

# Valspar Championship

Thursday, March 17, 2022

Palm Harbor, Florida, USA

Innisbrook Resort (Copperhead)

## Kramer Hickok

### Quick Quotes

#### Q. (No Microphone.)

KRAMER HICKOK: Started with a nice little round. This week, same thing. Five birdies. No bogeys. Game feels like it's in a really good spot. Looking obviously to finish a little better than did I last week and just kind of keep the train going.

#### Q. More important in a round today, getting off to the fast start like you did, taking advantage of the scorable holes on the front, or playing bogey-free the rest of the way?

JR PAYNE: Bogey-free the rest of the way. Yeah. Typically, you see, I mean, guys that are winning tournaments they are roughly three or four bogeys or less.

So it was obviously, conditions were pretty nice today with hardly any wind, soft conditions on the greens. So it was really scorable, really gettable today, but tomorrow it's going to start to blow so it will definitely start to show its teeth a little bit as we know this golf course can.

In the past, 8-, 9-under has won this tournament. So you'll see scores probably pretty low today, but I'm sure they will start to toughen up as it dries out as well.

#### Q. What is the potential for this golf course to toughen up because the greens were as perfect as they could get for you today?

JR PAYNE: Yeah. The greens are soft, obviously all the rain that we've had here. The rough is, it's just spotty. You can get some really, really gnarly lies, but you can also get some really good breaks and kind of have nothing to deal with.

But with the greens being as soft as they are, we are going to need some wind to help firm them up and it looks like tomorrow it's going to blow 15. The next day is going to be 10 to 12, and Sunday is going to be 10 to 12 as well.

That should be enough by Sunday for this golf course to



start firming up and playing a lot harder than it is today.

#### Q. You've put a lot of work in your iron game. It's showing in your stats and results. How important on a golf course like this to feel as confident as you are? It's a second shot golf course, right?

KRAMER HICKOK: A hundred percent. I think it's really a tee to green golf course. Typically the rough, the rough's just up, and the fairways are really small, so you got to put yourself in POSITION, which I felt like I did a really good job of doing that today.

You're right, a hundred percent, the irons are huge out here. You got to be able to control your flights, control your distances because if you don't, you're going to be this in left in a tough spot.

So today I was able to do that. I had some great up-and-downs for par and made some good 5-, 6-footers for par throughout the day. But the good shots that I hit were really good so I gave myself a lot of birdie looks so obviously that's important.

#### Q. Great start. Five birdies. No bogeys. Just a few comments on today.

KRAMER HICKOK: Got off to a hot start, birdied the first three holes had a good look at 4, 5, birdied 5, so 4-under through 5. Really put the ball in position, put the ball in the right parts of the green and was able to feel good with the flat stick and start rolling in some putts.

I got a little bit out of position as the day progressed but was proud of myself the way I hung in there. Finished the round without a bogey.

#### Q. How key is that to get out to such an early start on day one and 5-under?

KRAMER HICKOK: Yeah, it's important. You want to kind of put a, put your name up there and make a statement and it takes a little bit of stress off the rest of the week as well. It validates the hard work that you've been putting in, let's you know that you're playing really good. Sometimes



you feel like you're playing good, but not getting results.

Today was a day I felt like I really kind of put the number down on the scorecard that matched how I felt like I was playing. So I got out there and I scored well, got the ball in the hole, which we know this game's all about. My game is feeling really good I'm excited for the rest of the week.

**Q. Overall thoughts on the course first time seeing it this week?**

KRAMER HICKOK: It's a very soft, all the rain that came in last week that we got over at THE PLAYERS, it obviously -- I don't know how much hit this course, but the greens are very soft and with the wind down it's making it pretty gettable, as gettable as I've seen it.

It's only my fourth or third year. But we know what this golf course can do, in the past it's been single-digit winners and, so as the wind progresses and starts to blow the next few days you'll start to see it play a lot harder and you'll start to see it firm up.

And really I think it's a tee to green golf course, you got to get yourself in the fairway and then it's really an iron, you got to get it -- obviously your iron play's got to be pretty spot on. So if it starts to blow it really stresses those two areas.

**Q. You mentioned as day went on you got out of the position a couple times. Were there any saves that stand out that kept you bogey-free only your second nine?**

KRAMER HICKOK: Yeah, there's a few of them I ran a couple putts by on 6, I ran it by about five feet, made that coming back.

7, I left it short about five feet. My speed was way off today with like the lag putts, so something I'm going to go work on right now.

But I hit -- 8, I left a hybrid way out right and I had probably 40 yards coming in, I was in a divot, was able to hit that to about six feet and make that, which kind of helped the round keep going, so it kind of helped the momentum keep going.

Then from there 11 I thought I made that putt for birdie.

Then was able to make a birdie on 14 and kind of keep that round going.

I was really trying to get to 7-, 8-, 9-under and just really was ultimately happy with the way I just was able to keep

going. Just minimized the mistakes, which has been my goal for the week, limit the mistakes, because if you do that the birdies will end up coming.

**Q. How difficult is the closing stretch, 16 to 18?**

KRAMER HICKOK: When the wind's down, 17 -- we played the up box today, so it was only 180 yards -- but you go back 40 yards it becomes very difficult because that green's only 12 yards wide.

16, it was, it's always difficult. It's just one that you just want to get in the fairway. Once you're in that fairway it's somewhat normal of a hole.

So those two holes are or last three holes are about putting yourself in position. If you can hit those three tee balls good they ultimately become pretty easy holes. But where they show their teeth is just off the tee. So if you get out of position then you're kind of handcuffed a little bit.

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