

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
January 24, 2018

TIGER WOODS

DOUG MILNE: We'll go ahead and get started, like to welcome Tiger Woods, seven-time winner of the Farmers Insurance Open. Tiger, thanks for joining us for a few minutes. I guess the obvious question is how you're feeling as you're making your way back to a couple of layouts that are obviously near and dear to your heart.

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I feel great coming back here to southern California. This is a golf course and a tournament that I've had some pretty good results in and really looking forward to it. I played nine holes yesterday on the South and then 18 today on the North. Haven't seen it like this in a while where it's been this firm, this fast. The greens are definitely very springy and it's going to be a challenge this week. It's going to be a little bit harder to make birdies than it has been in the past and overall it will be a great challenge.

Q. Tiger Woods, you were in a similar situation last year, played well in the Bahamas, came here and with three rounds you were done for the year. Physically you say you're much better than you were last year. Can you give us an idea of how you know it's that much better than it was last year?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I have no more pain in my back, my back is fused. That wasn't the case last year. I was trying to manage the disk and the vertebrae, but it's all finished now. Now it's fused and quality of life is infinitely better than it was last year at this point.

Q. Tiger, obviously a lot of success here, but given your lack of tournament golf in the last couple years and how this place seems to have gotten tougher in the last few years --

TIGER WOODS: Um-hmm.

Q. -- with the rough and the greens and everything, is this an ideal place to return or is this a hard place for you to return to full official PGA TOUR golf?

TIGER WOODS: Will, I think that it's -- I can look at it in different scenarios. If I would have come back and played last week, the conditions are easier but you have to shoot 6-under par a day, and here it's difficult conditions and we're going to be making a lot of pars. Either scenario would have been difficult. I haven't played and I've got to start somewhere and try and get my game and my feels back. I just really haven't played tournament golf in, well, basically since Wyndham in 2015. It's been a long time and so I just want some starts, I want to start feeling what it feels like to be out here and hit shots, grind out scores and that's something that I've been looking forward to. It's been a full year that I've played on the Tour so I'm really looking forward to it.

Q. Tiger, you talked about having so many memories on this golf course. What immediately comes to mind when you remember the 2008 U.S. Open?

TIGER WOODS: How much it hurt. Yeah, no ACL and broken leg, it didn't feel very good. I do remember starting off every day either with a double bogey or bogey on the first hole so I think I was 7-over par in just my first hole I played in that day. But I remember I made everything that week, I really putted well. I hit it okay, but if it wasn't for my putting I wouldn't have won that Open.

Q. Tiger, compared to last year, how has your preparation coming into this event been different, how much more have you been able to practice? And then also, before the round is your warmup, your preparation to get your body ready, is it different this year than it was last year because of the surgery?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, my prep for this event, I was just playing golf at home, which has been fun. It's fun to play fun golf at home. I've missed going out there with my buddies and just having some fun playing golf. Before I had to manage how many holes I played, how many swings I made. It was all about managing my body. Now it's just, hey, want to go play 18, want to go play 36? Sure. That to me is fun. I miss those days, it's been a long time. And then as far as -- what was the second part of your question?

Q. Pre-round.

TIGER WOODS: It's the same warmup like I had been doing in the past. I go in the gym, I'll work out in the morning and come out here and go through the same warmup routine that I've used for the better part of 30 years.

Q. Tiger, obviously over the years that we've all covered you, your expectations going into every tournament is to win, you've articulated that for years to us. Given the amount of time you've had off and the difficulty of this track obviously starting, do you have to temper your own expectations, and what is success for you this week, how would you define that?

TIGER WOODS: I think yeah, my expectations have tempered a little bit because I haven't played. When I came back off my ACL injury in '08 and started playing in '09, it was nine months but I hadn't played a full schedule prior to that. Here, I haven't played a full schedule since 2015. It's been a long time. To be honest with you, I just want to start playing on the Tour and getting into a rhythm of playing a schedule again. I haven't done that in such a long time, so I don't know what to expect. Just go out there and just play, I'm going to grind it, give it everything I possibly have if I put the ball in the right position and make some putts and try to work my way up the board.

As far as understanding what it takes to win out here, I don't know what the number's going to be. I'm usually pretty good at calling the number before the tournament starts, but I

haven't seen a lot of these young guys. I met Jon yesterday for the first time and it's been a lot of names that I haven't seen, I haven't played with, I haven't seen their games and we'll see.

Q. Is there a tangible goal in terms of what makes this week a success, whether it's getting 72 holes in, whether it's being top-20, top-10?

TIGER WOODS: I'm just trying to build towards April. That's what I told you guys last year in the Bahamas, I'm looking forward to playing a full schedule and getting ready for the Masters and I haven't done that in a very long time. That's usually been my schedule and my outlook. From '96 on it's been that way to try to get ready for Augusta and there's no reason to change that.

Q. Given the previous disappointments, did this surgery and this comeback feel like make or break? And just further to that, Rory was saying that he's entering the second phase of his career which he finds even more exciting than the first. Do you have similar sentiments?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I think that, yeah, make or break? I just wanted to not feel as bad as I had felt for such a long time. We started with just -- I just want to have a lifestyle in which I can actually participate in with my kids' life and be around them and do things. Golf was not on the top of that list. But now that I'm able to start doing that, it feels good. It feels good to go out there and practice, it feels good not to have a burning sensation going down my leg into my foot or collapse when I'm walking, things of that nature. It's been so bad for so long. But turning it around and having my back fused, I haven't felt this good in years so I'm excited about it.

Q. Two things. Do you have a schedule in mind what you want to do pre-Augusta?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah. You know where I'm going with this. I know where you're going with it, too.

Q. I'm not going to follow at all with that. Secondly, I'm just curious, when's the last time golf seemed easy to you?

TIGER WOODS: Seemed easy? Probably 2013. I played well that year.

Q. Tiger, you're looking so relaxed out there with your playing partners. Did you feel relaxed? And secondly, since you brought it up, how are your kids doing?

TIGER WOODS: Kids are doing fantastic, thank you. Wednesdays are usually just hit and giggle and have a good time and our responsibility as professional golfers is to make sure our playing partners, our pro-am partners have a great time. I think we did. There was a lot of needling going on, which was fun. We had a good time out there.

The golf course is so brutal for the amateurs, the rough is up there four or five inches and it's a bit of a struggle for them to get the ball out, but overall I think they had a good time. They hadn't seen greens this hard and this fast ever, so to them it was a bit of a -- you know, an awe factor of how our courses are set up for tournament play. That was fun to be able to explain it to them on different golf courses, different venues what they like to do, what are the fastest greens on the Tour, things of that nature. So they were really into the golf questions, which was a lot of fun for me.

Q. Tiger, given the unknowns you're dealing with with this last comeback and you had even expressed your doubts on if you'd be able to get back to the point you are now, are you surprised at all you've gotten your clubhead speed over 120 and it seems like you're generating numbers that you haven't seen in four, five years?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I hadn't felt good in four, five years. My surgeon, you know, he said from the get-go, once it's fused, you'll have -- you'll have speed like you did back in your early 30s. And he's right because there's no pain, I'm not flinching, it doesn't hurt as I take the club back, it doesn't hurt right before impact, it doesn't hurt after impact, it doesn't hurt when I walk. It was a tough go for a while and I don't have any of those feelings.

So yeah, I can let it go, I can hit it and I'm getting the ball out there a little bit. I'm starting to hit some shots, I'm starting to shape the golf ball again and now I've got to start doing it in a tournament, hitting the shapes, the shots, those numbers. It's going to take a little time, but I'm looking forward to it.

Q. The fans in Japan are very, very excited to have you back and they like to see you competing with players from Japan like Hideki. Can you tell me what do you think about his performance?

TIGER WOODS: Well, Hideki at the end of '16 going into '17 was playing the best golf on the planet. He was winning a bunch of tournaments, and if he wasn't winning he was in the top-5. He's a very consistent player and he's still so young. So he has a long way to go, he's still learning how to play, he's still growing, maturing within the game and he's going to win many more golf tournaments and he's going to be the best player I think from Japan for a very long time.

Q. You've talked about your physical game and your body. What have you been doing to prepare your mental game for tournament play?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I think it's -- I've kind of started falling into that when I was at home practicing, starting to visualize shots I would have to hit here. I know the golf courses pretty well, so what I need to hit off of this tee, this wind, this approach shot, this lie and you start thinking about it. It's been fun to be able to go ahead and start thinking about that, playing tournaments in the future and what shots I'm going to need. That part's been a lot of fun and it's been fun executing it at home. Now I need to bring it out here and execute it out here.

Q. I was wondering if you could elaborate on the reasons for wanting to go on your own for the swing and work on it on your own and what are the benefits of doing it yourself?

TIGER WOODS: I've said it many times already, it's just that no one's had a spinal fusion at that level and be able to hit the ball that hard, as hard as I do. So I'd like to meet somebody who can swing it over 120 miles an hour with a fused back. Do you know anybody? That's what I mean, no one understands that. So I have to rely on my own feels and play around with what my body can and cannot do. It's not going to look like it used to, I don't have the mobility that I do -- that I used to and that's just the reality. Now it's just a matter of what can I do, and that's just practicing and getting my feels and trusting, experimenting a lot to try and figure out what can this body do and how explosive can it be and how am I going to control shots with different shapes, am I going to have different feels. Some of that stuff is yes, some of that stuff is different and I'm still learning it.

Q. Tiger, how much more of a test are these two golf courses than when you first won here? And the North course, you know, that's not where you made your hay most of the time, it was on the South, but what do you think of the North and how it plays now relative to what it did?

TIGER WOODS: Well, before both redos, I mean, it was 20-plus under par and irons to most of the par 5s. Eight par 5s you're going to have and if you drive it well you're going to have irons into all of them. Hell, I remember hitting 8-iron into 18, that's no longer the case on the South.

And then after the redo, I think when Olazabal won the first year, the greens were brick hard. It was really tough and we didn't really go that low. I think it might have been single digits under par, I think 8 or 9 under, something like that, so that was always the tougher golf course, the South by far and sometimes three to four shots was the spread between the two courses.

Now with North being as tough as it is, I think generally year in and year out it's probably one of the hardest courses to hit fairways on the North course. It has one of the lowest percentage of fairways hit. Now you add in four-, five-, six-inch rough with hard greens, it's going to be a hell of a challenge this week. I think they've added probably closer to 500, 600 yards on both golf courses combined since I first came down here watching the Andy Williams back in the day. So it's changed quite a bit and the guys are still hitting it a long way, we're hitting about the same clubs, it's just from much further back.

Q. Do you like the new North?

TIGER WOODS: I like the new North, yeah. I always felt that if I went out on the North and I shot 67, I always felt like I lost ground. Now you'd be making a lot of hay this week.

Q. Tiger, can I ask you, first question, how many games of golf do you think you've

played since the Hero?

TIGER WOODS: Jeez, we've probably played at least six days a week.

Q. The other question, can you talk about your relationship with Snowflake?

TIGER WOODS: Snowflake?

Q. And how important is Snowflake going to be just in this comeback?

TIGER WOODS: You mean the driver? I think every club's a snowflake, even your backups. They're all slightly different and trying to get one that matches up, you know, once you find one, what's the hardest club to put into the lineup as your backup because anything can happen. With the drivers as big as they are, I know they're supposed to be exactly the same but they're not and that's why I said each club is a little bit of a snowflake, they're all slightly different. They may look the same, they may weigh about the same, but sound, feel may be a little bit different to you until you find one that matches.

I had one that I used in the Bahamas, the M2, and that thing was -- it felt really good to me in the waggle, in the setup position, looking at it in the playing position, I felt it was fantastic, but my swing has evolved since then so I need something slightly different. Now I'm with the M3 and it took me a while to find one there, too. A lot of testing, a lot of drivers, a lot of moving stuff around until I finally found one.

Q. Was last year's Farmers the last time you dealt with rough like this?

TIGER WOODS: Excluding -- well, the following week was Dubai, it was rye, overseeded rye, and that was the last time I chipped in ryegrass.

Q. So how much does that add to your challenge this week?

TIGER WOODS: We were laughing about it, I was trying to remember how in the hell do you play out of rye grass. I haven't hit shots out of there in forever, everything's been off of bermuda because I've been home. Yeah, playing out of ryegrass is totally different. I hit a lot of chips yesterday, I was monkeying around a lot of times and trying to hit different shots. Putting on poa greens again, which has been fun, a little different than putting on bermuda.

Yeah, there's been some trying to get the feel more than anything else, and especially the runoff. The greens are really rolling out and that's been a little bit of a shocker is how hard that first bounce is. We were talking about it yesterday in our practice round, we could not believe how hard the first bounce was. I think the North Course might be even more firm than the South.

Q. Tiger, you just sort of recapped how tough it's been these last few years not feeling well, not sure what it was going to be like before and after a swing sometimes.

You did have your moments at times, even like in Dubai last year the last couple of holes you were striping it pretty good and then obviously you had to shut it down after that. Just curious, through all that time, was it always a matter of you were wondering if you were going to make it, is at any moment this is going to go bad on me, and what was sort of your hope that it was going to all fix itself? Did you think that, okay, I'm going to get to a point where I'm going to be okay?

TIGER WOODS: You know, I tried all different types of treatment on it and we went -- I went through every single procedure that is nonsurgical prior to getting it fused. I exhausted every single procedure I could possibly do and it just didn't get better. So the surgery and fusion was the only step I had left. I was very lucky because it's down at L5-S1 and it only has maybe six degrees of rotation, so it's really not much at all so I got lucky in that regard.

It's been tough. I didn't know when the back was going to go out. I don't know if you guys were watching this past week with Freddie, how bad it was. He was fine and all of a sudden he makes a couple bad swings and there it goes. That's very similar to how I was. I would be okay, I would be okay, I would be okay and I would hit one shot and oh, no, there it went and it wouldn't come back. That was frustrating, it was hard and I'm glad that's behind me.

Q. Was fusion presented as a viable option, say, three years ago?

TIGER WOODS: No, it was not. My disk and -- yeah, my disk hasn't deteriorated to where that was the option. I still had some room there.

Q. How difficult has it been to overcome golf troubles and overcome health troubles when you're also battling legal troubles as well, you're trying to find peace of mind, peace of body and spirit? It seems like it can't be easy over the course of a year to get there.

TIGER WOODS: No, it's not easy. That's why I'm very lucky to have such a great family and unbelievable friends. My physio and my training schedule has really helped after surgery and I'm very excited about where I'm at now. There's a point in time where I just didn't know if I was going to have an opportunity to feel like this again, but now I do and I'm excited about it.

Q. Tiger, all the aspects involved in playing quality tournament golf, whether it's hitting the shot shape on demand, the carry distance, short game, mental aspect of it, what's the hardest aspect to get back?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I think to go out there and shoot 65s like it's easy. There are times when it is easy to go out there and shoot 65s, I just need to get my game to where it's like that again. A lot of the guys have been playing well, have been playing a lot and they're seasoned. I know this is early in the year, but they're seasoned already and I'm not. I'm not there yet. I'll get some tournaments under my belt and keep progressing.

DOUG MILNE: Tiger, as always, we appreciate your time.

TIGER WOODS: Thank you.