

**Pre-Tournament Interview: HAROLD VARNER III**  
**August 1, 2017**

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**MICHAEL BALIKER:** It's our pleasure to welcome Harold Varner to the interview room here at the Bridgestone Invitational.

Harold, obviously a big week, first World Golf Championships event taking place in a town that you're very familiar with, getting a lot of good support this week. Just talk about the excitement.

**HAROLD VARNER III:** Obviously super excited. I'm starting to play a little bit better. I think it's just a great opportunity for me to get the season back going in the right direction, and what better place than where I was born?

It was pretty cool, after I got done practicing, me and one of my best friends and my caddie went to my grandmother's house and then we went to the house that I was, I guess not born in but where I grew up. Pretty weird to see, you know, that and where I live now. It puts things in perspective. I think it's real easy to forget where you come from, and understand that I just bought a boat for what some of these houses are. So it's good, it's humbling and I'm excited to get the week going.

**Q. Any idea how many family members you're going to have here on Thursday? I would think it would be outrageous.**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** I think it will be quite a few. I don't know the actual number but I'm excited to see them. I won't really be paying attention to them out there, but it will be a cool experience, for sure.

**Q. Were you by any chance born in the same hospital as Tiger Woods and Steph Curry?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** I didn't know Tiger was there.

**Q. LeBron, I'm sorry.**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** I was. I drove right by there yesterday, didn't recognize the whole deal.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** I was, yes, sir. Crazy how they keep building on that place. Every time I go back, it gets bigger. I'm like, I don't remember this. It was pretty cool. It was still light so I could like drive around and see. Man, I didn't realize how much it changed or how long I had been away really.

**Q. Harold, have you played this course a few times? I'm sure you have.**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** Never, no. I played Good Park, that's where I played where I would come back most of the time. I played in the Good Park Junior and I played this place called Copley Greens, which I went by last night and it's demolished, so it's kind of crazy.

**Q. The 18th hole here, I don't know how much you've studied it, but in your head have you made up a tactical plan on how you're going to play it?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** No, I've never seen it. The only shot I've ever seen, and I really didn't see it, was Tiger hitting it in the dark, so I don't know if that really counts. I'm sure I'll have a good game plan. I'll bet you have to hit the fairway and you have to hit the green to play it the best, and those are two things I need to do well.

**Q. How do you put all the family aside and all that excitement and focus on 18 holes on Thursday?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** I think it's pretty easy. I had a real bad experience with it in the Wells Fargo the first year I played on a sponsor's invite. I didn't do a good job of just -- the good thing about family, they're still going to be family whether you ignore them or if you talk to them. So knowing that, you just go do your job. I don't get to go to their job and get in their business or get in their way, so I think it's pretty easy because I also get to go see them afterwards. Sometimes when it's friends that you haven't seen in like four, five years like at the Wells Fargo, you're like, well, I see you but I won't see you after this.

Like family, you're going to see them. Like my mom and dad, I'm going to see them in Gastonia, I can't wait. I'm going to be mowing the grass next Monday. It's fine. It is what it is. I have a job to take care of, I have a great opportunity and I'm just going to do my best not to just blow it away.

**Q. Not many professional athletes get an opportunity to play in their hometown. You touched on it, but just the specialness, of how special this is?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** It wasn't that special when I was thinking about it, talking about it. Yeah, it would be cool. But when I drove next to the two houses last night and I went to both my grandparents' house, it was like, it was kind of weird, almost got goosebumps driving on the road because one of the houses is on this like brick road and I just remember the noise it makes when a car goes down it. The most annoying noise but you knew you were home.

**Q. I assume your grandparents don't live there anymore?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** No, no, my aunt lives in both of them actually, or on both sides. My mom's sister lives in the house and then my dad's sister lives in their house, I guess. Yeah, that would be right. Kind of weird.

**Q. Which aunt was the one that worked at Firestone? Does she live in one of those?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** Yes, Janet. She still lives there. I saw her yesterday. She'll be out here. It's a little different obviously going back to those houses, seeing them and not seeing my grandparents there and not having the garden. It's really weird. Goes to show how much I don't pay attention, to be honest.

**Q. How long has it been since Janet worked here?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** Don't know the year but it had to be at least 10 years, I think. It's been a while. I remember when she would work here and I would be like, what's Firestone? Like who cares? I hate to be like that, but that's how little golf meant to me when I used to come up here, and now I'm like sitting in front of you.

**Q. Despite Tiger's enormous success, of course you're the only African-American player on the PGA Tour. I've seen stories where you think it's mainly economic, the cost of the game. Could you talk about that a little bit?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** Sure. I think it's just so expensive. Right now I can afford to go play these nice golf courses, but if I'm a parent and I have the opportunity for my kid to go to the Y for 40 bucks or get two times at the golf course for 40 bucks, I'm pretty sure you couldn't do that, I would choose going to the Y. I would think that's just common sense. It's just not accessible. It's just hard to get out there. And all the golf courses that need that kind of help and support, they're just getting demolished.

**Q. Would you talk about recreating's Tiger's shot at the Canadian?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** Yeah, I will. I hit a 5-iron.

**Q. Was he away or would you have been away?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** Oh, no, we went to the exact spot.

**Q. I know in the bunker, but I mean on the green? I couldn't see the ball.**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** Oh, no, he was closer. Mine was just left, but I surprised myself, to be honest. I loved the comments on there because I just did it so I could get a fidget spinner, and people think I'm doing this just to be like Tiger and it's just really funny. But yeah, I surprised myself because it's not an easy shot. I hit the green, I was like, yeah, wassup?

**Q. I'm Uncle Buck from NBC Sports Radio in Phoenix. Glad to be here, glad to talk to you. Golf Tech Data had a study that came out that came out 18- to 30-year-olds are falling off the game of golf by a considerable amount. I know Tiger, when he came**

**out, there was a big resurgence to youth. Now that, especially in the African-American population, he's fallen off, he's moved on as far as maybe right now, does that mantel fall to you now? Do you feel like you need to be responsible in any way, shape or form in trying to raise the game, period?**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** Raise the game, yes, I do believe that. I think we have, we're all put on this earth to do something and it's like we have a special place, I have a special place with -- not kids, but just getting people into golf. I'm really excited, it's like something I'm passionate about because I was fortunate enough to be here because of that.

So yeah, I think for golf to grow, I think it falls on the shoulders of the people that are in that range you just talked about, whether they're parents, professional golfers or just play golf for fun. I'm going to do everything in my power to make that better. Obviously some things need to happen, I need to do it the right way, but I think it can be done. It's not an impossible thing. I think that yeah, I don't carry it as a torch, like I need to do this. I do it because that's what I want to do. I love it. I love seeing kids' faces when -- I remember when I got dropped off at the golf course, I didn't need no core values, I didn't need anything. I had these old men that told me how to conduct myself and those are like priceless things that I haven't forgotten.

**Q. I'm not an ambassador for this but it's called Youth on Golf Courses. I interviewed a gentleman the other day and they have a program set up, five dollars to get the kid on the course and they supplement the golf course. I'm just throwing it out there, they could probably use a great ambassador.**

**HAROLD VARNER III:** For sure. There's great programs. I think there's awesome stuff. Everyone has their own way that I think is a solution, but I feel like the model of when I was growing up was the best model to get people to play because it's easy to get someone on a driving range. I think that's -- I mean, I take my girlfriend to the driving range. Hey, here's some balls, hit it. There's no sense of etiquette, there's no level of understanding how to conduct yourself. When you learn how to conduct yourself on the golf course, I think it goes so far in how to conduct yourself in life. There's a certain way to handle yourself. I don't do a great job of it all the time, but there's things that I learned when I was a kid that help me out right now.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** Harold, we appreciate the time and best of luck this week.

**HAROLD VARNER III:** Awesome, thank you.