

Cognizant Classic

Sunday, March 2, 2025

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Champion Course

Joe Highsmith

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome the 2025 Cognizant Classic in the Palm Beaches champion, Joe Highsmith. Just talk us through how you're feeling, your first PGA TOUR win.

JOE HIGHSMITH: Yeah, thank you. Feeling great. At the moment, it's all a little bit of a whirlwind. I don't totally know what to expect. That was the last thing I was expecting at the start of the day was a win.

I mean, it's incredible. It feels really nice to just play a round of golf like that and get all the things that come from winning a tournament.

Yeah, feeling great.

Q. How was the range session today?

JOE HIGHSMITH: It was really good, actually. Unlike yesterday, it felt pretty good today, which I didn't know if that was going to be meaning I would have a bad day. But fortunately it worked out, and the whole practice session this morning was pretty good.

Q. When you make the cut on the number, it's always make the cut and anything can happen, but I think this was the first time in nine years that someone makes the cut on the number and then wins. What were your expectations at that point, and at what point did it shift to you could actually win the golf tournament?

JOE HIGHSMITH: Yeah, I mean, making the weekend, I played really nice the first day and was kind of trending off a pretty good week in Mexico, so I was feeling good. Then I kind of had a roller coaster day on Friday with two doubles and two bogeys, and found myself with a five-footer on 18 just to play the weekend. I was like, man, am I really going to miss the cut? I feel like I played really good the day before and even on Friday did a lot of really good things.

I feel like once I made it on the number, I knew I was going to go out early on Saturday and that was going to be a

good chance because the scores just get so much harder as the day goes on.

I definitely took advantage of that. I played really nicely on Saturday.

Then the course got really tough, so I ended up moving way closer to the lead than I should have. I knew that I was going to be on the opposite side of that today. I played really, really good today, so it was nice to kind of conquer that course when it was a little easy but also when it was baked and crusty and windy and everything. It was really hard out there this afternoon.

I never really try to think about winning. All that stuff is just kind of a little abstract. You're just trying to hit one good shot at a time. I had seen a couple boards out there and you get that feeling when you're playing well that maybe you do have a chance to win. As long as you don't mess it up, then you'll end up on top. I've had a few tournaments like that over the years, but I haven't won too many times. This one felt pretty good to do it out here at this great event.

Q. You talked a little about the perks that come with winning this tournament, and there are a lot. You start with next week with API, Masters, the PGA, all the Signature Events, exempt through 2027. Which of those excites you the most?

JOE HIGHSMITH: Did you say the Masters? Yeah, I don't want to break any protocol. I'm not sure if I've officially received (audio interruption). But that's the one. Augusta National is a place that has a really special place in my heart. I've only been there a couple times as a spectator and I was able to play, fortunately, with a couple members last year.

I mean, it is just like the most incredible place on earth. I went last year to the tournament just as a spectator because any chance that I can get to walk out there is pretty -- I'm going to take advantage of that.

But to be playing in that tournament is going to be very special and something, obviously, you work towards your whole life but you never really know when you're going to



get that chance. It's pretty sweet for that to be coming pretty soon.

Then obviously the schedule changes will be great. It's an extreme advantage to be playing in those elevated events for how much money and points those guys get to play for. Fortunately was able to get into those for the rest of the year, and hopefully I can play well.

But it'll be great, I think, to get out and play with some of those guys. A lot of guys -- those best players in the world, I don't really -- especially last year and even this year, I don't play in the same events as any of them. It'll be pretty fun to get to compete and kind of see how I stack up with some of them.

Just to get that schedule will be really ideal. A lot of other things that come with the win are pretty special. But certainly Augusta is No. 1 by far.

Q. Joe, I was talking to your coach, your college coach, Coach Beard. He was mentioning you guys last week talked about mental clarity and reprioritizing that. Just wondering how pivotal that has been in the last week or even just to your game in general?

JOE HIGHSMITH: It's been everything. I've really struggled for the majority of this year and been working harder than I ever have at my game trying to kind of clean up some physical things and get my swing in a better spot, my putting stroke in a better spot. I feel like I was kind of neglecting the importance of the mental side of things.

Beard has always been the one to really help me with that a lot in college. The stuff is kind of hard to explain, but I guess just putting most of the focus and the emphasis on the process and making sure that you're committed to what you're trying to do. It obviously sounds pretty simple, but that seems to be kind of the way that works best for me.

We're talking all the time about that kind of stuff, and I'm talking to my college roommate, Derek Hitchner, about mental golf stuff all the time. There's been a lot of people that's kind of helped me with this, but certainly Coach Beard is No. 1 there. I can't thank him enough for all the stuff that he's helped me through. Yeah, it's been great to get back on to some of the more mental things and see that work out well.

Q. It's my understanding you changed putters recently. You obviously had an insane putting week, at least statistically. Can you take me through the putting change?

JOE HIGHSMITH: Yeah, I was at the studio a few months

ago and I was with Paul Vizanko there, and I told him I wanted a little bit of a change. It's like the exact same putter but a cooler paint job and a different finish.

I don't know what it is about this thing, but it feels way better than any of the other -- because I have like four of the same shape putter, all with different finishes and metals or whatever. But this one has a special feeling to it, and I guess now it's the one I'm definitely going to stick with.

I made that change, I think, right before Torrey maybe, and I've putted really honestly pretty well for a majority of the year I feel like, and this weekend was ridiculous how many putts went in. Yeah, that one is here to stay for sure.

Q. I was just curious about your chemistry with Joe LaCava, Jr., and how you feel he's helped you this week and also this entire season.

JOE HIGHSMITH: Yeah, he's been great. I think it's been a pretty smooth transition into having him work for me. We were good buddies a couple years ago on the Korn Ferry TOUR, and we stayed houses together at a couple different tournaments and just became friends, and he was working for one of my buddies at the time. The timing kind of worked out well last year. I think their Korn Ferry season was coming to an end and he reached out to see if I needed anybody for the fall.

I had had a really bad year throughout the regular season, and I was like, why not, and I really like Joe a lot, obviously, and kind of brought him in and then started playing well. It was a really easy transition. He's a great caddie. He's really good at what he does, but he's also just one of the boys, and we have a pretty good time out there, and he just keeps it light and everything.

I think that was good today, obviously, with high pressure out there, being able to have him kind of keeping me relaxed and whatever. It feels like you're just out there walking with one of your friends, and that part has been great, but then also staying focused on the process and whatnot, he's been great. Yeah, so he's been awesome.

Q. In order to help you win, since you've been in the Palm Beaches, have you found a favorite restaurant, or what favorite foods caused you to propel into the winner's box?

JOE HIGHSMITH: Yeah, I've actually gone to the Butcher Shop place like four out of the last five nights in the lobby over here. I think that's what it's called. It's really good. It's like a nice steakhouse. I haven't really left the hotel much because I've had that good food, but I haven't really



been out and tried much of the local food. I've been going to the Soul Good place for breakfast quite a bit. I went there today, and that place was really good. Probably maybe go back to that Butcher Shop.

But yeah, a lot of good food in the area, but fortunate to find that place here.

Q. I was wondering, the putt on 18 on Friday, the five-footer, do you remember the read?

JOE HIGHSMITH: Yeah, it was, like, the worst putt you'd ever want. The greens were so baked out and bumpy and it was right to left kind of falling away. Just a super sketchy putt. I hate right-to-left putts because I have a tendency to wipe them or block them a little bit.

I had already been kind of crumbling under the cut pressure. I think I had bogeyed two of the last five or something, made a couple pars, and of course I ended up with this five-footer just to make the cut. Same kind of thing; I just tried to make sure at a minimum I committed to it. I didn't want to leave knowing that I had wished the last putt on Friday, so I committed to it and fortunately it went in.

Q. Is there something to just getting comfortable on TOUR? You had a full year, managed to keep your card. Was it noticeable how different you felt entering another year?

JOE HIGHSMITH: I think so. The fortunate level is there for sure. I think having been to all these places once before and then you just as the year goes on, you meet guys -- I haven't met a ton of guys out here but have made enough friends to where it feels -- you see the same people every week. You just have a little bit more of that comfort than I think as a rookie.

But yeah, so this year has been nice. I obviously haven't really been playing well at all until pretty much this week. But it feels much more comfortable, and I've obviously already been to all the places.

Second year has been a little bit more easy than the rookie year, but now especially, I guess.

Q. There was a moment today when I think there was a four-way tie for the lead and it could have been a five-way tie. Other golfers with great backgrounds made mistakes, and you didn't make any mistakes. What was your mindset in not making that mistake and really on 17 getting that birdie to give yourself that distance?

JOE HIGHSMITH: Yeah, absolutely. I felt like at the start of the day, I was in a pretty focused state of mind where I had a lot of clarity on what I was trying to do with my golf game. On the first couple holes, I saw some pretty nice shots and just kind of was able to draw, okay, when I focus on this, I'm going to get this result.

Seeing some of those good shots early, I hit a really nice shot in there on 6, and I kind of felt like I switched into, like, a little bit deeper of a state of focus, and from that point on, it was like, let's just try to do that on every shot and not get ahead of ourselves. I have a bad tendency to start thinking ahead or thinking about what other guys are doing.

A lot of big names, obviously, up on that board, and knowing that there's a lot of great accomplished players that are right around the same score, and I saw, like, Russell Henley was under early, I think, and I was playing so good, and I think I was at 14-under and he was at 17, and I was like, how am I going to catch these guys. Was able to just stick with it.

The putter for sure saved me. Every part of my game was really good today, but I made a lot of long putts. Those are just stuff that doesn't really happen too often, especially on greens like this.

But yeah, I felt like I was just really into my stuff and was clear on that, so I was able to block out any of the distractions that usually would get in the way. Even the 15th hole, it's not that hard of a hole, but you have all this potential trouble that makes it so much more difficult mentally. But I felt like I was in a really good place to where I knew kind of what to focus on and was able to kind of manage the mistakes.

The up-and-down on 14 was really big, as well, just not dropping a shot, because every shot is the same as any other one, so it was nice to save that.

Q. Are you going to return next year?

JOE HIGHSMITH: To this tournament?

Q. Absolutely.

JOE HIGHSMITH: Oh, yeah, 100 percent. This is one of my favorite tournaments, regardless. I missed the cut last year and still couldn't wait to come back. But now especially after being my first win, it still doesn't really feel real, but this place is pretty special. I absolutely love everything about the tournament, regardless of how I've played.

Yeah, really excited to come back here, hopefully, for years

to come.

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