

MARK O'MEARA

Q. When you reflect on that win last year, what's sort of the first thing that comes to mind?

MARK O'MEARA: I think that certainly it had been a long time coming, eight and a half years or something like that since my last win. To come here to Tucson National, you know, play in such a good tournament with such a good field and, you know, to come out on top was really a highlight of the year, for sure, especially at 62.

And like I said earlier, you know, to play the PGA TOUR and now the PGA TOUR Champions for all these years and to have won in my 20s, won in my 30s, won in my 40s, won in my 50s and won in my 60s, there's not a lot of sports that you can do that.

So it's great to be back. We've got a great sponsor in Cologuard. They've made this tournament one of our premier events, and it shows because if you look at our field this year here, it's special. You've got a lot of Hall of Fame members playing and we've got a lot of these young rookies, Ernie Els and some of these other guys that are very talented players. It's going to be tough to defend, but I hope to have a good week and excited to get started tomorrow.

Q. When you win a tournament like this and you come back the next year, is there a certain way you attack it from what you learned a year ago?

MARK O'MEARA: No. I mean, last year was such an interesting start. To run it over the edge for birdie on the first hole and then birdie eight in a row, two through nine, I don't think anybody expects that, including myself.

So it gave me a good sense of, you know, that my game wasn't that far off. And to come through in the clutch with the pressure on and the lead on Sunday and shoot 7 under par, you know, I mean, I understand this game is very difficult because I've been doing this a long time, so I never take anything for granted. But hopefully this week I can reflect on some of the fond memories that happened last year.

Q. You withdrew from the Chubb Classic after the first round because of injury to your elbow?

MARK O'MEARA: No, no. I played all right the first week in Hualalai, I finished 17th, and then in Marrakesh I finished 13th and I was playing pretty well. But I developed some kind of a virus where I kind of had a cough and I laid in bed for four days after coming home from Marrakesh, Morocco. A lot of people were sick, we all kind of had the same thing.

I felt a little bit better. I thought I was good enough to go down to play in Fort Myers in the Chubb Classic, but I got down there and I was coughing really bad and I wasn't in a good place. I tried to play the first round and I just, I knew that I shouldn't have kept -- I shouldn't have probably been there in the first place.

So I withdrew and I flew home and I laid around the house for three more days. Finally feel like I've made the turn, I'm a lot better so I'm not coughing anymore. It's not easy when you get older to recover quickly.

Q. So last year you went snowmobiling before coming out here. Did your illness prevent you from doing that this year?

MARK O'MEARA: Well, that's the problem, right? So when you're not feeling good, I can't go to the river and go fly fishing and I can't ride my sled, but I will say that I did ride this Monday up in the backcountry. I was on my snowmobile on Monday. I felt good enough to go ride, which obviously meant that I was good enough to come and play here and defend. I used the same technique, three out of four days before I came here last year I was riding up in the backcountry on my sleds and I rode this last Monday and felt pretty good. I hit it all right today out there, so just wait and see.

Q. Keep the same routine?

MARK O'MEARA: Keep the same routine. Wasn't grinding on the driving range by any means.

Q. When you're out there riding, what are you thinking about, what's going through your mind? Are you just kind of relaxing?

MARK O'MEARA: You know, the great thing about where I am in my life now is like, look, I want to play well for myself and certainly my pride, but I don't let it beat me up as much as back in the olden days. So lowering my expectations has been greater, and when I'm riding my snowmobile or I'm fly fishing in a river, I'm not thinking about my golf swing or why I hit it over the trees on one hole. I think I've become a better player. I play better when I have time off, when I go and distract and get away from the game. It doesn't take me very long to get in the groove of things.

Q. Listen to music? Are you a book-on-tape guy in those situations?

MARK O'MEARA: No. When I'm riding up there in the backcountry I'm trying to not obviously slam into a tree or hit a stump or start an avalanche. But I have all the gear on, so if I get stuck up there I can survive for a few days. It's a little bit extreme for what most people probably think, but I love it, I have a lot of fun.

Q. Do you go by yourself?

MARK O'MEARA: No, always ride with people. You know, I always ride with at least one or two guys. So I have a guy and I have like six snowmobiles and a big old trailer. I rode last week on Monday with my buddy Marty and I rode with a couple of NASCAR guys that like to ride. They're a little crazy, the NASCAR guys. They're a little different. I can't go 80 on my sled, I just want to cruise up through the trees. The whole idea, like anything when you're doing it, is not to get hurt. That's the whole thing.

Q. This is in Utah?

MARK O'MEARA: Um-hmm, in Park City.

Q. How would you describe the arc of your career?

MARK O'MEARA: I think it's been one where, you know, when I was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 2015, that was a tremendous honor. I always felt like I was borderline whether I deserved to be in the World Golf Hall of Fame or not, but because I won more globally around the world as a young American player, winning the U.S. Amateur, playing five Ryder Cup teams, two Presidents Cup teams and winning in Australia, winning twice in Japan, winning five or six times in Europe besides the 16 wins in America and winning in Argentina, too. I think because I was more of a global player at a young age when most Americans weren't going around the world, I think that that -- I take a lot of pride in that. Besides winning in America, winning outside my own country is something I put high on my list.

Q. Since you were here last time, Tiger won the Masters. What was your reaction to that?

MARK O'MEARA: Well, I sat next to him on Tuesday night at the champions dinner and I knew he was in a good place. I knew that night, I came home and told my wife, Meredith, you know, he's going to finish in the top-10 this week. I didn't know if he was going to win or not. Once he gets near the lead and the fact that I always remember reminding him back in our early days of our friendship was coming down the stretch, he's done this before, right? He's won the Masters many times. The other guys he's playing with and against, they haven't won the Masters, so that's a big advantage.

And nothing surprises me with Tiger Woods. As soon as people count him out, that's usually when he comes through. In our early days, if I ever wanted Tiger Woods to do something, I would just tell him, nope, don't go over there, because that's a sure way to make him go over there. He likes the challenge.

And it's great for golf what he did last year. Certainly winning 82 tournaments now and catching Sam, you know, he's a special guy, he really is.

Q. Were you still on the grounds?

MARK O'MEARA: I was not. No, I saw him on Friday and Saturday before he teed off and I watched on TV like everybody else did on Sunday.

You know, look, once again, it's good for the game when Tiger plays. When Tiger plays well, it's even better.

Q. Does it surprise you, though, in some of these majors situations how guys who are really, really good can implode on certain holes and just --

MARK O'MEARA: Yeah. I mean, listen, the pressure is certainly elevated in major championships. Needless to say, at Augusta National, playing in the Masters, knowing what it means to try to win the Masters tournament, that 12th hole, it just goes to show you you don't need to have a 520-yard par 4 to make it interesting. Twelve is a tremendous golf hole and it showed that on the final round there at Augusta National this past year where guys hit it into Rae's Creek. And it happens. They're only hitting 9-irons and yet they still hit it in the creek.

So many things can happen around Augusta National, especially those last six, seven, eight holes.

Q. Just starting off the year, a couple back-to-back top-20 finishes, by your own standards following the win here last year probably didn't keep that momentum going. What's been clicking early this year, sickness notwithstanding?

MARK O'MEARA: I've driven the ball pretty well and I hit a lot of good shots in Hawaii. Got off to a little bit of a slow start in Hawaii where I shot 1 over the first day and I shot only 1 under the first day in Morocco. But, you know, I've actually hit the ball okay, and it's not like I'd been practicing or playing. I've been up in the snow all winter. So it was nice to get off to a decent start.

Yeah, last year after winning here I didn't play as well as I would have liked to through the middle of the year and at the end of the year I started playing a little bit better, but I'm looking forward to trying to play well this year, for sure.