

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
March 5, 2020



ERNIE ELS

Q. Just first and foremost, what's your favorite part about playing the Hoag Classic?

ERNIE ELS: Favorite part of playing the Hoag Classic's coming through the area. The weather, so far we've been here since Tuesday, it's been unbelievable. I know it's going to change a little bit over the weekend, but it's nice to be in southern California and playing a different golf course other than Riviera.

Q. A little bit easier out here than Riviera?

ERNIE ELS: Well, we'll see. I played Tuesday evening and really liked the course. Obviously a little bit shorter than Riviera and so forth, but there's a lot of good players around, so you've got to score well.

Q. Back-to-back weeks, you played last week and this week. Are you starting to feel a little more comfortable out here?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah. I mean, last week I only got there on Wednesday and I only played the pro-am Thursday on a very new golf course. So I've got to learn quickly, I've found out. A lot of the guys have played the courses many times so they have a very good local knowledge. That's why I came here Tuesday and got a look before today's pro-am and get a bit of a better idea of where I can go for flags and where you've got to play safe, just get a better plan of a golf course. It's very much a rookie year for me.

Q. Ernie, you come to various parts of the country, in this case, Newport Beach. Is there anything about the community, maybe the connection to Hoag Hospital, other sort of community fingers that you would like to get immersed in?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, no, we had a nice breakfast meeting on Tuesday morning at the clubhouse here with the Hoag charity, the Hoag Hospitals, and had a nice audience with people that do understand charity work, our foundation work with autism. We had a big chat about that, kind of told them what our foundation is all about and what we stand for. Met some really interesting people. So this is a community of giving.

I actually drove out to the Srixon building yesterday and I drove past one of the Hoag hospitals, clinics, and so I'm learning more about them. And the more time I spend here, the more people I'll meet and it's been a wonderful experience already. It's a wonderful sponsor.

Q. Can you tell me what the name of autism foundation is?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, it's the Els for Autism Foundation. We run a charitable foundation down in Florida. We've built a school, a center for autistic kids that can host kids, 300 kids from the ages of 3 to 21. We spoke at length about that the other morning, so kind of filled people in about that. We do golf tournaments around the country to raise funds for the center. We've raised over \$50 million in the last 10 years or so, so we're on a good track. And the kids have a great time.

Q. And forgive my lack of knowledge, do you have a personal -- do you have a child with autism?

ERNIE ELS: Yes, I do. We've got a 17-year-old son, Ben, he's autistic. He goes to the school and it's changed his life, like a lot of other kids. He was really very reluctant to go to school before we built the center and now it's his favorite pass time, to go to school. So that's a big change in a kid's life.

Q. On the senior tour, is that kind of giving back a focus on the charity more so than on the regular tour?

ERNIE ELS: I think it goes hand in hand. Both tours have a huge contribution they've done to charity, I think it's over \$3 billion that they've passed the other day. And the PGA TOUR obviously has a lot more players, has a lot more focus there.

But we go from the PGA to the Champions Tour, and when you get older you understand a little bit better, I think, than when you're young and you're just focused on golf. Out here we look around at what's going on in the communities in a little different way because we've grown a little bit as people. In my case, that's a fact. My daughter is in college, going to be 21, and my son's 17 and he's autistic. Every single player on the range has some kind of affiliation to a charity and it comes through the PGA TOUR and it morphs right through the Champions Tour.