

Cognizant Classic

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Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Champion Course

Luke Clanton

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Luke Clanton to the interview room at the Cognizant Classic in the Palm Beaches. You're making your debut this week. Opening thoughts on how your game has been looking.

LUKE CLANTON: Yeah, it's been good. The start of the season has been a lot of fun, from traveling to Hawai'i to California and kind of back home a little bit here. Again, I've played here a couple times, so I'm pretty excited to get it started.

Q. You have the opportunity to earn your PGA TOUR card with a made cut. What would that mean to you?

LUKE CLANTON: Yeah, it would mean the world for sure. To do it here, as well, would be amazing. An amazing journey I guess you could say.

But again, I think I'm going to be boring with this answer yet again, but just to kind of stay focused on one shot at a time.

I think at Waste Management I kind of got a little ahead of myself for the first day and had to do something pretty amazing the last eight holes. Again, I'm going to stay in the zone and stay with my game plan.

Q. Let's go back a few weeks to Phoenix. You kept saying it wasn't your time, that your time is going to come. Now fast forward to now, you're an hour north of where you grew up. You're going to have lots of friends and family in the crowd. Can you speak to the specialness of this tournament and this area and perhaps the perfect storybook setting for a pretty cool career achievement here in a couple days?

LUKE CLANTON: Yeah, it would be amazing. I mean, I've watched this event growing up since I was probably nine or ten years old. Again, it would be a perfect story.

But we don't know if it's my time yet. My time will come, and we don't know if it's this week or next week or whenever it will be. I'm going to trust in Lord and know that

it's golf; it's going to go my way or not go my way.

I would love for it to be this week with all the friends and family coming up, but I'm just going to focus on one shot at a time.

Q. What comes to your mind specifically when you think about your roots in this area and growing up at CC of Miami and CB Smith Park and rounds with your dad and all that?

LUKE CLANTON: Yeah, I mean, we played the Junior Honda here a ton growing up and we had high school stuff here growing up. It's a little bit emotional for sure because I've always been on the sidelines watching this event, and being inside the ropes out there hitting golf shots out here on this golf course is amazing.

I think it's just been an incredible journey so far, no matter what. Me and Jason have always kind of been talking about it. It would be a perfect story, but we've got to stay focused on what we have to do. We're not going to look too far ahead. We're not going to be worried about who's coming or what we're going to do. We're just going to go out there and play the best we can.

Q. Can you estimate how many times you've played this course?

LUKE CLANTON: I've played 36 in one day a couple times. We used to -- I don't know if I should say this, but we used to sneak out on 3 or 4 and play a couple holes.

But probably 40 times I'd say.

Q. So that gives you, like several guys in the field, almost like a home course advantage. What have you learned about the course? What's going to be challenging about the next four days for you on this course?

LUKE CLANTON: Yeah, if you just don't hit it in the fairway you're kind of screwed, to be honest with you. If it gets windy out here, it gets tough. If it's not windy, then if you drive it well you can play well.



Again, you just have to be smart. Don't push anything. Don't try to force any kind of golf shots. You can go out there and just play some good golf.

But again, I think it's like every other golf course you play. We can say that about last week at Waste or the week before. If you have a good game plan, you stick to it, and you just keep going forward.

Q. You touched on this a little bit earlier, but what did you learn from your last time out, maybe thinking ahead a little bit too much? Was that the big thing? What's the biggest takeaway you'll take from your last time out and now trying to accomplish the same thing this time?

LUKE CLANTON: Well, I've never played in front of a crowd like that before, so that was a first for me. Again, pressure is a privilege. That's a big thing that everyone says, and it's true. I kind of looked at it as almost a little bit nerve-racking at the beginning of the week, and then once we got to Thursday, it was amazing to play with Justin Thomas and then again with my good buddy Nick Dunlap. It didn't go my way that week, and you can look at it as a failure, but I look at it as learning, as we always say, and again I'm just going to try to stay in the moment as much as I can.

Everyone is trying to say to make the cut, but I want to play well. I want to try to go out and play the best I can.

I'm trying to kind of flip that mindset from just making the cut to actually trying to compete in this event.

Q. Are there specific things you do to try to stay in the moment? Some people will be right in their yardage books. Some people have different strategies. Are there specific things you've tried to do to implement that and stay in the moment?

LUKE CLANTON: Ours is pretty funny. I talk about basketball with Jason. I almost get a little too much into the moment, I guess you could say. He tries to kind of calm me down in some dumb ways, I guess you could say. But we have such a great game plan every single week. We prep great. We've learned so much from the 11 or 12th start on TOUR so far.

Like we said, it's like a rookie season within a rookie season. So we're just going to go out there and just do the best we can.

Q. You mentioned pressure is a privilege. I'm just wondering, do you feel pressure to get this done, get this -- I don't know if it's been a weight to try to get this

20th point, but do you feel the pressure to kind of get it over with?

LUKE CLANTON: Yeah, yeah. There's no doubt. Everyone has been talking about it a good bit. It's cool, though. Again, it's a position that everyone wants to be in, and I'm in that position right now, and I'm excited to play the best golf I can. Like we say, if it's my time, it's my time, but we'll see.

Q. Do you kind of know who's going to be out here this week with you, family, friends? Do you have a ballpark number of how many people are out or what it's going to look like?

LUKE CLANTON: No clue. I let my mom take care of that because I told my mom, I said, I don't want to know who's coming. I'll see them on the first tee.

Q. Speaking of your mom, she shared some good stories on Monday evening, a lot of good ones and some maybe that you don't want shared. To think back on maybe the first time you really felt pressure, can you recall an event, whether it be junior golf, high school, college, where you really felt like for the first time you handled pressure and handled nerves well?

LUKE CLANTON: U.S. Kids Worlds at 11. I know it sounds kind of ridiculous, but we played a bunch of local events growing up and whatever, and that was our biggest event of the year. My dad was on the bag and I remember I was shaking on 18.

Pressure is kind of a word I don't like to use. I like to use excitement because it's exciting. You're out there trying to do the best you can and accomplish things that people are training for.

Again, I think the whole pressure and excitement, it's an honor to be even feeling that in general.

Q. Would that U.S. Kids have been the first one you played after you got TaylorMade full set, all that?

LUKE CLANTON: Yeah. I didn't use it. I actually still used U.S. Kids golf clubs. I think I had the Jet Speed irons, and me and my dad were kind of going back and forth because I was hitting a 7-iron like 20 yards further with the Jet Speeds and I wanted to use them but he didn't let me use them. It was a little bit different.

But I used the TaylorMade driver and everything else, and I used a TaylorMade mallet putter that I have still in my room back home because it's a one of a kind.



It's just been incredible, so I'm excited.

Q. Your equipment, do you still use the same irons that you've used for years, or have you finally switched those out?

LUKE CLANTON: No, I still use the same ones, five years old. We just actually found a backup set for the first time. It's pretty cool to know that I don't have to stress out about traveling with them and hopefully they don't break.

But I'm pretty generic with this stuff, and what works is what works.

Q. Sticking with equipment, it seems like you have a pretty good mix of old and new clubs in the bag. I'm curious if you're pretty hands on with your own equipment or do you work with a fitter or a couple different fitters? How do you go about that selection process for what's in the bag?

LUKE CLANTON: I can't tell you what my loft/lie is or my degree or whatever it could be. I leave it up to the people I trust and the people I know. I think I kind of have a great team around me that helps me out with the process. I try not to overcomplicate things with golf because it's already complicated enough.

Q. I saw a new putter in the bag recently. Can you talk about how that ended up in the bag or any other changes you might have made recently?

LUKE CLANTON: I didn't putt too great at Sony, and I just wanted a new look, and I put it in at Torrey and gained about five shots in the first couple rounds, and I said that's not too bad, and I kept it in.

Q. How did you find that backup set?

LUKE CLANTON: My caddie. So my caddie -- I've been telling him for years about these 760 irons that we just can't find, and Taylor Made doesn't have any more. He went to an old club pro in Illinois and found a set that's brand new. He always brings like one little gift for every event and he brought them over this week, and it was pretty cool.

Q. You talked about pressure. What do you think is the pressure like on your teammates, that you pretty much have said you stayed there because you want to win a national championship?

LUKE CLANTON: Say that one more time so I understand that.

Q. What do you think the pressure your teammates

feel to win that national championship, given that that's kind of the reason you've stayed?

LUKE CLANTON: Yeah, I mean, listen, again, it's a journey with the whole team. We know that if we put the work in and what we have to do, if it happens, it happens.

I think the national championship, it involves a lot of things. You're playing six, seven rounds of golf back-to-back, fatigue, everything you could imagine. We've been in that position. We've come close to winning. If it happens, it happens.

We all know that we have to put the work in and grind as hard as we can but also take the time that we need. Yeah, you can call it pressure, but it's excitement. It's just exciting even to be in that conversation about national championship team.

Again, I think all the guys back home are super pumped. We just won water sound which is pretty cool by a couple strokes. It's cool to be back there with the team, travel and have a good time.

Q. It almost happened at RSM. What did you learn about yourself and your game that week?

LUKE CLANTON: That I can do it. At John Deere it was a little bit different because the guy who won it was playing pretty good golf, no doubt. But at RSM we were on the final hole tied for the lead, and that's something different. I had my best friend on the bag for that week, Sam Kodak, and he just was a college teammate of mine, and he was more nervous than I was. So it was funny to see that. We were on 18 with an iron in my hand and he was shaking handing the club to me, and I saw it and I was laughing.

That kind of stuff to me, it's all a learning experience. I hit that ball in the middle of the green, I probably had a chance to win the tournament. Again, I'm 21 years old. I'm still learning. I'm still an amateur. I'm not going to make that excuse all the time because we need to perform, but it's learning through everything. So it's awesome.

Q. We were going through old footage and I think we found you playing in the pro-am of this event a while back, maybe even in a little press conference. Do you remember that?

LUKE CLANTON: Yeah, I do.

Q. What do you remember about that?

LUKE CLANTON: I played with Kevin Kisner. He was a Bulldog, my mom was a Bulldog, so they got along pretty



well. He was hilarious. He's a very funny dude to be around for sure, and I was like 11 years old and I was talking a little bit of smack to him and trying my best, but he kicked my butt that day, of course.

I think from 11, 12 years old to now, it's just kind of seeing the development of everything happening. We always talked about how cool it would be to play in this event and how cool it would be, home field advantage, whatever you want to say. Now it's happening. It's pretty surreal.

Q. You look a little different than what we've seen in previous times, Nike stuff on. Was that another kind of pinch-me moment in this, signing with I'm sure a company that you've long admired?

LUKE CLANTON: Yeah. I mean, that's kind of been the dream for me. To kind of be able to wear it and rep it, it's unbelievable. Everyone knows that Nike is pretty cool. It's just an amazing accomplishment, and again, I've tried to just realize what's happening in the moments because we always look forward and keep chasing and keep chasing. It's pretty cool.

Q. You're from Hialeah, Florida. I've got to ask you, how is the Cuban food? Do you still consume it at all?

LUKE CLANTON: Oh, yeah. We have a Cuban restaurant right next to our house, and I go there every time I come back, and I get a palomino steak and Cuban sandwich. It's the best.

Q. What's your favorite course in Miami?

LUKE CLANTON: Gosh, that's hard. I don't know. Doral was really good when I was back home in high school. It was in pretty mint condition there for a while. I haven't been there for a while. Indian Springs, obviously that's one of the best golf courses in Florida. But yeah, if you get out to Indian Springs, that's probably the one for sure.

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