

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
June 20, 2018



STEVE STRICKER

CHRIS RICHARDS: Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to welcome Steve Stricker to the third annual American Family Insurance Championship. Thank you for coming and thank you for hosting the event for the third time.

STEVE STRICKER: Thank you.

CHRIS RICHARDS: You've had a busy stretch playing in six tournaments in the last seven weeks. How's your energy level and how's your game feeling right now?

STEVE STRICKER: I'm looking forward to a couple weeks off after this, I know that, but I feel good still. I feel -- well, I'm excited to be here, so I think the excitement level, the adrenaline level will be good this week and enough to get me through the week.

My game has been okay. I showed some really good signs last week at the U.S. Open and the week before that at Memphis. I'm excited about how I'm playing. There's always things that we can work on and that I'm not happy about, but for the most part things have been okay.

CHRIS RICHARDS: As I mentioned, this is the third year of this tournament. What is your favorite part about hosting this tournament here in Madison?

STEVE STRICKER: You know, I think the giving-back part is very special for all of us. In December time is when we've been doing it the last couple years. And sure, there's a lot of work that goes into getting this tournament ready, you know, with Nate and his team, but I think the real fun part is December when we see these groups come into the American Family Insurance corporate headquarters here in town and we announce how much we're going to donate and how much they're going to get. To see the smiles and the happiness on their face is really something pretty special for us.

CHRIS RICHARDS: Two years ago when you first hosted this tournament, could you imagine where we are today in the third year, how elite this tournament has become in such a quick time?

STEVE STRICKER: No, not really. We had this vision of trying to improve and trying to get better each and every year, and hopefully we've done that in the eyes of the fans, the players, the volunteers, the community. So I hope everybody sees that. We're trying to make it fresher and newer and more exciting every year.

No, it's a little bit beyond our expectations, I think, for what's happened, but we continue to strive for fun things for everybody to do and the players that are coming are responding because we've got a better field it seems like this year. So it's been -- knock on wood, it's been very exciting for us to see the growth in this tournament. You know, I can't say enough about our community standing and getting behind this event and supporting it the way they do, so it's very special to be and see and take part in all this.

Q. Steve, especially on the regular tour, your first-round scoring average has been exceptional, but is it that much better than it's been in the past?

And then how have you handled some of that success you've had early in tournaments and how would you assess what's happened the final three rounds of those type of events?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, that's been a bugaboo on my playing resume this year. I've gotten off to some really good starts in some events and it's been really one round in these tournaments on the regular tour that's kind of jumped up and bit me. You know, I don't know what's causing that. I'm really one good round away every week to getting into some serious contention. That's the exciting part and the frustrating part all in one. So I don't know what that's all about, but I know I've been thinking about it and trying to improve on that.

Last week, kind of the same thing. I kind of had a not-so-good second round at the U.S. Open and then played pretty good on the weekend. So it's just one round keeping me away and hopefully I can rectify that. I'll play a few more PGA TOUR events as the year goes on and see if I can't do a better job of that.

But to answer your question, I don't know why I'm doing that and I wish I wasn't doing that, but I'm dealing with it and trying to move on.

Q. What does this week mean to you personally, though, because your name is on this and, like you said, you've been playing so much coming in here? What does it mean to you personally, though, with everyone here and with your name on it?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, it's very special. You know, it's pretty surreal to see this event taking place in our backyard here in Madison. The overwhelming support that we've gotten from companies and fans, other players coming, the PGA TOUR being very supportive, it is, it's overwhelming at times. It's pretty cool. There's a lot of things I could say, but it's a little bit beyond my expectations how much this has grown in the three years.

But it's an event that I look forward to each year, the last couple years since I've been able to play, and it's fun coming back to play in front of family and friends in the area where I live now.

It's also a lot of fun to give back to these groups that we're giving back to, the Children's

Hospital and all these other charities. The bottom line, that's why we're doing it. That's why this event started, was not only to be able to give back to these charities, brand recognition from American Family's standpoint, to get their name out there. They're such a good neighbor in Madison. I mean, they do so much for our community and so it's just, you put all that together, it's a really special week for us all.

Q. Steve, as far as this tournament, this tour, you've talked about it often this season, you're conflicted about where to play. Bernhard came in here and said it took him two tournaments out here to know he never wanted to go back to the other tour on a regular basis.

How does one assess where they should be? Davis said he thinks eventually the young guys who keep coming out, pouring out on the tour like we saw even last week at the Open, will push you guys out here quicker.

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I still struggle on where to go. When I see signs like the last couple weeks and really this year, I've played eight or nine times and I'm 130th in FedExCup points, which isn't great but I have the opportunity to maybe keep my card again, which I'm probably going to try to do just so I can get back in the PLAYERS Championship.

So when I see signs like that in some of these tournaments that I'm playing on the regular tour, I still have fun doing that, I still enjoy going out there and trying to stack up against these great young players. I go there with a little bit of a chip on my shoulder, something to prove, you know. I'm 51 and trying to still play against these guys, so that's kind of enjoyable and fun in a weird sense.

But yeah, I still continue to struggle on where I should play. And I will, I'm sure, for the rest of the year on what to do next and where to go. I know where I'm at this week, that's kind of what I've been taking each week as I go. I don't know if I'm going to play -- I know I'm going to play John Deere next, but after that it could be Senior British Open or Canadian Open. I still, I don't know, I don't know where I'm going.

Q. Are you still committing to both tours on certain weeks?

STEVE STRICKER: I've only done that once this year, committed to both tours. I may do that, although the Senior British, I'm going to have to commit earlier than normal. But yeah, I may have to do that as we continue on the rest of the year, too.

Q. I told Chris I would ask this question: Since the gun deer season in Wisconsin is over just before Thanksgiving and the Schwab Cup wraps up two weeks before, can we get a commitment out of you to be in the Schwab Cup Playoffs this year?

STEVE STRICKER: No, you can't. (Laughs.)

CHRIS RICHARDS: Good try, Rob.

Q. Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give your 18-year-old self?

STEVE STRICKER: Say that again?

Q. Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give your 18-year-old self?

STEVE STRICKER: My 18-year-old self, if I was 18 again?

To be patient, I guess. You know, when you're 18 and young, you want everything right now. You want whatever you're doing, if it's playing golf, going to college, all these experiences you want to happen now. Looking back, you know, I wish I would have been a little bit more patient at times, trusted my ability a little bit more at times.

I guess the biggest thing, play equipment that you want to -- make sure that you like the equipment that you're playing with because we play for so much money out here that you've got to be comfortable with the equipment that you're playing.

But just to be patient, I think, and to work hard, I think, is the biggest things I've learned in my career.

Q. Steve, with Jerry Kelly also being from the area, do you guys have any sort of friendly rivalry for this tournament or at the very least have some sort of friendly hometown banter?

STEVE STRICKER: There's always banter with Jerry, it doesn't mean that we're here in Madison. We don't need to be here in Madison to have that banter. He's ready to give it to you at any time, and I don't really give it back to him too much. Occasionally maybe, but he's the guy that gives it usually.

But yeah, it's a great time for us to be here and I know he enjoys this a lot, to be here and playing in front of his family and friends in Wisconsin again. We enjoy one another and I think the biggest thing is we drive one another. I think we spur each other on. If I were to do something well in a tournament, it kind of motivates him to do something well and vice versa. So I think that's been the biggest thing of our relationship over the years is that we tend to spur each other on.

Q. Steve, what did you learn last year compared to year one where the first year you were host and that was your role and last year you had to do dual roles of hosting and playing?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah. The playing part is way easier than just sitting around and watching guys play. I get to go inside the ropes and do what I know how to do and I enjoy that a lot. Enjoy playing here, like I said, in Madison. It's way easier the last couple years being able to play. I can get away then and get inside there and play the golf game like I

know how to play. I shook a lot of hands that first year, I felt like I was running for office kind of. But it was fun and got to meet a lot of the sponsors and say thank you, and I still continue to do that. Even today, went up to CDW and there's some very key people that support us, you know, through the last few years and it's important to say thank you. We're all in it together and we need that kind of support from them to make this all work.

Q. As you look at your career out here, Davis made the comment that he sees a certain fitness level that's kind of come on to the PGA TOUR, it's obviously much different than when you two started.

STEVE STRICKER: Right.

Q. And if you look at what Bernhard's done, he might be the poster child for the next wave of golfers coming out here. Is part of the fact that you've kept yourself in good shape, do you feel you can win out here well into, you know, late 50s, maybe to 60 and that you've got some time to accomplish things out here?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, very much so. If I continue to take care of myself and do the things that I've done over the years and eat properly, and I've got a wife that watches what I eat for me and I can't get away with anything. So that's important, though.

You see that in guys. I've totally felt like if you can stay in decent shape, continue to work on your game. I enjoy working on it still and that's the part that hasn't gone away, I still continue to enjoy working on it and staying in shape and staying flexible. It's getting harder and harder every year, but continue to work on that.

I'm thinking my time out here is going to be a little bit later than what a normal, you know, 50 to 55 kind of age group. I'm thinking maybe 55 to 60 could be my time out here. I still enjoy going out there and play on the regular tour. I'm a part of the Ryder Cup team this year as an assistant captain. I feel it's important to be out there to play with some of the guys that are going to be on that team and hang around and be a part of that, too, as I'm out there.

Q. Speaking of your wife, was there an arm wrestling match to be the person on your bag? And how did Mario, I heard he's on Fred's bag?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, he's on Freddie's bag. No, it was always going to be Nicki here. She did it last year and we had a good time doing it.

Then Freddie, his caddie has taken another job for like a three-week period with Sergio Garcia, so Freddie needed a caddie. He just texted me one day and asked if Mario was available, so that's how that all played out. Look, Mario's really looking forward to that. Should be a lot of fun for Mario.

Q. What is the most important skill that you've learned on the course that you've used off the course?

STEVE STRICKER: Probably my -- there's a couple things probably. Perseverance, just the ability to keep working at it, keep finding a way, which is the work ethic part, I guess. I guess that would be the biggest thing. It's just trying to -- and golf emulates life in so many ways and the game of golf is like life. Through the course of a round you have your ups and downs and you've got to fight through those ups and downs. Your years are ups and downs, so you've got to try to find ways to persevere and get your game going again and work hard.

So I think that's been the biggest key of my career is just to keep working hard, keep believing in myself, persevering through those tough times to try to turn things around and make it better.

Q. Steve, I know that you and Jerry and Skip Kendall have been asked and answered this question a hundred times already, but the longer it goes and the more experienced you are, how important for you guys to see a Wisconsin winner at a Wisconsin event?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I think it would be fun. I think any of us winning would be a really cool story. I don't know if it's vital. I mean, obviously we would all like to be the guy to win, but it was great to see Freddie win last year. I mean, if it couldn't be one of us, to have Fred Couples win your event is a real feather in our cap to have him come back again this year.

Yeah, I think it would be a neat story, but like I said, to make the event go and to be a success, I don't think it's vital, but it would be surely a fun event if one of us were to win.

Q. Speaking of winning, I mean, you and Jerry are probably two of the favorites to win this. What is it like to play in this tournament and be one of the guys that people think has maybe the best chance to win this?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, there's a little bit of extra pressure on us this week playing in front of everybody and being here, and the expectations that we put on ourselves are high as well as other people that are watching us, family and friends and fans. Everybody expects us and wants us to play well, so you feel that extra little bit of pressure.

But we've been dealing with this for a while. You know, with the GMO tournament, when we were playing there, and you just kind of got to learn to go with it and try to use that excitement from other people to your advantage and try to play well so you can feed off of them and have a good tournament and a good round. So there's extra pressure but it's also fun, too.

Q. With Andy hosting the Sioux Falls event that's been added to the schedule, you, Jerry and Andy are now hosting PGA TOUR Champions events. What does that say about the three of you being hosts and how important is it to have someone like that

in that capacity for a tournament to kind of get the word out on tour and other things?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, no doubt. Yeah, would you have ever thought that years ago that we would all be having a part of a tournament with our names on it? So it's pretty cool to see. And you know what, if you have a good sponsor like we have here with American Family Insurance, good things can happen. Andy's got that with Sanford and Jerry's got that with Cologuard, Exact Science, a Madison-based company.

So we're very fortunate to have been a part of these great companies that want to get their name out there, do it through the game of golf, to raise money for charity, to raise awareness in Cologuard's case to what they're doing. So it's pretty neat, it's pretty neat to see.

There's a lot of different storylines there, but it's pretty remarkable that three of us from Wisconsin are all doing that, so it's cool to see.

CHRIS RICHARDS: Is there anything else for Steve? All right. Thank you very much. Have a great week.

STEVE STRICKER: Thank you. Good to see you again.