

MARK O'MEARA

Q. Well, having walked the Green Mile at Augusta there for the last time there, what's your emotions, what were the emotions then?

MARK O'MEARA: You know what, I think I was a little bit more emotional last summer in July at Birkdale playing my last Open Championship. I've sensed the last two or three years at Augusta National that the day was coming that I wasn't going to play again. Even though at 58, three years ago I tied for 22nd and made a bunch of birdies or whatever.

You know, look, it was time for me to step away, I just believe that in my heart. I know that the Crenshaws called and some of the members at the club say, hey, let us know if it's your last one. I'm like, look, I'm not Tom Watson, I'm Mark O'Meara. I'm a guy who made a putt in '98, 20 years ago, to win the Masters. I just didn't want to make it a big deal. I just wanted to play and when I got done, whether it was Friday or Sunday, I had in my mind and I told my wife, I said this is it. A lot of -- some of my friends and even her were like, you know, how do you know, you might want to play another year. I'm like, I know, I know. I have too much respect for Augusta National, for the Masters tournament to continue to play when I know that I'm not playing at a level I would like to play at. And it's a big course, let's face it. The kids are really good and it's fun to watch.

Q. Do you see yourself -- Watson just won the par 3, so what are you going to do next year?

MARK O'MEARA: Next year I'm come and I'll spend the week there. You know, I'll do some corporate stuff, I'll go to the dinner on Tuesday night, I'll probably play the par 3. I won the par 3 one year, maybe five six years ago, seven years ago, something like that. Just kind of take it in. It will be a unique situation. Since 1980, the years that I was able to play the 33 or 34 Masters that I played, I was always competing, so next year not competing but being there and being a small, small part of it still.

There's just great tradition at the Masters and the Masters tournament. The club does a super job as all of you well know. For me to have a green jacket in my locker. Obviously watched it this weekend like we all watched. I flew home on Saturday. I watched the telecast Saturday and Sunday. Patrick Reed played unbelievable. I've always been a big believer that if you want to win the Masters, somebody's going to have to make some putts on the last two or three holes and he did it.

Q. How often do you relive that 20-footer from a couple --

MARK O'MEARA: A lot, a lot. I look back and I was watching actually the other day, I

YouTubed -- I just wanted to kind of see what my golf swing looked like. I YouTubed the Masters tournament in '98, the final round, so we kind of scanned through it so I could see some of the shots. It kind of replayed in my mind because I was telling Mitch, my caddie, I said I kind of remember making the putt, I remember making the shots I hit on 17 and 16 and 15 and all that stuff, but I don't remember the gallery. You look at the Masters tournament, you look at the gallery, it's huge. And the patrons, besides being around the beautiful grounds of Augusta National, the patrons help make that event so special along with the media and everything else that comes into play. When I watched some of the highlights of '98, I saw how big the crowds were.

Yeah, was I nervous? Absolutely I was nervous coming up 18, but when I look at myself I didn't look that nervous. I remember walking on the 18th green in the final group with Fred Couples, and Duval was finished at 8 under and Fred was 8 under and I was 8 under. When I walked up to the green I remember I needed some water badly because my mouth was so dry. I didn't get any water, but luckily somehow, somehow I never once thought when I was over that putt on 18 like if I make this putt I win the Masters, I'm going to get a green jacket, I'm going to -- all this stuff that comes along with that. I don't think you can get too far ahead of yourself.

So what I said to myself, what I said earlier to you all, is sooner or later you're going to make a putt. Whether it's on 18 or 17 or the 10th hole or going back to 18 in a playoff, you're going to have to make a putt of any length, whether it's three feet, five feet, 18, 20 feet. I said why not just put the best stroke you can on this one. I think it kept me more in the moment, and when I hit the putt I knew I hit a good putt on 18 in '98. I was watching it, like everybody stood up and they're all watching it. When it got close to the hole, my first reaction was, a foot and a half from the hole was, my God, it's going to go in. Then it was breaking off to the left and I just remember clearly that I was thinking, please don't lip out. When it went in and disappeared into the hole and my arms and hands went up in the air, I think I was more in shock and disbelief as to what the heck just happened. Then I realized I had won the Masters.

And certainly to put the icing on the cake, I did it at 41. I birdied the last two holes, which you always hope you can do something well when you win a tournament of that magnitude. And then to cap it off, Tiger put the green jacket on me, that was pretty special.

Q. Talk about the transition now from Augusta, now you're here. Pressure's off, relaxing?

MARK O'MEARA: Well, it is. It's not as intense obviously as it is there, but it's still, I think these guys and myself included, we play for our pride, too. We always want to go out there and give it our best. To come here to TPC Sugarloaf, you know, Mitsubishi's been a great sponsor of our Champions Tour. I think a lot of the players, a lot of the guys had off. A lot of the guys who played who are Masters champions are here this week, you know Woosnam and Vijay and Sandy Lyle and myself, Larry Mize. You can just go down the list, Tom Watson. So there's a lot of guys that had fond memories of winning the Masters tournament

that are going to be playing here this week, which is really cool.

Q. Restaurants around, where are you eating?

MARK O'MEARA: I just got in last night. I actually went home for four days so I can sleep in my own bed. You know, I'm not a big like high-end guy. I'll be going like one night some Mexican place, I'll go to a pizza place. Who knows, I might even hit Chik-fil-A. I heard Patrick Reed was at Chik-fil-A with his green jacket, so I'll probably go to Chik-fil-A one night, too.

Q. As that course at Augusta continues to grow and everything, do you think former champs will be younger and younger when they decide to hang it up when it becomes more and more difficult?

MARK O'MEARA: No. I think what makes it so unique, the Masters tournament, is the fact that they let you leave on your own term, right? Which I think is a great honor for players and I think it just comes down to the player whether they want to be honest with themselves or not.

My feeling would be if I'm out there playing and I've got to play just unbelievably well to make the cut, then maybe it was time for me to move aside. That's why I really came with that decision.

It's true, some of the younger players, if they aren't playing the way they want to, maybe they'll step aside, but I see guys that have won the Masters tournament, guys like still got game. Adam Scott, guys like that. I think Vijay, too, still hits it far enough to play. And I know how much Fred loves it. I know he struggles with his back. I played with him on Sunday, a week ago past Sunday, the week before Augusta, and he was hobbling around but the guy makes the cut every year and he still seems to play pretty good around Augusta National. Bernhard Langer, too, the guy still plays phenomenal golf. So I see those guys playing for a little bit longer, but there will come a point in time where they'll want to walk away, too.

Q. How does your game translate here now to this field and this place? Do you feel like you can contend?

MARK O'MEARA: Look, I haven't played as well as I would like the last year and a half, two years. I've been working on it. I went home and practiced Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday before I flew here late yesterday afternoon. I'm a hard grader, I would give myself a B-minus on my game right now. I think to win you've got to be better. I've got to be in a better place, I've got to have a little more confidence and that just doesn't come overnight, it comes with a period of time seeing some good play. I'm not there yet, but I'm working on it.

Q. On Friday I think you bogeyed 18. I was there, but --

MARK O'MEARA: I did. I hit a good drive and I hit it in the right bunker. I made bogey.

Q. Did you have a par-saving putt?

MARK O'MEARA: No, no, it was like opposite of -- pin was front right, I was on the front left of the green because I was in the right bunker. Yeah, I putted it up there but nothing great. I played pretty good the first day, to be honest. I missed two fairways on Thursday and I hit like 11 greens or 12 greens and I shot 6 over. I made a triple and two doubles. You just can't give away shots like that at Augusta National.

So I hit the ball respectfully decent on Thursday and then on Friday I shot 3 over on the front and then I didn't hit it very good. On the 13th hole when you lay up and you've got an 80-yard wedge shot and you lay the sod over it and hit it 30 yards short of the ditch, that's when you know it's time to maybe step aside.

Q. And I would be remiss if I didn't ask you a Tiger question. Is he going to win again?

MARK O'MEARA: I think he will, I think he will. I think the difference is that he's been away from the game for so long and we've seen some obviously very good play at Honda, certainly Tampa, certainly at Bay Hill. You know, I mean, I would never underestimate what Tiger Woods can do. Usually when people -- you want him to get something done, just tell him he can't do it, usually that means he will do it. So I think he'll win again. Whether he withins a major or not, I don't see why not if he feels good and he hits the ball with the speed he's got and he looks good, short game seems to be really good and he's a wonderful putter, so there's no reason why he couldn't win again.