

**ROUND 3 INTERVIEW**  
**March 3, 2018**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA (-13)**



**MARK WILLIAMS:** Shubhankar, thanks for joining us. Two-shot lead at 13 under through three rounds at the WGC Mexico Championship. You were the second-round leader as well, of course, and the outright third-round leader. Just talk about the day today and how meaningful it is for you to be in the lead right now.

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Yeah, it's fantastic. Obviously a dream come true for me to be playing in this tournament and obviously leading after two days, that's just fantastic. Really happy with the way I played today, stuck in there. Obviously made a few mistakes on the greens but the greens are tough this week so I think everyone's making a few mistakes. So I wasn't too hard on myself. Very, very happy that I could grind out a par on the last hole.

**MARK WILLIAMS:** What do you anticipate for tomorrow? You'll be paired with Phil Mickelson and Tyrrell Hatton in the final group, just what do you expect?

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Yeah, it will be a lot of fun. Obviously Phil is a legend in the game of golf and I've seen him on TV for as many years as I can remember. You know, I met him for the first time today and it's great that I'm paired with him tomorrow. It will be a lot of fun.

**MARK WILLIAMS:** You said you met him for the first time. Did you meet him before you played?

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** I saw him on the putting green. I think he was just about a tee time and I had about a half hour, so I just went and said hi.

**Q. Did he pronounce your name correctly?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** To be honest, me and my caddie Baaz, we both went up to him. He thought we were media and he said, "Not right now, after the round." Then he just realized and said, "So sorry, I thought you were media," and he said hi, I said hi. Then he made a few putts and he came back to me and said, "Have a good day." It was nice.

**Q. Shubi, can I call you Shubi?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Yeah, that's fine.

**Q. You said you were a little bit nervous before your first and second rounds. How were the nerves today? And then when you think of playing with a Hall of Famer like Phil Mickelson, do you get slightly nervous about that?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Yes, I was nervous today as well, but I think that is probably working for me and I think being a little bit anxious and a little bit nervous on the first tee is not too bad sometimes, just keeps you at the job and you try and be as concentrated as possible. That's what I tried to do.

And obviously playing with Phil, there will be a lot of people and there will be a lot of support, but the good thing is I have a lot of support here, too. Even when I got here on Monday I had so many people coming up to me and asking for autographs, so it will be a lot of fun.

**Q. When he realized you were not media, did he laugh?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Yeah, he did smile. He came back and said, "Have a good day today." I think that's the great thing about a player like him because that's what my caddie told me. He said, "Look at the focus, he's just in his game right now and he just wants to perform and that's what you should learn from him." Yeah, he was very nice.

**Q. Do you remember how old you might have been when you first saw Phil Mickelson play, I'm assuming on a TV?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Early 2000s, I think. Maybe 2003 or 4, something like that.

**Q. And are you getting a lot of texts from friends in India? Are you getting a lot of texts from friends the last month, two months?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Yeah, I've been getting a lot of texts, especially after my win at Joburg, plenty of texts and tried to reply to all of them. And then after Maybank got more texts and I tried to reply. This week I'm not replying to everyone, I just want the tournament to finish, but yeah, I've got tons of messages, tons of good wishes and really happy about that.

**Q. A couple things. There was a little bit more emotion on the putt on 18. Why was it so important to make it?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** It was very important. Obviously Rafa had a birdie putt and could have been a two-shot swing, but I think I got a bit unlucky on the second shot. Right before my shot we checked the wind and it was still. As soon as I hit it, the ball just hit a gust of wind which came from the front and the ball stayed in the bunker, and 10 seconds after that it was still again. So that's -- it's not easy to get the yardages here sometimes. I've done a good job of it till now, but again everyone makes mistakes and I just did that there, and even on 16, made a few mistakes. But yeah, making par was very, very important. It was a very tough putt, but yeah, I just did my routine and just looked at the line and hit a great putt.

**Q. Secondly, I don't know what it was like in Joburg or Malaysia, but is this one of the**

**bigger crowds you played for?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** This is the biggest, this is the biggest event by far, just with the crowds as well. There's so many people out here. Yeah, to be honest, maybe in the morning I was a bit nervous, but as I teed off I was really comfortable after maybe a couple of holes. I got off to a good start, which helped. I was really comfortable enjoying it and a lot of people calling out my name. Yeah, everything is very new to me, but I'm really enjoying it.

**Q. What do they call you?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** They just call me by my surname, it's easiest. My first name is tough, but probably come up with a short name.

**Q. You mentioned watching Phil on TV, you watched all the majors despite the fact that they don't end until 4:00 in the morning?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Yeah, 4:00 or 5:00, 6:00 sometimes.

**Q. Can you describe the scene in your living room watching the end of a major? What's that like? You're with your mom and dad?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Mostly my dad. Mom as well. But yeah, dad and me are very passionate about it. I remember all the majors pretty much by heart and pretty much all the shots, and I remember Phil winning in 2013 and the shot on the 13th was just fabulous.

The best I think was when Rory won the U.S. Open. It went on until 6:00 in the morning back home. I remember I was so inspired that I didn't sleep, I just went straight to the range and hit balls for two hours. It's great for kids like me back then. It's very inspiring to see all these great players and that's the beauty of the game.

**Q. You're not tempted to fall asleep?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** No, not at all, not when I'm watching a major championship. Maybe for a few PGA TOUR events, but if Tiger's playing I don't sleep at all ever.

**Q. Two questions, first one is related to that. Did your friends, family think that you were crazy for waking up at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning to watch golf?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Not really. I mean, most of my friends were golfing fans and even they were awake all night so it wasn't crazy at all. Just like I said, just for kids like me back home trying to get the game to a better level, watching these guys hit these great shots on TV just inspires you a lot. It was never tough for me to wake up. Even if I had to go to school in the morning, I tried to stay awake as much as possible.

**Q. And the other question is, did you look at the scoreboard while you were playing**

**to see how -- you know how you're doing, but like how everyone else is doing?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Yeah, when I see the scoreboard I do have a glance. I think there's nothing wrong with that, you should know where you stand. Yeah, I don't really go and try and look out for the leaderboard. If I just see it, I just have a look at it.

**Q. You turned professional at 16, right? Can you walk me through what that process was like for you to turn professional at such a young age?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Yeah, I mean, a lot of coaches and a lot of senior players back home told me not to, but like I said, my dad has been such a big motivating factor on me being where I am. He was in the Army and he took time just to follow me and help me in golf, so he thought that I was ready. Even I always thought I had to set the bar higher for myself in order to reach something. So that's how it all began. I turned pro at 16, finished in the top 25 on the Order of Merit back home in India and won my first event in 2014, I think I was 17 years old then.

**Q. Finally, speaking of raising the bar, when you were watching these major championships through the early morning hours, how many times did you envision yourself ultimately holding one of those championship trophies?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Every time, every time watching these majors. It really inspires you, especially watching it at night, it's a very different atmosphere. Everything is quiet and you see a guy make a putt and you see that roar on it TV, you can't contain yourself.

I remember when Tiger won the U.S. Open in 2008 or 9, 2008, that 18-hole playoff. I remember I had an exam the next day, so I studied all day for the exam just so that I could watch him play, and I remember when he made that putt to get into the playoff, which is Sunday night for us, I remember I jumped on my bed and almost broke it. These are the stories that inspire you. Yeah, it's been great.

**Q. What did you jump on?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** My bed. I was sitting on my bed and I jumped on it. I didn't break it, but yeah, I was so happy. And obviously seeing it on TV, Tiger made that curler, yeah, it was great.

**Q. Along those lines, I'm just curious from watching all these moments on TV, what is the difference of seeing that and then when you get to probably a place like Abu Dhabi and you're seeing Dustin Johnson, Henrik Stenson, what's the difference seeing them in person as opposed to TV?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** For me, it's actually almost like watching TV. I was telling to Baaz, who's on my bag there, watching all of these guys on the range, it just seems like

there's a TV in front of me and I'm watching them through the TV. Obviously the broadcasts these days are so clear in high definition, it just feels so unreal just watching them right in front of you. It just feels like there's a TV in front of me and I'm actually watching it through a TV. But yeah, it's great just to see the way some of the guys like Dustin strike the ball. I think it just pushes guys like me to play even better.

**Q. What does it feel like to be beating them?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** It's just one event. He's the world No. 1. Yeah, I'm just happy that I'm playing well. There's so many players in the field and thankfully I'm on the top right now, but yeah, I'm really happy I'm on the top.

**Q. Two questions. Do you remember how did you on that exam in 2008?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Yeah, I did well. I was a good student.

**Q. What exam?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** It was a local language, Hindi. It was an exam in Hindi. But I was pretty good at Hindi so that wasn't a problem.

**Q. The second question, how many times being in a situation like Phil this morning when you went up and introduced yourself, how many times this week have you done that?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** I've just said hi to Phil, no one else. I could have probably said hi to Dustin and Jordan, they were both behind me just hitting balls. But Phil obviously I think just the way he conducts himself on the course, he's a true legend. I saw him on the green in the morning and I was a bit nervous to go up and say hi to him. But my caddy said -- Baaz, who's from ASU as well, he said, "I'll take you," and we went and said hi.

**Q. So being a young player playing with the big stars, now we're a Latin American network and we would like to know what would you like to say for those upcoming players in Latin America that are trying to make it big just like you?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** I just want to say I'm still a kid, I was a kid a few years back just like them. Obviously they're watching the tournament and watching all these great players. It's the same story for every generation. You just look up to the great players that you imagine yourself in their position. So I just want to say that dreams do come true, you've just got to keep working hard on it. Golf is such a game, it's so mental, and the best part about it is you're always playing against the course and against yourself. I think that's the best part about the game. They should just keep believing in themselves and anything is possible.

**Q. Any place in Latin America that you would like to visit?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** I'm pretty happy that I'm in Mexico. This is a great place, and it's obviously a little distracting with so many good looking girls walking. Yeah, I mean, it's a fantastic place.

**Q. We have a commentator that is a big fan for you since the beginning of the tournament. It's a man that announce your name in the morning, his name is Carlos. Do you have a message for him, can you send him a message?**

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** What do I say? I just say thank you for starting us in the morning and he's a great guy, I just met him two days ago. Just thank you so much. Obviously he'll be there tomorrow as well, he's a great guy. He said that he's rooting for me and really thankful for that.

**MARK WILLIAMS:** Thanks for your time and good luck tomorrow.

**SHUBHANKAR SHARMA:** Thanks so much.