

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
June 21, 2018



FRED COUPLES

CHRIS RICHARDS: Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to welcome defending champion Fred Couples to the media center.

Thank you for joining us at the third annual American Family Insurance Championship. First of all, how are you feeling and how's it feel to be back out here on Tour seeing all the guys?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I feel pretty good. Last time I played was at Augusta, and I played last week in the member-guest where I live just to see if I could play. I played a practice round and three days and I didn't move very well Sunday or Monday. Then I hit a couple balls on Tuesday, then flew here, and the flight was okay and I feel pretty good.

So a little disappointing that this weather may keep us maybe just to play nine, but I played last year obviously and won. Really like the course, which for me personally always helps. When anyone that turns 50 becomes a Champions Tour player and they go play, it's all new golf courses and this was another one. I didn't play the first year because I wasn't playing any golf, but coming last year, really liked the course.

Like I say, I don't even know what I shot because I had a very good last round and picked up a few shots on maybe Kenny Perry or Billy Andrade or somebody.

Steve Stricker is a huge friend and if this was maybe any other tournament I might not have come, even though I won last year, because I just am so rusty. I don't know what I'll shoot, doesn't really matter, but I think I'll hit the ball fine. That's about all I've got for you. I don't know what else to say.

Augusta I played because I told myself if I had to crawl around, I would. Somehow I made the cut. Here there's no cut, so I'll be playing hopefully a few holes today and three good rounds of golf.

CHRIS RICHARDS: You mentioned your friendship with Steve Stricker. Looking back at your win, what does it mean to you to have won your good friend's tournament and what does it mean to be here again to support him?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I think Steve supports this area. I've known that since I met him. I didn't really know much about how he practiced in the winter and you hear all that stuff.

Basically, Jerry Kelly is not as close a friend as Steve, but I've known Jerry Kelly a long, long time, too, and always fun to play with.

I think for us on this tour, what Steve has done, given us another place to play with huge galleries on a really, really good course, I think it's all important. I think it's important for Steve and he does a great job.

As far as the Stricker family, they're so much fun to be around. He invited me or asked me to be one of his assistants in New York and he did a great job at the Presidents Cup and I enjoyed that.

But just being around Steve is a very positive day. He's a good friend and, like I say, the things he does, he does it quietly and he just does a phenomenal job. This tournament is no exception.

CHRIS RICHARDS: I'll take questions now.

Q. Fred, when you left here last year, physically how did you feel and at what point did things change? And I know you played Hawaii and was that kind of the point where something happened and you were kind of in that standby mode?

FRED COUPLES: To be honest with you, the last couple years my back has been not so good, so I don't even know -- I didn't play much before I came here but I actually was playing a little more, like I wasn't trying to rush into it. It was a shock to win last year, it really was.

But if you get things going, and I finished pretty well the last nine but I had a nice run in between that. So I have to tell you, after I won here, I don't even know what the next tournament I played in. Maybe the British Senior Open, I don't even know. You know, this year I can tell you right now, I played two tournaments, Hawaii and Augusta. At Hawaii, I was so frustrated that I just kept playing and then it was just I couldn't bend over. Hitting a drive, you know, when we play tomorrow and if I'm feeling pretty well, I can hit a tee shot or a wood.

Basically, when I'm home now I don't hit any irons. I no longer have a 4-iron, I have five woods in my bag and the next one to go out will probably be my 5-iron because they're just a little longer and they're easier to hit and I don't have to bend down.

In Hawaii it was mostly putting, and every time I putted the ball and I straightened up, it actually -- you know, I told myself I would never do that ever again unless it was at Augusta. And at Augusta, it kind of flared up a few times, but nothing like Hawaii.

Q. (No microphone.)... after every round at Augusta, right?

FRED COUPLES: Yes, I've been going a lot of places and nothing -- I think golf's a very tough game on a back. I just saw another guy just last Wednesday, Thursday and Friday when I was playing in this member-guest. He came in from Toronto, very nice guy and, you know, I don't feel much better now than I did after a couple treatments. It just kind of -- it just

gets crooked pretty fast.

But again, cold weather is not a problem, hot weather might help, but it's really just bending, and in golf you bend a lot. As I get to 57 and 58, it's become not much fun. I don't play. When I'm home, after Hawaii, which is in January, I played two days before I went to Augusta right before I left and I just wanted to go and, you know, I felt like I won the tournament by making the cut. And then Saturday and Sunday, and I played Sunday with Bernhard, which we were laughing about. I love Bernhard, but I mean, all the guys I could have played with, I get a guy I see every single day, but it was fun just to at least not be outdriven by 40 yards.

CHRIS RICHARDS: We'll take a question from The First Tee.

Q. I'm Angelina Myhr, junior course reporter. Obviously you play well here. What about University Ridge suits your eye?

FRED COUPLES: You know, that's a great question.

A, I love the greens. The greens are where I grew up on and I grew up -- how old are you?

Q. Thirteen.

FRED COUPLES: Thirteen, right. So when I was 13 I could really putt. Really, really putt. And I could putt on my home greens, so that's always a key. When you play in Florida, which maybe you never have, they have different greens and you have to read them right. So on a real quick pro-am last year when I went back to my room, I kind of go over the courses and, you know, you have to fade it off No. 2, you have to fade it off No. 4, then you have to do a couple draws, and for me, if I can hit those shots, then I get comfortable. Normally, I fade the ball. And it worked out just where the course kind of just felt -- I just like the looks of most of the holes.

And sometimes you say, well, why is that? You know, I didn't do anything great in the pro-am. I do remember, it's not like I hit every shot great and I thought, wow, I'm ready to go. But a lot of times making putts and then hitting a few good drives, I think people maybe like yourself if you're a good golfer, sometimes you think you have to hit every shot perfect. I mean, that's so far from the facts. But what you have to do is be consistent and play well, and last year after getting to know the course I played pretty well three days. I didn't have any kind of bad stretches, so I just kept plugging along and made a few birdies on Sunday and won.

Q. You mentioned your friendship with Steve in the context of the Presidents Cup last year, Ryder Cup coming to Wisconsin in 2020. Steve's being mentioned as a possible captain for that. What did you see in his ability to lead a situation like that out in New Jersey, and even though he's your friend, does he have strengths, weaknesses as a Ryder Cup captain potentially in terms of, you know, if he is

considered?

FRED COUPLES: Well, that's a good question. It would be like Steve playing in Wisconsin where he's really, really, really well liked, or going to play in New York, where he's really, really well liked.

So, you know, this Ryder Cup versus Presidents Cup thing is -- there's no difference. You get 12 guys, you have to be their captain, you have to tell them what the plan is. I think what I saw -- Steve's been on a lot of teams and he knows what people like to do. He's a very quiet leader and I think a lot of times what happens is it might be easier to get a point for Steve Stricker than Jack Nicklaus or Ray Floyd or Arnold Palmer and I think that's a really, really good thing.

For instance, if you're out on the 17th hole and Jack Nicklaus comes up to you and says, "Look, we need your point badly," that's like four times the stress. When you go up and Steve Stricker comes, he might have a little different way of approaching you and just telling you, "We still need your point," and then you kind of just tell him, you know, "Get away from me and let me do my job."

So I honestly think it's not an ego thing at all. I don't think any captain I've ever had had this ego, but I think it's now becoming more prevalent where you ask the players a lot of things. When I was younger and played on teams, the captains just told you what you were going to do and who you were going to play with and that was the way it was.

I mean, again, Davis Love, we won several World Cups. We played so few Ryder Cup matches, I still am in shock over it, but that's how it is. But Steve, he deserves it and I hope he gets it. There wouldn't be a better guy for this Ryder Cup, for sure.

Q. What would it mean to you to win again?

FRED COUPLES: You know, it would mean a lot. I think anytime you win it's an incredible accomplishment. For as little as I've played, you know, if I don't go hit any balls today or if we don't get to play, tomorrow I'm going to have to be out here an hour early just to be semi ready.

So it's a farfetched thing, but it was last year, too. When you're older, you kind of know how to get it around. I know if you're 24 years old and you come off an injury, it's not as easy to take a month off the PGA Tour and go out and battle against those guys.

But it would mean a lot. And it's such a good tournament, any tournament you win, but the galleries here, I don't know how many people have been to a lot of tournaments, but I saw Jeff Purser, who's the Newport Beach -- you wouldn't know him, but he's the tournament director there. They get like 15,000 people, such a nice field, and the same as here. Some tournaments we don't get as many people, which I think is tough. But for us players, we like to play in front of big crowds and here in Wisconsin they surely support the tournament.

Q. With so little golf being played by you, what do you do with your time? You don't strike me as being the guy that sits around and watches Price is Right all day.

FRED COUPLES: Well, I do watch other stuff. I'm just finishing up a course in Cabo that took like 10 years to get going, so I've gone down there a few times and probably more because I haven't been doing much.

To be honest with you, days go by really, really fast. I'm not a depressed person. I don't miss golf at all. Do I want to play? Of course I want to play, but I refuse to play -- I don't want to say half-heart -- I refuse to play mediocre, and if my body doesn't let me do stuff, it's going to be mediocre. And how long do I want to do that? We're going to find out pretty fast because the more I practice, I just get really, really stiff.

Then I played four days in a row, actually played pretty well and then I didn't feel like playing Sunday or Monday because I thought it might screw me up to come here.

So anyhow, I do everything and anything. I see movies, go on little two-day trips, go to soccer games, basketball games, and the next thing you know it's time to go to Wisconsin. Three, four weeks from now I'll go to the British Open because we're playing St. Andrews, so I do not want to miss that. So it's a teeny schedule, but I'm 58 and I said I'll play as long as I can and I think my time's running out. Then I'll certainly do other things.

CHRIS RICHARDS: Anything else for Fred? Thank you very much and good luck this week.

FRED COUPLES: Thank you, guys.