

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: HENRIK STENSON
November 30, 2016



JOHN BUSH: We'd like to welcome Henrik Stenson into the interview room. He's making his fourth career start here at the Hero World Challenge, including a second-place finish in 2014. Henrik, welcome back to the Hero --

HENRIK STENSON: Thank you. What about the other ones?

JOHN BUSH: I just have that one. They've all been good, though.

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, I can't quite remember. I played at Sherwood a couple times back in the day, but I can't quite recall. I think I was fourth once at least.

JOHN BUSH: I think all top-5 finishes.

HENRIK STENSON: All right. Let's continue that trend then hopefully.

JOHN BUSH: Talk a little bit about the golf course and being back here at Albany.

HENRIK STENSON: It's a wee breeze as they say in Scotland. It's pretty windy here and I expect us to have some wind in the next couple of days. Maybe a bit less here on Thursday, Friday, but then I think on the weekend it might be, that fan might be on again. That obviously is one of the big factors around here, makes some of the downwind holes play really short and some of the other ones play really long. I think I hit two -- two times I hit 4-wood into par 4s into the wind today and I hit a driver and 9-iron on a par 5, so that kind of shows how short some holes can play downwind and how long a par 4 can play into the wind. I don't recall the last time I hit two woods into par 4s. So it's definitely blowing a bit, and funny enough that affected the shots on my amateur partners a couple of times out there and it was a pretty tricky day.

JOHN BUSH: Before questions, you just capped off obviously an excellent season in Europe. Just comment a little bit on how that felt.

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, yeah, managed to wrap up the best year in my career so far. It was, yeah, the win at The Open being the highlight, of course, as you all know. It was a strong year. I had a lot of strong finishes on the European Tour. I won in Germany a couple of weeks prior to The Open, and then I can't remember whether it's close to 10 top-10s I think and quite a lot in the higher numbers of the top-10 as well. So it's been a solid year. Olympics was a highlight, too, and very nice to round it off with once again winning the Race to Dubai. So yeah, it's been a great year and kind of ready to go into holiday mode, but we'll try to make a few putts and a few birdies here before we start thinking about Christmas presents.

Q. Obviously Tiger coming back this week is a big narrative here. Can you talk a little bit about what your anticipation is as a player for him coming back and maybe the things you might look for when you're watching him?

HENRIK STENSON: Well, the main thing is that his back is in good shape and he's healthy. That's always the first part, and that seems to be pretty good from what I heard, what he mentioned to me at the Ryder Cup. Seems to be in pretty good shape there.

I think golf game, he's been out of competitiveness for quite some time so that might be a little while before you find your bearings again. But, as you know, he's done some remarkable things throughout his career and if there's someone that can jump right back up and play some great golf again, that would be him. He's got all the experience, and it might take a bit of time and it might go quickly, you never know.

Q. Congratulations, first of all, on a great year.

HENRIK STENSON: Thank you.

Q. What's coming up next year, can you give us some ideas where you're going to be?

HENRIK STENSON: I was asked in Dubai, I said "copy-paste." That would be nice.

Q. I can't guarantee that, sorry.

HENRIK STENSON: No, neither can I, unfortunately. In terms of schedule you mean? My schedule will look pretty much the same as it has done the last three, four, five years I would say. I don't see any major changes. Announced that we're going to play in the Zurich Classic together with Justin in late April. Other than that, I expect the spring to be very similar. I'll play some in the Middle East early on and that's kind of mid towards end of January, early February. Then I jump on again on the Florida swing. I think Tampa would most likely be my first one on the U.S. mainland. We've got the World Golf Championship in Mexico the week before, so up until Augusta I'll pretty much play the same schedule as I've done this year and the previous ones.

Q. (No microphone.)

HENRIK STENSON: No, I never really played west coast and that's not going to change this time around. I like my tournaments in the Middle East and the weather is a little bit more secure there, I think.

Q. Henrik, you had a great year, as you just said. Dustin had a great year, Emiliano, many others have had their best year. Can we say that all of you are getting ready for Tiger to come back and is he going to face tougher competition than he would when he was still at his peak?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, I think the game has changed, changes more every year. Competition gets harder. There's more and more challenges at the majors and all the big tournaments. There's more players that can win on a weekly basis. So I think it would be even harder this time to be as dominant as Tiger was in the early 2000s because every year the game progresses and more and more players coming out.

The younger players that come on the scene these days are better than we were 15, 20 years ago. They're more prepared. We've got a lot of different ways at being better at a younger age. The coaches are better. You've got probably a more holistic view on your golf game and the whole thing earlier than maybe we had, and the physical side and eating. You know, whatever it might be.

So I think it would be hard where golf is at right now to be as dominant as Tiger was even if Tiger were now to play as good as he did in 2000, it would be hard to be as dominant in today's game.

Q. Henrik, I have sort of a tongue-in-cheek question to start with. Did the Roses roll out the red carpet for you last night?

HENRIK STENSON: Roll out the red carpet?

Q. Did they roll out the read carpet for you?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, we had a lovely time and got to spend some time with some of my other colleagues and friends as well so it was a good enjoyable evening. I think that kind of sums this week up a little bit as well. It's a limited field, we all know each other well and we can have some nice social times also. That practice ground might not be worn out after play, either.

Q. Now that you're into your last tournament of the season, how much confidence would it give you now going to Augusta and U.S. Open as a reigning major winner?

HENRIK STENSON: I think it was a career dream and a boyhood dream that came true at The Open, winning a major, and it still brings a smile to my face calling myself a major champion. It's very nice to have had that one, and of course I'm looking ahead for next year and trying to come well prepared.

Augusta is the one where I've done my worst results in any of the majors over time, so we'll see if we can figure something out there. I'm open to suggestions. I'll give you my email later, you can all send me what I should do differently because I still haven't figured it out in 11 tries. But yeah, your confidence is definitely a little bit higher when you've got one of those under your belt.

Q. I don't know how much time you spent in Sweden, but what was the reaction in

Sweden to winning The Open compared with your silver medal from the Olympics?

HENRIK STENSON: I haven't been back since. I was a couple days in Sweden after winning The Open, but after the Olympics I haven't been back and I will not really be back in Sweden until probably end of May, early June next year. By then they've probably forgotten it all, so we'll see.

It's two totally different things. Everyone within the world of golf knows how big it is to win The Open and win a major championship. Everyone in the sporting world knows what an Olympic gold or an Olympic medal is. So it's two different things and two different audiences that kind of pick up on the difference.

Me personally, I said that before going to the Olympics I was looking forward to it, but I would always hold a major championship higher than winning the gold or winning the Olympics just as my own preference being very involved in my sport. But if you go anywhere in the world and you say you've got an Olympic gold medal, people would know what that means and what you achieved.

So it was a much, much greater view in figures because it was basically I think nine times more people watching Justin and myself battle it out for the gold medal compared to me winning The Open at Troon. So the way it's broadcast and different -- I think it was very good for golf, too, to be there, to be at the Olympics. And we put on a good show and I had lots of messages from people who never watched golf before and all of a sudden want to take up the game or they got very intrigued watching us play and having a close competition. It was a lot of good things I think we achieved by being in Rio.

Q. Henrik, about the Masters, could it be as simple as you wanted it so badly, and having won a major, can that make it -- take any of that pressure off once you get there?

HENRIK STENSON: I think with Augusta, we all play a different game. We've all got strength and weaknesses and certain courses are going to play in our favor or against that. I think possibly at Augusta some of the things that I don't necessarily do well or the way I play my game doesn't really favor me on that golf course at times. I think that could be one reason of it. It certainly isn't experience. By now I've played that course enough and I feel very comfortable playing there, but still I've got to try and make a few changes and see if we can get it right.

Q. Come to think of it, how many players can actually say that they're having their best year at 40? It's like somebody winning a FIFA World Beta (inaudible) at 30. What I mean to ask is, what did it take for you to be at this level at this stage and does it hold hope to somebody like Tiger?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, I think experience in this game plays a big part. Staying fairly in good shape, staying fit, I think you can get a few more years on the back end of your career.

But there's no question about that I'm on the second half of my career, I know that. I'm looking for these next four, five years in all the big events and that's kind of the way I look at it in terms of time frame. But obviously it's very nice to have your best year at the age of 40. I had my second best year, that was in 2013, and I wasn't sure at that point that I was ever going to be able to beat that, but I somehow managed to do that this year. Yeah, I'm sure guys in similar age bracket would definitely see that it's possible to play your best and it's nice to keep some of the youngsters at bay.

Q. A little bit along those lines, one of Tiger's biggest challenges will be rebuilding confidence that he's lost. You got to a point in your career where you had to totally rebuild your confidence. What was that journey like and the stepping stones there and how patient did you have to be?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, you have to be patient. And I think in terms of your game, it's a process. You've got to look at your game, you've got to accept where you're at because it doesn't matter if you won five tournaments, 10 tournaments or 100 tournaments before, you're only as good as you are for the time being. Of course you can use some of your previous experiences and that would still be a confidence or help knowing what you achieved in your past because your ability's not going to go away just because you're in a slump or you're not playing as well. If you're a winner of that caliber, that's still in there and that's never going to go away. What goes away is your form and your ability to bring that out.

So you've got to work hard on that over time and I think really committing yourself to the long-term processes, that's what gets you back. It's very easy if you're out of shape with your game, that you're out there on the range on a Tuesday, Wednesday, you want to find something that's going to work on Thursday and it very rarely does. It's more having that patience over time and working on those different areas of your game and the processes within there to every day get a little bit closer to where you want to be and eventually the game will get back and the results will come as a consequence.

So it is all grind, but it can certainly be done. I've gone through some ups and downs over time, probably bigger than most, and if I didn't have that patience and drive to get back, I wouldn't be sitting here talking about winning The Open Championship, I know that much.

Q. Just curious, do you recall the first interaction you had with Tiger, first time you met him, played with him, something like that? Dustin would have said no by now.

HENRIK STENSON: I think it might have been, could have been American Express in San Francisco in '05. I know I played with Phil there a couple of times, but I think I played with Tiger as well because I think I recall telling my caddie at the time, like there's no point trying to get the crowds to stand, I'll just try and focus and hit my shot because as soon as he either made a putt or hit his tee shot, approach, everyone was just walking. I think that's a memory I had from there that I told my caddie, just leave it, you can't stop a herd moving forward at that pace. It was probably '05.

Q. Were you intimidated to play with him?

HENRIK STENSON: No, I don't think I've ever been that. I think I've been a player that's been rising to the occasions of playing with the best player and the best players in the world. That's always triggered me to try and get the best out of my game and for me to focus harder and give it my best to try and beat them. No, I don't think, he hasn't quite succeeded in that part.

Q. As you've got closer to 40 in the last two, three years, have you changed anything about your game? Have you and your coach worked on any aspects of your swing to make it where it got to this year?

HENRIK STENSON: No, that's always been long-term process and long-term work. Golf is a game where you're never going to reach that goal where you're finished. You can always be better at all the different areas of the game and I think that's, for me it's two different parts. One is the competitive part. I like to compete, I like to beat the other guys out there and try and bring my best game, but it's also working on my game and trying to improve as a player. As long as you can keep that drive and keep on doing that, you're always going to move forward.

As I said earlier, the competition gets harder and harder every year. The day that you stop and you're satisfied with where you're at, the other guys are going to run past you. But we haven't really done anything different. We're still running around in the same circles and trying to become better.

What was the second part of the question? I've lost myself here. I started going in a circle.

Q. Any specific swing changes?

HENRIK STENSON: No, no, not really. I probably hit it two yards shorter than I used to three years ago, but otherwise it's sort of the same.

Q. Since you haven't seen Tiger for a very long time, was he this kind of backslapping golfer that he is right now apparently back in 2005 with fellow golfers, especially international golfers?

HENRIK STENSON: Sorry, I didn't get that.

Q. If he was on backslapping terms with fellow golfers as he is apparently now back in 2005, and specifically from international golfers, from a non-American golfer's point of view?

HENRIK STENSON: I think when he was at his peak of his career and he was very focused. I think he was always very much into his own bubble. He did his practice, he didn't

spend much time at the venues. If I remember correctly, he would go elsewhere to practice because the pressure on him from everything around the tournaments and all the fans and everything. My memory was that he spent very little time at the events, did his work elsewhere and focused on his things.

I'll tell you he's more social now than he was back then, but there's certainly that would be a big reason for that as well, that if you stop and talk to everyone, if you're signing everything, it's just impossible to do that. You can't keep that many people happy in terms of fans and everything. You're trying as a player, but you can sign a thousand autographs and if you miss two, there's always going to be someone unhappy somewhere. Yeah, potentially he's opened up a little bit more than he used to, yeah.

JOHN BUSH: Henrik Stenson, thank you.