

Chubb Classic presented by SERVPRO

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

Naples, Florida, USA

Tiburón Golf Club

Ernie Els

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Your first start here at the Chubb Classic. You're staying right here at the Ritz and you've had a chance to play the course a bit. Just your thoughts so far.

ERNIE ELS: Loving it. I mean, it feels like a holiday. I've got Liezl here, just the two of us. We played up in Black Diamond on Monday morning, and Martin Courtois, who caddies for Rocco Mediate, had another little charity event with some of the great players.

Then drove down Monday. I've been here ever since, so we played yesterday, a practice round. I played with Scott Hoch.

I've seen this golf course on television many times. I've played many tournaments there, but the Black Course I don't think anybody has played. So it's new for everybody, and it's in unbelievable shape. You've got to keep it very much on the fairway. It's a very tight golf course, but it's beautiful, great condition.

Q. What was the event Monday like, and how did that come together?

ERNIE ELS: Well, it was really Martin. He came to me early in January at a wine event and said that he wants to do a charity event, and he wanted our foundation to benefit. I said, that sounds music to my ears. The Black Diamond Foundation, they support the foundation -- I'm not sure what the money is raised for, but the Black Diamond Foundation was also involved, and he got 10 of some of the biggest names in golf: Fred Funk, Lee Janzen, Freddy Couples, Rocco, myself, Tom Lehman. I'd better get them all now. Vijay Singh. I'm almost there. 10 of the greatest players you'll ever see, some really major championship players come up there. Mike Weir was also there. We had 40 nice people we played golf with, and we raised really good money for our foundation and the Black Diamond Foundation. It was just a wonderful cause and wonderful day.



Q. TOUR golfers obviously know how much events raise for charity, period, but you know a little bit differently with the autism foundation and everything. What has that meant to you over the years?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, like you said, each and every player has some kind of a cause they look after or is close so their heart. Through the years we all are affected by something somewhere in life. In our case it was autism. We felt a need to be able to do more in that field, and that's what we did. So that's kind of our niche.

You go to the next player down the line, he's got some other thing that he supports.

We're all supporting charity. That's one of the wonderful things of the PGA TOUR and Champions Tour is that we are almost educated by the TOUR how to give back, because they do it every single week. There's charity dollars being raised and being given back to local charities.

I just kind of learnt on my way, and when it was my time to step up, myself and my wife and our family, that's what we did.

But believe me, I'm not unique in that regard. There's many, many players out there doing exactly the same.

Q. How do you feel out here on this TOUR now?

ERNIE ELS: I'm loving it. It feels like home. You know, we just had quite a few weeks off again. The guys are really ready to go. I can sense that. And we've got some tournaments coming up now, so it's really nice to have Chubb sponsor our event here. We have a great golf course here, great resort.

It's one of the great things about the Champions Tour. We play on really great golf courses and resorts. Very nice to be on this Tour.

Q. What was the biggest adjustment for you? Was it the three rounds or was it --



ERNIE ELS: Yeah, a little bit. It's getting the structure right again.

You know, you only have to play one pro-am, yet you have two pro-ams, and I'm still kind of figuring out when I should play my pro-am, if I should maybe play it on a Wednesday or a Thursday. At the moment I'm playing on a Thursday, but I'm thinking of maybe switching that around because you've really got to be ready by Friday, and on Friday I'm ready to go. By Friday, Saturday, Sunday you move on. So the three rounds is the biggest adjustment I've had to make.

Q. Can I get a comment on Hideki's big win from you?

ERNIE ELS: Hideki is such a wonderful chap. I've been telling him for many years now that he's got the game to win. A major, but especially Augusta. He's got the perfect game for that course. I think he's got a lot of pressure on him. He's the biggest golfer in Japan. But thankfully he found his gap to separate himself, and he took that chance on -- was it Saturday when the rains came? He played the last five, six holes in magnificent style, making the eagle on 15, birdieing 16 and 17, and that was the big change.

And then holding his nerve. He could have won by five, but just that one shot on 15 kind of made it tight again.

He had it covered for most of the way, so just great for him. I just hope he can handle all the media attention that's going to come his way. It's going to be incredible.

Q. We should ask you about next week's event? Just kind of tell us what's going on next week.

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, so one of our challenge events, Els for Autism challenge events is going to be hosted here at Tiburón. We have a nice full field. I believe we have 88 players playing, all local people. For us as Els for Autism foundation, we are so blessed to have another new venue. We're trying to reach out to new markets, and this is a new market, especially with the Chubb Classic here in Naples and getting the event hosted here.

We've got new people coming in, and hopefully they like what they see and they like our foundation. If you raise more than \$15,000 we're going to see you in the Bahamas. We host you in the Bahamas at Baha Mar, so that's in Nassau. We have a great couple of days lined up there. Not only there but also Albany. So if you raise that kind of money, you're going to have a really good time.

Q. Is Ben coming? How is Ben doing? I know that always lights you up.

ERNIE ELS: Ben is wonderful. You know, Ben is at home. We FaceTime him every evening. Ben will definitely be coming to the Bahamas. You have to come see his dance moves. He loves to party. He doesn't need an ounce of alcohol in him. He goes. He loves to dance. He loves to sing, and he likes to show off a little bit. He's about 6'3" now, so if you want to see Ben, the real star of the show, raise the 15 grand and come see us in the Bahamas.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports