

FRED COUPLES

FRED COUPLES: I haven't played a lot, but I'm getting ready to enjoy this tournament. I played a couple years ago and I love the course, I like the weather. And then I'm going to play next week in L.A., so I'm hoping to do a little work this week and get four rounds in and then play Riviera one more time.

I'm not here just to show up. I feel like if I can go -- there's a few key holes that I remember butchering last year. I think there's a drivable one over there, maybe No. 6 or 7, which I'm not going to try and drive anymore. I think I'm going to hit a 5-iron and a wedge, see if I play it better. But I really like the course.

Q. I know you have to take a different approach to being competitive, pacing yourself, not over-practicing. What has that approach been lately to make sure that you're not hurting your body but you're getting better and better?

FRED COUPLES: Right. Well, the good news is this is our second tournament for everybody, so -- for some. Some of them didn't get to play Hualalai, so this is their first event of the year, so I'm maybe ahead of a lot of players by it being my second event.

The process is just trying to figure it out. I've been doing this a long time. I could play great today and get in the car and drive to the hotel and get out wrong and something could go wrong with my back. Or I can hit a driver as hard as I can and something could happen there.

So there's no rhyme or reason, but I do really feel pretty good at the moment and I'm planning on playing a little more this year.

Q. Was it hard for you to sort of rewire the process, because I know your instincts from when you were younger are to go out all the time and hit as many as possible. How do you rewire that?

FRED COUPLES: I know the year. I was 32 years old when it started happening. It was never really horrible except for the first time it happened and I was out for like seven months and I thought, wow, am I going to be able to play?

Then when I came back I kind of took it easy, and from that day on I've kind of taken it easy because all my buddies that are young kids, I tell them, look, you guys, don't worry about missing a cut or having two bad months of golf, it's not a sprint, this is a marathon. That's how I really wanted to treat it. I felt like there was -- I didn't know if I could rush into playing 25 tournaments a year, and when I started to play really, really well, pushed it to one more

event when I was 35, so I just played 16, 18 tournaments a year and I'm -- knock on wood, I've lasted. I'm going to be 60 this year, so I've been going a long time.

I get frustrated, you know, when I miss events. Two years ago I skipped Augusta because I physically couldn't move, and last year I went basically wearing a back brace and I just didn't want to miss it again and I made the cut, which I felt like I won the tournament just by making the cut.

So this year I'm really paying attention, trying to get in there while playing and maybe can have one more run there. Believe me, when I play Champions Tour events, I'm here to do my best and still win and enjoy that part of it.

Q. How do you determine your schedule?

FRED COUPLES: You know, I look at it at the beginning of the year and it's a pipe dream. I mark like 16 tournaments every year just kind of how they go. But again, this is one I really like. Oddly enough, sounds bragging, but I won Naples a couple times and I still want to go to play L.A. I probably should go to Naples, but Riviera is one of my favorite events, so that's two in a row and I'll take a couple weeks off and then I'll play a couple more. I skip majors on our tour because I don't really feel like I should go play in them. That's not the greatest thing, either, but I do want to play 12, 14 events this year, that's my goal.

Q. Does winning mean the same thing for you now as it did before?

FRED COUPLES: Well, when you're out there on a Saturday night and you finish and you've got the lead or you're tied with whoever, David Toms, Langer, Montgomerie, Tom Lehman, you get a little edgy that night. You come out the next day and you know you have to shoot a very, very good score just like on the regular tour or any other tour for that matter.

But yeah, I mean, I do want to win again, and if I play enough this year I feel like I'll have plenty of chances.

Q. Two years ago you came here and you pretty much admitted you were pretty cold as far as the course. Do you feel a lot more comfortable now that you've been through an event?

FRED COUPLES: I think so. I heard it's in unbelievable shape. I kind of remember most of the holes and, you know, I played some of them poorly because I felt like I didn't play them correctly. I'm not talking about the hole you can drive. If you can drive a par 4, you should go for it. I couldn't hit a good drive there, so I played the hole pretty poorly.

You've just got to be careful. There's some really, really good driving holes, and I believe I putted pretty well. I do like bermuda greens and that will be a key because I haven't played any since Hualalai. To win out here, to play well, you've got to putt.

Q. You feel you're still competitive in your head, you mentioned it a couple times, but at this stage of your career is there more enjoyment in some ways, reflection, are you soaking it in a little bit more than ever before as we all do?

FRED COUPLES: What a question. You know, I don't -- that's a great question. I enjoy it a lot. I got in late last night, I'll play a pro-am, I play with David Toms and Retief Goosen, which is an unbelievable pairing. I think that's the most fun for me is the pairings, I say that every time someone asks me.

But the soaking it in part, I still am very competitive. I walk around here with the idea of paying attention to every shot I hit and not just feeling like, you know, how lucky I am to be playing because I still want to win. I don't even know if I won a tournament last year. The next time I win, I'll for sure remember it.