

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT: PHIL MICKELSON
Wednesday, January 22, 2014

MARK STEVENS: I'd like to welcome Phil Mickelson. You're going to play your 25th Farmers Insurance Open this week. Do you want to kind of talk about your thoughts coming into the PGA TOUR season and then we'll have a few questions.

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, there's a lot of exciting things that have been going on. First of all, I'm proud to announce that KPMG and I have extended our partnership another three years through 2016 and will continue our KPMG Family for Literacy and our Blue Hat promotion to get books in the hands of young children. So this has been a fun relationship for me that started back in 2008 and people that I've really enjoyed working with, partners and clients that I've really enjoyed spending time with will be continued for another three years and I'm excited about that.

I am excited to talk a little bit about the Torrey North project, which will start now in about a year I would say, under works. The last year, year and a half we've been taking a lot of input from the public and making sure that we're on the right track to make the golf course as playable as people still enjoying playing and doesn't beat you up, and it also is challenging for the TOUR pro. Through some things of our eight public meetings you probably heard some of the ideas that we talked through about bringing the canyon back into play and eliminating some of the unnecessary grass and reducing water costs, maintenance costs and so forth. So that's been going on the last year and a half. We've got another year we'll break ground. Right now, the next year we'll do more intense design work.

I'm excited about this year. Off to a good start last week in Abu Dhabi. I am really excited for two reasons and that is one area -- the two areas of my game that I've not been as efficient as I would like in the last three or four years have turned into strengths. One of them is putting. I putted great last year and I had a remarkable turnaround and feel great with the putter. And the other is the driver. As we have done a complete reversal on the direction technologically speaking, it has made a world of difference for me and my game. We've talked a little bit about some of the technology, but as the club heads have gotten bigger, my driving's gotten worse. Having the center of gravity lower and more forward has allowed me to make the same golf swing as my irons and hit the drives and the shots that I want and that I expect. It's just made driving a lot easier. I drove it the best I ever have Sunday in Abu Dhabi when I needed to hit fairways, I drove the ball great. So with those two weaknesses or areas of my game that I have not been happy with becoming strengths, I'm more excited about this year than any year ever.

Q. You talk about your driver. When it's working for you, how does that

change your mindset from a confidence level? How does that make you feel when you step up and you know that things are working well from the tee box?

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, the biggest thing for me is that not having to have two different swings. So what's happened for me in the past is that when the center of gravity moves back as all the manufacturers were trying to do, the spin rate goes up and the moment of inertia goes up, the head stability goes up, so the club does not square, it doesn't square up, it just goes through like it's on a rail. Consequently for me who comes at an inside path, I block everything. And because I overspin it, the other way to take spin off it is to deloft it, so now I'm hitting a 6, 7-degree lofted driver that won't square up and I've got to change my swing. Now my driver has 10 degrees of loft and it spins a thousand RPMs less than it used to. It's just mind boggling the way it's made a difference in my game and it allows me to swing like it's a 7 iron or a 5 iron and my irons are the strength of my game. So now that I'm able to make the same swing with both driver and irons and have the same kind of control with the driver as I do my irons, I'm going to be able to be a much more aggressive player. Not that I wasn't before, but more aggressive in that I'll be playing from less ideal spots or more ideal spots.

Q. Phil, what do you think it says that at age 43 you're looking at this with the most excitement ever, and are you surprised at all by that given how far in your career you are?

PHIL MICKELSON: Yeah, I would think that as you get older it would -- your skills would start to decline. Really what's happened is when I started working with Pelz in 2004 on certain things with distance control, iron work, wedge work, putting and so forth, it's all getting better now each year the more I'm able to work on it, the more I'm able to practice. I've been building a foundation out for nine years now as opposed to just learning it or just starting this work. So I feel like my iron play, my short game, my chipping, putting, all these areas now are better than they've been, and the last element for me, for my game and the way I swing the club, we've been going the wrong way technologically in the woods and we saw last year with the 3-wood, it changed my game off the tee. I was able to play the U.S. Open very effectively because I was hitting fairways, I was able to win The Open Championship because I was hitting fairways. We took that technology, essentially applied it to the driver and now I've got -- and we did it with a hybrid, too. Those were my two least favorite clubs, the hybrid and the driver, and now they're two of my favorite clubs to hit. That's why I'm so excited. Every club in my bag I'm excited to hit, I can't wait, whereas in the past I might have had a slight dread factor.

Q. Phil, you don't look like you're suffering any jetlag. What is the greatest challenge doing these back-to-back tournaments and could you have pulled it off if this one wasn't at home?

PHIL MICKELSON: Traveling west is easy. Traveling east is much more difficult.

Going there was much more challenging to get on schedule than it is coming home. Coming home it took a day, if that. So I haven't had any effects from jetlag, but that's just because coming back west, whether San Diego or any other city is a lot easier for me than traveling east.

Q. (No microphone.)

PHIL MICKELSON: It was crushing, you know, but the thing about this is that it was the greatest year for the Chargers because we had a new coach, we have a new GM, we have great key players, we have a great direction, we got better every week and we only lost one game by more than a single score. We lost to the Raiders by 10. Every other game was a single score game, which means we're in every game. If I equate that to golf, it's like putting. When you're putting well, they might not all go in, you might lip some out, but when those balls are catching lips, you're putting well, you're not missing it by six inches. They're bound to fall and eventually they will. And I feel like when you're losing games by a single score, you're in it and it's just a small little factor, a little play here or there that turns the tide. I'm excited about the Chargers next year.

Q. (No microphone.)

PHIL MICKELSON: Certainly I get more excited and there's more anxiety watching the Chargers play, just like watching my kids perform in their athletics because I have no control. When I'm playing golf, I have control. It's much more relaxing, I feel, when you're the one behind the wheel.

Q. Phil, what would you say has been the most interesting thing you heard from the public about the North course, and then also are you interested in anything that your fellow players had to say in terms of input on the design?

PHIL MICKELSON: More from the public, there was concern that after what happened to the South becoming almost unplayable for the average player and 80 plus percent of the local rounds going to the North, that would happen, that the North would become too difficult in attempt to make it challenging.

Really I have different beliefs on design that are very similar to what are currently in place at the North and other golf courses is that I do not like blocking the fronts of the greens forcing a player to carry over a hazard, a bunker and what have you and stop it on the green because the majority of amateur players simply can't do that, which is why so many players love links golf is that you always have the avenue to run a ball up and it's very easy to make the parameters left and right. There's no need to block the fronts of the greens.

The other thing is to make the ground -- so much of golf now repels balls away into trouble and what I want to do is contain. I want to create containment where balls run

up to the green. Once you get to the green, that's where you can start repelling and making it challenging, but you want to give the average player the opportunity to run shots up to the green. That's very easy to do and we'll do that at the North golf course. But we'll make it challenging for the good player because I'm not running those shots up, I'm flying them to the green, and by making around the greens challenging.

Q. Phil, as soon as you won the British Open, people immediately were penciling you in for Pinehurst and completing this career slam. You're talking about how excited you are for this year. Where does that figure into it? I know it's only January, but people are already talking about how it's the perfect fit for you.

PHIL MICKELSON: I love the fact that I have one tournament to go, that I have one to get that career Grand Slam. I'm not going to hide from it. It's pretty obvious that would be a career goal of mine to win the career Grand Slam and the U.S. Open is the final link.

Now, for me, I'm excited that the tournament that I've played some of my best golf in is the one that I haven't won and I feel like it's just a matter of time. It may be this year at Pinehurst, it may not, but I do believe that will come. It's a tournament I've played too well in over the years not to finally win and I actually believe I'll win a couple. I'm not putting it all on one week. I think Pinehurst would be a great fit for me in that the greens repel balls off and there's very little rough which allows short game to be a factor and it's a big reason why I played so well in '99. 2005 it changed, they lost the grass around the greens, it was all fanned, and chipping was almost impossible, you had to putt it. It played away from my strength.

I'm hopeful that the course will be in great shape, we get it the week before the women do, so it will not be beat up. Unfortunately, they're going to have probably a beat-up course when they get it. But around the greens I should be able to take advantage of my short game there.

Q. John Howard from Channel 8 Sports. 25 years playing this event. Can you talk a little bit about what it means to play here and is it still a special thing, has it become just another event, your thoughts on that?

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, this will never be just another event for me because every time I play here I think about when I was a kid with my father watching the guys play and standing outside the ropes dreaming of being inside it. It doesn't matter how old you get or how many times you play, every time I tee up on that 9th tee box I think of the time I was standing there with my dad watching the guys play. I think although the golf course on the south has changed a little bit, I think about all the high school matches that I played there, we used to play two or three a week, and how much I enjoyed spending time on this golf course. This will never be just another tournament

for me.

Q. When you came here as a kid, Phil, who was the one player you wanted to go watch?

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, Seve was always the gentleman I enjoyed following and watching. He did not play here very often but the first year that he qualified to play in the San Diego Open, they had that amateur qualifying and they had two spots and I got one. I was 17 years old and he played that year and Ernie Gonzalez coordinated a practice round and I had a chance to play a practice round with him.

So often you'll look up to certain people and when you finally meet them it will be a letdown, but Seve was never a letdown. I had a chance to spend a lot of time with Seve over the years. We were with Hugo Boss in a number of photo shoots together, played practice rounds together, and from day one when I played with him he was gracious, classy, entertaining, exciting to watch and helpful and he was never a letdown.

Q. How much did you take from him?

PHIL MICKELSON: That particular day -- I would have loved to have a game. He didn't keep score, he would hit two or three balls and he would pick up. I actually wanted a little game, but that didn't pan out.

Q. The question I have for you, from the time you first came out on TOUR, let's say early to mid '90s, can you quantify how the level of competition has changed?

PHIL MICKELSON: I think there was a lot of depth back in the '90s when I came out and started playing. There's still a lot of depth and a lot of talent. The style of play has changed quite a bit. The golf balls changed quite a bit, the driver has changed quite a bit. I actually played back with persimmon, my final NCAAAs I played a persimmon driver. It was right around where it was changing.

What's happened now guys are after speed and they hit the ball a lot longer than they did 20 years ago and it's a different style of play. But there was still a lot of depth back then as there is today, but it's just a different way of playing the game.

Q. (No microphone.)

PHIL MICKELSON: No, because the thing that I found about a lot of young players is that they are incredibly impressive in some areas, but they have weaknesses because they're young, they haven't developed their games, and so many of them aren't willing to work on their weaknesses. So it's not more difficult to win, no.

Q. Phil, on the North, you make it playable for the public, so then what do you envision it being like for the tournament? Where are the challenges going to be and do you see a narrowing of the scores between the two courses or do you still want to make it an (inaudible)?

PHIL MICKELSON: The scores does not bother me, whether the scores are low or high. That's not the factor. You can make any golf course hard by simply making the greens firm and making thick rough. So if there's no rough and the greens are soft, the scores are going to be low, it doesn't matter what golf course we play. Look at the score difference between Pebble Beach when we play the AT&T to when we play the U.S. Open. You can take that same course and make par a good score.

What I want to do though is make a course that is fun to play, that is playable under a variety of conditions. I want to reduce the maintenance costs and reduce the water bill. I want to bring the canyon back into the feel of the golf course. I don't want to move the holes to the canyon, I want to bring the canyon back into some of the holes so that you feel the natural beauty that's here. Those things are easy to do, especially if you do it strategically so the grass is taken out in areas that balls are never hit to.

Q. On Sunday you birdied three of the last five after the triple. Curious how (inaudible) seemingly be something that would send you off the other day and fall down the leaderboard after something like that. How were you able to maintain that and bounce back?

PHIL MICKELSON: I got a little upset and it forced me to be aggressive and try to make some birdies to catch the lead and I was able to make some but just not enough. I had a good week last week, though. We had perfect weather, we had great practice facilities, we had a beautiful golf course that was challenging and difficult, it was tight off the tee. Gave me a chance to see where my game was at and the strengths and weaknesses. And what made the week so good for me personally is that I got better each day, I started to strike the ball better each day, from terrible the first day to really good as the weekend came about. Putting felt great, the short game was really good, and I worked on the areas that I was not feeling good. I did my distance control was not sharp last week. I spent the last two days working on distance control and getting my irons dialed in and I'm excited about this week because I feel like my game for starting the year feels pretty sharp.

Q. Phil, as you grow older as we all must, are you more concerned now about history and your place in it, do rivalries like Tiger Woods still matter very much or is it more about winning majors now?

PHIL MICKELSON: It's more about winning major championships for me. The difficulty for me is that as I get older, it's a lot more work to be physically able to perform the way I would like. I've got to watch what I eat, I've got to work out,

manage arthritis and I've been fortunate that the treatment on that's been phenomenal. I haven't had anything holding me back from working on my game or what have you, but I've got to spend a lot more time in the gym making sure that ligaments and tendons and muscles and joints and everything are strong and healthy and it's just more effort to be able to play golf at the highest level.

Q. Phil, you've made it pretty clear over the last 12 years that you're not a huge fan of (inaudible.) How much has that affected your results here that you just don't love that course anymore like you may have loved the old version?

PHIL MICKELSON: I haven't won since it's been redesigned, so that -- my feelings of animosity towards it might have a factor as to why I haven't played well per se on it, but I have come close a few times. I've had a couple seconds that I can think of and I've learned to play it over the years, but it is not conducive to the way I like to play, which is aggressive. Every shot is repelled away from the tucked pins, every green breaks away from the bunkers, every time you're in a bunker you've got a downhill shot. It's just monotonous to me and it doesn't allow for great recovery and it does not allow for aggressive play. It allows for 40 feet away from the hole and try to make a putt, take advantage of the par 5s.

Q. (No microphone.)

PHIL MICKELSON: I don't know, I don't know, that's a good question because there's a lot of pluses to get to the U.S. Open, there's a lot of great things that have happened for Torrey Pines after having had the Open. And the way the way that event unfolded, there's a lot of good things that happened, so it's hard to say.

Q. (No microphone.)

PHIL MICKELSON: No, we haven't. No, it doesn't.

MARK STEVENS: Thank you for your time, Phil.