

**PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: BUBBA WATSON**  
**November 29, 2016**

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**JOHN BUSH:** We would like to welcome Bubba Watson into the interview room, our defending champion here at the Hero World Challenge making his seventh start at this event.

Bubba, welcome back to Albany. First of all, just take us back to last year's victory.

**BUBBA WATSON:** It was funny, I don't really remember much of it. It was just an amazing week for me. When I played the pro-am, just like I played golf yesterday, when I played the pro-am last year, I looked at Teddy. It was the first time I saw the course and I looked at Teddy and I said, I can't play here. I mean, it's too windy, the greens are really small, and then the wind died down a little bit. It still had a little bit of breath of wind when we played it last year. But I hit some great shots, I made some putts, I made the birdies on the holes that you've got to make birdies on. Somehow we lifted that heavy trophy. It's like 60 pounds for that trophy, I think.

You know, I played yesterday, same thing. The wind was up yesterday from a certain direction, makes the golf course very difficult, so I still can't believe that I got to 20-some under. I'm not even sure what I got to. Just an amazing run.

A beautiful place here. My family loves coming here. I think all the families love coming here with we call it the pirate ship, my son calls it the pirate ship, but the water park over there. The golf course is in great shape. So it's fun coming back here doing this event that they put on is an amazing thing.

**Q. Can you describe how much golf you've been playing in recent weeks?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** I've been testing equipment, so I've got all new equipment in the bag. They made me a couple putters, new wedges, new irons. I got a hybrid in the bag. So I've been testing it. I just love to play golf so I haven't been hitting many range balls but I've played a lot of golf. I play on Wednesdays and Fridays and Saturday with a group of guys at a couple different golf courses. Pensacola Country Club and at Stony Brook on Saturdays, so I just play golf.

My money man, Randall Wells, I always tell him all of our meetings are on the golf course because he's a golf nut, too. So we always have our meetings on the golf course. We find a way to get on the golf course.

**Q. Can you just quantify how important it was for you to take the spot back in this field last year?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Say this again.

**Q. Can you quantify now looking back how important it was for you to get the spot back in this field that you had given up before Jason pulled out and whatever else?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Yes, it worked out, but my time at home with my family and stuff would have been just as important. But no, for sure. It was funny, we got a message from Ellie Day this morning how much they miss not being here, and the same thing happened to them last year, which got me in the field. So no, it's pretty amazing when you look at it from that perspective. But if you look at it from the other perspective of being home with the kids and the family, it works out the same. But yeah, it was lucky for me that they accepted me to come back.

**Q. When you look at a course last year and you said you can't believe you could win here with the wind and then this year with the wind, how do you overcome that?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Well, we got lucky because the wind died down during the tournament. It was still blowing, and every golf course there's a certain direction the golf course is tougher with certain direction of wind. The wind switched and it died down a little bit.

I don't think I -- maybe I did, but I didn't mean to say I didn't think I could win, I was just saying the scores. I mean, I thought over par would be the scores because the greens are so small. I've heard about the golf course over the last few years before I got here and I heard about the design was very difficult because of the wind and the small greens. So when I saw it for the first time in the pro-am, I was like, man, I don't know if I'm going to be able to play very good around here. But then like I said, the wind, the putter got a little hotter and it worked out.

But yeah, just certain wind directions, the golf courses that are built a certain way with what they call the trade winds, the normal winds, whatever you want to call it. When I played the pro-am last year and I played yesterday with a couple guys, wind was very difficult and made the golf course even harder than you want it to be.

**Q. Bubba, I think you were 25 under last year, that number, which is obviously pretty remarkable.**

**BUBBA WATSON:** And Patrick Reed was what, 22?

**Q. Yeah, pretty close.**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Okay, good, I just want to throw that out there just to stick it to Patrick Reed. Not that he's watching this.

**Q. He probably is.**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Yeah, he probably is.

**Q. We were talking to Tiger in here a little while ago and he was referencing those numbers and talked about how it would be a tall order after a long layoff just to get up to those kind of numbers. I just kind of was curious what your expectation is of Tiger, and being somebody who's friends with him, what you expect to see out here and what you hope to see this week for his first time out?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** You know, you've got to look at it, like I was just saying, you've got to look at it from the wind perspective, the weather. It could be sunny all day long, but if it's windy from a tougher angle, I don't know how to word it the right way but a tougher angle where it makes holes difficult, the par 5s are harder to reach, maybe not even be able to reach them, then it makes the number -- that 20-something under par is not there. For everybody, it doesn't matter who you are.

So what he's saying and what he said, too, on the green, I remember he said, "I can't believe you got to 25 under." I think I was actually at 27, I think I made a double maybe on the last hole. And it was just because of wind direction and the wind died down for us for the week.

It was funny, I played with Rickie yesterday and he's like, Man, I hope the wind comes up, I love playing in the wind, and I'm like, No, I want it to stay down.

But what do I expect out of him. I think Hack said it the best on TV today on the Morning Drive is that he said we just want four days, just let us watch you for four days. I don't care what the score is, we want our champion back. We want our Tiger Woods back, we want Tiger back, we want him playing again. So let's get him -- what Hack said on the Morning Drive was let's get him playing again. Let's get four days under our belt. That means if he feels good after four days and he's not hurting on Monday morning, then he'll play in January. He'll play these events that we're used to seeing him and used to watching him dominate and get excited about.

So let's just go with four days. Make a few birdies here and there and get him pumped up. Let him chip in and do the fist pump. Let him do all that stuff that he wants to do. And it's Tiger Woods, he can still win. He could win this week and everybody's going to say he's even better than he is. But let's just get four days under our belt and then go from there. We're just excited. Us guys that are in the field, we're just excited to be here because what he does for the game of golf and what he does off the course. So we're just pulling for him and want him to be the best he can be.

**Q. What do you think you'd do if you didn't play a tournament for 15 months? What do you think the biggest challenges would be?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** I would probably be eating a lot of candy at my candy shop and hopefully selling a lot of cars at a car dealership. I'd be goofing around. I definitely wouldn't be -- I wouldn't be grinding every day probably.

**Q. How do you think you would perform after that long of a layoff?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** I'd be rusty, for sure. Getting down, you know, making the three-footers that you have to make. It's not about money, right? It's not about -- even the games that I play at the house and probably that he plays, you know, 20 bucks on a team event or whatever at the club event, it's different because it's pride. It's pride. It's your fellow competitors, your friends. You want to beat them. So those three-footers mean a little bit more than they do at your home course.

So lifting that trophy, having his name on his own trophy, things like that. And the same for me, that's what it would be. It would be trying to get your name on trophies and trying to make those three-footers and trying to make the chip shots. You know, under pressure, the pressure changes as we get to certain events. The pressure of majors are more, then Ryder Cup's more, Presidents Cup's more. So he hasn't had the pressure, the true pressure of competition and I wouldn't have it either if I was off for 15 months.

**Q. Bubba, being an assistant captain and being around the team, did that motivate you, can it inspire you to play better so you're on the team the next time this thing comes around?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Yes, for sure. You know what, it changed my attitude towards -- I don't know how to say it the right way because y'all are going to write it many different ways, but I see that I was not a good person for the captain. What I'm trying to say there is when the captain says, Who do you want to play with, when you give the captain one person, like Webb Simpson or J.B. Holmes, Presidents Cup, when you do things like that, it limits, it limits what you can do. You're only learning one person that week or those practice rounds. So you need to go out there and do more, give the captain more, the vice captains more.

Those are things that I learned seeing it from the other side, and those are things that I didn't think about because all you're thinking about is yourself. We're so used to thinking about ourselves and not the other stuff. So I learned a lot about me as a person and I learned about how I could do better when it comes -- if I do make another team event or if I'm vice captain again or if I was ever captain, I've learned a lot from seeing it from the other side.

And so just me personally, forget the golf side of it, what I've learned or saw or my motivation, it was more motivation of being better in certain situations where I could help the captain. If I just keep giving one person, now when he has to change teams because somebody's sick or somebody doesn't feel right or they hurt their arm or they're just tired, whatever it is, now they're limited by, well, Bubba's only practiced with this guy for three days, he hasn't seen this guy or hasn't even interacted with this guy on the course, that might not be the right fit. So I learned more for myself and not really the golf side of it.

**Q. You said you learned a lot about yourself as a person. Can you expand on that?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** I thought I just did. My passion, and I told the team this, what I told the team on Saturday, on Saturday night and what I told them throughout the week and individuals that I saw just me and that person that came up to me and talked to me. You know, as a Christian man, as a God-fearing man, as I said on the green after the event, there's two things. I really -- I love helping, I enjoyed helping, I love giving to charities and being a part of charities, and I love giving. It's kind of together but different.

So my thing I told them and what I said this morning on Morning Drive, it's the first time where it was different. I was helping the whole team and not just one person that I was partnered with. And the reason why -- I know now the reason why I'm no good in individual Sunday matches, Presidents Cup or Ryder Cup, is because I'm so worried about my partners, my other team, that I don't ever focus on what I should be focusing on. So I've let the team down that way.

So I've learned that about myself when it comes to golf, but also it was so much more enjoyable for me to help the vice captains, the captain, the wives and the players. It meant more to me to do that than it did to ever play on the team. It was an honor and a privilege.

I know people have said things about me and wrote things about me, but that team came to me and asked me to be a captain, a vice captain, and they wanted me in the locker room. They know what it means to me. And I told them on Saturday as well that my dad -- this is the last event that my dad ever saw me play and what it means for me to be there, part of the Ryder Cup, what it means to be in the locker room as a vice captain, as a helper. It meant more to me than any other golf event I've ever been a part of, and I said that on the greens afterwards. And those guys knew it, those guys know it and they know what I brought to the team and what I try to do for the team. And certain players have said thanks, Davis Love has said thanks. So for me personally it was better for me to do that and show who the true Bubba is and not the golfer, who cares about the golfer. So that was a short answer to all that and I didn't cry so it worked out good.

**Q. Bubba, you say you tinker around with equipment, you're going to have a lot of new stuff in the bag. Anything radically different for you? Have you carried hybrids in the bag before?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** I've never -- I played a hybrid back then it was the Nationwide days, now the Web.com. But you know, the golf courses are getting so much longer now, especially around here you need a ball that comes down a little bit softer. A 2-iron into these par 5s, the ball's just going to go over the green, the small greens. So you need something to go a little higher but I've been looking at that anyway for other courses. And then these are new irons, these are i-BLADES that I haven't been able to hit yet so I tried to tweak them. There's no offseason so I had to try and do it the last few weeks and I wanted to put some pressure on them for this week to see how they work out for this week getting ready for next year. I know the year's already started but I always count January as next year.

**Q. Quick ones, how did you figure out that you were, for lack of a better way to put it,**

**a pain in the butt to a captain or for a captain, and secondly -- well, just go on with that first.**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Well, like I said, like I said earlier, it was because of the fact that I didn't give him enough. I didn't do my own work, my own practice with other people, learning a ball. When you're playing a different ball than what you're used to playing for your whole career, it changes everything. It changes your mindset, you might not trust it, it doesn't feel the same, all these things.

So when you're sitting next to the captain and the other vice captains, you're like, you're right, they haven't played that ball, could they play together, could they not? So now I'm looking at myself saying, you know what, I haven't done enough. Everybody else did their work, I'm saying for me personally, I haven't done enough when I was on these teams to make sure. Luckily for me, Webb Simpson helped us get a lot of points, J.B. Holmes helped me get a lot of points so I had great partners. But there's going to be a time and a place where things don't work out. Or a guy, if I keep Webb or J.B. Holmes and they don't get to practice with other people and I hurt myself or I don't feel good, get food poisoning, whatever it is and they need to sit me, then they haven't been able to practice with their guys, so I've let the team down in that way, I feel. Captains might say opposite, but I'm just saying from my own personal experience, I know I could do more that way.

**Q. Secondly, do you think you would make a good captain and why or why not?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Now, would I make a good captain? I have a thought on this. Ryder Cup is a Hall of Fame pick. If you make the Hall of Fame off your record, that's a Hall of Fame, and then the Ryder Cup captain used to be before this, whatever they're calling it now to pick your Ryder Cup captain, that was an honor. So I've always looked at Ryder Cup captain and Hall of Fame as the same. You might not make the Hall of Fame, but because of who you are and what you've done for the game of golf, we're going to pick you as Ryder Cup captain so it's another form of Hall of Fame. I've always thought of that. So those have been on my bucket list, I want to make those.

Now, will I be a good captain if they let me? Who knows, but I know my passions as a person, I know my passions in the locker room and, you know, maybe it would be better for you to ask the guys that I was with. But everybody's happy when you win, so they're gonna say Bubba was great.

So do I think I could do well at it? Yes. Would I want to do it? Yes, in a heartbeat. I would do it next year, the year after, I'd do it every year. But it was just a dream. And I told them even in the team room, I said I'd be vice captain for life. If you let me just sign up now as vice caption for life, I'll do it, I'm in, because I just had so much fun doing it and enjoyed it so much.

**Q. Bubba, Tiger was in here talking about the last 15 months and how many players have come forward and to his surprise made him feel as if they really care about him**

**and want him back out here. When you talk about the texting strings, I know you were joking --**

**BUBBA WATSON:** No, I was serious. He cut me out one time and then I snuck back in there.

**Q. You changed your phone.**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Right.

**Q. Do you sense that for all that Tiger has to teach younger guys, that he's maybe getting more out of these interactions than even anyone else?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Well, you know, I think as we grow, we grow as people, we grow as family. Now seeing his kids, I think Tiger has softened as we've all seen it, right? And the way he's interacted in the team room, what he said, how he put his arm around certain people and trying to inspire them. These were great champions that were all on the team and the way he's inspiring them. His own foundation is probably changing him, making him realize that there's more than just golf or being the greatest golfer of all time. That's going to help him in golf and it's going to help him in life so he's meant so much to all of us. I mean, '97 when he won the Masters, I was graduating high school and watching this and I said oh, my gosh, I want to be like that guy.

So he's inspired all of us, he's touched all of us in different ways. No matter how old or how young you are, he's pressed forward.

Again, like I'm going to go back to the charity side of it, his foundation and what he's doing, that means more to me and I've told him straight up to his face, that means more to me than his golf. For an athlete to do the right things, and go the right path and give back and make this game grow. But he's not even doing it on the golf side, he's doing it on the education side and giving people opportunities. With Hero on board now coming from somewhere else besides the U.S. seeing his vision and wanting to be part of his vision is what I'm more impressed with than this his golf.

I think he's learning that now that we all miss him. We miss the interaction with him, we miss the interaction from seeing him practice, the interaction to just learning from him and listening from the charity side of it and from the golf side of it. So I think he sees how much he truly is missed. And again, like I said, we don't care what he shoots. Y'all might but we don't. We just want him out here being healthy because we can learn from him on and off the course like I said.

**Q. Bubba, we had Tiger this morning and he was reminding us that when he came into the game at 296, he was ranked second in driving distance. All these years later, nearly 50-odd guys have passed that mark. How much do you think, Bubba, as a long driver yourself is technology and how much of that is player contribution in terms of**

**fitness and all of that?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Well, if you go back and look at football, our football, not soccer as we call it but football, look at the players back in the '70s and '80s to players now. Linemen, defensive players, they're bigger, they're bigger, stronger, faster. And when you look at Tiger, like I said, in '97 when you see him calling it training, training for golf, Tiger has pushed us to a new level. Bigger, more athletic players are coming along.

Look at Dustin Johnson, he could play any sport he wants. He's just a freak athlete, but he chose golf because of his power. He can hit it farther than everybody. Look at J.B. Holmes, his strength. So I think Tiger has brought more athletic players to the game of golf as well as just humans, we're getting bigger as well as you can see on the football field. But we know how to train and prepare, get bigger, stronger, faster even in the game of golf, which sounds weird, we're all trying to do that so we can keep up with the demand of these yardages that people keep building.

**Q. If you think of distance into the future, what do you think might be the limit off the tee?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Well, the ball can only go so far and then technology takes over. I can only hit a ball so far and then at some point, my old age is going to kick in and the ball's going to start going shorter but that's just life.

But the younger guys, the younger guys, like a Spieth, I think he's 22, 23, however old he is. Brooks Koepka's 26, I think. So you look at these guys, they're younger, learning how to train and prepare for golf, get their swings faster and then their bodies are catching up getting in the early 20s. So the ball's just going farther. But at some point the young 20 is going to be 40 and he's not going to hit the ball as far.

**Q. Are you saying if you would have presented yourself to Davis as a guy who could mix and match with anybody, would you have increased your chances of being picked?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** No, no. I'm saying when we're on the site, like when we're on the team. They don't care who you're going to be paired with when you're not on the team. He didn't contact me two weeks before and say, Bubba, who do you want to play with? Or months before he didn't say, Bubba, who do you want to play with?

But I'm saying once that pick happens or the last -- Ryan Moore was picked on Monday, Sunday night, whatever, and so Monday to Sunday, I guess Monday to Saturday because Sunday you're by yourself, but on those days I need to talk more and prepare better playing with you, with the next guy and the next guy, trying to see how we're mixing.

So that's the -- that's what I'm saying. The two weeks before he's not going to -- Bubba, I might not pick you so who do you want to play with? You know what I'm saying, that doesn't

happen until you're finally on or you make the team on points obviously. Now if I was guaranteed the team on points then he might ask me, but since I was falling down quickly, it didn't work out.

**Q. Would you like the idea of a pick going until the TOUR Championship? They're moving towards going away from that for the next one. Would you be in favor of that?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** I think the system works either way. This year it works perfectly because Ryan Moore was playing so good. I didn't know, I mean, I don't check the leaderboards. I was way down on the leaderboards. So I didn't see that Ryan Moore -- I think Ryan Moore finished, what, top-10 in three of the four, something like that? So he was playing so good, how would you not pick him.

You know, me and Ryan are friends from way back and it was awesome being his vice captain and making sandwiches for him. So it was fun getting to see him. And not many people know Ryan because he's very quiet. He's a great guy when you know him but he's very quiet. It worked out. I made Teddy come up there. Teddy wanted to come up there but I made Teddy come up there so Teddy got to ride around and drive his family around to get inside the ropes.

And Ryan, again, I was the closest person to Ryan on the team and so Ryan, I could really bond with him and get him to meet the other guys and hang out with the other guys. And his wife is very quiet as well, so it worked out.

It's funny, Jim Furyk, we talked about this, too. Jim Furyk got hurt last year at the Presidents Cup and who was his replacement was J.B. Holmes. J.B. Holmes was my partner, but who did Furyk go with all week, pod system, whatever you want to call it, the group of guys he was babysitting. It was J.B. Holmes that took his spot. Took his spot because of injury, not because he didn't make the team. Took his spot because of injury. But he was right there, the guy who took his spot, he was cheering him on all the way and that's what I was doing, not because I had to but because I wanted to. I didn't have to be a vice captain, but it worked out. I bridged the gap between Ryan and his quietness to the other guys, which was a dream come true, like I said.

**Q. You mentioned earlier how you guys have all kind of rallied around Tiger and kept him pumped up and motivated, but he admitted that he also had his doubts, his share of doubts of whether he'd be able to come back, if at all. So how difficult and how challenging was it? Can you give an insight in dealing with those doubts and trying to keep him motivated enough?**

**BUBBA WATSON:** Well, you've got to look at the first part. We all have doubts. Even when we're healthy, we have doubts. This whole game is about confidence. It's all about your mind. The physical part's only 10 percent. Your mind is what they say is 90 percent.

It comes back. I've never had an injury like this. I've never had -- I've had a paper cut a couple times where I've withdrawn, but I've never had a real injury. So for him to get the confidence that he's got to find that confidence again that he trusts his golf swing, he trusts his chipping, his putting under pressure, and he's doing it with an injury. Now he's got to trust his back as well, what the doctors have done, his training, all of this. So it's a different mindset than I've ever had to deal with because it's always been just trusting my own golf swing and my putting stroke. So it's very difficult and I could see where he would have some down moments, a day that his body doesn't react the way he wants it to. So us encouraging him.

Patrick Reed and him have really buddied up and so it was cool to see the grief that Patrick was giving him in this group text that we had going. If I could share it with you, y'all would cry how funny this was, and listening and seeing some of these comments that we had going for a few weeks.

But yeah, it's amazing to see the outpouring of support from our side. These guys that are here this week, 17 of us and then Tiger, we're all here because of Tiger and what he's done off the course but we're here to support him as well. We want him back out there. Like he said, it's noise. We don't listen to what people are saying about us negatively or positively, it's really about your own self and what you believe in yourself. And so the drive that he has to get back just to prove to himself he can do it. It's like any athlete that gets hurt and wants to prove they can do it again for themselves. Not for anybody else, just for himself.

Tiger doesn't need to play again, I think he's good. I think his money's good, he's okay. So I feel like it's just for him. He's playing golf now just for himself and just showing his own pride that he can do it again and it doesn't matter what other people think. So our support is just his own -- his own kind, his own athletes that he's playing against trying to beat and beat for many years showing him love and support and that we're right here behind him, no matter what. We'll give him the shirt off our backs if we need to.