

ROUND 3 INTERVIEW
March 3, 2018

PHIL MICKELSON (-11)



Q. Phil, bogey-free 65, only 24 putts. What's the key to getting around this golf course?

PHIL MICKELSON: The key for me is missing it in the right spots. There's like five or six fairways where half the fairway blocks you out so you're better off in the rough on the opposite side. The first round I made a mistake on the 14th hole and I missed in the left rough, the one place you can't miss, and I made double. So if you find me in that fairway again, I've miss-hit it. I'm trying to play to the right. There's a lot of holes like that where if you put it in the right spot, you have a pretty good angle for shots in and you can go low.

Q. Let's go to some of the highlights. Start at the first, your second shot from off the green.

PHIL MICKELSON: So I hit a really good 3-wood, it landed eight feet from the cup, it just trickled over. It was a very basic uphill chip.

Q. The par-3 third was so accessible today, Ross Fisher had a hole-in-one there. What did you see from the tee?

PHIL MICKELSON: It was a low pin so you're just trying to hit it long left. You have a massive area to miss it where the ball will come down a hill. So I love how there were some pins that were very birdiable. We've had a lot of low pins the first two days and we'll also have a number of high pins, so that set up a very good birdie opportunity.

Q. Let's go to 7 as we fast forward to another hole, par 3, what did you see from the tee this time?

PHIL MICKELSON: Yeah, this was one of the best shots of the week for me because the wind had been left to right -- the first two days it was right to left -- and I just hit a very penetrating 6-iron right at the pin and it hit soft. That green sometimes hits firm.

Q. Let's go to the other side of the golf course and 15, using your imagination here from off the green.

PHIL MICKELSON: Yeah, but there was a ton of green to work with and it was actually back uphill by the hole, so it was one that was -- it really wasn't a hard shot if you just get it on the green, it's going to fall down by the hole.

Q. Todd Lewis made a great point over on Golf Channel in the early part of your

round; one of the reasons you're familiar with this golf course and perhaps like it so much is because of the kikuyu grass, the familiarity you have with the surfaces here, or is that something that's a little overblown?

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, certainly I grew up playing kikuyu and poa annua greens, but the difference for me is I didn't play Honda last week. I went from L.A. to here, so I had this continuity or consistency. I like all different grasses, they force you to hit different types of shots. What I love about kikuyu is that you have to fly the ball on the green, around the green, you can't land it short. That's the way I like to chip anyways, and I love how the ball sits up in kikuyu so you can get the wedge underneath it. On some of these bermuda fairways and some of the bent that we play, they're shaving it so tight you can't get the leading edge of a wedge underneath it, so you're putting it or you're bumping it or you have to play a full flop. Here it's just basic chip shots, so it feels very comfortable.

Q. Now we know, Phil, traveling around the world that you're beloved everywhere you go, but have you ever seen anything like this, all these things going on, your face on top of that image? What do you make of that?

PHIL MICKELSON: I think in a previous life I was a bumblebee and so I'm pulling it off better than most would, but that's probably not my best look.

Q. Phil, great round of 6 under par. Before we get to the good stuff, though, on the golf course you have to make so many calculations. How nice is it to go bogey free?

PHIL MICKELSON: Yeah, it's great. You always feel good after a round where you don't make a mistake or you don't give one back. It just feels good. You've kind of managed your way around the golf course, you've put the ball in the right spots, you've attacked the pins, you've played smart, you've played smart off the tee. That's something I've been trying to do here is put the ball in the right spots off the tee. Sometimes you want to hit driver, 3-wood, go for it. Sometimes you've got to hit 4-, 5-iron, and it doesn't always feel comfortable but you've got to make the smart play.

Q. The short game looks as divine as ever, but the iron play as well. We're going to look at some examples. Just look at the one on 3, just talk us through this.

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, this was a wedge that anything long left of this hole, there's a bank that's leading to a lot of birdies I think on this hole. It's a very big margin of error. So I just hit a solid pitching wedge past the hole left and it just came back down the hill. It almost hopped in and it gave me about a six-foot putt for birdie.

Q. Very nearly catching the edge of the hole as well. Phil, when you look at how you've been playing as well on the back of three consecutive top 6s, the last win was a little while ago, but have you ever felt so good about your game in the last year or so?

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, it's been a long time since my game's been back to this point. I'm back playing some of my best golf again. It will start to click and get better and better as the year goes on. My swing is back on plane. I want to thank Andrew Getson for his time and patience. I want to thank Callaway for giving me the support system needed over this tough few years. Now I have the support there with my equipment, with my instruction to play some of my best golf. It's starting to come together. I think whether it happens tomorrow or not, very good chance it will, but if it doesn't, it's going to happen soon because I'm playing too well for it not to.

Q. (No microphone) one part of your game more than others that put you in this position for the week, do you think?

PHIL MICKELSON: Overall I've putted very well for some time now and I'm putting like I have been. I'm also driving the ball well. I'm putting the ball in the proper sides of the fairways or in the rough on the correct side. So there's only been probably over the course of three days where I've put it in the trees three or four times where I didn't want to be, and for the most part that's pretty good for me. But I'm putting myself in position off the tee, and then iron play's always been a strength. I've adapted pretty well to the altitude over the years, so it's been pretty good club selection, Tim and I.

Q. Can you remember the last time you were this consistent for that long of a stretch?

PHIL MICKELSON: Certainly in the early 2000s when I was playing some of my best I was doing that, but I'm finally starting to get it back. It's been a while since that happened but my game is back on plane, it's starting to feel easy, I'm not making mistakes, I'm not making too many big mistakes. I had a bogey-free round today. I had one yesterday, one bogey yesterday. So I'm putting the ball in play better, my iron play's back, my short game is back, I've been putting well, so overall I've been playing well and the scores are starting to reflect it. So I'll get that W. I don't know if it's tomorrow, I don't know when, but it will be soon, and when I do, I think I'll start to peel off a few.

Q. Phil, you won the U.S. Amateur at Cherry Hills also at altitude. What is it about playing at altitude that agrees with you?

PHIL MICKELSON: There's no great mathematical formula because the percentages will vary based on how you hit it, how high, how hard, how much spin you put on it is going to increase the percentage as opposed to some of the lower shots. But most of the guys have adjusted pretty easily this week because everybody's got that radar TrackMan that shows them how far the ball's flying with each club, so it's been much easier for the field to adjust this week because of technology. In the past I would just have to go out and map out each iron shot and go through the entire bag and figure it out.

Q. Do you have another one of these in you tomorrow?

PHIL MICKELSON: I believe so, I'm playing too well for it not to. I think that it's just -- whether it's enough tomorrow -- I know I'm going to play well. I don't know whether it will be enough or not, but there's a good chance it will be.

Q. The fact you've been getting better scores out of your game in recent tournaments, is it hard not to get too excited about tomorrow?

PHIL MICKELSON: I'm looking forward to it because I've been having so much fun having opportunities to win on Sunday. This is the fourth week in a row for me that I've had an opportunity. I haven't been leading, it's not like I've -- I've been having to chase a little bit so I need to improve and get a little bit better. But having that chance is what we play for and it's why we play and it's feeling those nerves that makes it so fun. So my energy level and my excitement level is back as I'm having fun opportunities on Sunday.

Q. Can you touch on coming straight from L.A., playing on similar grasses?

PHIL MICKELSON: Yeah, coming from L.A. not playing at Honda and having to adjust to the bermuda and the different lies with the irons and different greens, I think had more continuity for me coming here. Certainly I like those grasses, I grew up with them, but I also spent a lot of time on bermuda and bent, too. It's not that it matters, but the biggest thing for me about kikuyu is that when you chip, you have to fly the ball on the green, you really can't land it short because it grabs the ball, it won't skid through. I like chipping that way.

Also, the ball sits up in kikuyu and so I can get a wedge underneath it. So many times I have to putt from off the greens because the lies are so tight you can't get the leading edge of a wedge underneath it, and here you can. So my wedge play's been a big factor these last two days. It wasn't great Thursday, but it was really good the last two days.

Q. The USGA and R&A have a business report coming out next week, week after that supposedly has a bit of a spike as compared to previous years. Do you have any thoughts on overall distance and whether anything needs to be done?

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, the athletes are getting significantly better, they're in the gym every day. You go out to the gym here and there's dozens players in there every day. They're the ones that are able to take advantage of the technology. So I don't think that type of hard work and dedication should be punished.