

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: GREG NORMAN
December 9, 2015



DAVE SENKO: We would like to welcome our tournament host, Greg Norman, into the media center. Greg, maybe before we get some questions, talk about this event. Twenty-seven years now, the impact it's had not only in the Naples/Fort Myers community but also on the charity aspect of this event.

GREG NORMAN: Well, I knew 15 years ago when there wasn't a PGA TOUR event in the southwestern part of Florida that one was needed because the growth of this area's been extremely good over the last couple of decades. Good meaning a lot of golf courses were built here, a lot of quality golf courses were built here. You've got the Ritz-Carlton building two hotels within a couple miles of each other, one on the beach, one inland. So I knew this place was really crying out for something. When we were in the southeastern part of Florida, it was a great idea to transition over to here.

Since we've done that, a lot of other events have followed suit. So to me it was important to bring professional golf to this area. We've been welcomed with open arms since we've done that. The community has embraced it all the way from the media all the way down to the volunteers. They've loved it, they've loved the process that's going on and obviously we've given a lot back to the community at the same time.

So it's been a great symbiotic relationship and we look forward to continuing it on for a long period of time. Obviously that leads into the charitable side of things. The charitable side of things, I notice more than anybody else because I travel so much that America's a very philanthropic country. People are fortunate here that they have a great quality of life but they're also very generous in giving back in times of need and we've seen that through our corporate sponsorship and through the pro-am participation and even through tonight's function. Last year I don't know how much we raised at the dinner, I thought Taylor was here, how much we raised at the dinner last year but it was a phenomenal amount of money even though it was going above and beyond what the amateurs had put in to play in the event. Those are the things that I notice probably more than anything else here in the United States. And it's not just in golf, it's across the board. That's why I say America's probably the most philanthropic country in the world.

Q. Does it seem like it's been a year ago since the Fox debut, and what do you feel going into this year's event from that standpoint?

GREG NORMAN: From a television standpoint, I think I'm more excited this year than last year because we've learned from what we enjoyed, but more importantly you learn by your failures. Look, we were thrown into the Super Bowl, which is the U.S. Open, straight off the bat. I thought our production crew did a phenomenal job. I think at the end of the day from my own personal level I have a lot to learn. Going into that first one, I thought I learned a lot coming in, and even this morning in a meeting I had with our producer Mark Loomis, the

feedback coming out of it as we prepare for Saturday but more importantly we're preparing to get into June at Oakmont. The laundry list is not that deep. So I feel really good about the job I did, but as like the game of golf, you can play a phenomenal round of golf but you've got to keep practicing and practicing and practicing and working on it and working on it, working on it to get consistently and uniformly good.

Q. How about a couple of your thoughts on this tournament as far as what your observations have been on what it takes to be successful from a team aspect? Kenny Perry's talked about that the two guys be really good friends, acquiescing on shots, having a role playing on shots. What have you seen as being some of the keys to these teams winning?

GREG NORMAN: The teams winning?

Q. Yeah, this event.

GREG NORMAN: Absolutely, it's the harmonious approach they both have. Knowing your partner's got your back. A lot of times when I was playing, I wanted to be the second one to hit because I always felt like one of my strengths of my game was driving the golf ball. So if my partner got out there and hit a good drive, then I could actually unload a little bit more and push it out there a little bit further. So it's how your team strategizes who's going to go first, especially even in the modified alternate shot it's still important because if somebody chooses to go for the putt and they're not putting that well, you've got to strategize whose drive you're going to take if there's only a few yards difference. So it's all about the team communication, that's for sure. I think the guys who have gone on well, their games match up with each other. Those guys, when their games match up, two long hitters together, if one's straight and one's crooked, that crooked guy all of a sudden becomes a pretty straight driver because he's got the confidence he's going to be in the fairway.

Q. How about when you played, how much of what you talked about was non-golf?

GREG NORMAN: Oh, between shots?

Q. Yes.

GREG NORMAN: A lot, a lot. You never talk about golf between shots. I mean, I wouldn't say to my partner, hey, I notice something wrong with your swing back there, this is what I do. You just leave that alone. You might say to him, hey, your rhythm looked a little bit off or some simple correction that doesn't make a big mental download on your partner to try to figure it out in a matter of 90 seconds, right? But even though the players are good enough, they should know their games well enough that they can or should be able to make that adjustment.

But normally walking between shots you're just talking to your playing partners about life in general and how bad the food was the night before, how great the food was the night before,

how bad the pillows were in the bed and the mattress was worn. Stuff like that, kind of mundane stuff where you're just trying to kill time.

Q. What was it like having Tim Tebow be part of this event for a couple of days?

GREG NORMAN: It was great. I met him for the first time last night at an Omega event. Being a non-American, I still follow a lot of American sports and I've always watched and known a lot of what Tim has done in his career. So to catch up with him, what you see sometimes on television is totally different than what the reality is. He was just an absolute gem of a guy. He was very down to earth, very, very engaging, very humble. So from my aspect, it kind of solidifies my belief in celebrities. When you get to know them, they are the down-to-earth individuals. Not everybody's like that but most of them are down-to-earth individuals. And I think in Tim's situation, he loved the game of golf, right? He loves it with a passion. So when the connector is golf and I don't think he's probably ever seen me swing a golf club because he's a young kid, right, at the end of the day, golf was our connector.

Q. I wanted to get your thoughts on another element of the state of the game and Bobby Clampett had mentioned to me that he understands that there's like 90 million golfers who have stopped playing and you had talked about various ways of growing the game among millennials. How about as far as why this has happened because golf viewership is actually strong, maybe as strong as it's been. It's almost like a contradiction in a way.

GREG NORMAN: Well, I don't know about that 90 million number, I haven't read a stat like that.

Q. I think he got it from the PGA actually.

GREG NORMAN: 90 have gone away from the game of golf?

Q. Yes.

GREG NORMAN: Worldwide?

Q. Yes, worldwide.

GREG NORMAN: I thought you meant referencing America. Worldwide I can probably understand that. I actually look to the recession of 2008 that was one of the catalysts why people got out of the game of golf. They were looking for probably an excuse anyway and disposable income may have been that excuse to stop. Golf is expensive to some degree and time consuming. So your cost of time I think is more important than the outlay of disposable cash, right? So when they got away from the game of golf and they're spending more time doing other things maybe with their wives and maybe with their kids, they're going okay, right, I'm enjoying this other side of my life. It's incumbent on us now how do we bring them back. Yeah, everybody's tried different ways from bigger holes and this and that, and

will continue to try and figure out how to bring the people back. I think there are a lot of -- 2016 you might see some new initiatives take place from different corporations and different individuals trying to stimulate and give opportunities, basic for the millennials but also to bring some of the baby boomers back as well who were really the backbone of the game of golf for a long, long period of time by reducing that requirement of time, by creating a connection between something else, right? You're holding the device in your hand. Maybe that's the secret, who knows.

But I do know one thing. To move the needle forward, you've got to get out of the box that we've been stuck in for a long period of time now, and I think there's a lot of people who are now interested in getting out of that box. And you're not going to get the support a hundred percent of everybody but you're going to create enough of an interest. I related a lot to snowboarding when it first came in, I've said this a few times, to skiing. Everybody turned their mind off snowboarding. They're a grungy looking group, they're young, they're long haired, they're wearing different clothes and they've got their earphones in their ears. What happened was the family, one would ski, one would snowboard. Families wouldn't go to ski resorts because of this division. Now all of a sudden they open up the slopes to snowboarders, now all of a sudden the families go back and look what's happened to skiing. There's been this kind of consistent rise in the popularity of skiing because snowboarders as families can get there and enjoy it.

That's something that I take on board seriously and how do we do that to the game of golf to a degree. I have my theories. I'm not going to talk about them now because I think there are some seriously good opportunities out there that hopefully will be announced in 2016.

Q. The 12-hole concept that you've talked about; one, would you consider building one of those courses, and have you gotten much feedback from --

GREG NORMAN: We have. We've built 12-hole golf courses. Successfully as well, too. That was more of a real estate play, an ROI, play, return on your investment. Making them understand, first of all, when you get asked to sign a contract to design a golf course, the first thing I ask is, do you want to have a PGA TOUR event here or do you want to host an event, amateur, or do you need to have an 18-hole golf course.

Q. What's your demographic maybe.

GREG NORMAN: What's your demographic. So you go through this list of questions you talk to them about. If at the end of the day they say yes, this what I want, you say okay, I'm going to go build you a par 72 18-hole golf course. It's also incumbent on me, too, to show them the other side and give them the other option and the other option could be this. You lay it out on a land plan, you sketch it out as quickly as you possibly can. Now you start running the numbers. You don't run the numbers out one year or two years, you run it out over a 25-year cycle because if you can save a million dollars a year in maintenance, in one year a million dollars sounds a lot but it's not really, but 25 million is a lot just in one deal, right? Now you see the return on the value of the property that you've actually saved.

Now you value the time, right? You're coming down from four and a half to five hours down to maybe an hour and 15 for six holes. So now you put a value on that time. There is a value. So all of a sudden you have opened their mind up and now you allow the developer to make his decision on what he wants to do. Instances we've done from a pure real estate play, the guy loved us because we opened up, took six holes and opened it up to high-rise developments and he got a massive return.

Q. Maybe people could play over lunch or something like that?

GREG NORMAN: Look, you can play six holes in an hour and 10 minutes. It doesn't take much to do that. That's what I would love to see and encourage that. And the cost of building these behemoths are out the window.

Deep down inside, deep, deep down inside what I would truly love to see happen is the golf ball be rolled back to the specifications of 1996. That way we can still build great golf courses at 6,800, 6,900, 7,000 yards, and 7,200 yards is long golf course. Now all of a sudden you're not using this extra 700 yards to 800 yards, you're not using this compounding of maintenance and fertilizer and water and electricity and staff and mowing equipment. So you can see how it keeps rolling out and out and out just on those two things, maybe 12-hole golf courses where applicable and rolling back the golf ball.

The long hitters are still going to hit the ball a long way. When you really look at the PGA TOUR and the stats, it's not hard to see that there's only probably about 15 to 20 guys who bomb it out there 320-plus and that's probably even stretching the number out there. I might be wrong but it's not a hard number to figure out, but everybody else is around that 285, 295, that area. If you're hitting it 330 to 290, that's a 40-yard spread. If you're hitting it 295 to 275, that's only a 20-yard spread. So now all of a sudden the game becomes a little bit more competitive because the field is starting to be grouped up correctly in my mind.

Q. Going back to the Fox thing, what's kind of the biggest takeaway you and Joe had from it? Not to ask you to speak for him, but biggest takeaway, biggest thing you learned?

GREG NORMAN: Biggest thing we learned or the biggest thing we would like to implement?

Q. Both.

GREG NORMAN: Okay. What we would like to do is have more time for each other. What I mean by that is if you went back and looked at Sunday at the U.S. Open at Chambers Bay, you might not have noticed it but there wasn't a TV commercial for I think 47 minutes of the last hour of play. Joe and I carried that entire 47 minutes except maybe one on-course announcing, which I think might have been either Corey Pavin or Scott McCarron and we went to them occasionally.

But where Joe and I loved it, that's what we wanted. We wanted to carry that moment like he carries the Super Bowl or he calls that play in the World Series. That's the moment that we really enjoyed because that's what I look for. As a player, I look for that moment to be there, and as a commentator, that's what he's looking for. So we were uninterrupted. We would just look at each other, we knew where I was going to direct my thoughts to and he knew, got me straightaway. So all of a sudden became a seamless flow and that's what I took away from my first year. If we can pull that back in and create more of a conversational type deal instead of being in a box, I guess, I hope we get to do that.

I just had the meeting this morning about it. That was my first topic of conversation when they asked me what did I like or didn't like about last year, that was what I said. So that was my takeaway and that's what I learned, because if you allow two people who are connected, right, in their mission statement and allow them to flow, then you're going to get the end result that you're looking for and the spectators and the people watching TV. And the other thing I learned, too, is don't read all the other garbage that people write about you. (Laughs.)

Q. Bret Baier in the pro-am too, he's emceeding tonight, how well do you know him and what it like to have him here?

GREG NORMAN: I got to know Bret basically because of my Fox relationship and I've watched Bret all the time when I work out in the afternoons because I work out between 4:00 and 6:00 and his special report comes on during that time. When I was up in New York doing Fox & Friends many years ago, I heard that Bret was a good golfer and I called BS on it, saying okay, if you've got this type of gig, you can't be a scratch golfer. That's how we connected through texting. He came down to my house, had some dinner, we messed around a little bit and all of a sudden a friendship formed. So we're like minded in positioning on world politics and world economy and sport and golf obviously. So I just enjoy his conversation and he enjoys a cocktail and a glass of wine, too, which is equally as good. He'll do a great job tonight.