?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, Michael played golf at Georgia, also, played mini-Tours for a number of years and has caddied for me off and on for the last, I guess, almost three years now. He's just really kind of gotten to the point where he knows me so well, he knows what I need and what I don't need. He knows when to say the right thing and when to just leave me alone.

He was unbelievable, yeah. There was a number of putts on the back nine that I was really unsure of. That putt on 16, I got down and read it, and I had him look at it, and I was just like, I've got no idea, just tell me what to do. He read that one perfect, and made it. But more than that, he's just a very calming influence out there for me, and obviously a very close friend. We care for each other a lot and really want to see each other succeed. He's turned into a pretty darned good caddie.

Q. You've knocked on the door early in the season at Amex and Sony. What do you think pushed you across the line today?

CHRIS KIRK: I think that the situations that I was in at the Sony and the Amex, even though I did not win either of those two tournaments, my mindset changed after those two weeks from maybe I can still win out here to I definitely can still win out here. I didn't know when it was going to happen or if it was going to -- for it to happen this soon is incredible.

But the way I played those two weeks, especially Sunday at the Amex, coming down the stretch, I just felt great. I was nervous, but I felt great, and I hit so many great shots, and I hit a ton of great putts, and unfortunately on the back

nine at Amex, none of them went in.

I felt like I executed almost flawlessly, so to do that even though it didn't work out was just like, I know that if I do that again, it's going to work next time.

Q. This was Eric's I think 15th TOUR start. Before you won the first time out here, did you have an experience where you had a close call and fell just short? If you did, what did you pull out of it?

CHRIS KIRK: Yes, I finished second at the Houston Open my rookie year, which was at that time in the spring, and at that time we also -- Sony was the first tournament of the year, so that was relatively early in my TOUR career. I think I had a one-shot lead after 36 holes at 9-under, and I shot 8-under on the weekend and got waxed by Phil Mickelson, who I think shot 16-under over the weekend or 14-under over the weekend, something like that.

That was a great experience for me being in contention and being in the lead and right around the lead. Also got to see like sometimes you can play great and get beat. That's certainly happened to me a handful of times. AT&T Pebble Beach in probably 2013 or so comes to mind also. I played unbelievable and finished, I think, three shots clear of third, and Brandt Snedeker, a good friend of mine, just could not miss from 40 feet the whole week and played unbelievable and won.

Yeah, you've kind of got to do what you can do, and that experience of it going both ways makes you realize there's only so much I can control here. I can't control the outcome of this tournament, I can just control what I'm doing on each shot, on each hole.

Q. I'm just curious, is this the first time you've won on TOUR without celebrating with an adult beverage?

CHRIS KIRK: On the PGA TOUR, yes. I did win a Korn Ferry TOUR event a few years ago, and yeah, so I was able to -- but I think we'll probably celebrate tonight. Sepp who won last year is known for his very high Diet Coke consumption, and I'm probably pretty close to him actually. I remember last year we ended up back at his house together that night, and that was the first thing he did is poured a bunch of Diet Cokes in there. I'll probably do the same.

Q. What's it like to do something that's so different and says a lot about what you've gone through in your life?

CHRIS KIRK: I don't know, I didn't really think about it, to be honest with you. I mean, I just am so excited to

celebrate tonight with my friends, and obviously wish that my wife and kids were down here with me, but I'll get to see them on Wednesday. They're coming down for Bay Hill next week. It'll be a lot of celebrating, and I thank God that alcohol won't be a part of it.

THE MODERATOR: Chris, we're proud of you. Congratulations.

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