



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT: FRED COUPLES

Wednesday, June 27, 2012

MODERATOR: Well Fred, thanks for joining us. You're coming in as defending champion in this event, albeit at a new course. First off, have you had a chance to see the course at all?

FRED COUPLES: No, not yet. I've heard my caddies walked it the last couple days and then I'm staying with Andrew Magee, who said it's phenomenal. And the gentleman I'm staying with, Rob, is a member, and, you know, told us a few things about it. But I'll see it today for the first time and try and figure it all out.

MODERATOR: State of your game right now coming in, you had a week off, you played well and finished fourth at Regions Tradition a couple weeks ago?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, I had a good stretch, I don't know, in the last day to move from a decent spot to a good spot. I went up and watched the U.S. Open, took that week off, then last week didn't play either. So I've had two weeks off, you know, state of my game is, I wouldn't say it was great as the PGA.

At Birmingham, that was my third week in a row, I played the Memorial after the Senior PGA and actually hit the ball very well. I didn't putt very well, which was kind of a killer. Then on Sunday I made every putt I looked at, and that's really the last time I played. I played a couple days. On Monday I had a little outing, but ran around, didn't hit many shots, and then today will be a good practice day and start tomorrow. But I haven't played much. I have a big stretch as everyone does. I heard Calc on TV the other day I haven't really looked that far ahead say he was going to try to play 12 of the next 13 events. That's not going to happen for me, but I might play 7 or 8 of the next 12 or 13. You know, it just becomes a little bit of a struggle. So whether I play well here or not is not the end of the world, but I do have quite a bit of golf coming up.

MODERATOR: Okay. Let's open it up for some questions. If you a question we have a mic here. We're getting it transcribed, so you can put your hand up. Jared?

Q Fred, you were a guy because of your back and everything who always had to pace your routine, practice, whatnot. Is that especially true out here, maybe not necessarily for you but a lot of the guys, it just seems they don't you know, they watch how many balls they have to hit, and how many holes they play, especially when it comes to a 72hole event?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I think, you know, there's a lot of golf out here and we do get

weeks off, but to answer your question, you know, this tour gets a lot of support and a lot of guys will play almost every tournament well, not every tournament, but 23 or 24 events out of 26, which to me, you know, in the regular tour I didn't play more than 18 or 19. So out here if I play, you know 15, or 16 events, it seems like I never play because everyone else plays every single week. I think that's a great thing. I physically can only speak for myself. I can't play much more than that. If I go home, you know, like for two weeks, literally the first week I didn't hit any golf balls; then last week I played on Wednesday, Saturday, and not very well to say that. But it's really the standing in one spot banging balls that I think kills everybody. But if you do it, you know, in moderation, pay attention, you know, you can catch up a little bit.

For instance, I played Augusta. I was shooting for Augusta and I played five weeks in a row, but I really massaged it very easily. I didn't practice much. I just kind of played the tournament rounds. And I wanted to be ready to play at Augusta. Then I just played three weeks in a row, the Seniors, PGA Seniors, and then Memorial and then Birmingham. And I was pretty sore at Birmingham.

Q Fred, you're young enough and still good enough to play on both of the tours. What's it like bouncing back between the PGA Tour and the Champions Tour? And also just your thoughts on getting a chance to play golf 50 and over in a Senior Tour?

FRED COUPLES: Well, the Senior Tour is phenomenal. You know, this is my third year. It's all really for me personally it's about the pairings that I get. That's not a slight to say to any other guys who see this, but I enjoy playing. Like this week I have Calcavecchia and Jay Haas. I had Jay and Tom Lehman at Birmingham. Those are guys I grew up playing against for 30 years. And then you get out here and you get them every week. The golf is great. It's if you watch, I played with Tom Lehman the first few rounds at Birmingham, honestly never missed a shot. I played with Tiger the next week at Memorial the first two rounds, he never missed a shot. So those are the guys winning because they're playing well. So in my opinion, Tom Lehman cannot go beat Tiger Woods, but Tom Lehman on the courses we play can beat us because of the way his ball. And it's all relevant to me that the best players I think forever have been the ones who hit the ball solid and have you know, I wouldn't say Tom Lehman has got the best short game in the world, but he doesn't really need it.

For me, bouncing around, I mean, I've played L.A. every year. That's one I always try and play. And I play Augusta because I'm in it. And then this year I was named the Presidents Cup Captain, so I stayed in Muirfield or at the Memorial and played there. But maybe except for a few holes I played really, really well and finished I think 45th or 50th at Memorial. So my days of worrying about the PGA Tour are long gone, but I do like to play in an event every now and then out there just to see the guys and have a good time.

Q Fred, John Cook yesterday said that because of technology and the way guys are paying attention to fitness that he thinks a guy over 50 can win a major championship not just out here but on the regular tour. Just wondering your thoughts on that, especially since you contend at Augusta?

FRED COUPLES: Well, you know, it's happened three times. I mean, I wasn't really that close. I led after two rounds and then shot 75 on Saturday. I guess if I would have had a maybe 67 or 66 on Sunday. But really Tom Watson is the one, you know, and actually Greg Norman, although Greg struggled, I don't know when it was, at the British Open the last day, I think. But he was right there, played in the last group, led after three rounds and then Tom led, you know, for 72 holes really. Can it be done? Of course it can. I mean, it takes I think the right course and if you looked at it, for Tom Watson it was the British Open. For me it would be Augusta because I'm not ever going to be in another U.S. Open or British Open or PGA unless I win one of these out here. But, yeah, I don't know if it will ever happen, but could it? Sure. I think when you see guys play, like John Cook last year I think finished third at a tournament, I don't want to say in Mexico, but somewhere, Puerto Rico, wherever it was. Tom Lehman has played, Fred Funk has played a few, Kenny Perry, but for all of us those are just hand picked. I mean, there would be no reason for any of us to play 15 12, 15 times on this tour and 10 on the regular tour. It would it's just some places where we won and feel comfortable, we decide to go play. But I don't think any of us, you know, when you get to be a certain age, maybe 50. But when you get to be 52 or 53, the regular tour is just a pipe dream. There's no reason to go play that.

Q I know you said you haven't played this particular course yet, but going in what do you think is going to be your greatest challenge playing it?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I hear the greens are really, really fast. And I've played the Field Club, which is right down the road, and I've played Oakmont. So if they're anything like that, you know, they'll be a challenge. As far as the golf, you know, there's a few holes you have to pay attention to, but I mean I might play today and have a pin on the front of the green and then tomorrow go and have the pin on the back and hit a shot that, you know, goes two feet too far and goes down some little hill and you've got no shot. So you pay attention to a lot of these things. Off the tee, you know, if I decide to hit an iron off the 5th hole today, I'll hit an iron off the 5th hole every day. So I don't consider the tee shots you've got to hit them in the right spots, but once you figure out what to hit off the tee, then that hole, unless the wind starts blowing or whatever, whatever, whatever, but around the greens is usually the toughest thing, and I heard they're hard and fast.

Q Fred, you began your career with a traditional length putter and went to a longer putter later in your career. For young kids who are starting out in the game, do you have any advice with respect to whether or not they ought to think about beginning with a longer putter because we see some of the younger players on the PGA Tour now with a belly putter and doing quite well. What are your thoughts on that?

FRED COUPLES: Well, my thoughts are, you know, I did it when I had some serious back problems, and it kept me from bending over to a certain spot. And has it helped my putting? You know, I don't really know because I haven't looked back or gone back and forth, but the only reason I did it was because once I got the length putter and put it against me, I couldn't my back couldn't bend down anymore. That's when I would get

these spasms. And when I tee a ball up, I do a couple things and when I get the ball out of the hole. But when you putt over, you have your pressure on your feet, and obviously you just you tilt over. And that was a no-brainer for me.

As far as Webb Simpson if you're talking about him and Keegan Bradley, young players, you know, those were I don't know if they've ever answered it. I don't know if Keegan has ever used a short putter since he went to college, but, you know, they're not winning because they have a long putter. They've won tournaments using a long putter. I mean, Webb Simpson I've never seen stroke a putt with a shorter putter, so I can't say he's a bad putter. There's no way for instance, I was watching Rickie Fowler play when he was winning a month ago, and he was cross hand. You know, I'm looking, he's one of the best putters I've ever seen, and at the age of 23, 24, he's already gone cross hand. So it's just a feel. And I think there are other players using a long putter. Out here, you know, there's a lot of guys, because once you get older you can start to tinker with all this stuff and some of these putters just feel better. But some are done because of the yips. You know, they have the claw, Calcavecchia uses the claw. O'Meara. So you'll try anything to get the ball in the hole. But when you're that young, I can't imagine they're using a long putter because it's an advantage. There's no advantage. I don't care what you say. If they outlot, they outlot, but there's no advantage with any putting. You've got to be able to read the green. My eyes are so bad now that no, seriously, when I putt, once I stand and look this way, I'm totally lost. It's not all by feel, but my eyes just don't work like they did ten years ago. So it's more than just I could use a 10inch putter or 100inch putter, a lot of it is direction and how your eyes work too.

Q Fred, two questions. One, how long does it take you to look at a course and get a feel for it? And, two, how big a carrot is the Player's Championship, getting into that for this?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I mean, you know, the last win I had was at Mississippi and it rained, I didn't even get to play the course, but it was flooded. So, you know, drives were hitting, stopping. Here it's going to be firm, so there will be some bounces. You've got to get used to the roll. I wouldn't say that by Thursday I'll have the course down, but, you know, it depends on what you're doing well. You know, if it's a tough driving course, you drive the ball well, then you don't really need to play it three or four times. But I think for most of us, I'm sure some guys were here Monday, but everyone played yesterday and then some of those guys aren't in the proam today, you know, I'm hoping it's one look and I'll be semi ready tomorrow.

Q (Inaudible)

FRED COUPLES: Well, it was a big deal and then I got sick and couldn't play, but I think it's very nice for us to get to go play the TPC in Jacksonville. So that's a big deal. To be honest, last year when I won I didn't even know. I was more excited about winning and then someone said, you know, you get to go to the TPC. And I know now, but I did not last year.

Q Fred, just on a slightly different tack but still seniors, Turnberry is hosting the Senior British Open this year. You haven't played a major in Scotland for seven

or eight years, I guess. What's it like playing in front of the crowds in Scotland and how do you assess your chances at Turnberry?

FRED COUPLES: I'm going to the British Seniors for the first time, and it is at Turnberry. You know, the Rolex, I've been to the Rolex forever and they're a sponsor of it, so I talked to Jean Noel and Peter at the U.S. Open and talked about it, so I'm going to go. Turnberry a phenomenal. I think I've played at least two British Opens there. The one year Greg Norman won, he shot a phenomenal score one day. So, you know, whether it's the Women's British Open, the regular British Open or Senior British Open at Turnberry, it's going to be a hard, hard course, especially when the wind blows. Any of those courses are hard. But I am very much looking forward to it. Like I say, the first year I skipped it because the U.S. Open was in Seattle where I grew up, and it was the week after. And then last year I was not playing golf in July or August, so I didn't go. But this year I'm going.

The people, great crowds. I think I think for us players, I think if you're on this side we all think Augusta the crowds are the best, and if you're from over there, you probably think the British Open are by far the best. For me personally, you know, when the wind is blowing and, say, if you have a 5 iron and you just get it on the green, they think it's a great shot and so do we. So they know what it's going on. It's very difficult. I don't know how they'll set Turnberry up, but it will be a great week.

Q Fred I hope this isn't too personal, but your back problems you've had, when did you first encounter them and how many surgeries have you had, and that Anatabloc, how is that working out for you?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I'll answer the first one. The first time I really, really hurt my back was in '90 at Doral. So I was in the last group, there were only two guys in the range, myself and John Huston, and it just exploded. And that's happened maybe four times where literally I go to my knees. It happened in Tampa one year. I've never had any surgeries. I did go to Germany to have some shots last early July, late June, and it worked miracles. And then when I was there I found out that I had a pretty high level of inflammation in my body. So to give you a quick analysis of really the best news for me is a lot of my family have passed away at young ages. And so the guy in Germany felt like it was because of inflammation, which they just couldn't fight whatever they had. So my level was at 6.5. It shouldn't be over 2. So I've had a series of blood tests just recently, two weeks ago, and now it's at .3, which I'm lower than 99 percent of the people. And the only thing I've taken is Anatabloc. So I'm a big believer in the stuff, and I believe if you listen to them and the reports they're doing, the stuff came out today, that they're going to be like in their opinion like Aleve for doctors. It will be like taking Aleve. But that's all I take. It's not going to cure my back. My back is structural, you know, I have some major problems, but with the shots in Germany and now they do it in LA, so I just had a couple of shots in LA last week on Thursday and Friday, which is not great timing. It makes you extremely sore and that's how I feel now, but this Anatabloc stuff for me, I mean, I went from 6.5 a year ago to two weeks ago to .3, and that's really important for me. And in all the times I had my back in bad shape, no one ever took this. It's a CRP test. And so when you hurt yourself, your body gets inflamed or your ankle or your elbow. You know, everywhere in my body was inflamed, not just my back.

So that was a big find. And when I came back to America from Germany the guy said you need to find something, get off Celebrex, can't take that the rest of your life. And this is a supplement that's easy to take and it's now kind of taking off.

Q Fred, do you ever wonder what might have been if not for the back problems as far as winning more majors?

FRED COUPLES: You know, to be honest with you, I look back at tournaments that I felt like I should have won, and I never look back over my how my back never look back about my back. There are other people who play with thumb injuries or neck injuries. You know, I can personally, if I'm feeling okay, hit the ball around. And when it actually explodes, you know, so far, knock on wood, I've been able to go home and relax for maybe a month and then come out and my body feels pretty good. But, you know, if I was healthy, would I have won a few more tournaments? Sure. I would have played more, would have won a few more times. But at the same time, it's pretty much irrelevant. Everyone gets injuries and cricks and all kinds of small problems, but the blessing I have is the way I play. So if I was really playing well here on Friday and I woke up Saturday and my back didn't feel great, I've done it enough where I feel like I could get it around this course at a decent score. It's not fun, but then come out Sunday and maybe, you know, have a shot at winning.

The TPC the one year in '96, I walked off the course on Tuesday. My back went out. I didn't play on Wednesday. I had this guy, we all know Tom Boers came in, and I won. So, you know, it does have a tendency to work out both ways, but it's the pain and not sleeping that's the pain in the end. The back problem is okay, but when I quit last year it was because I wasn't sleeping one minute at night. That's why I went to Germany and I refuse to do that. So

Q I apologize if you already answered this, but can you talk a little bit about how you're feeling coming into the tournament this week?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, I feel okay. I've had a couple weeks off, but I feel a little sore and a little rusty, but today is, you know, like they say, a good day to go out and see how I am doing. And if I'm able to, you know, pound it, I don't know how this course is, I don't know, you know, it's an old style course, so it's probably got some little tricky nuances to it, but I feel okay. I just am rusty. I haven't played any in the last two weeks and I said earlier there's a big stretch coming up and we all want to play well. I just want to be able to get through this next two months and that's why I've taken a couple weeks off.

MODERATOR: If everyone is okay, thanks for everything. Appreciate it.