

# Ascension Charity Classic

Thursday, September 7, 2023

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Norwood Hills Country Club

## Ernie Els

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Your thoughts on coming back here after playing a couple times already?

ERNIE ELS: It's great to be back. It's a wonderful golf course, great history in the club and the golf course obviously with all those great players winning back in the day.

For us to come back here on this classic design is really a treat. It's my third time here. I must say that the golf course is the best I've seen it in my third time here.

Greens are beautiful, they're holding. I'm expecting good scoring, especially with the nice weather that's predicted.

**Q. What have you learned about the golf course in your two previous visits that you can put into practice to get a top finish here?**

ERNIE ELS: If you get the ball in play off the tee, you can get going around here. The greens are so pure, especially this week, and they're holding. If you can come out of the fairways...

Par 3s are excellent. Very strong par 3 holes. Undulating, some of the par 4s. You got to have your wits with you getting the yardage just right.

If you're hitting the ball properly, this golf course is going to give you some good scores.

**Q. How would you assess your form coming into this week?**

ERNIE ELS: I had a win in March. I've had quite a few top 10s. I played well in some of the majors. In Akron I finished I think third. I finished second in Birmingham. But I'm looking for wins, so... Not too many wins coming my way. I've put myself in position.

I'm looking for a strong finish this end-of-the-year stretch. I think we've got eight events. It's great to come back here and keep going.



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**Q. How about the galleries and the crowds?**

ERNIE ELS: Wonderful crowds. St. Louis, wonderful crowds. I remember way back in 1992, played with Arnold Palmer, the PGA Bellerive. Obviously playing with Arnold, the King. They were seven, eight deep. Some of the biggest crowds I ever played in front of in '92.

It's a great sporting town. People love their golf. Even today in the Pro-Am, a lot of people have come out. It's really great to come here.

**Q. How is your health?**

ERNIE ELS: I'm struggling a bit with the rib on the left side. I did a lot of travel in my five weeks off. Went to South Africa to see the family, England. Flew to Seattle and back. A lot of traveling. I think it kind of took its toll on my body a little bit.

But I'm getting better. It's 100% better from yesterday. I couldn't play yesterday. I'll be good to go tomorrow.

**Q. What kind conversations go on the walkie-talkies or headsets during Ryder Cup or Presidents Cup, from a lighthearted standpoint, no secrets or anything?**

ERNIE ELS: Being on the team for many, many years. It's everything from very lighthearted to very tense stuff depending on where you are in the matches. A lot of organization stuff going on, especially from management, management telling you where you have to be at certain times of the day, especially if you're captain, the vice captains.

It's strategy, making sure that the players stay on their strategy that we planned.

**Q. Any good jokes or anything?**

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, there's a lot going on. Language is actually the funniest thing of it all. On my team, we got sometimes seven different nationalities. I remember K.J. was on our vice captaincy. K.J. is speaking to me, then I have a person telling me what K.J. is telling me, trying to tell me, because his English is a little funny.

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A lot of different stuff that goes on.

**Q. More on the subject of teams. Have you paid any attention for Zach Johnson and Luke Donald's selection for the Ryder Cup?**

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, you're always going to get criticized. I was when I had to make my selections. You've got to leave somebody out. It's almost obvious. But there's always a plan by why you are making certain decisions. It's really got to do with pairing, just the whole team concept.

As long as players don't take it personally, that will be good. But it's hard for players not to sometimes take it personally because you give your whole life to playing Ryder Cup, Presidents Cup, then you get left out.

It's very hard on the player, harder on the player that gets left out, but it's as hard on the captain because you have to live and die by your decision.

**Q. When you were a young man on tour, still developing your game, break it down on the course, on the range, short game, how would those percentages have broken down? And how much has that changed now that technology has become a big part of that process?**

ERNIE ELS: Good question.

I mean, I felt like I was a bit of a range rat away from tournaments. At tournament sites, I didn't really get all those hours on the range. I basically did all my work before I get to tournaments, especially with David Ledbetter, especially when we lived in Orlando, and David being in Orlando. I was out there. If I had a week off, I would be there five days out of the weekdays. A lot of work there on the range.

My short game was always pretty sharp. I think I was just gifted with that kind of ability. But I did spend a lot of time on the short game. Putting was always kind of there.

Now it's kind of flipped around a bit. I spend a lot more time around the greens and on the greens, a little bit less time on the range just because of the body. Body's a little different now.

**Q. What about the technology?**

ERNIE ELS: Technology, very different now. In those days, we didn't get all the help from technology, and the game was different. Didn't have to go after the ball as hard. Now it seems like everybody is going after it 100%. I

always felt like I played 85% just to keep the ball in play long enough to be able to do that.

Now things have changed. You have to go 110% on the driver. I think the body will break down even quicker now, even with how strong the guys are. The body's not built for hitting a driver at 130 miles per hour.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Ernie.

ERNIE ELS: Thank you.

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