

# Black Desert Championship

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Ivins, Utah, USA

## Jay Don Blake

Press Conference



# BLACK DESERT

CHAMPIONSHIP

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Jay Don Blake, making his 500th start here at the Black Desert Championship. Want to start off with some comments on what it will be like celebrating your 500th start on the PGA TOUR.

JAY DON BLAKE: It's going to definitely be very exciting. I'm looking forward to it. But it's going to be pretty emotional at the same time.

I mean, the journey of thinking 500 PGA TOUR starts. I mean, if you play 20 years, 25 tournaments a year, that's a pretty long career.

Great accomplishment. I'm pretty proud of it. The situation of the scenario of being born and raised in St. George and having the opportunity to get that milestone of 500 PGA TOUR starts is a dream kind of story. You can't make it up, can't script it.

I will definitely be pretty emotional when I tee off.

### Q. How and when did you find out that you'd be receiving a sponsor for this week?

JAY DON BLAKE: They started out doing this documentary of me for St. George. Greater Zion got involved with Patrick Manning, which is a big involvement of this facility here and the golf course. So they're doing a documentary. We're going through our archives of all of our pictures, all of our information and history of how I started when I was eight years old and where I played at the city park. Made my own golf course, shooting around trees and tree trunks, just to go about a block and a half away. And if I couldn't get to a course I'd go to the park and do it.

They did all these different kind of things. We did some video work out here, and they said we're just about done, we need to do just one more clip that we forgot; your wife, Marci, has never really -- we haven't gotten a whole lot of her, and we realize she's been your caddie for 10 years or longer on the Champions Tour.

They brought us out here like 5:30 in the morning, they

wanted to do this clip of me and her on one of the greens, her tending the pin and raking a bunker, just doing some caddie activities. And so we were out there crazy early, and they wanted to get the perfect light off of the red rocks and the hills around here and get that nice great light for the morning video shoot.

So we were out there for about 45 minutes and running around doing different things, and they're like, okay, let's head back towards the putting green and the driving range, we're going to do some stuff down there. And as we approached the putting green area, we pull up in our carts that we're in, and I just see a group of people of 30, 35 people out there, and I just thought -- which I've been out before where they've had people out there -- and they're describing and trying to show what they're going to do with the future of this and we're going to build here, we're going to do this. I didn't even pay attention who was there. They were probably 30 yards away. I didn't even think anything of it.

We get out of the cart and just kind of stand on the side of the putting green. Next thing you know, I turn around and I've got 10 grandkids bombarding me, running at me, Grandpa, Grandpa, Grandma. I didn't know what to think. I didn't know what was going on. Then I look around, my whole family is here. So they all knew about what was going on, and me and my wife, Marci, had no idea. So we're surprised, shocked, kind of. I mean, I had some things rolling around in my head thinking, maybe this might be a time that might be presented with -- I didn't know what was going on. I was confused really.

They gathered us around over where everybody was at and they had the Greater Zion people there that did a lot of the documentary and the camera guys, and got our family kind of standing in a group. And somehow they kind of hid Patrick Manning kind of behind my family and a few of the people.

As we're kind of sitting there, kind of emotional and kind of excited to have my -- it's like 7:00 and the kids should be in school anyway. And all of a sudden, Patrick Manning sneaks around the back of the group, my family, and walks

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up and says, hey, Jay Don, would you hold this for me?

And I'm like, sure.

It's a little plaque, picture frame, and I look at it, and obviously I start reading what it says, and it's -- he'd like to offer me a sponsor exemption for the Black Desert Championship.

It was like right now; it was a very emotional, very proud moment to be part of what's going to take place this week, to have my family be part of that and all the support they've given me throughout the years. A big surprise, very excited, kind of what went on that day.

And the documentary that came out when it was finally did, and they did have Marci's caddie bib in there. It turned out to be a pretty good thing for memorabilia for the documentary, and the City has provided some extra things that they've added to that.

Just the way the scenarios have turned out have been, you know, kind of a dream. Being 499 tournaments, it's been, I don't know, 12, 13, 14 years since I've played a PGA TOUR event. To get to 65, I never thought I'd make that 500th. I've tried to get sponsor exemptions, I've tried to qualify a few times, and it just hasn't kind of worked out.

I thought that I'm not going to get there and just felt like I'm going to get stuck at the number. For Patrick Manning -- and I have to give a lot of pat on the back to my daughter-in-law, Jan Amico, she's sitting right over here. She was very persuasive on getting in Patrick's face constantly, telling him you've got to do this story. It can turn out to be a big story.

So she kept pushing him and pushing him. And he's like, I don't know if I can do it, I can't do it, the PGA TOUR won't let me do it because they don't usually give sponsor exemptions until like the week before, the Friday before until they know how many players are in and who's all playing and how they're providing. But Jan, she's pretty persuasive with what she done and talked Patrick into finally kind of touching base with the PGA TOUR, and he did a lot of legwork to allow it to be presented back in March.

That was nice for me because it gave me some time to kind of work on my game and get some practice in and finally work my way up to be as prepared as I can for the tournament.

The 500th is a milestone that I'm very proud of. Tomorrow at 2:14, I'm going to start it all off.

**Q. As you reach this milestone and look back on your career, what moments are you most proud of with your career?**

JAY DON BLAKE: You know, I felt like I was a player that was a real consistent player. I had a lot of chances to -- not a lot, but I had a few chances to kind of win tournaments. First few years, never really kind of was able to pull them off. Then went to San Diego and had a chance to win that week, finished it off to win this year's Shearson-Lehman Brothers Open. So that's a milestone and an accomplishment that makes you feel that you belong and makes you feel that you're accepted, you're a winner, and you can perform as well as the guys out here.

That was one of the accomplishments that was a big step for me to really feel like I fit in. There's other stuff that comes along with that. The dream for a kid, you've always been in the backyard talking about playing the Masters and playing the U.S. Opens and PGAs, playing all the majors, and having that win allowed me to play all the majors that year and the next year.

Those are accomplishments and dreams as a kid that I used to make up stories. My son Patrick over there, he'd be out in the back emulating playing the Masters or the U.S. Open. He's got Jay Don Blake, and he's talking to himself hitting chip shots. He's got Arnold Palmer hit a shot here, and he's just talking all this events being played, the same dreams that I've had.

I mean, those milestones of participating in those events was a big accomplishment that I felt like I dreamed about having and happening. It came true, and I played a few of them. I still appreciate every moment I had when I had those chances.

**Q. Jay Don, there's a couple of places on this course on the front side where you can look down the valley and stand here at Black Desert and see what was the Dixie Downs neighborhood where you grew up. What goes through your mind when you take that view and think about your whole career, the international travel, all of everything, and it's brought you right back here?**

JAY DON BLAKE: Yeah, when I first came out and played for the first time we were playing, I ended up -- I pretty much kind of took in awe of what the golf course presented, the lava rock and the beautiful green grass and the sand traps. I knew in the back of my mind that I just grew up just down the road a little ways.

It wasn't until I think about the second time I played, I had a little bit more time to kind of stand up on some of those little lava rock peninsulas and look a little deeper down the

valley where I grew up in a tailer park. And standing there I'm thinking, I possibly probably stood on this same peninsula when I was a little kid. Used to come up in this valley right here, and there wasn't anything out here, just the lava rock and sagebrush and a few rabbits that I was chasing around.

Every time I've played the course now, it's a moment that I look that way, and I miss my parents. I had a great support team with my family and my parents, especially my mom. She would take me to all the junior tournaments growing up, and St. George didn't have a whole lot of junior events in this area. We always had to go up north into Salt Lake and participate.

We'd drive north evening time and slept in the car a few times. And in the morning we'd get up and freshen up in some gas station where we could stop and get prepared, get my golf clubs out, go play a junior tournament that day, and then drive back home. We did that for a few years.

Having that support, and then it carried on to the PGA TOUR, where I can still see my mom walking the golf course right with me. She was as proud of me as what I am of her.

Just this dream scenario; everybody kind of wishes their parents can live as long as they can and enjoy moments like this, but I'm just very grateful that they gave me the opportunity. I look down that valley every time.

**Q. How is the game? How long has it actually been since you played in a Champions Tour tournament? How is the game? Give us an update. Tell us a little strategy how you're going to attack this course and play some of the par-4s and par-5s out there.**

JAY DON BLAKE: You know, I feel pretty comfortable with the game. It's still kind of a little rusty. I've worked at it pretty aggressively. I've felt decent with it, so I'm not -- I mean, you never know with golf. I've hit a lot of good shots. I played pretty well on Monday.

Strategy-wise, mine is going to be a little different than some of these big bombers out here that hit it 350 yards. So I'm going to -- par-5s, No. 18, I think I can probably reach the par-5 on 18. And then No. 9, there's a little ravine off to the right that is 295 to carry from the back tee, and I can't carry it that far. So I've got to make it a dogleg, and these guys can make it a straight shot. I don't think I'll play that as a two-shot. It's too risky up by the green. Gets pretty tight up there. So that will be a three-shot hole most of the time on that hole.

No. 7, if you get a little downwind, I can reach the green. I

played with Fishburn a couple weeks ago, media day, went out and played a few holes, and what did he hit, 9-iron into that green that day? He hit it like 400 yards down there. It was crazy how far he hit it. I'm like, I think I'm in the wrong ballpark right here. I'm still hitting wood in and he's got 9-iron.

Their strategy is going to be different than mine. Some of the par-4s, that's drivable, if I get the right winds, I can drive No. 14. No. 5 is another drivable one. Pretty tight down there, not as forgiving of a tee shot as what No. 14 is.

But I've just planned on hitting a 5-iron and having about 80 yards or so, 90 yards. Just kind of hope my wedge game can pull through and give me some good chances for some birdies on those drivable holes.

The par-3s, they're just kind of normal par-3s, nothing really tricky in those, so I feel like I'm pretty comfortable on that stuff. So strategy-wise, it's just the par-5s they're going to have a bit more advantage than I will.

I'm excited about it, and I'm comfortable enough that I feel like maybe my knowledge can outsmart them and out-whoop those young kids.

**Q. We're here recognizing and honoring tenure today. A question that I frequently get asked is this is Jay Don's 500th start. Is it 500 on the PGA TOUR or is it a combination of the PGA TOUR and the Champions Tour? Educate the room.**

JAY DON BLAKE: No, it's not a combination. It's just 500 PGA TOUR starts. I'm not sure of the exact number, but I think I've also played 230-something Champions Tour events, also.

Golf has been my life. It's a great game. Obviously you can play at any age and still enjoy it. I'm 65, and I've played with guys out here that they're 80 that they love the game. Play it at 12 years old, you can love the game. That's the great part about golf is you can play it at any age and love it. And having that kind of a career, I'm very proud to get to the 500th, and it is just PGA TOUR starts.

**Q. What gives you the most joy out of golf, and are you thinking about trying for 501?**

JAY DON BLAKE: I've kind of been asked and we've kind of talked about it. Even talked about it last night, kind of chatting. Had a guy on the telephone, a friend of mine, and it's kind of probably one of those moments that might be what they call a mic drop. I'd hate to -- yeah, you'd like to kind of go on. But the way the kids are now, I just don't

know, competitive-wise, if I can continue to hang with those guys. So at 500, I think I'm going to kind of leave it at that number and hang a plaque on the wall and look at it as much as I can.

**Q. What gives you (indiscernible)?**

JAY DON BLAKE: You know, you meet different people. You meet a lot of great people. You travel the country with the PGA TOUR. You're all over the place week after week.

Even you go out there and shoot 64 one day, you still feel like you can do better. It's that desire of getting as good as you can and playing as good as you can and always trying to outdo what you've done before.

When you do play bad -- I mean, people say I'm never going to play again, and as soon as they get to the parking lot, they take their shoes off, and they're like, what time is tee time tomorrow.

It's a game that just can either beat you up or you just can love it. I think the challenge of it is it's always challenging in some way because it did make you better and bring you back. It's just a game that's enjoyable for everybody.

Playing these pro-ams, I've always loved playing the pro-ams because you meet guys in other businesses and you get talking with them and you learn a lot and make a lot of great friendships. It's just a combination of all that. I don't mind working hard to be as good as I can.

**Q. Have you shot your age yet?**

JAY DON BLAKE: I have shot my age. I played with some friends of my nephew's, came down from Idaho, we went down to Vegas and played about five, six days in a row, and went down to Boulder Creek, Nevada, and ended up playing down there and bogeyed the last hole and shot 62. That was the first time I've shot my age. I'm going to try this week.

**Q. You're using an awesome Classic putter this week. Can you tell the story about how that ended up in the bag and the history you have with that putter?**

JAY DON BLAKE: You know, I grew up in the ages when what they call a Bulls Eye -- Acushnet Bulls Eye putter was kind of a popular thing when I was a kid. So to have one of those was kind of a neat thing to have. I've had a few of them, and I just remember my dad giving me a putter, and that's it, a Bulls Eye.

There's a story that goes along with it I'll tell after this, but the putter is probably, I think, 52 or 53 years old that I've

got. I just seen it sitting in the corner. I always keep it right there. I thought, you know, I'm going to -- what was interesting, I played with a guy, that same little trip that I played with my nephew those five days -- and played in a group with a guy that had a Bulls Eye, so he was like -- I kept looking at that thing and going, that's the coolest looking putter ever. We get done, and he walks over and hands me that putter. I'm like, I can't take your putter, and he told me his boy got it for him.

I said, I'm not going to take something that your boy has given you because I know my dad gave me one, and I couldn't do it.

He's like, no, you keep it. He insisted. I kept trying to in the parking lot give it back, and he didn't want it back.

I've hung on to the one that my father has given me, and I've kind of thought, you know -- and I'd hit a few putts with that guy's putter when I was playing that day with him. I took my putter out about three months ago and played with some buddies of mine in town. And they still to this day they keep saying, he made every single putt he made with that thing.

Then I go back to a Scotty Cameron putter that I've been using for quite a few years and I'd putt okay with that and I'd bring that Bulls Eye back out. And every time I putted with that thing, I felt like I putted pretty exceptional. I've been debating whether I put it in play or not.

I mean, it's nice that I feel comfortable with the putter, but it's a remembrance of my father. And so I'll be walking the fairways again with that putter. I'm proud to do that. I'm comfortable with it, and I feel like I'll have no issues. I know a lot of guys have looked at me like, what do you got there? Some people haven't even seen a putter like that. I'll enjoy it, and all this stuff is going to be a lot of good memories.

The putter that I had -- I've probably got 10, 12 of them, but I've kind of switched around. I put lead tape on a few of them. And I had a situation, I played Palm Springs event, didn't putt very good, stayed the day after and played with some buddies of mine that came down from St. George to play. And we messed around the day after, and I played -- what is it, Canyon Crest in Palm Springs? I can't remember the name of the golf course. What was the course?

Canyon Country Club.

I went out and played this golf course, putted horrible, still putting bad, I was frustrated. I'm not a guy that gets upset. I've never broken a club in my life. Well, I've done it just for

fun just to say I've done it.

But I played these holes and missed these putts, and about the 14th, 15th hole, I got frustrated and I went to kind of take my putter and kind of flat fly it, boomerang it over just off to the side of the green. And I accidentally held on to it took, and the carts were about 10 feet to the right of where I was going to slide it over to it, and all of a sudden as I let it go, I see where it's headed. And the putter sounded like a pinball machine, the shaft rattling the railing.

And I've still got that putter today, and it's got bands in it where I've had to re-straighten it and get it all back into shape to where I could use it for the rest of the round. I didn't make it to the rest of the round. I threw it in the pond over at the golf course over there.

We get over to San Diego. I drove over there and they went back home, and it's still afternoon. And I go to the putting green, and there's a gentleman, Scotty Cameron, that had just got credentials to provide putters that he'd built with his dad in the garage. He grew up there in San Diego, so he was out there promoting his equipment.

I'm out there looking for a new putter and end up finding one and putting with two or three of them. And he's like, can I help you with anything.

I was like, I'm just checking out your putters. Turns out he let me use one of the putters that I felt comfortable with, and using that putter I ended up winning the San Diego golf tournament that same week. So me and Scotty have been kind of buddies for a long while.

After the interviews and stuff, you're leading the tournament, they come and ask you some questions, what's changed in your game, I couldn't think of anything. I said, I've never really done anything different from the game and the game is still the same, I didn't change much -- oh, wait a minute, I got a new putter, I got a different putter. So they asked me what happened to the other one and I had to tell that story.

Then as the story goes on, they send a scuba diver over to Palm Springs and they fished the putter that I threw in the lake out, and I've still got it. It sits in the corner with the one my dad gave me. It still looks as good as ever, but it's got a few little nicks in it. That's kind of the story of the Bulls Eye putter of how I went from that to the Scotty Cameron. And then it's going to be a pleasure to use a Bulls Eye again that was given to me from my dad. It meant a lot when I got it, and it still does.

It's a good thing to remember my dad for.

**Q. Just wondered, you previously spoke about it, but talk about the uniqueness of this golf course, kind of the contrast with the emerald green fairways, black lava rock, bentgrass in the desert. Talk about the overall beauty of this course.**

JAY DON BLAKE: I mean, you look at the terrain, it's kind of a desert kind of terrain around this community. There's a lot of people that have asked me, where did all the lava rock come from. They think they actually brought it in to create the golf course with lava rock. But about three miles up the road just kind of up one of the valleys, there's a couple volcanos, which that's probably where it came from.

I mean, having the lava in this terrain, territory, a lot of the community didn't even know this was even part of what it was going to be, the uniqueness of it. Then you've got the red cliffs kind of north of us and to the sides.

We used to go to a place called Tuacahn up in the canyon before the course was even built, and it was kind of a hard road to get up to it. And things started snowballing, just the beauty it has everywhere you look. You've got the mountains in the distance. And bentgrass is not really a grass that's normal for a hot climate kind of areas. And for what they've done to keep this golf course in great shape in the condition it's in, I haven't seen really a dead spot yet anywhere.

And throw the white sand out with the green grass, and then you've got the lava rock just right off the edge of the grass, it's a very unique kind of style of golf course for this desert kind of climate. A lot of people have made the comment, I feel like I'm in Hawai'i playing on some of the courses.

I mean, it's just beautiful. I don't know how they can really explain -- I think anybody can see how unique it is, the way it's been laid out and through all the lava and designed the way it is. Tom Weiskopf did a great job and had a great vision of how he wanted to make it happen.

I was a little leery at first when they started talking about a golf course out here because I already knew the terrain and what it was going to be like. I was like, how are they going to get dirt to be on top of lava rock and have enough to where all of a sudden you put water to it and then you get a sink hole that could be a mile down below.

But what they've done is make a spectacular golf course and picked a great location for the beauty, and they're trying to finish up this resort that's great for the community. It's going to be -- they've got bigger dreams that go way beyond my imagination.

The golf course is very unique and beautiful, and the scenery everywhere you look is spectacular. I've never heard any players really say anything negative about it yet, so I think they all like it and enjoy it.

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