

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT: GREG NORMAN
Thursday, December 12, 2013



DAVE SENKO: We would like to welcome our tournament host, Greg Norman. Greg, maybe get us started, it's got to be gratifying to reach a milestone of your 25th Franklin Templeton Shootout. Maybe just reflect on that and the impact it's had on the community here for 13 years and just the event itself.

GREG NORMAN: Well, quite honestly I never expected to go 25 years, especially in the circle silly season we slotted ourselves into. But back in '89 starting off with four players and here we are 24 players, that's a testament to the tournament itself, it's a testament to the best players in the world doing exactly what I wanted them to do is just come out and have fun with their mate under a format which they don't generally play on a regular basis, and that with our corporate partners, and then finally great venue. No question about it, these guys love this venue. They love the fact the hotel is right there, they love the fact that they fall out of bed, fall on the elevator, fall on the driving range and go have fun with their buddy. So really it's a testament to a lot of things. I never anticipated making 25 years, never in my wildest dreams.

Where do we go from here? Like I said on ESPN, I see the gradual growth that's taking place here for the Franklin Templeton for the last basically 25 years, it's gradually gotten better and better and better and I've been extremely proud of it. And obviously for the local community, too. They've embraced it. I knew many years ago, 13 years ago that Naples was craving for some type of golf and seeing the best players, and by bringing it here they've embraced it, support it. You only have to look at what's happened with the 5K run and the number of people that have gotten in that on a Saturday. You see the popularity of that event, so that's spilling over.

Q. Greg, Jonas Blixt said this morning that he was blown away when you invited him to be your partner on this. He's one of the few guys here not real --

GREG NORMAN: That's probably why I picked him, you know? He's young enough, he's strong enough, he can carry me around. I'm always a big believer in seeing what the young talent is doing in the world.

I said to Taylor Ives when we were going through the pairings, I didn't want to play with somebody I played with before. I wanted to see what the young generation. There is a big spread, I don't know how old Jonas is but I'm sure he's in his mid 20s, right, so there's a 30-year spread. So I want to see how this young generation is today where I was when I was 24 with the ultimate goal if, you know, if I can help in some way, shape or form to make Jonas a better player by him asking me a question and me giving the right answer for him, that makes it very, very worthwhile for me.

I've seen, you know, great satisfaction out of seeing what's happened to Adam Scott

and Karrie Webb coming up through my foundation and seeking and spending time with me at my house, so I love it. I've got very much an open door policy. So I heard a lot about Jonas, asked a lot a questions about younger players, especially caddies, and they all raved about him. When I spent a little bit of time with him in the locker room yesterday, I knew I checked the right box because he's a very amenable guy, he's very Chatty Cathy, which is good because that means he's going to open his mind up a little bit more, so we'll just see how it plays out.

As for the scoring wise, I think it's more important that he enjoys himself and gets a good week and I enjoy myself. And tomorrow's going to be the interesting start to the ultimate shot because I haven't played a golf tournament since this one last year so I might be a little bit rusty tomorrow.

Q. I also wanted to ask you, I came over from Palm Beach and Freddie Jacobson was telling me that you're back more with Medalist, I knew you had a falling out with them. Can you talk about what's happened there? He said it's good to see you around again.

GREG NORMAN: Yeah, it's a crazy situation, it's been resolved, I think that's probably the best way. For whatever reason I never under any circumstances felt like I was out of the golf club, but some people did feel like I was out of the golf club, but that situation's been resolved but I'm just back there practicing and playing and that's it.

Q. In the 25 years of this event, Greg, are there either any particular relationships or any particular moments that really have stuck out for you?

GREG NORMAN: I think the great relationships that I've gotten out of here -- let's put the PGA TOUR players aside because I spent my whole life around these guys. I think the relationship that I have developed through people in the corporate world from the Franklin Templeton people, the Johnson family, right from the beginning I've gotten to know them, stayed friends with them; from the UBS and Bob McCanns of the world, those are the people that constantly reach out to you and say hey, how's everything doing, can I help you. When you have the corporate world basically, here it's corporate America, have that corporate world available as a source of information for you as I develop my business was invaluable. So those things that I really cherish and they came, developed out of the Shootout.

Then I look at obviously the shooting 55 with Steve Elkington in 2005. I really wanted to shoot 18-under. Even though it was a scramble, shooting 18-under for 18 holes was something I really wanted to do. We didn't but we got close. So those moments impress me as a player.

Then obviously with the players, see the consistency of the repetition, the number of players that have come back on a repeating basis tells me that we did it right there.

Then finally my comment would be the letters I get back from people, from the PGA TOUR pros. Every year I get incredible -- how impressed they are with the event, how we looked after their wives, the commitment to CureSearch, commitment to charities, how effortless it was. Then I get letters from the amateurs who played in the pro-am saying how intimate it was, how small, we love it, never experienced anything like this before in my life. Those are the things I really cherish the most.

And then developing my production company out of this. I mean, that's how it started and now we run three PGA TOUR events. It's a great business in its own right because it all started because of the Shootout.

Q. I would think there's some kids whose hearts have touched yours I would think.

GREG NORMAN: More than touched me. I've cried, too, when I've heard some of our young kids who have passed away. Seeing what we've done to some degree helped CureSearch or childhood cancer rate go from 28 percent up to now near 78, 80 percent. We're a small part of that because we give the money to CureSearch. We have helped eradicate childhood cancer to some degree and I'm very, very proud of that.

The more you talk, the more things come to your head, but it's really a combination of all of it, extremely proud of it. Extremely proud of the people that work for me, like I said, in the production company. If it wasn't for them, I never would have been 25 years up to this year, no chance.

Q. Didn't see the context, but I saw the Golf Magazine interview where I guess you were asked how would you compete against the guys today during your prime, and you know, you said you could beat Tiger or whatever. Can you expand on that? Where was that?

GREG NORMAN: Why do I need to expand on that?

Q. I don't know.

GREG NORMAN: If I'd had answered the question no, I could never have beaten Tiger, then people would say why are you so negative?

I think at the end of the day every player believes they have the ability. I never said I'd beat Tiger every time. If you didn't believe you could beat somebody or win the golf tournament, then don't go out and play, it's as simple as that. Tiger believes every time he goes out there that he's going to beat you, right? And if you believe he's going to beat you, then he's going to beat you.

So my belief was there wasn't a shot, and if you read that, there wasn't a shot that I wasn't afraid of and there wasn't a player that I wasn't afraid of, so I went out there with the belief that I could beat anybody and I would have cherished going head to head against Tiger in his heyday and my heyday. I would have loved to do that. That would have probably stimulated or elevated my golf to a higher level, no question, because when you are No. 1, you actually have a tendency of pulling other people up to your level. That wasn't any slight or anything like that. That was just a compliment saying that, hey, I probably would have loved going up against -- just the same as playing against Jack or Ben Hogan or Snead or anyone of those guys, I would have loved it. And hey, they might have beaten me more than I would have beaten them, but I would have beaten them, I definitely would have beaten them. I know the Twitter world goes off a bit crazy on that stuff.

Q. And you are in the Twitter world, so I get to ask whether you know what Dufnering is and if you have done it.

GREG NORMAN: I actually was going to do it and then the photograph that I had turned out to be pretty bad, so I didn't do it. I do have a photograph on my phone, but I'm not going to show you.

Q. I saw you committed to Humana for next year. What was the mindset? Is it just, you know, hey, we'll see how this one goes and maybe play in a couple more, or have you thought that far ahead?

GREG NORMAN: No, I've decided with Humana -- obviously President Clinton, when I spent time with him last time we were out there, we kind of played nine holes before the weather came in and disrupted our play. Since then he wanted me to sit on the panel on Wednesday night that he hosts, so I obviously accepted that. If I'm going to go out there and do that, then I might as well play. It's more a respect for the president and I like the golf tournament, I like what Humana has done turning it around because it was a tournament going south very, very quickly. So by bringing Clinton in and bringing in Humana and redirecting it, not having a Bob Hope, you're having a Bill Clinton.

I hate seeing golf tournaments disappear for whatever reason, so when the president of the United States asks you, it's pretty hard to say no, too, by the way. And I'm looking forward to it, to tell you the truth. The weather conditions out there last time I played were not very good, so I'm looking forward to getting out there and experiencing good Palm Springs weather. Like I said, if I can help promote the game of golf to some small degree, then I've done my task.

Q. Can you just catch us up, you're much better known as a businessman these days than as a golfer. Catch us up on your ventures. We know about the three tournaments you're running but what beyond that are you doing business wise?

GREG NORMAN: I say go to shark.com and you'll pick up what's happening. I'm very lucky that I've had the opportunity in my entrepreneurial world to survive the recession of 2008 to where we are here today. It hasn't been easy. You had to change your business model to some degree, but at the end of the day we continue developing revenues and really we didn't have to change or shut down any of our businesses. That's a big testament not only to the way my company runs but to the people behind it.

So with that, now that you can start seeing the pendulum swinging more on an international basis than the United States. Golf here is still languishing, there's no question. I think we're starting to see the bottom out of the washing through of inventory, the negative closure rate of golf courses being up near 68, 80 this year and leading into next year, but after that I think it's going to start leveling out and maybe start picking up a little bit. Probably three to four, four to five years from now you'll start seeing a little bit of an upswing in our business of building golf courses and stuff like that.

Rest of the world, you know, emerging markets, tremendous opportunities. China we're still trying to unravel, understand what the government moratorium really means and how long it will be in place. Once the government of -- central government of China understands that and releases that, the game of golf has the opportunity of growing in a huge fashion in China. Because I've got my finger on the pulse there a little bit more than most because I'm the advisor to the Chinese national golf team, so they kind of speak to the minister of small ball sports there who actually asked me to come on so I get an idea and sense about where China golf can go. If all the confluences of everybody's wishes and desires gets to a point where I think it can do, a generation from now you'll probably have more golfers in China than in the United States. So that means you're going to have close to a hundred million golfers in the next generation and that's great for everybody. If that has a chance of happening now you're seeing golf on a global basis truly be a global basis. You'll have the PGA TOURs and the European Tours, but you'll have the amalgamation of both tours because as the world gets smaller, corporations get bigger and you're getting these corporations on a global basis that have the ability to really step up to the plate and sponsor the game of golf.

We haven't even talked about South America, we haven't talked about India, we haven't talked a whole lot about the far east. Korea has been dynamic, you've seen that with the women, been extremely dynamic with their development. But there's places down south in Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, there's a couple hundred million people in that part of the world that also has a huge chance of growing.

That's not really talking about my business, that's talking about golf. I mean, from business I like it -- I'm in a position now because of my base, my platform is pretty

solid that I can look at other opportunities. I started an opportunity fund very successfully in the last year and that's morphing out into something else now. Like any other business, if you open your mind up a little bit, you have other ways of growing and developing new businesses.

So I'm very, very happy where it is. I'm very happy my kids are working for me now, so it takes a little bit of pressure off me. I can hopefully step back someday soon. I just did a corporate retreat out at my ranch with all my executives for five days and I gave my 12-year game plan. Most people can't think out a week let alone think out 12 years, but I gave them my strategic plan and where I wanted the company to go and how I wanted to go. So anyway, that's all part and parcel of it and I love doing it.

Q. I think it was 2001, it could be a year out when you played with Adam Scott down at Doral. Everybody thought he was going to be like a meteor at the time. Why do you think it took him so long to finally break through and what do you think this year's going to do for him in the future, particularly with these two wins?

GREG NORMAN: I think anytime somebody puts a rocket under your butt and tells you you're going to be a meteor taking off, I think that's the kiss of death because so much expectation is not only put on him by everybody else and he's scrutinized. That's not just Adam Scott, there's a lot of players that we can talk like that, about that. Back then it maybe took him a little bit more time to get a bit of stability underneath him. When you're getting this constant -- it's easy on the golf course, but when you step off the golf course and you have to do all the other stuff that you've got to do, which is the expectations of other people, it sometimes can really push you down. I saw it happen with Ian Woosnam. Woosie, when he won the Masters, he went to No. 1 in the world and all of a sudden Woosie looked like the weight of the world was on his shoulders. I sensed from Woosie he didn't really like it so he backed up off a little bit and I thought that was detrimental to him. You know, people react differently to it. I might be wrong with Woosie but I noticed that with him. He didn't continue on with it.

With Adam, with what he's done this year because -- I shouldn't say because; what he's done this year I think is going to be a very good catalyst for him because his patience level now that he has stability underneath him is there for him. He's got the game, there's no question about it. Now he has the patience to really embrace it and take it forward, and he's the type of guy who's very, very meticulous about his schedule. He's not going to push himself too hard. He understands exactly where he is in the world right now and he understands where he wants to be.

Now, he's nearly there, but he has to slowly keep that curve, just keep gradually going up and up and up. No meteoric rise and a crash and a meteoric rise and a crash, just a slow gradual climb and he'll get to where he wants to go for sure.

Q. Two-part question here. One, I was wondering if you could give us an update on if there's anything new with Fox and being an analyst, and the other thing is along those lines with the Golf Magazine article where you shared some of your feelings for the PGA if that could lead to some interesting television commentary.

GREG NORMAN: I think you guys know my commentary's going to be the same as I do in any press conference, right?

I think with Fox there's definitely the conversation still moving forward. It's very, very active. I'm very excited about the opportunity. I know they've checked the box on some very important hiring positions, which they needed to do which will probably help me at the same time, my decision.

Now it's a combination of a lot of things that go into the decision of how many tournaments do I actually want to commentate, which ones do I want to commentate. And the most important year is next year, is 2014, not 2015 and beyond. It's actually the preparation for 2015 before that first televised event. The quicker they get the team together, the quicker the team can work together before the deal actually goes hard. That's the crucial thing to me. That's what I'm enjoying the most, having the ability to step -- get involved with preproduction, how do we present golf in a different way, what do you see on the other side of the TV screen and what the player's really feeling. I think a different message can be sent out there.

I've been a big fan of Johnny Miller, the way he commentates. I think if you turn on most capable talk shows or anything, you've got to have that open, honest, fair and balanced answer or comment. I don't think you can just put yourself in one corner and say I'm going to be this type of person. You've got to be fair and balanced in your comments across the board and I believe I've always been that way. I think that's why Fox likes that, I'm not afraid to step across the line in the hopes that my comments or thoughts might accelerate a process to get it there or make other people think about it.

I'll give you an example, when I sit on boards, I never want to sit on a board that's a friendly board, right? I've talked about this before. And I don't want to ever be involved in anything in business or in life that everybody agrees with you or you're the only one that's right.

I'm not the be all and the end all and nobody else is the be all and end all, not even the president of the United States. You've got to have smart people around you to make you look smart, and at the end of the day your viewpoints and your opinions, some are going to like them and some are not. They're going to be thought provoking and that's the important part about being a commentator. If you're going to be specific to your sport and you've got history in your sport, and I've got some pretty good history in my sport, I don't want to change. I don't want you guys writing about it

if I do sign with Fox and say the first year, well, look at Norman, he's completely changed, now he's scared to say what he wants to say. I'm never going to go down that path I promise you. That's why I love Johnny Miller, Johnny Miller was that way when he played and he was that way when he jumped in behind the microphone. If I sign with Fox, that will be my consistent message that I want to get out there.

Q. Is that why 2014 prep is so important, so you can analyze and do research and be in a position where you can make some really good commentary based on what you've seen over the last few months?

GREG NORMAN: Well, I think it's more than that. That's to some degree but more to knowing the team. Remember, everybody coming to Fox is brand new. It's not like NBC, who's been around, or CBS. Everybody is going to be figuring out okay, what's Greg really like or what's John Smith really like. When you sit in a room in a think tank session, I don't know what's going to come out of his mouth but we've got to react. Now you've got people in your ear saying, okay, Greg, what do you think? Now all of a sudden there's this cohesive approach, this teamwork has got to be brought together before you go live and that's what I mean. I think 2014 will be fantastic if I get involved because you're meeting new people, you're learning new things, preproduction and what goes on behind the scenes and the broadcasting van, how they're putting their thoughts together. All that stuff that I haven't really been involved with but I think I'm going to absolutely fall in love with it.

Q. Greg, you had some tough circumstances that forced you to make a couple of late additions in the field. How happy are you with the way that all came together and the strength of the field as a whole?

GREG NORMAN: Well, I'm extremely happy with the field, number one. Number two, again back to the testament of this tournament, when other players hear that there's an injury, the phone rings off the hook. Taylor Ives will call me and say, Greg, we've got boom, boom, boom, boom who want to play. All of a sudden you're running -- not really scrambling around, you're trying to make a decision because you've got all quality players who want to come in and play. So again, that's a testament. At the end of the day Freddie Jacobson was right there. It's easy for him to come from the east coast to here. So you have to take transportation issues into play and location and all that. It's amazing, if you actually saw the list of players that we had to go down and we had the choice from, it was pretty impressive.

Q. Along those lines, what do you think the chances are down the road of going to 28?

GREG NORMAN: 28 players? I don't know. We haven't really discussed it in depth, to tell you the truth. If you go to 28, that means the number of pro-am amateurs has got to go out another 16, right? So at the end of the day it's not that easy a decision to make. Everything works so beautifully right now. The amateurs feel like they're

spoiled. And we discussed it but we haven't really made a decision on in this case. We do discuss a lot of other things that we could contemplate doing into the future, but everything works so well now.

What I would like to do more importantly is make sure our corporate partners are happy for years out and make sure that we keep them secure for multiyear contracts more than anything else.

Q. Another thing I wanted to ask you about was in your career you were probably victimized by a couple guys who would have what they consider their dream shots, Larry Mize. Did you ever have a dream shot or shot that just stood out for you in your career that you think back on every now and then?

GREG NORMAN: Never one where I holed a shot to beat somebody. I've holed putts and stuff like that. No, not on the last hole. I remember hitting a 1-iron at 18th green at Wentworth, Bernhard Langer, and I think I was one back and I hit a 1-iron to about 18 inches or foot and I made it to win by one. Probably if I had to think back to it I probably could, but not too many on the 18th green.

Q. Can you talk about Jason Dufner and the year that he had? I'm sure a lot of people could see that eventually something was going to come like this, but for him to kind of come through and do it like that.

GREG NORMAN: I'm so happy for anybody who breaks through. It's not the easiest thing to do. Everybody wants to win a major championship, everybody wants to win on a regular basis, but really there's only four guys that win them and sometimes there's guys that win two majors, so really maybe two guys or three guys who win majors a year. So anybody who breaks through I think it's a monumental milestone for him, for Jason, for anybody, Adam Scott, you go down the list.

I feel for guys who eventually don't do it like Colin Montgomerie. I feel for guys like that who get the taste of it and never really get there. There's so many great players out there who deserve a major championship, there's no question about it. So you congratulate those guys, you're happy for them. It completely changes your life, especially for that next year and maybe the following year. The residual rub-on is just a phenomenal thing for that player. So I love seeing it. I wish everybody could experience it, I really do.

When Jason does go out there and win it, I think he's -- I love his Twitter world, I really do. I love reading his crap, I do. I love his Auburn, I love his love for his alma mater. But at the same time what you see Jason -- I don't know Jason that well, but I love the guy, you know? You really do. And to know that he's a major champion and to know that he's out there on the PGA TOUR promoting the game of golf makes golf that much better because if you're a guy sitting back with a personality like Jason Dufner, you go look, he did it, I can do it. So it absolutely opens up the whole world to

enlightening other individuals to step back, take a look at themselves, you can do it, and just don't -- you don't have to be the perfect golf swing, you don't have to be the perfect athlete, you don't have to be the perfect, perfect, perfect, perfect. You can get the job done your way if you want to. There's so many guys who do it and so many guys who are perfect and don't do it. Having Jason winning the PGA Championship, I watched every -- I got started watching golf a little bit more and especially when the major championships come on, I love watching it because you wonder, you know, what's going through his mind and how he's feeling. At the end of the day adrenaline kicks in and things happen that don't normally happen when you go out and play on your own around the golf course. You hit shots that you couldn't do on your own. It's because of the situation, because of the adrenaline, because of the position you're in and because of the playing partner you're playing against, the atmosphere, and all of a sudden you elevate yourself to a place you didn't know before and now you know you've been there, now you want to stay there. So it was good, it was great.

DAVE SENKO: Thank you, Greg.