

Valspar Championship

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

Palm Harbor, Florida, USA

Innisbrook Resort (Copperhead)

Collin Morikawa

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Collin Morikawa to the interview room here at the Valspar Championship. Collin, you're making your first start in the event. You've had a chance to see at least part of the course. Just a few thoughts on the course and how you imagine it might set up for your game this week.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah. I've heard great things about this golf course and heard it was a ball-striker's golf course, which obviously suits my eye.

But for me, I show up to these courses and I don't really know what a ball -- like I show up to a golf course and I just figure out how to play it with my game, which is irons and that.

And I love the way the setup goes. You're hitting kind of everything off the tee, having a lot of mid-to-long irons into some greens and as long as we can stay in the fairway that's kind of sticking to my strengths. So hopefully everything's put together and we can have a really solid four days.

THE MODERATOR: Speaking of your game, you've finished no worse than 7th place in five consecutive starts prior to last week. Just kind of bring us up to speed on how you're feeling confidence-wise and so forth with your game.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Game still feels really good. It's tough to judge off a week like last week. I really wouldn't have prepared much different even with everything we knew what was coming. Sometimes you just, yeah, I wasn't playing out of the fairway and it was so tough to play out that have rough that I just couldn't hit close enough shots and I couldn't make my putts when I had shots and had opportunities to make birdie.

So it happens. It's one of those week. But it's one of those weeks where I've come off after it and I still feel really good. There's times where you play bad or finish whatever and you're still searching for something. I'm not doing that. I still feel really good about my game, which is great, and



hopefully just start putting together solid rounds and put it throughout a tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. What did you learn about your game, about yourself, from last week's experience?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: A lot of little things. Like, I didn't learn anything about myself. It's just more about being prepped to hit shots. Obviously, I played with JT that Saturday? Whatever, second round, when it was windy, right? Saturday. It was so good because he had so much control over the golf ball and I've had those rounds and I feel like I can have a lot more of those rounds, but when it called for it, I didn't.

There's just little things that sometimes you get away and you think you can do something when you really can't. It's just going to be really beneficial for possibly The Open or possibly places where it does get a lot more wind or a lot more rain. I know I have those shots, but I got to be able to recall them and be able to play them when I'm out there, and I just kind of tried to force some issues and it's not how you play golf.

Q. A lot of people would say either yourself or JT are the best iron player in golf right now. Do you feel like based on what happened out there on Saturday that maybe he's ahead of you, there's still room for you to get better?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I mean, look, JT's iron game I've loved and I've admired, but to me, I still think Tiger has the best iron game. Like, even now. Like, I haven't seen him hit a ball for awhile.

But when we had our TaylorMade shoots and you would see him out there and I'd talk to him and we did a little 10-minute video of watching him hit irons, it is amazing. I'm sure JT's like, that's why they're really good buddies. Like, I'm sure he's learning.

But do I think he's better? I mean, I still think when my iron game's on, like, it's better than everyone. It would be bad



for me to think otherwise because then I'm showing up to these events thinking, okay, I've got to do everything so perfect. Like, I still think I can still play an okay game and still get away with a week and possibly win.

So I think the gaps in my iron game, look, there's ups and there's downs. When I was in Dubai for two weeks and, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, my game was the worst probably it has been for two years.

So I worked a lot over the past month just to get it to where it was at Riv, so I'm at a point now where I feel really good and just hit some shots.

Q. I probably should have prefaced this active for the iron play, but take me back to that TaylorMade shoot, what did he do that blew your mind?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Just hit every shot on command. I mean, it was, and I can go out with some buddies or go out in a pro-am like this and tell them, oh, I'm going to hit this shot, right?

But you could tell that he knew exactly what he was going to do and he came out exactly in the same window and it was so simple. Like, we want to make it that simple but sometimes for me cut shot comes easier than a draw. I'm working to hit that draw probably a little more than he's working to hit the draw. It was just so efficient. It was so easy. And that's how you want to make golf.

Q. Going back to last week at 17, when you go back to play there next year, will you have some scar tissue from that or will you be spooked at all?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No. I came here on Monday, and J.J. and I, I mean, I don't think we're going to get the wind or anything we're going to get where we had last week. But we already hit that shot to what I should have hit. So I literally put a 7-iron down, one of the first shots we hit on the range, and I was like, okay, what did I need to do?

So will I be spooked? I don't know. I mean, I had great bogeys. I mean, I joked around. Like, I probably should have laid up and I would have made 3.

Q. Do you know what you have to do this week to reach world No. 1?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No, but I assume if I win I'll get there. You know, before you ask anything else, I think the biggest thing for me is just I need to focus on the golf course. I say that every time, but there have been times where thinking about world No. 1, thinking about this and things that I should do and I just need to get back to

playing the way I know I can play.

(Audio cut out.)

In certain events where I've been able to put it together but I'll keep doing that, right? And it's just working on those little things. So it would be huge. It would be definitely a part of my career that I would remember, but I want to stay there as well.

Q. I'm curious what the mental reset has been like for you this week and being able to get here on Monday, like, is that a better transition for you, given everything that happened at THE PLAYERS, just the conditions and everything that you all had to face out there?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I mean, I wish I played on Monday. Like, I'm never not wishing I made the cut. But you know what, I think the guys out here are so good that even if you gave us one day, and a lot of the guys have played this course, even if you gave us one day, they would still know how to figure out the course. They would know what's in front of them.

The TOUR and the caddies and everyone else us around us, our team, do such a good job of prepping for Thursday that it's not like I have an advantage because I played one extra day over everyone else or guys might be a little more tired.

I think when you show up on a Thursday, the guys that really want to win and that are ready, like, they will be ready. So I guess it's nice because I didn't have to go off my normal schedule of my normal Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday practice, but at the end of the day, it's who is ready by Thursday.

Q. What are your impressions of the course? What do you think is one of the keys to doing well out here?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I think that with some small greens, it's a little choppy around the greens, so you got to get a little lucky with some of the breaks you get in the rough or in the fairways. But you got to hit some good mid-to-long iron shots. You have to. There's some long par-3s out here, there's some position tee shots that you have to be in the fairway, which hopefully the irons are working this week.

Q. For many years it's been scientific studies and some even in the last year or so that show that golfers who look at the hole while putting perform better than people who do it the way it's traditionally done. Is it possible in the world of golf has just been doing this wrong for a hundred years?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I don't know, do you putt looking at the hole?

Q. Actually, I do.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Oh. (Laughing).

Q. The first study like 15, 18 years ago I read it, but I'm hardly the test case.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I think it varies. I've tried it. I've tried it. Look, when I was in college and high school and whatnot, you watch Jordan and he would always look at the hole, right, or inside so many feet.

I think there comes a point where like we focus so much on the ball and we look down at the ball that that's kind of our space, like we're still very external but we're also focused out here.

Like if you give us a 60-foot lag putt and you're looking at the hole and you got wind and everything -- I mean, shoot, who knows, maybe the ball moved and you don't even notice it. I mean, the ball was moving last week. And if you were looking at the hole -- I think it's a good feel, it's a good test, a lot of guys when they hit their practice strokes look at the hole. I don't know, are you saying my putting's really bad or?

Q. No, I'm asking lots of people. I didn't just single you out.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No, I think that it's a, I mean I think I saw Curtis or, no, Lexi's brother? Nicholas Thompson. He was out here putting looking at the hole. I don't know if he actually does it in tournaments, but he was doing it on the practice green. Yeah, I tried it in a tournament.

Q. I mean, Tony Finau did it at the Masters last year for a day or two. A couple other people have said to me, your colleagues have said there's kind of a stigma if you try something that radical. That people will look at you a little weird. Do you think that's true?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: People looked at me when I was using my claw grip or my saw grip, right? People were saying I've won, I played okay, yeah, I was a terrible putter, but why change? So you have to try something new, if it's not working you have to. Or else you're not going to find, you're not going to find what you want, you're not going to win doing the same thing it's just impossible if you're not seeing the results.

So I mean, will a lot more guys start looking at the hole?

Probably not.

Q. What's your impression of Sam Burns and his game or how much experience do you have with Sam?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I've known Sam since I've been like 13, 12, 13. He's always been a stud. He's always been, him and Scottie, like AJGA guys, those guys were tearing us apart. Those guys were the ones that were winning everything, playing really well. He's always been solid, always a game that I knew was going to be out here on TOUR, went on TOUR and will be here for a long time. And I've seen it. I think everyone has. Yeah, I don't know what else to say.

Q. You had seen that, back when, he just always seemed like a kid --

SAM BURNS: Yeah, he was really consistent. Always that player that had something that you knew that was going to be out here. And there was a lot of different things.

It was weird, I thought about this more, about everyone's paths and everyone's way to play golf, and it's a weird thought for five minutes on the range, but everyone's different. Like it's hard, it is hard to pinpoint someone out because like, oh, yeah, they look good, they look talented as a junior. But sometimes you kind of just see it in some players and you see it now in the same players that I saw when I was 12.

Q. It seems like there was a time out here even the younger guys were always driven by Tiger, chasing Tiger, even if he was out here or not. There's so many 20 somethings now making a push in the World Ranking, are you kind of, is it a transition where you guys are pushing each other kind of with your accomplishments and majors and things like that?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Not for me. I just want to keep pushing myself and just see how many wins and see how many times I can keep winning and put myself in contention. I think for some guys it is a comparison, especially young guys, as more young guys come out.

A lot of Korn Ferry guys are or the guys in the Korn Ferry category this year I know. Because they're all roughly my age and I've seen them since I've been 12 to 15 years old. And it's cool to see those guys and I don't know if some guys compare and some guys don't, but for me my motivation is like all within myself, it's all how I see myself and the best golfer I can be and that's what pushes me.

Q. March Madness starts tomorrow. Have you had a chance to look at a bracket and no, have you followed

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basketball much this year?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No. No.

Q. Not really?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No.

Q. So asking you who you think might win and why might be a little off, right?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, I'll throw Duke.

Q. Why is that?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Why not? They're pretty highly seeded aren't they?

Q. Yeah, 2 seed. Coach K, Hollywood ending.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, I mean, yeah, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you for your time.

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