

U.S. Adaptive Open

Monday, July 10, 2023

Village of Pinehurst, North Carolina, USA

Pinehurst Resort & C.C. (Course No. 6)

Conor Stone

Press Conference

Q. Conor Stone, 5-under 67, the overall leader. Can you talk us through your round today.

CONOR STONE: Yeah, to be honest, complete shock. Was not expecting it. The last two weeks I couldn't swing a golf club. It was about to withdraw from the tournament. Only for my flights booked and accommodation booked, I wasn't coming.

I need to give a shout-out to my physiotherapist Jerry McDonough for fixing my back. So very happy, and a good preparation, as well, with my caddie Glen Davis, who I met here last year.

Yeah, to be honest, it was easy. I don't know where it came from. But happy to be able to hit a golf ball good again.

I've always been able to shoot these scores, but I just haven't done it in a long time, so it's nice to do it on a big stage like this.

Q. Started with an eagle on No. 1. Can you just talk us through maybe what you were feeling after that first hole and how --

CONOR STONE: Yeah, I was kind of nervous after that because the juices were flowing after I holed that putt for eagle on the first, so I was slightly nervous going forward. But then three or four holes in, I kind of settled it, and I felt fine after that.

But yeah, I was kind of nervous after holing the eagle putt. If I had made a birdie putt or a two-footer for birdie, I probably would have felt a lot better. But yeah, obviously I'm happy with the eagle, so it kicked off the round.

Q. You talked about you might not have made it back here, but now that you are back, was there any added pressure knowing how well you played last year and coming back here to get the individual title and defend your category?



CONOR STONE: Yeah, I played terrible last year. I really did not play well. I think I shot a score in the double digits in the first round or in the 80s anyway. Then had two okay rounds then coming in.

But much better preparation this year. I know the course better. I was able to expect the humidity. I was not used to the heat and the humidity that we had here. I was much more confident coming over this time. Well, in my mind, the way my golf was, I wasn't confident, but I felt more comfortable on the course. Yeah, it worked out well.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about what your trainer, your physio was able to do to make you able to play this week, and is there anything you have to do to ensure you can still swing and go?

CONOR STONE: Yeah, obviously a lot of stretching. I'm in the arm impairment category, but it's actually my spine. I have 60 pieces of metal in my spine. I have good days and have bad days, and to be honest I thought my time was up. I thought my back was just giving in because I've lost 15 miles an hour club head speed in the last six, seven months. I've lost 20, 30 yards off my irons. It's been scary. I've been worried about what's happened to my body.

But I'm hitting it shorter now, and look, it's fine. The ball was going straight. I was still hitting greens. I might be hitting two clubs more than what I did last year, but yeah, it's fine. But I have to stretching trying not to do too much. I have to keep loose, keep moving, and hope that I don't do too much.

Q. We talk about it a lot, but is that in the back of your mind when you're playing, the back possibly flaring back up?

CONOR STONE: Yeah, of course. Even after I played the practice round here the first day, the Saturday, I went off and I come back to do a TrackMan session, and I was hitting balls, and afterwards I felt like, oh, my back is gone. I was saying my prayers. I'm not too holy of a person, but I was saying my prayers Saturday night that I could still swing a club Sunday morning.

Lucky enough, I was.

Look, I'm not feeling 100 percent, but I can still swing, and

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the heat helps a bit because back home in Ireland it's 16 degrees and your body just feels cold and feels stiff the whole time. It's nice coming out here to a bit of heat.

Q. You mentioned your caddie. How did that relationship pop up and how is it going?

CONOR STONE: He actually caddied for another friend of mine, Jeremy Bittner, who's playing this week. He caddied for Jeremy last year, and became good friends with Glen. Edwin, my good buddy, was caddying for me last year. He couldn't make the trip over this time, and Jeremy had bagged another caddie in the meantime, his uncle. So luckily enough, me and Glen exchanged emails last year after the tournament to stay in touch, and Glen was free. When he was free, I took up the opportunity, and he's probably one of the best caddies around here, so I'm very thankful that he's willing to offer his services.

Q. What's been that one key piece of advice maybe that's stuck with you the first couple days here?

CONOR STONE: Just staying patient, just taking it one hole at a time. Glen helped that. Like not once today did I -- well, it did enter my head a few times that I was 4- or 5-under par, but somehow Glen managed to just knock that out of my head, and I just stayed focused on one shot at a time. It never usually works, but it worked today.

Q. Are there any courses back home that resemble Pinehurst that were able to --

CONOR STONE: Not really, but we played the R&A's G4D Open back in May over in Woburn in England, and it would be pretty similar to that. It's actually tighter than this. I walked off this course last year thinking, holy crap, this is the tightest golf course I've ever played. OB left, OB right, sweaty hands.

Then I played Woburn, and it's made me realize that this still is a tight golf course, but it made this course look a lot wider than what it is. Woburn was good practice for this.

Q. How has everything been going on the G4D Tour?

CONOR STONE: It's good. I've played a couple of events. Haven't played too well. I've kind of dropped down the World Rankings a bit, which has been a bit disappointing because I always -- my ambitions were to move up the rankings and get into the top 10, and I'm clearly good enough, but I work hard. I work 40, 50 hours a week, and a lot of these guys who are ahead of me in the world rankings, this is their job.

This is not my job. My job is sitting in front of a computer

looking at spreadsheets on Excel. But I've got a very good boss, Michael McGuirk. He owns the Irish version of the PGA Superstore, so he's very helpful. He let me bring the laptop away, and I can work from over here, and even now I have to go back and work for a few hours. The day job comes first.

Look, I'm very lucky to have people around me that are helping me do things like this. Yeah, it's worked out well.

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