

RBC Heritage

Sunday, April 18, 2021

Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, USA

Harbour Town Golf Links

Stewart Cink

Press Conference

HALEY PETERSON: We would like to welcome Stewart Cink, our 2021 winner of the RBC Heritage. This is your eighth PGA TOUR career victory, second of the season, and third here at the RBC.

You've discussed how you've approached this week differently, great gratitude, it's been enjoyable with Reagan as your caddie, so many pinch-me moments.

Can you talk about how this victory is different and resonates differently from past wins?

STEWART CINK: Well, they all feel unique, but really it's nothing different that we did this week. We didn't really approach anything differently. This is what we've been doing, and it's just this week I threw some really good execution in there and our game plan was solid.

This course just demands so much discipline, and I was able to -- we were able to just stay committed and really just -- it's more than just being committed. It's believing that the game plan is there for a reason, and we stayed with it.

It was just a really good, solid week all the way through. It was pretty spectacular the first two days, just like could do no wrong, and then the week was just -- it was just a bunch of solid hitting, nothing exciting but enough.

The best thing here this week to make it more special or differently special than other tournaments was the fact that it happened at my age and with Reagan caddying and Connor and his fiancé and Lisa were all here; several of my friends came down just to be here for this.

To have a posse like that waiting at the end to celebrate with is just -- it's just an experience that you just don't get to have in your life that often, and I'm very fortunate to be one of the people that got to experience that.

Q. I was talking to Kevin Streelman a little bit about how in golf, sometimes when things in your life are really, really lining up nicely and you feel very at peace



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and content and a lot of gratitude and joy, that it somehow sort of translates into the golf. To what extent is that happening with you right now, and to what extent does that explain this run that you're on at 47?

STEWART CINK: Oh, it's a big part of it for sure, and certainly I believe that Kevin Streelman is right when he says that about having peace and joy in your life leads to a more peaceful and joyful golfer and that leads to better scores.

But the thing about me and my family with the peace and joy we experience, it's not something that just we wait for the circumstances to line up like the planets or some signs or tea leaves or something. We install our own peace and joy because of our faith in Jesus Christ, basically.

That is the No. 1 tenet of my life, and it enables me to feel peaceful and joyful even when the golf ball is not agreeing with my club face and not going in the hole. I don't seek peace and joy out of golf because I know I can never depend on it to sustain that kind of peace and joy that I'm looking for and it's too low of a target.

The peace and joy I feel on the golf course is something that stems from something far different than golf, and golf happens to benefit from it, but golf is not the end goal for me. I love playing and winning and having a week like this is just amazing, but the peace and joy that we experience - and it's available to everybody - is something that you don't have to wait for the circumstances, the worm to turn, so to speak.

It's there, and that's what we choose to go for.

Q. This may be really poorly timed after what you just said about religion and peace, but I have a quote here from Harold Varner that I'd like to read to you. He was asked about you today and he said, He's old and he's kicking everyone's ass. I wanted to throw that at you and ask you does that basically sum up your week in some ways?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, I mean, I don't think that you -- I don't think if you're a follower of Christ that you can't say

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you've kicked ass. I think I kicked ass this week, and it was fun.

There's so many good golfers on the PGA TOUR, and I felt like coming into this week after Augusta -- I had a really good, solid week in Augusta except I played more like I did on the weekend here all four days there.

The only difference was that I just sprinkled in some really great golf on Thursday and Friday here, and I distanced myself out from everybody.

I really felt like I had the kind of stuff this week that was going to be very, very hard to beat if I just maintained my composure, and I knew that with Reagan caddying and with our belief in our game plan and the way we're going about things, businesslike and very monotonous on the course, that it was just going to be really hard to beat Stewart Cink at this course this weekend.

It's cool when something like that comes over you, when a feeling like that happens, and then the end result is you're right.

Q. One quick question following up on that. We spoke yesterday about the idea of maybe you want to avoid a defensive mindset even when you're leading by five strokes, but in a way it felt like today was kind of a defensive masterpiece in some ways, like you weren't really going out and shooting 63 again, but was there a sense that maybe defense was the best play?

STEWART CINK: No, not at all. In fact, it was the same game plan that we've had for every round that we've had since the first tournament Reagan caddied for me back in Napa. We don't choose defense or aggression. We don't like those terms very much. We choose the right shot on the hole. There's some holes that say, This is a red light and there's some holes that say, This is a green light. We do a good job I think identifying where those are, and we play to those.

We let the kind of golf that we're playing and the kind of decisions that we're doing right now, I think, are ones that fit into the golf course really nicely, and this course is just very tiny little pockets where you've got to fit the ball in, and that happens to be a really good strength of mine, hitting my iron shots the right distance and trajectory and controlling the ball.

I wasn't defensive at all today. In fact, I fully expected a dogfight. I kept saying that before the round today when I was at home. You've got a lot of time to think, and I kept saying, I expect a dogfight. We are built for a dogfight is what our kind of motto was today. Let's have a dogfight. I

almost expected it.

While it didn't turn into a close dogfight, I felt like me and the golf course were in a pretty good dogfight today, and I don't think I really won because I shot 1-under par. I was pleased with the way I was able to control my emotions and stick to the game plan and really just -- it was a ball-striking week for me that was going to be hard to beat.

Q. Stewart, just to clear up a couple of things, where did Connor fly in from?

STEWART CINK: Connor has lived in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, for his work-from-home stint with his company Capital One. He and his fiancé, Jess Baker, have chosen to locate themselves in Jackson Hole for ski the season. They work in D.C., but they've been working from Jackson Hole to work in D.C.

Like a lot of people, they just kind of spent quarantine and whatever we're in now working from home and doing their thing remotely, and they chose Jackson Hole. So he flew in from Jackson Hole, Wyoming to Atlanta and drove down here this morning.

Q. With this win, are you thinking about bigger things the rest of this year, including the Ryder Cup? Is that on your mind?

STEWART CINK: Not really. It wasn't until a few people yelled out "Ryder Cup," see you at Whistling Straits or something like that when we came back over here from the 18th hole.

Really the first thing on my mind after finishing out on 18 and knowing that the win was secured was that part of this whole game plan thing is that we're trying to take the energy to make decisions off of the moment and putting it the night before so that we can have our decisions already made.

At 47 I just don't have this endless supply of energy, and I need to kind of like keep my decision making to a minimum.

As it turns out, I think that having two wins in between the U.S. Opens, maybe I might be exempt for the U.S. Open now, I'm not really sure, but I'm hoping that I can get out of that 36-hole qualifier.

That's where I'm going with this whole energy thing. I would love to not have to play in that and save myself a little bit of scheduling and also energy output for that Monday.

I don't know, I'm not sure about that, but that's one of the -- hopefully the benefits of winning.

Q. You're moving tomorrow; is that correct?

STEWART CINK: 7:30 a.m. the movers show up.

Q. Downsizing to going downtown?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, we're moving into town, into midtown. We're going to be condo people. We just have lived in the suburbs for a long time, and now feels like the right time for us to change the scenery a little bit, so we're moving tomorrow.

Q. Do you have room for all the trophies now, for this one?

STEWART CINK: Well, yeah, I think we're going to be able to have plenty of room for this trophy. We're excited about the move, but any time you get a win on the PGA TOUR, it's obviously a real awesome experience.

And so I haven't really been thinking too much about what stress is coming my way the next couple days, but I'm sure that the euphoric feeling from right now will probably turn into a lot of stress and pressure about 7:30 a.m.

Q. A father-son question. Have you and Reagan always communicated this well together or has that evolved with this job?

STEWART CINK: No, I think that the job fits in nicely with our connection that we have. He and I have always just been on the same wavelength. We're kind of from the same DNA, and I mean literally like we are the same person. We think about things -- we think about jokes, we notice the same funny stuff, we just pick up on the same kind of little details about things in our immediate surroundings.

It's been a real good fit for him caddying, and I just can't tell you how much fun it is to have my son caddying for me. I'm hoping that I get Connor out there on the bag, too, at some point before this whole family run ends, but it's been amazing and just a true blessing having him.

Q. Stewart, for a lot of golfers as they get older, short putting becomes harder, more difficult than long putting because there's such an expectation, Oh, it must go in from, let's say, five feet in. What kind of self-talk do you have when you're over shorter putts?

STEWART CINK: If I told you the truth -- I mean, it's not getting any easier. It doesn't get any easier. I work so

hard on the mental side of the game, and that is a big part of it, obviously. You hit it right on the head.

As you get closer to the hole your expectation level changes. It's not a linear change. It's like that.

Short putting is just something that I just really try to be rock solid on my routine and trust in the process and know that some of those putts are going to lip out, and sometimes you're going to look silly and you're going to feel bad and you have to expect and plan for that and move on.

If you spend your whole career or your whole tournament bracing for something like that, hoping it doesn't happen and trying to hide it, then you're going to be devastated when something like that happens at the wrong time.

I've missed my share. I went through Southern Hills in 2001 where I missed a really short putt on the last hole that was mostly embarrassing to me at the time. Of course later on it ended up costing me a spot in the playoff. I didn't know it at the time. No one likes that feeling.

I've spent a lot of time and money on trying to be solid in my beliefs about what is really happening on the course and where my trust is, where my peace and joy come from.

If I depended on all these two-, three-, and four-footers going in to feel good about myself, then I'd be in the wrong business.

Q. I can see you're standing behind the putt and you can see that you're thinking and I know you're a very verbal person, but can you give us some sense of the words that are in your head?

STEWART CINK: Well, yeah. My coach, James Sieckmann and I work on that is we know that the right way to success is through the process, because we only try to control what we can control, and that is -- you know, you can't control the results. You can't control bounces or the wind or a ball that rolls on the green and rims out of the hole.

But you can control your own self before your shot until impact, and we trust that process innately -- actually, I'm sorry, we don't trust it innately. We want the results innately, but we input and insert the process as a true goal, and so you probably see me mouthing something to Reagan or you might audibly pick it up on the coverage, but one of the things I like to remind myself is that I want to be -- I want to see what the mountaintop of trust is like before every putt.

Those aren't just words to me. I'm actually trying to construct my pre-shot routine so that that's what I'm focused on consciously. I hate the word "routine" because that's such not the right word for what we do. It's an operation that requires focus and cadence, and I'm trying to hit my little spots along that routine.

By the time I finish that routine, the ball is already rolling.

But you probably heard me or see me mouth the words, "mountaintop of trust" or "mountaintop of peace," you know, or a couple little phrases like that. That's what it is. I'm saying it out loud. I'm really just saying it so I can hear myself and remind myself.

Q. As you're describing it it sounds more like a path to the hole than a routine.

STEWART CINK: Well, it's a path to success. Obviously I want to make the putts. I obviously don't want to miss putts. But I believe that the way to keep myself the calmest and the way to keep my stroke doing what it's supposed to do, my shot, my swing doing what it's supposed to do, is through the process and staying calm and focusing on something I can control as opposed to something you can't control.

If you depend on something you can't control you're just going to end up frustrated, and I don't want to be frustrated.

Q. I know you said you had a dogfight with the course. Did you feel any pressure from competitors maybe on the first green when Collin rolls in that birdie putt and maybe Emiliano gets to three behind at a couple of different stages of the game? Did you feel any kind of pressure at all?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, I think I remember feeling pressure on every shot. (Laughing.) Come to think of it, I can't think of one shot where I didn't feel at least some pressure except maybe the -- well, yeah, even the putt on 18. I still felt pressure.

But no, yeah, certainly when Collin made that putt on the first hole I expected nothing less. He's a great player. He's riding a big confidence high. So I expected him to throw something my way.

It didn't really materialize that much for him today. I didn't see that anybody ever got closer than four, but I just may have looked at the leaderboard at the wrong time.

But I felt like I had a lot of pressure all day. When you have a big lead, it's easy to fall into the trap of trying to not play bad and not lose it. In fact, one guy when I was

walking in from the car today going into the locker room, a guy was standing by the fence and saying, "Don't choke today." That's not exactly helpful. I'm glad he was entertained by that, but it wasn't helpful to me.

It kind of reminded me like, Don't choke today. Okay, is that what you're worried about? And it kind of got me to take stock of the situation.

To be honest, if I had played poorly today and not won, it's not going to define my career at this point, and I wasn't playing for that kind of a -- I've won enough times and I've lost enough times where another loss wouldn't really -- it would have stung but it wouldn't have been an end-all for me.

I had that going for me for sure. That's something you earn playing 600 plus PGA TOUR events. But I felt pressure the whole way. I definitely felt pressure the whole way. There's some big shots out here that you can get caught up by.

I was proud of myself for sticking to my guns, the game plan, and just tee to green my execution was -- today was one of my best ball-striking days I've had in my life. It was awesome. I'm definitely going to be writing some notes down about my hitting the last four rounds.

Q. Three of those plaid coats now. Do you still have the first two?

STEWART CINK: The first one I won when I lived in our house before this house, so it's moved now. This will be the second full move that the first plaid jacket made, and -- actually that's wrong. This will be the third for the first one and the second move for the second one, and now this one is going to have to -- well, it's not really ever going to establish a home, so it's going to have to move right into the condo.

Q. Is that the same size jacket as the first jacket?

STEWART CINK: (Laughing) I don't know what size jacket I was back then. It's too long ago. I've mostly forgotten that, but this jacket I believe is a 44 long and it fits me okay. If I was going to wear it on a date I might get it altered a little bit, but I think they did a good job guessing.

Q. Can you give me an example of some of the decisions that you made the night before?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, it's just all related to wind direction and hole locations. Basically that's what it boils down to.

What Reagan and I want to do is to create a game plan where the golf holes capture the ball nicely. We don't want to be fitting shots into certain little places where there's a lot of danger around. We grade all the trouble around all the hole locations based on wind direction and slope, and we come up with basically kind of a red, yellow, green light kind of scenario that kind of dictates what we do.

It takes the decision making out of our hands. It makes the day efficient. It's just something nice to be able to rely on where the decision is already made by the system, and I don't have to be under the pressure to try to make the decision when I'm feeling a lot of duress.

My heart rate is up, my adrenaline is through the roof. I hit an 8-iron like 180 into the wind on No. 17, and that's not normally me. But the decision is already made, and it just kind of keeps that part of it from interfering with what you want to do.

I've seen tournaments lost, I've lost tournaments myself because I made a poor decision in a heightened moment, and with this system that we have going, we don't have to make a lot of adjustments and the system takes care of itself. All we have to do, we're left with executing and then reading putts, because we're not going to put the ball in very many places where we shouldn't be.

Q. Do you have a theory on why there's so many multiple champions at this tournament, like yourself, Davis Love, Luke Donald, et cetera?

STEWART CINK: Gosh, I don't. It totally goes opposite from the fact that this course doesn't really lend itself to length or short and -- like Davis has always been a long hitter, especially when he first won here.

A lot of guys that hit the ball a long way win, and Brian Gay won this tournament by 10 shots and he's not the longest hitter. And myself, I've been -- I think I was one of the shortest hitters when I won this tournament in 2000, and I think I was probably one of the longer hitters in 2021.

This course doesn't really lend itself to one type of player, so it definitely makes it harder to answer that question. I do not know why.

Q. Just a very broad question. It's been 17 years since you had a multiple win season. You went a decade without winning. Why now, and how? How has this happened?

STEWART CINK: Well, I don't want to give you too much information. Maybe one day when we're -- I have to really give a lot of credit to the team I work with. I know that's

kind of a cliché thing now. I've got a great team. Cornel Driessen, my fitness coach, has been instrumental in helping my body stay kind of young, and I've got plenty of flexibility and strength to be able to support what I'm trying to do with the golf club.

That leads me into my swing coach, Mike Lipnick who's at TPC Sugarloaf who's really helped me understand the cause and effect nature of the way the club face interacts with the golf ball and the ball flight.

I've got a really good handle on what my golf swing does. It's a little bit different than a lot of golf swings, and I'm certainly from a different era than almost everybody playing the PGA TOUR right now, but I understand what I do, and I can't say enough about what coach Mike Lipnick has helped me to understand that.

It's not been perfect, it's been sort of fight and fall back at times, but on the PGA TOUR you can't win them all.

And then James Sieckmann has been instrumental with me, as well, on short game, putting, and also has kind of some of the mental coaching aspects of my career now. I changed a few things at the end of last season when I didn't make the FedExCup Playoffs and I was kind of in a partially exempt category.

I had gotten myself really strong and I was able to change some of my equipment and get my launch and spin rates a lot more efficient. It helped me control my mis-hits a little bit more, which I don't have a lot of mis-hits. I'm usually a pretty good hitter, but it helped me control my mis-hits, it helped me play in the wind a little bit better. It helped me be more predictable, and it helped me and Reagan sort of implement that system that we use to where we have very few surprises on the golf course.

When I'm executing well I have some good external cues for my golf swing and my putting and my routines are good.

Our game plan fits really nicely, and it's going to be something that we're going to keep relying on, and it's going to be showing up more, I think.

I feel like I'm in a good spot, and my team has been great. But I was able to really kind of change my golf game into a little bit more of a power game, and immediately it busted right now in Napa with a win there.

Since then, I've had a few lulls, but when I'm playing well, I feel like I'm playing well enough to win at any time. So that's been a big change for the last, what, eight months or so.

Q. You and Reagan, you had this funny little thing at

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the Sanderson Farms where you made a deal where you had to have a top-5 finish in order to keep going as a partnership, and you finished T12. I'm wondering, how many tournaments did Reagan actually miss, and then was there like a big skull session, like, Look, we've got to go back, we've got to keep the team together?

STEWART CINK: It basically was exactly like you just described it. He caddied for me when we won at Safeway in Napa at the Fortinet I believe now it's called. And then he caddied for me to keep it rolling at Sanderson Farms, and you're right, I told him, We need a top 5. If we finish top 5 again you'll keep rolling.

When I putted out on the 18th green we were tied for fifth. Of course that -- birdies happened and all that. Finished 12th.

And then Kip Henley caddied for me in Vegas, and I think I was in fourth place after two days. I shot like 63 the second day and I was like, Doesn't matter who caddies for me right now, I'm just killing it.

I didn't finish that tournament that well, and the Bermuda Championship came up and it was a tournament that I wasn't expecting to play in, but I decided sort of last minute to play.

And that's a tournament that's not really easy for the caddies to get to, and Reagan's job, he got -- he was going to go to work for Delta Airlines, and he got a start date which was just after the tournament in Bermuda.

I told my caddie, Kip, that he didn't have to worry about trying to scramble and get a flight and expensive hotel and all that stuff and I would take Reagan for one more tournament. Tied for fourth.

So our flight out of Bermuda was on Monday afternoon at like 3:00 p.m. because there weren't any flights at the time because of COVID, so we had a long time to sit around the hotel room. Lisa was there, Reagan was there, and that Monday in the morning while we were waiting for our flight, we had a big team pow wow and kind of said, Reagan -- it actually started with the Masters.

I said I would like you to caddie for me at the Masters. I have fun with you caddying and I think we've got a good thing going, and he says, I'm there. I said, You know what, come to think of it, how would you just like to caddie for this season?

He said, I'm so glad you asked. I'm supposed to start work in two days, but he called his team, I called a few people at

Delta that I know. Luckily one of those people is Ed Bastian, CEO of Delta.

I didn't ask Ed to do anything. I just said, Ed, if you were me, what do you think you would do? And he's got grown daughters and I've got sons, and he said, Stewart, this is the opportunity of a lifetime. I don't think Ed would mind me quoting him. He said, We love Reagan. We think Reagan is going to work at Delta for 40 years. We don't think waiting one more year is going to hurt, so let him caddie.

Reagan does not have a job lined up with Delta for when he stops caddying, but he's going to caddie for me through this season. He gets married July 31st, and then however far we go in the FedExCup Playoffs, Reagan will caddie through that and then I'll be back on the caddie market or maybe retire. I'm not sure what I'll do.

Q. There were a lot of paths from Augusta to Hilton Head. I'm wondering, I imagine you drove there, and did you go back roads, on the interstate?

STEWART CINK: Back roads all the way. I actually came through on the route where Congaree is, which is that tournament that's going to replace the Canadian Open. And so I never played there, and I was thinking that there was a chance I might have to go -- well, the U.S. Open qualifier and then Congaree, and then not have a practice round or anything.

So I wanted to go by there and see it. I didn't play it but I took a cart and rode around for a couple hours, and it looks unbelievable.

We drove right through the little towns and the country roads. I'm from a small town in Alabama so I love driving on the country roads, and it makes me feel like I'm close to home.

Q. Was that you and Lisa or --

STEWART CINK: Yeah, Lisa and I rode in my truck and Reagan and his fiancé, Olivia Lockhart, were in her car because she came down here for a few days but had to go back. She had to go back to work on Wednesday. They rode in her car and Lisa and I rode in my truck.

HALEY PETERSON: Stewart, congratulations, and thank you for taking the time to answer the questions.

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