

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: RICKIE FOWLER
May 4, 2016



DOUG MILNE: Rickie Fowler, thanks for joining us for a few minutes here at the Wells Fargo Championship, your first PGA TOUR victory in 2012, obviously a place near and dear to you. Got a busy schedule coming up, you've got this week, defending your title next week at Ponte Vedra. Just your thoughts at being back here at Quail Hollow.

RICKIE FOWLER: It's definitely nice to be back, good memories here. The course is, other than being wet, it's the best shape I've seen it in, so I'm looking forward to some good weather the next few days and the golf course is firming up for the weekend. So yeah, it's going to be a busy stretch through THE PLAYERS, looking forward to THE PLAYERS next week obviously and going to get two weeks off before we really get things going. Going to be June hopefully through the Ryder Cup.

Q. Rickie, the Whereabouts program drug testing begins Friday. Who do you have coming out (inaudible)?

RICKIE FOWLER: I've had some help as far as getting the basics done but I'll be taking care of all my Whereabouts on the app so I'll be going over that and making sure I know how to handle everything and operate. Yeah, I want to make sure that I can change it on the fly and be able to, if there is a last-minute change of plans, that way I'm on top of it and there's no question there.

Q. And a follow-up if I can, some golfers are pulling out of consideration, they have their reasons. Why do you remain all in on this?

RICKIE FOWLER: For me it's almost not a question as far as having the opportunity to possibly go down there. Obviously I've still got to continue to play well to make sure that I am there, but I just think to have the opportunity to walk in the opening ceremonies at the Olympics for your country would be pretty special, and I would get to play golf so that would be a bonus.

No, I've always watched the Olympics growing up and for golf to be back in after over a hundred years, I've said it before, it's almost like a dream come true, a dream that I couldn't have before. It wasn't something where I was going to be a distance runner or sprinter or anything like that, those were not any of my major talents, so I'm going to have the opportunity to hit a golf ball around in Rio. No, I think it will be pretty special to be able to be a part of that.

Q. Forgive me if you've already said, but is the Scottish Open going to be a casualty of this hectic summer or have you not decided?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, the summer's not fully decided right now. This summer is going

to be very hectic with some added events. I think that's going to be a bit of a discussion in the coming weeks after THE PLAYERS. I think my main focus was really getting through these weeks. It was nice to come back and have a decent finish last week, and obviously I want to play well at two places I've played well before so that will be something we're going to figure out after THE PLAYERS.

Q. Would you expect you would be playing Bridgestone the week before then?

RICKIE FOWLER: I mean, yeah, I haven't missed Bridgestone. As far as a World Golf Championship on a golf course that I love as well, it's hard to miss those limited field, no-cut events.

Q. If you weren't already asked this, does the golf course set up any differently for you with it so wet like this?

RICKIE FOWLER: I mean yeah, there's not very many changes but I know they added some length on 7. Yeah, it played long out there today. I had 5-wood into I think three par 4s today, which wasn't fun. I did hit the green on two of them, though. It's playing very long out there right now. Obviously with the forecast, looking forward to it drying out a bit, and I would assume by the weekend it's going to be a completely different golf course. But the golf course is in perfect shape other than being wet, the greens are good the way they are right now and they're only going to get tougher as they dry out.

Q. Does that length put it even more in your wheelhouse or does it make a difference?

RICKIE FOWLER: I think it's going to make distance off the tee a bit more of a premium. I mean if I had 5-wood into a couple holes today, I'm not a long hitter by any means but I'm not short, so I would like to think that there's a little bit of an advantage, like I said, if you can get it out there a little more right now with it being soft. And obviously with it being wet it makes the rough play a little tougher as well. It will be interesting to see how much they're able to dry it out because there were some fairways and some low areas that was still a bit of casual water out there.

Q. Can you talk about your excitement about the Olympics? There's nothing certain with the Olympics in golf beyond Tokyo. Is there much talk among players that it could be a really short window to get in there and try to get a gold medal, it could be two and out for golf?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, like you said, it could be two and out, it can being short lived. And you never know, they could continue on to potentially be able to go down and have a chance to medal in the first one back, obviously with gold being, that would be the perfect storm. But I think just being able to be a part of the Olympics, share the whole experience with other U.S. athletes and to be able to be down there and see the Village, go to other events and just really kind of take in the whole Olympic experience.

Q. Rory was in here a little bit ago and he said he feels like this gives him the best chance to kind of break this winless streak. Your thoughts on that, what makes it so tough here with the scores (inaudible.)

RICKIE FOWLER: I think what we talked about the length being a little bit more of a premium this year more than others. But even so, if you can drive it a little bit further than other people and keep it in the fairway, having shorter clubs in on this golf course definitely helps. You see with Rory, I feel like the weeks where he is driving it better, I guess just decent for him, and if he is driving it really well, he's always in contention if not winning. So if he drives the ball well this week, he's going to play well here as he's done multiple times. He's had a very good record here with two wins. Luckily, I kept him from a third. But I know he feels very comfortable around here and I expect him to play well this week and look forward to going up against him the first couple days.

Q. Rory was just in here talking about that duel you had. Can you talk about how much confidence that gave you that you were able to close out a big tournament to play like that?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I think more so just to hit the wedge shot in there in the playoff and to make the putt, that putt that I made here on 18, it was definitely different but not far off from the putt I had to make at PLAYERS. They were both left-to-right putts. This one here was edge and PLAYERS was inside left. I mean in a perfect world you would want a putt that's breaking toward you to win a golf tournament. To be able to have that, that definitely crossed my mind at PLAYERS knowing that I had made a putt similar to that before. Unfortunately, from after winning here I had to wait a little bit until I got my second, but it was nice to get that monkey off my back here. Yeah, I definitely think back to the swings I made down the stretch and in the playoff here.

Q. Rickie, you talked about what the golf course is and you hope it dries out over the next couple of days. That being said, how much does that affect -- the course drying out, how much does that affect your strategy as you go forward because the golf course will change drastically when it dries out?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I think it will still be soft the first couple days. It's going to play very long and then I think the biggest change is going to be going into the weekend. It's definitely the longest I've seen the golf course play, but at the same time the greens are basically perfect. I mean, they're probably a little softer than they want them right now, but they're going to have full control of the golf course from here on out as far as how they're able to dry it out. I know the forecast is good, so unlike last week, we should finish on Sunday.

Q. Does it change though when things start to dry out, firm up, does it change how you think your way around the course?

RICKIE FOWLER: A little bit. When the course is soft you can definitely be a little bit more aggressive in some areas. This place, if it firms up and gets fast, becomes a whole different golf course, especially around the greens because there is quite a bit of slope and you've got to play somewhat defensive at times. But I think most of the guys here have seen the golf course play in many different conditions. We play a lot of different conditions through the year, so as far as adjusting goes, we're used to it so no excuses on that side.

Q. This tournament will move next year to Wilmington, I'm assuming a course you've never seen before. How do you prepare personally for tracks you've never seen? Do you just take them on that week?

RICKIE FOWLER: I may come up earlier than normal. A lot of times if I'm coming into a tournament, I may not fly up until Monday night or Tuesday. If I'm coming from a tournament prior, you know, I may spend some more time trying to get maybe two rounds around the golf course versus, you know, coming in this week I tried to get a little time to relax after last week. Came out and practiced a little bit yesterday and then today was pro-am and basically my practice round to look at the golf course. When you go to a new venue, a lot of times one look, it helps, but if you can get two it's better. So if I'm able to squeeze maybe get in Tuesday to play at least nine that day and spend a little bit more time learning the golf course, when you're a bit more familiar, it definitely helps when you know a golf course.

Q. Rickie, Jim Furyk turns 46 next week, is back. He was No. 9, got injured. What does he have in his toolbox that allows him to compete with people half his age?

RICKIE FOWLER: First of all, it's great to have Jim back. It was I know a lot longer than he was hoping for and expected but he's always fun to play with and be around. He's a grinder. He definitely gets the most out of his game. He may not be long by any means, but he's going to fairway and green you to death and he's going to get the ball up and down and he's going to find a way to shoot the lowest score possible. I think that's always been a strong part of who he is as a golfer, probably one of the best wedge and short iron players that's been in the game. Yeah, like I said, he's a grinder. He finds a way to get it done.

Q. Is this a tough track for him to return to this year given the length?

RICKIE FOWLER: I don't think so just because I don't think that phases him in any way. I played with him in the U.S. Open, I think it was U.S. Open, if not maybe Barclays, we played at Bethpage and it's probably one of the longest courses we ever play and he got it around there just fine. Like I said, he finds a way. It doesn't matter if it's a long course, short course, narrow, wide open, whatever, he's going to find a way to get the ball in the fairway, on the green or around, get the ball up and down, he's going to make birdies. Just the kind of player he is, he figures it out.

Q. I was talking to Rory earlier and he was talking about the influence of his father in his life in terms of off the course and the way he handles himself. A lot of people love

the way you handle yourself on and off the course. Can you talk about how important being a role model is to you as well as people who influenced you in that area?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah. Well, my immediate family, parents, grandparents, golf coach growing up, they all had a huge impact on obviously how I was brought up, who I was as a person, how I conducted myself and how I handled myself on and off the golf course. To have the opportunity now to be a role model after looking up to professional athletes growing up as a kid, whether it was golf to action sports, I felt like I picked some people that I looked up to that were great role models.

And I never thought I would be in a position where I would be a role model, but as I kind of turned into something and once I turned pro and became something that kids were looking up to, it was pretty cool to be able to return the favor and to continue to do that.

Q. Are you concerned at all, just the NFL draft a couple weeks ago there was a player that a video came out on social networking that really hurt him on draft night, something that he did privately about three years ago. You're a guy that's on social networking a ton. I work with kids that social networking sometimes they forget about what it is. Tell me about how you safeguard yourself, especially with wanting to have access to fans yet knowing that people have cameras all the time.

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, you've got to be careful. You have to know that really once you're a public figure or athlete or celebrity or whatever it may be, there's I guess almost never a case where there may not be a set of eyes or camera on you. It could be your own camera, might be posting it somewhere, and yeah, you just have to be cautious. You have to know we're in position where we get to be role models and there's definitely the younger generation that look up to us. It's fun to be able to do it, it's fun to be able to show the life that we get to live on and off the golf course. Let them know that we're not just die-hard golfers, we're normal people. There's plenty of ways to have fun.

Q. I'm sure when you were coming down the stretch at THE PLAYERS last year it wasn't on your mind at all but the survey that created a lot of buzz during that week, did it help you in any way early in the week, any sort of motivation for you, or was it just all coincidence that that thing came out and you win?

RICKIE FOWLER: It was just coincidence. I can't sit here and actually give credit to a survey. That's pretty funny. I mean, I laughed at the survey. Same as what Poulter did. It was obviously nice to win and take care of the survey. Shows you how credible they are. Yeah, it was fun. And always, like I said, nice to -- I mean whether you call it proving something wrong or just taking care of business, it was good timing.

Q. Is there anything about the way you won where you surprised yourself or where you've taken on from there to help you, obviously you've won several times now since, maybe just a confidence boost for the way you got that accomplished?

RICKIE FOWLER: I mean, well, definitely just how I kept myself in the tournament on Saturday was the only reason I was able to go and do what I did on Sunday. There was a couple key holes that kept me going on Sunday, one being 12 and then was able to go on from there. And then obviously the swings down the stretch, the wedges on 17 and the drives on 18. It was nice to come off the year before having some really good finishes in majors and then to get over the hump and actually win.

DOUG MILNE: Rickie, we know you're busy. We appreciate taking the time. Best of luck this week.

RICKIE FOWLER: Thank you.