

Cognizant Classic

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Champion Course

Rickie Fowler

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome our 2017 champion, Rickie Fowler, to the interview room here at the Cognizant Classic in the Palm Beaches. Maybe a couple words on coming back to the property at a place you've had success.

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, good to be back. I was bummed I had to take last year off just due to scheduling and how everything fell with some of the elevated events. This is a place where I've played well, like you said, won here. Actually my caddie had asked what year it was. I couldn't exactly remember. It means it's been too long, so I need to change that.

It's a place that's a very good test, second-shot golf course, typically windy, and there's a lot of trouble that is around to ruin your round.

I've always enjoyed it, and it kind of brings out what can be your best but also can tear you apart if you're not on.

Very demanding and a test that I always look forward to.

Q. Obviously you and Rory get all the attention coming back and playing as locals, but there's a lot of locals in this field. What does that do to this tournament? It's been rebranded, there seems to be an excitement about the future, and now with more locals coming in, how does that all play in?

RICKIE FOWLER: I think it has a lot of potential to grow. I feel like it's always had good local sport. Unfortunately with how the schedule works, not everyone can play. There's guys that choose to play potentially some other events and how the flow of the schedule, and this is one of the ones that can take a hit with guys choosing other events.

Unfortunately with how it works, we can't play every week, but for me, like I said, I've always liked this golf course and the test that's here. Luckily we have plenty of TOUR players and pros in general that live in the area, so having an event here, you're at least going to get a few of the guys

to play.

But I think having a new title sponsor -- I was out there playing with G just a little bit ago. I feel like they're excited for the potential of growth and kind of revamping this event to see how we can make it better together, players as well as with Cognizant.

It's cool to have sponsors that come in and want to work together with the players and do things like that.

Q. What I'm wondering what your memories good and bad are of the Bear Trap over the years?

RICKIE FOWLER: I've hit plenty of good shots. I've hit plenty of bad ones. Got away with -- I had a big enough lead where I got away with one going in the water on 17.

It's not a finish that you want to play on the number, whether it's on the cut number coming in on Friday. Once bad swing at the wrong time, and your tournament is done. There's not much of a -- really no lead that's safe going into that with that being the finishing stretch. There's a lot that can happen.

I think I had a four-shot lead going to 17 and gave myself a little bit of cushion, but still dropping and hitting the third not, not exactly the most confident. You're just like, please let this be dry and we can move forward.

Especially now that we play 17 up -- 17 used to be a lot different playing another tee back, so it's a little bit more inviting versus being back there hitting 4- and 5-iron.

It's a cool finish. Like I said, there's a lot that can happen. You hit good shots, you can make some birdies. But there's some big numbers that can happen quickly.

Q. In your amateur playing days, how motivated would you be by the trophy itself? Were there trophies that were so cool looking or meaningful to you that that was as big a deal as the actual title?

RICKIE FOWLER: Not necessarily. I mean, a cool trophy is something that's fun to have, but sometimes at the time,



I have one of the -- it's not one of the big, big checks, but like decent sized, from when I won -- I'm pretty sure it was from here. Sometimes something like that is just as cool.

There's obviously some special trophies out there, some iconic ones, but we don't play for -- we do play for trophies. We play for wins. But I guess in a way not specific ones. A cool trophy is a bonus, but we're not teeing it up because I want to have that trophy.

Q. That leads to a quick follow. In this age when the money is becoming increasingly more significant and ranking and such, are trophies becoming passe? Would you be just as happy to just get a giant cardboard check as a memento, once the money is gone, of what you did?

RICKIE FOWLER: I don't know if wives or spouses would like trying to display the checks. It would be great because it's nice to have those accomplishments, and the more checks you have on the wall, the better.

But I think trophies are a better way of displaying victories, and at the same time, I think if you're playing the tournament to ultimately make that money, yes, it's our job, but it's more about the competition and ultimately -- I remember when I won THE PLAYERS back in 2015, and I think the purse had gone up that year, and it's continued to go up since then, but I didn't know how much I won when I had won. I was playing to win.

The trophy has changed since then. I kind of like mine better because you can drink out of it. The new one you can't.

When you get down to the base of it, we play to win, and all the others are kind of bonuses or perks on top of it.

Q. How do you feel about the start to the year you've had?

RICKIE FOWLER: Obviously terrible start to the year for me coming off of last year. Never got anything going on the West Coast. I don't think we exactly had the best weather, either. I'm not blaming it on that, but it definitely didn't help me to get things going, so I'm excited to get things going back in Florida, which has been home for 15 years, at least trending and heading in the right direction.

I'm ready to kind of get things going back how they were last year.

Q. How do you approach when maybe you have a slower start like if this came later in the season after a bunch of strong finishes, you may just see it as a

couple not tough results in a row? At what point do you start to wonder about where it's at?

RICKIE FOWLER: I think you're always wondering week to week. That's kind of the game of golf. Sometimes you have it, sometimes you don't.

I think the big thing is the patience and not freaking out or getting too worried and adding stress. That never helps.

I learned a lot about patience over the last few years prior to 2023. Yeah, not trying to press too much, continue to work on and do what we have been doing. You know what works. You know what you need to do. But it's a lot easier said than done.

Q. I know Anthony Kim's kind of college days at OU predated you at Oklahoma State by a couple years, but I'm interested to know if you had any run-ins with him when you were still in school and he was still living in the area, and if not, what's your best Anthony Kim story from being out on TOUR with him for a few years?

RICKIE FOWLER: We really didn't get any time together prior to being on TOUR. He was always a bit ahead of me. We both grew up and played junior golf out in the same area, desert junior golf out in Palm Springs, out in the desert area. But he was always in the age group ahead of me.

So I always knew about him, knew who he was, but we didn't really get to play and spend time together until being on TOUR and really didn't spend any time off course. I played with him a handful of times in those few years. I think we were a 2-ball one of the years Canadian Open when it was over in Vancouver.

He was one of those guys when you'd walk by that made that sound. There's few guys that make other players' heads turn. He was one of those ones, and he's obviously very talented.

Q. There's a lot of talk about the money from SSG to allow the PGA TOUR to be innovative and some cool new things. Do you have any big ideas you can share?

RICKIE FOWLER: I mean, I'd say luckily I haven't had to think about that too much. I haven't been as involved as some of the guys like Tiger and Cantlay. I'm excited about the partnership because I feel like there's some very smart and influential people part of that SSG group that I feel like ultimately can help the TOUR evolve and head in a potentially better direction and be in a better position for the future.

As far as big ideas, not necessarily. That's a rabbit hole we could go down --

Q. Please do.

RICKIE FOWLER: (Looks at watch.)

No, I feel like ultimately we're in the entertainment business, and we've got to figure out a better way to entertain our fans and it come across better on TV. How we do that, I don't exactly know, but like I said, I feel like with the people that are involved, I definitely trust the guys, the players that have been involved, and I feel like the guys -- especially since they're not just golf guys, I think they have enormous respect for the game of golf, but also they come from a lot of different avenues in sports and business, and I feel like they can help us kind of give direction on where we can or need to go.

Q. Everything that LIV has tried to be ridiculed, whether it's the shotgun or the music or compressing the tournament into three days. Is there any room for evolution in this sport?

RICKIE FOWLER: I think within reason, but at the same time, like you said, it's also a very traditional sport with traditional tournaments. 72 holes, cut going into the weekend.

I do feel like say if the season is kind of where it's at with the January to August, is there ways to do different things in the fall, but I also at the same time feel like there needs to -- we kind of have to create the want for golf. Right now you can basically watch golf every week of the year for the most part. There's not really an off-season.

I feel like with other sports, people can't wait for football preseason to start up, and that's just preseason. The games don't really matter a whole lot.

Something along those lines to create a little bit more of a demand for golf because depending on how you want to talk about it, is the product potentially diluted with how much golf is available.

Q. How do you think the course is playing this week after playing a few practice rounds? Obviously there's been a few changes on 10 with changing it to a par-5 and I think they removed a few bunkers on 6. What's your thoughts on how the course is playing?

RICKIE FOWLER: There's a little less rough than what I'm used to seeing here, which I like that. I think it allows you to play some more shots versus being in the rough and just

kind of having to either hack it out or maybe advance it up by the green or have to lay up, depending if there's water.

Like I talked about earlier, I've always liked this golf course because it's very challenging, and you can't fake it around here. I feel like it tests kind of all aspects of your game. It's not just hitting driver everywhere. There's certain holes you can, but then it's more about being in the right position.

As is pretty common for South Florida, 10- to 20-mile-an-hour winds, and you have to hit solidly struck golf shots. It'll expose you if you don't or if you're a little bit off.

Q. Is there a hole in specific that you enjoy playing most on this course?

RICKIE FOWLER: Whichever one I stay out of the water. I think 4 is probably one of my favorites, short par-4. You should hit the fairway, but you don't, you get out of position -- really any hole you get out of position, and you're just trying to pray for par and hopefully make bogey and pray that you don't make anything more.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports