

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT: GREG NORMAN
Wednesday, December 10, 2014



DAVE SENKO: Well, we would like to welcome our host, Greg Norman. Greg, this is 26 years for your event, 14 years in Naples. A couple changes this year. Maybe you could just get us started, talk about the new format, a little bit of a course change as well as Fox's debut as broadcasting golf.

GREG NORMAN: Absolutely. First of all, I said it when we had the 25th anniversary last year that I never anticipated running this tournament for 25 years. Now we're into 26 and it seems like we're just getting better and better every year.

There's been the golf course changes. Fortunately for us we had a 36-hole golf course to be able to work with. The agronomy department, we all know there was a disease got into the greens so we made the adjustments very, very quickly. Quite honestly, as far as I was concerned, I always wanted to use -- I'm going to get them all mixed up -- the black course in the beginning because I really thought it was a better golf course to play.

So, you know, we made the adjustments very, very quickly. I think the players really like the new golf course, the layout of the golf course. So there really has been sort of a seamless transition, quite honestly.

And the third one with Fox, extremely excited about it, I really am. There's a lot of things I've done in my life and there's a lot of opportunities I've had to do new things in life but this is one that I'm extremely excited about. And probably more so because my relationship with Joe Buck. My relationship with Mike Loomis, my relationship with David Hill and Eric Shanks of Fox. We've got a tremendous rapport amongst us already. There's a sense of excitement, keenness. A lot of nerves as well because we're all starting a brand new venture together. So as we go forward, everything we do we're actually doing it as huge teamwork. There's not one individual out there who thinks they're ahead of everything else. It's a tremendous team.

So I know come Saturday I'll be a little bit nervous, and I haven't been nervous about doing something for a long, long period of time. When we come to the U.S. Open at Chambers Bay next year, I'll be really nervous for sure. But hopefully all my preparation and lead up to it will be for the good reason, not the bad reason.

DAVE SENKO: How did the format change?

GREG NORMAN: The format just came from a discussion internally because we noticed a couple of times come Sunday, if you're within three or four shots of the lead in a scramble, it's very very difficult to play catch-up because if a team is playing well, you know they're going to shoot like 61 or 59 or 58. So that means if you're going to

have a chance of winning from four back, you've got to shoot 54 or 55 or 56 and that was a big ask. So we thought it would be a lot more exciting. More golf for television, more excitement for television. So the combination of Fox and internally we decided to do it that way.

Q. You talked about these changes and the 26 years. Do you feel like you needed something fresh, or do you think you could have been status quo and still had a good tournament?

GREG NORMAN: You mean with Fox?

Q. Everything. With all the changes, do you think you needed something fresh with the format, the course?

GREG NORMAN: No, we were fortunate that Fox came on board. That was just an added bonus for us. We had the strong field before Fox, right? This year I think it's the strongest field we've ever had. So irrespective of the broadcasting partner we've got, the tournament was going to be one of the most successful ones in the 26 years anyway.

Just the other stuff like with Fox adds a little bit more panache to it because people are excited to see it and hear it and people are excited about what is Fox going to do differently than NBC or anything else. You probably won't see much between 1 and 5 on Saturday. I think all the really good stuff, I know it's going to be held for the U.S. Open. But you'll see just what Fox has done with the production crew and the techies, what they're doing for the whole week leading up to Saturday. Well, tomorrow actually, but to Saturday has been more than what we've seen before at NBC.

So just you probably don't pay attention to it, but I do. So they're just making that extra effort to make this just that little bit different, a little bit better than the broadcasting partner last year. And that's quintessential Fox, right? They're going to go out on a limb and they're a great marketing partner. They market the event. More marketing dollars have gone promoting the Franklin Templeton Shootout Fox on Saturday than I've seen for years and years from the previous broadcasting partner. So it's a big positive, positive win.

Q. I was going to ask you (inaudible).

GREG NORMAN: Who did I admire? I like Johnny Miller because Johnny Miller says what he sees. When I was finally, when it was finally announced that I was going to be involved with the Fox deal, I got a lot of phone calls from commentators from other sports, not from golf. Mike Tirico reached out to me. But they all of them to a T said just be yourself, just be yourself, just be confident and just be yourself. I saw that a lot in Johnny Miller. And I had a lot of probably preparation for this

moment, if I can put that in a weird way through Frank Chirkinian. Frank Chirkinian really behind the scenes created a phenomenal team of people around him and he created the analyst and on-golf-course reporting and the style of telecasting, put a great team together. I've actually referenced Frank many, many times in our team production meetings about what we need and how we can pull a lot of what he injected in CBS because that was a fun group of guys. Even today when you look at some of the CBS led by Jim Nance, they're a fun group of guys. I want to take a lot of that and inject it into the Fox deal. I wouldn't say anyone else other than Johnny Miller. I think everyone else is pretty status quo. When you have to be strong enough in your own mind to be able to make a believing comment about what you see and what the viewer is expecting you to say, to make them think about. And then okay, you might get a little bit of flak because you're willing to step over that line, but you've got to do it with confidence and with ease and not with, you know, any arrogance or in your face. I'm learning as I go along. And I've had a great mentor with Joe. He's been phenomenal with me at the moment. And David Hill from Fox, he's taken a lot of time out of his time just to spend with me to help me navigate through this process.

Q. This morning (inaudible) said that you would be as nervous as stepping on the first tee at Augusta, which surprises me it's that uncomfortable behind a microphone.

GREG NORMAN: Well, the thing is all about the timing. It's going to take me a little bit of understanding of when I can say something. Most of the time you just want to jump in and say something, right? There is a process you have to go through and you've got to watch the progress of the game, you've got to watch the progress of the player, and there's a moment you can step in. There's a moment when you'll be like a Henry Longhurst, too, and nothing should be said. I don't want to get into a position where people say, well, why isn't somebody saying something. Well, let the story unfold with your eyes and then add a little bit to it on the back side of it to make people think why, what happened then. That will be an interesting where I might be, you know -- I shouldn't say might be, where I will be a little bit nervous knowing when I can step in and when I cannot.

Q. Let me ask you about Jordan Spieth and how impressive it was to get his name on that Australian Open trophy and his effort last week.

GREG NORMAN: I was actually more impressed -- last week, I get last week in a small man field, one man gets confident, he's going to disappear because you really don't have a lot of other guys to put pressure on you if you're running away with it.

But the Australian Open, I was impressed watching him because I know the Australian, I know the conditions down there. I know what jet lag can do for you. So to watch him progress the way he did down there shows me that he's a lot more experienced than his young years, right? There was a huge injection of confidence

for him. He played well this year but he really hasn't played well enough to put his name up there on the pedestal where everybody expected him to be. So by winning the Australian Open, which there's been, as you say, a lot of pedigree names put up on that, but it's the conditions and the type of golf course he won on and the way he won on that type of golf course should be an indicator to him that there's not a golf course out there in this world that he cannot play on. And the more he plays different golf courses, the more he'll reflect back on the Australian because it's a really demanding golf course and he played it with a lot of confidence. Yes, he putted well, but again that's part of the ingredient of going on and winning, too. You putt well for four straight days, not just one day.

Q. Can you see a parallel with what Jordan did and what Rory did 12 months ago and how Rory's Australian Open success was pivotal to his year?

GREG NORMAN: I think that would be a logical way to look at it. I think from Jordan's standpoint, he's got to look at it as a springboard. Understanding winning in Australia on a tough golf course on tough conditions and flying again with jet lag the next week to playing, I shouldn't say it's a tough golf course but a totally different golf course and adapting to the fatigue in your body and the mental aspect of being able to mentally concentrate as hard as he had to do to win the Australian Open, to shift gears and travel and do it again. That's why I say if he sat back and he looked at okay, winning is one thing, we've got that, but how he did it and how he managed his body and managed his time and managed his golf game and managed everything else around here, that's what he should be looking at. Because if he got that right, which obviously he did, he's got to somehow inject that type of format or platform into wherever he goes because it worked for him. Now it's not going to work all the time, but to me a great barometer for a great player is the fact that they can win in one country, jump on an airplane and win in another country on a totally different golf course, totally different greens, totally different grass, totally different atmosphere. That's the sign of a really, really good player.

Q. Did you watch any of Tiger last week, and if you did or didn't, any just general thoughts on him going with another swing coach at this stage of his career and somebody who is unknown, not going to a Hank Haney or somebody like that?

GREG NORMAN: I did watch a little bit of it. First of all, I thought his swing looked better, number one. I thought it looked freer. It's going to be hard to go back for him and look at the old VCR tapes and say this is the way I want to swing because his body is totally different today than it was back then. But I think he's on the right path, I really do. He needs to relieve a lot of pressure on some of his ailing joints. And we've all been there. We all have spoken to our coaches about how can I change my swing in such a small way to allow to take pressure off a certain joint or I will not feel so much pain the next morning after practicing or playing.

So I think the motions that I saw were really good. He's going to take a while to get that freedom back into his game. I think he will and he will become a better driver of the golf ball, no question. But I can see a few of the old motions that he's got in there. The head drops still dramatically. His practice swings are really good, but his main swing you can see a little bit of the old swing when he has to pull the trigger.

Quite honestly, I was really shocked at his short game, as bad as what it is considering what he has in his backyard. I know when I took time off, the thing I spend most time on was my short game because I wanted that to be so sharp because I knew my new swing or my game wouldn't be as sharp as what it should be. So I always spent more time on my short game. I was really surprised to see him hit some of the chunk shots that he did. But anyway, I think he'll figure that one out pretty quickly.

Q. I know you spoke about it before. Any newer thoughts or changes on the Ryder Cup task force? I know they're supposedly meeting next week. Some of the players have said it's overanalyzing the situation, some have said well, if something good comes out of it, then it was worth it.

GREG NORMAN: I think it's just up to the players. I think at the end of the day if you just take a page out of the European Tour's book and see how they approach it. I think we all are very observant to this. The captains hand down the secret to the captain before. The captains want to know what went right or what went wrong from the previous captaincy. There's no egos, there's no jealousy or anything.

The European team really gelled all the way through. And they start talking about the Ryder Cup as a team from the day after the one that was completed at Gleneagles. So they instill this spirit for two years and that spirit just comes out for that four or five days, whatever it is, and you can see the difference. You watch it on TV, and I watched every stroke of the Ryder Cup. You could also see the difference in expressions on the players' faces and that's what's missing.

I mean, the American players aren't lesser players physically than the European players. The European players aren't a better player than the Americans because led by a Rory McIlroy. They've all got that, but they need to focus on that team spirit and getting everybody working together at an earlier stage. That's when I think the American team will really start gelling together.

Q. Were you not surprised by the way Paul McGinley went about his leadership?

GREG NORMAN: No, not at all. I know Paul fairly well and he's a guy who -- I mean I don't want -- I know a little bit more than what I really want to say. But I think he's the type of guy who really would want the players to feel like no matter what was asked of them to do, he had all the bases covered. He allowed them just to be able

to work together as a team, talk together as a team, practice as a team, and then go execute as a team. So I think he just did everything so beautifully behind the scene with no pressure either. I think knowing Paul, I think that's exactly how he approached it for the two years.

Q. Were you surprised when the PGA of America announced the task force?

GREG NORMAN: Yeah, I was actually. It's not rocket science. Just go have fun and play. And the European Tour, they have fun and they play.

Q. Billy Horschel was just in here and he was asked, you know, is there one or two bits of advice you would give to the task force and he said to name Fred Couples the captain. You've gone against Fred in the Presidents Cup. How do you think he would do if he was in that role?

GREG NORMAN: Well, just look at the Presidents Cup. I mean, the guys love playing for Freddie. I mean, Freddie just allows a player to be the person they want to be. That's no reflection on other captains or anything like that. When you have that respect that Freddie gets from anybody else, why not? Or why not put Freddie -- is he on the task force? Why not put Freddie on the task force and say, Freddie, what was your secret of dominating the Presidents Cup as long as you have done. Quite honestly, the international players aren't lesser players than the American players. The American players just came out with a totally different attitude in the Presidents Cup than they do in the Ryder Cup. The task force, I was a bit surprised by it.

Q. When Ian Poulter was in here he mentioned a little bit about what you're talking about, the team part. You just got the sense from him that that's almost like the old Jordan line that there was more of a fear of losing than winning and he just really felt like he wanted to play for his team and that seemed to drive him maybe even to a higher level than what we see on a week to week basis. Is that what you're talking about?

GREG NORMAN: Have you ever seen Ian Poulter reacts like he reacted when he pitched that ball in? It looked like he had won a major championship. That emotion coming out of Ian Poulter I never see in a PGA TOUR event or anywhere else. So what brings that emotion out? The Ryder Cup. He wants to win. He wants to win for his teammates.

You know, from his standpoint, he should take a look and say wow, how come I get so inspired? Can I take that inspiration, take that energy and plug it into my year-by-year program?

I would love to see him do that because I think Ian is one guy who's really underrated with his talent. I think he's a way better player than what his record really shows. But my gosh, he's hard to beat in the Ryder Cup because of that emotional buildup or

emotional drive that he has within himself.

DAVE SENKO: Thanks, Greg.

GREG NORMAN: Thank you.