

ERNIE ELS PRESS CONFERENCE

SANFORD INTERNATIONAL (THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2024)

How does it feel to be back here this week?

It's always great to come back. I think it's my fourth or fifth time here now in Sioux Falls and the golf course is in great shape. We just finished playing the pro-am this (Thursday) morning and I really enjoyed the guys I was with. And yeah, the tournament's supported by the city, by the town, and it's one of the really excellent events we have on our Champions Tour. So, hence the great field we always get coming to the Sanford tournament. Again, it's great to be back and hopefully we can have a good week.

How do you feel about your game coming into this week?

Yeah, I've been, I think, pretty solid this year. I've taken two weeks off and you know, I've had a couple of little needles in the back, but it's getting much better. I'm starting to hit the ball soundly again. Seems like the wind is up, so the wind might play in a factor in scoring this week. But as I said, the course is in great shape and I'm getting back to normal form.

Are you a little surprised with how dry its been here in Sioux Falls?

No, the place, I must say is in absolutely fabulous condition. You know, the turf is great, fairways are absolutely immaculate, greens are running quite fast. It's probably going to get a little firmer because of the wind, so that might make scoring a little bit more difficult. But the course is in immaculate shape. You know, the clubhouse, the right people look after this here, it's just fabulous, so it's a great tournament to play.

What kind of weather conditions have you played out here in the past?

Well, I heard that one year, it was in the 50s and it was cold and rainy. I wasn't here, I was still too young. But since then, I've played in just about everything. I remember when Darren Clarke won, I'm not sure how many years ago that was, but it was really windy on that final day and firm. I mean, we could almost drive the 18th green and I think Darren actually did hit it on the 18th green, so that just shows you how firm it got. So, anything can happen around here weather-wise, so hopefully touch wood, it's going to be dry. But I think it's going to be a little windy, so it'll be a fair contest.

About time for someone other than Steve Stricker to win this thing, isn't it?

Yeah, I mean, since I've been over 50, I know Steve's won it how many times? Is it three times? And Jimenez won, I was here once for that and obviously, Darren Clarke one. So, you know, you got some guys who have done well here and they're all playing in this field. So you'd think that Steve's always a factor it seems like, and Miguel and Darren are playing good golf lately, so they should be a factor.

Ernie, can you talk about the story at the tournament that you used to carry balls and change one after every birdie?

Yeah, I still do that. It's funny how you pick up things through the years. I remember years ago, playing with Sam Torrance in the Tournament, and I saw him do that. And I was like 'Sam, what are you doing?' And he says, 'You know, Ernie, you wouldn't understand – there's only one birdie in a golf ball.' And I'm like 'really?' I didn't believe that until I kind of saw it start happening to me. So now I'm changing golf balls every time I make a birdie. So, you know, surely you're not going to make 18 birdies. I'm not putting 18 golf balls in my bag, but at least 12.

This is one of the only pro events, if not the only pro event that comes through here. Do you think that kind of adds to why the people, the pros enjoy coming here so much? Because it does make for a more unique atmosphere maybe than you get at some of the other stops?

Yeah, that's a great point you make. It's exactly what's going on here. It's getting long in the season, in the regular season before the playoffs start in a couple of weeks. So, there's a lot going on, a lot of guys trying to position themselves for the finals in the Charles Schwab points finals. Some guys are playing for survival to get in the top 36 to be exempt for next year. And then, as you say, the only real big sporting event, golf sporting event going on in this region at this time of the year. So, there's a lot going on, people still want to enjoy the sunshine. And, I'm not sure when schools have started – I think they've started up here. But the kids can still come out over the weekend, so it's right where you want it. If you want to have a big field, this is the way to station it.

How do you feel about your game has been going so far this year?

I've played better this year. I've had a couple of wins so that's always good. But as we say, we're getting long into the season now so there's been a lot of golf that has been played so we got to be fresh for the final stretch. We've got seven weeks left so there is a lot of golf still to be played but I am in a pretty nice position so hopefully I can keep building, keep getting stronger.

You've touched on the weather. Whether you are kind of a duffer around here, or a high school or one of the pros on the tours, the weather changes out here you have to deal with it. When you play British Opens, the places you've played, you've dealt with everything. Do conditions still have much an effect on you when you have played through everything?

It absolutely makes a big difference in your shot making, shot selection, and even on the putting. When the wind blows, it makes a big shift in your plans so to speak so you have to adapt. When you only hit a five iron say 200 yards into the wind, your five iron is only going

180 yards and you have to keep the ball down. So there is a lot of shot making that has to take place so the wind plays a huge factor in how you play and how you prepare.