

Cognizant Classic

Wednesday, February 26, 2025

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Champion Course

Gary Woodland

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to welcome four-time PGA TOUR winner Gary Woodland as well as PGA TOUR Commissioner Jay Monahan for a special presentation. We'll start with a few remarks from Commissioner Monahan and then start the Q & A portion with Gary.

JAY MONAHAN: Good morning to all of you. It's an honor to be here at the Cognizant Classic in the Palm Beaches to make a special presentation today. On behalf of the PGA TOUR and the entire golf community, I'm pleased to present Gary Woodland with the PGA TOUR Courage Award.

The PGA TOUR Courage Award is not presented annually. It's reserved for special individuals who face exceptional and extraordinary circumstances.

Gary Woodland is the seventh recipient in the award's history. Gary's journey is well-documented. He has been bravely shared his story that led to brain surgery in September of 2023. He's overcome so many challenges, which is nothing short of miraculous.

He continues to manage symptoms associated with his initial diagnosis while competing, and competing very well, at the highest level of professional golf.

Gary Woodland is a constant inspiration to us all. He's an inspiration to his family. He's an inspiration to his friends. He's an inspiration to his peers.

In that regard, I'd say it's hard to find a player on the PGA TOUR that's more admired and more respected, and he's an inspiration to organizations and individuals and families impacted through organizations like Folds of Honor.

Please join me in recognizing Gary Woodland, recipient of the PGA TOUR's Courage Award.

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Gary's press conference. Earlier this year you sat down with "Good Morning America's" Michael Strahan who surprised you with the news on the show. Now you're receiving the



award from the commissioner. What does it mean to you to receive this award?

GARY WOODLAND: Sorry, it's a little hard right now.

It's everything to me because -- sorry.

It's been a hard journey for me. The last couple years has been really hard.

Receiving this is a testament to the people around me because there's no way, one, I'd be back playing or no way I'd be sitting here today if it wasn't for them.

It means everything for me to receive it, but it really belongs to the people around me. It's been hard for me to share my journey, but I've done it for the sole purpose of trying to help people because I am blessed with amazing family and my team around me, and even the golf world, from the TOUR, players, caddies, to you guys, the love and support I've had has been amazing.

It pains me to think that somebody is out there going through something and doesn't have that much support, and hopefully they can see me or see my story and realize that I battle it every day, too. They can see me and say, if that guy can do it, I can do it.

I'm very blessed to have my family and my team and the golf world behind me, and this award is for all of them.

(Season 3 clip of "Full Swing" shown.)

Q. The Courage Award comes with a \$25,000 donation and you've chosen Champion Charities as an organization helping fund research and support patients with brain tumors, brain disease and brain trauma. You and your wife Gabby have also committed to matching that donation, so thank you. Why did you choose Champion Charities?

GARY WOODLAND: I had the honor this year of playing with Harris Barton at Pebble Beach. He was my amateur partner there this year at AT&T, and I've known Harris for a while, but as we were talking during the tournament, I found out through him that both of his parents passed from



brain tumors.

We shared what he went through as a son and obviously what I went through as a patient and what my family went through, and it stinks. He talked about his charity that he started, and Gabby and I started to look into it more, and when the TOUR was amazing enough to donate to a charity of my choice, this one just hit our hearts. That's why we decided to get involved financially and just try to help.

Like I said, they're doing a lot with pediatric, kids with brain tumors, too, and I know how hard this was on my family. It was hard on me for sure, but my family, what my wife went through dealing with me and my struggles still on a daily basis, but my kids are too young to understand that, and I can't imagine a parent on the reverse side dealing with a kid going through it. I just can't.

Just trying to give back and bring awareness, and hopefully we can make this an easier path in people's lives.

Q. You currently sit No. 73 in the FedExCup, a great position. As your last year in the tournament winner's exemption, how do you approach this season as you continue to navigate the health challenges with the pressure to keep your card, as well?

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah. At the end of the day, I'm fighting. The last thing I'm going to let this do is let this thing in my head stop my dreams, and that's why I fight every day. I want to be there for my kids and my family, but I want to chase my dreams, too. I've got a lot of dreams out here.

I'm starting to understand what I need to do every day to function in life, but the things I'm doing to help with my brain are also helping me play golf, and I'm knocking on the door. I know my game is close. It's coming, and I'm going to keep knocking on that door until I bust through, and then we'll see what happens.

But I've got big goals and big dreams, and I'm starting to see signs of my game getting to where I want it to be. I'm excited for the rest of this year for sure.

Q. We spoke a year ago, you spoke to everybody a year ago when you were so gracious sharing your story. Then from seeing before Sony your comments, I'm not sure if you thought last year - maybe you did - was going to be as hard as it was; you said it was sometimes as scary as it was the previous year. What was difficult about last year knowing that you had come off the surgery successful but yet you still had times where you said it was very scary. How was that?

GARY WOODLAND: The unknown is what's so scary. As athletes, especially playing an individual sport, for the most part we're all control freaks. We like to control everything around us. Being out of control -- I had no control of what's going on with my brain.

The hard thing is, and this is an experience that my family and everyone, we've had to deal with, is physically I look normal. I look fine. But this thing that I battle in my head tells me every day that I'm not.

The surgeons told me when I came out of surgery, Gary, you'll be swinging a golf club within six weeks; you're just not going to want to play golf for a long time. Well, I want to play golf. This is what I do. It's all I've ever wanted.

When I came back, I just thought I'd be okay, and I wasn't. It was hard, and the things I battled last year through stimulation were too much.

But I played -- I'm proud of myself for playing. It would have been easy for me to take a medical. It would have been easy for me not to play, and from a results standpoint, that's what I should have done. I shouldn't have played. I had really no chance to play well.

But I learned so much. If I wouldn't have played last year, there's no way I would be sitting here today as optimistic about my game as I am because I understood what hurts me and what doesn't. I understand what I have to do now before I get out of bed, the breath work and everything I have to do to give myself the endurance to withstand what I'm going to face that day.

I didn't know that last year. The stimulation of playing -- there's a lot that goes into just showing up and playing golf tournaments. We've got a lot of things to do each week. It's not just showing up and playing Thursday through Sunday. You play multiple weeks. You throw major championships in there. You throw tournaments in there with a lot of stimulation, my brain couldn't handle it. I didn't understand that.

The scary part for me was is this what it's going to be like the rest of my life. I'm blessed that my wife is such a stud. From early on in the year, I think she just let me vent and let me cry and let me tell her everything that was going on, and then it got to a point of the year where it's like, well, what's the solution. It's one thing to sit there and complain, but when you sit there and complain and I'm venting, if you don't have a solution, it's going to keep spiraling and it's going to get worse.

So every day I'd call towards the end of the year and I was

crying or whatever. Well, what are we going to do to get better.

So it was amazing because she let me vent, but then it was, let's start focusing on what we have to do. That's when we started flying around, we started meeting with specialists, we started finding techniques that I can do on a daily basis to target this specific part in my brain that gives me the endurance to function each day.

Now I have hope. Every day I get up I know I have a lot of work ahead of me that day but I know I can function. I know I can spend time with my kids now. I don't have to leave the room when my kids get excited. I'm getting my life back.

I credit my wife for forcing me to find solutions. She let me complain for a little bit each day, and then it was time to move on and find, what's the answer. That's something I'll live with for the rest of my life. She'll let me vent and complain, but then it's finding answers to make this better because complaining does nothing.

Q. How much is golf -- I don't know if it's the distraction, but just being able to get out on a course because you know, like you said, you need to concentrate when you're hitting a golf ball. Does it allow you to just, okay, everything is normal as it can be right now and not think about anything else?

GARY WOODLAND: It's hard because I'm trying not to think about anything. I've given more responsibility to my caddie and my team to make my life easier, but the one thing about golf is, and I've said this, I don't think I realized how much I love this game. I don't think I realized -- the golf world is going through a lot. We have a lot of change going on and things like that. But I don't think I realized how close everything was out here. The love and support I've had from the TOUR and the golf world, it's nothing less than amazing.

I truly love being out here. This is my 17th year on TOUR. I probably took it for granted. 2011 through 2019 I had a nice stretch, I think I was TOUR Championship seven out of nine years, won four times, won a major. You take for granted this is what it's going to be like.

That was taken away from me, and it was almost taken away from me for good. I realized how much I enjoyed that. I realized how much I enjoyed coming and doing the things week in, week out, the pro-ams, everything that you'd probably say, this is -- take a little for granted. I don't take it for granted anymore. I enjoy that. I enjoy each day because I know what the alternative is, and I don't want that.

Q. I did watch "Full Swing" last night and it had me in tears and my family in tears. If you could describe some of the support that you have received from some of your TOUR buddies, some of the guys you play with, and some of the support your wife Gabby has received from some of the other TOUR wives through this really difficult process.

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, the golf world has been a family. It really has.

The first player I told about all this was Justin Thomas. Justin and I are close, and I didn't tell anybody for about four months, and for some reason, JT and I were playing, we were in Minnesota, this was 2023 and we were a featured group that day so we had cameras all over us, and JT is like, G-Dub, how you doing. It kind of hit me, it wasn't like, how is golf. It was, how are you doing.

For him to ask that question, I said, man, I'm not doing well. He's like, what's going on, and I turn around and there's a boom mic right next to us, and I'm like, oh, I'll tell you later, I'll tell you later. Then the next day we were playing with Joel Dahmen - I'll never forget it - and he had a ruling going on so we were by ourselves, and JT is like, what were you going to tell me yesterday. I was like -- it's Friday, it's cut day, right, and JT and I were both kind of close to the cut line. And I said, JT, I've got a tumor in my head, in my brain. And he bogeyed the next three holes. He claims he didn't, but he did, and he ended up missing the cut by one, so he's going to blame me for that.

But since that day, JT -- I had my last MRI last week. He's texting me every day, checking in, everybody. That's not just him. He's just the first one I told. But every player out here. Rookies I don't even know coming up and checking on me. Then the caddies have been the same, the TOUR staff. Jay was one of the first phone calls I received after surgery. His whole staff has reached out.

It's literally a family. I know we're out here trying to beat each other up every day and every week, but people care. That's what makes this thing so special.

My wife, I can't say enough about what she's done. She's had it harder than I have because she's in it every day with the three kids and then trying to battle me every day and make sure that I can get out and function. I feel for her more than I definitely feel for myself and feel for anything else. She's the stud of everything.

Q. 16th at Sony, 22nd at AT&T, 21st WMPO. Those are three really different golf courses. Sounds like you're in a better place with your game, but what seems to be

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

click willing coming into this week? This is a place you've played well. I'm optimistic about you.

GARY WOODLAND: Thank you. Me too.

I went back to Randy Smith at the end of last year on my wife's -- my wife is the one that guided me to that decision, and it was one of the best decisions I've made in golf. His voice in my head just makes my life a lot easier. He's given me a ton of confidence. He's worked extremely hard to make the golf swing to a point where I don't have to think, which is a beautiful thing for me right now, so the game is starting to get a little bit easier for me again.

I'm starting to regain some confidence that I lost for a couple years of battling through things.

I'm starting to see shots again. I'm starting to be able to work the golf ball like I have for a long time, and that's why I can go to different golf courses and be successful because I'm able to see shots again. I'm not thinking about my head; I'm actually thinking about the golf course and the golf shots I need to hit.

I believe my best golf is ahead of me. My speed is back. I'm hitting it as hard as I was 15 years ago. I understand the game a lot more now, I think, than I did when I was young. I came out here as an athlete; I didn't know what I was doing. I was just talented.

I'm getting to a point now where I understand how I need to play, how I need to be successful, so I can show up on golf courses week in, week out and have a chance.

I'm knocking on the door. I know I am. I'm going to keep knocking until I bust through that thing.

THE MODERATOR: Gary, thank you very much for sharing your story and thank you for coming today, and congratulations.

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