

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
November 27, 2018



HENRIK STENSON

JACK RYAN: Thanks for joining us today, Henrik, at the 2018 Hero World Challenge. Henrik, you mentioned this is your third time playing the event here at Albany, so if we can just get an opening comment on the week.

HENRIK STENSON: It's a good, fun week. Obviously a great field, we get the chance to test ourselves against a very strong field. Previous times here I think I've been second from the top and last year I was second from the bottom, so we'll see if we can do better than last year hopefully.

Yeah, I haven't played a lot of golf in the last couple of months due to the injury. I played the Ryder Cup and I had five weeks off. Played the Race to Dubai Final in Dubai and did okay there a couple of weeks ago, and then this is the next outing.

So yeah, I feel like I'm pretty keen on playing golf, which is late in the season and I'm sure one or two of my colleagues might feel a little tired after all the traveling and such. I feel like I'm ready. I played all right here in the pro-am. The golf course, it was very windy out there today. I think it's forecast for a bit less wind the next couple days, which is good. But no, the course is in good condition and looks pretty much the same as -- there's nothing really changed compared to the previous times that we played. Keep it out of the bushes and hit fairways and greens and putt well and you're going to be there or thereabouts.

JACK RYAN: Sounds like a good plan.

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, same plan every week really.

Q. It was an elbow injury, correct?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, yeah.

Q. How is it and what have you -- where are you back, 100 percent, 80 percent?

HENRIK STENSON: It's good playing golf, practicing. I'm not 100 percent in the gym, I still have to be a bit careful with certain movements and how I stress it during workouts and so on. But day-to-day stuff is good and golf is good, which is the main thing. I just hope that it's going to heal out and disappear so we can feel like we're 100 percent going into next season. We'll see. I'm pretty happy with the way it's been recovering and the main thing is that I can play and practice and that works, so all good in that sense.

Q. What specifically was it?

HENRIK STENSON: I got a slight tear on the tendon, the common extensor tendon up here, and that turned into a bit of a tennis elbow, inflamed. Yeah, so it's been dragging out. Been annoying in that sense, but it is what it is and we're trying to make it better.

Q. Henrik, when was the last time you didn't have to worry about your elbow, do you remember?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, that was in -- before the summer really. It's been kind of from middle of the season on to about now. But I had another issue with the right elbow a year and a half back. Yeah, it's been little bits and pieces. We've all got our weak points, I guess.

Yeah, but it hasn't really been -- it's been a problem, but it hasn't really had me have to skip a lot of tournaments. The odd one here and there to try and make it better, but overall I needed a lengthy period of time to try and heal up and those five weeks seemed to have helped together with the procedure I had done. Yeah, like I said, not 100 percent, but we're working towards it.

Q. Is it a challenge to keep it out of your mind at all, or do you find it pretty easy to eliminate it?

HENRIK STENSON: No, it's not really been a problem by playing golf with that injury. It's been more -- anyone who's had a tendonitis kind of issue, if it's cold, if it's before you get going, it kind of puts a little bit more -- it's harder before you get going and then it's kind of fine. Yeah, hopefully the worst is behind us and we can focus on this week and the season ahead of us.

Q. Can I just ask you as a member of both tours how important is it when you do sit down to look at your schedule for next year to get the right balance?

HENRIK STENSON: I think the -- sorry, Dougie, it was not me that made you yawn that big?

Q. It was Bernie.

HENRIK STENSON: I think for me, my schedule has looked fairly similar over the last five, seven years in terms of how many events I've played and where I've played. I think it's more trying to find a good balance for next year given the changes that we had. PLAYERS moved, PGA Championship moved, there's a few events of the regular events have all been kind of shuffled around to a degree as well. I think for '19 it will be a slightly different schedule for everyone, and then maybe from '20 onwards we would have found the new balance, tournaments found their place and it's looking more the same going forward.

So I think next year will be a little bit different, but I'm pretty happy with the schedule that I've

looked at and I'll find a good balance. As always, you've got the big events, you want to prepare well for them, and you're playing some other good events in the lead-ups at random. So it's going to be a lot of golf for me, and given that I missed out on the HSBC, the one in Shanghai, I've got to play a lot of tournaments on the PGA TOUR from early February until the U.S. Open, I've got to get a lot of golf in then. So it will be a busy spring for me and a lot of golf being played there.

Q. You and Tiger are kind of in the same age bracket. Can you talk a little bit about what it takes to manage your body, working out, managing your tournament schedule maybe in a different way now than you might have when you were 30 or when you were 25?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, it's definitely different. If you're playing just one tour, for instance, it's not that difficult to play maybe 25 to 30 tournaments, but when you're playing a worldwide schedule, it certainly takes more toll on your with the jetlag and all that.

Yeah, that's definitely a reason to stay fit and try and stay healthy, workouts, managing your time, how much you practice. I think we've hit a lot of golf balls over our careers, so there's other things you can do as well to try and work on your game and not just beating yourself up on the range all the time. It's certainly something to keep in mind when you're getting older, and everyone that's been out here for 20-odd, years you're going to have some little issues and things that you have to manage. It's certainly one area to, if you want to keep on playing longer, you've got to stay fit and healthy.

You see the young guys, how long and hard they go after it as well. Potentially we'll have to see in 15 years where that takes them because I think that takes even a bigger toll on their body than maybe is done on mine and some of the others guys who are my age because the younger players now go after it even harder, I think.

Q. And there was a time when you had to go away and redo your swing. Can you identify with what Tiger's experiencing? It wasn't an injury for you, it was changing form, but to come back and have to see it again and feel it again?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, and Tiger's had numerous knee operations and the back operations. Yeah, he's been injured a whole lot more than I have, thankfully for myself and my career. But it is tough, and every time you're out of the game for long it's a tough way back and you've got to put a lot of hard work in to get back to your best.

Yeah, I think everyone was both impressed and happy to see with the comeback he made now. He did a comeback at this event a bit further back when he only played for a little and then had to take time out again. When he started off here last year, that really was the beginning of a great comeback and put himself in contention a lot of times, and then ultimately winning the TOUR Championship. So he's done great and I think a lot of fans are happy to see him back.

Q. A little bit along those lines, a year ago when we were all here there was a lot of question as to if Tiger's going to be able to have the kind of year he had or any kind of year. I just wonder what your impression has been, and could you have imagined it having gone as well as it went for him?

HENRIK STENSON: I played with Tiger in Tampa, which was one of the first tournaments after this one in the early part of the season, and he played really well. I expected him to be up there all the way to the end in Tampa given how well he played the first two rounds when I played with him.

He came close to winning that one, and then from there on it was no surprises for me to see how well he played and how many times he was up there, and being right in the mix at the PGA Championship as well kind of keeps that dream of another major championship, for sure.

So yeah, it's been a very good comeback and, you know, time will tell where it goes next.

Q. Henrik, given where you were with injury in the summer, at some point you pointed toward the Ryder Cup and played so well there. How satisfying was that, and as you look at those two teams, what do you think the difference was that week?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, for me personally, a lot about this year was about the Ryder Cup, I was very keen on being there. I've played in Paris over my career many times back in the day, not in the last five or six years so much, but I knew it had the potential to be a great week.

Ryder Cup means a lot to me personally and to the European team. Yeah, I certainly wanted to be there. It was a big focus of mine to make sure I made that team. Even though I didn't qualify on my own merits, I got the phone call that I needed and I tried the best to prepare. I didn't come in there with the best of forms, but I think mentally, and I was working hard and just managed to get a lot out of my game the first couple of days. And then one of the best rounds I played all season was really against Bubba on that Sunday.

I felt good to be able to deliver to the team and help out in every way we could. It was a fun week with the boys. I think a combination of we can influence a little bit on the course setup, we set up a tighter golf course. The American team influenced Hazeltine to be very open and little rough, and we kind of repaid that favor a little bit by making more emphasis on driving the ball and hitting the fairways, which we think we would be slightly better at.

But then I think as a team we came together great again and we played some good golf, and at the end of the week I guess it's the team that plays the best golf that will win it and this time it was our turn.

Q. Two things. A quick one on Tiger, I think you guys played together in the second or third round here last year, didn't you?

HENRIK STENSON: At least in one round.

Q. It was one round, though?

HENRIK STENSON: I played with him at least one round, yeah. I think second round.

Q. Given the curiosity, was there anything that day since you hadn't seen him play or whatever that intrigued you or surprised you?

HENRIK STENSON: I thought he was having a lot of speed when I saw him coming back here a year ago, I thought he was going after the ball very strongly and he hit it a long, long way. So yeah, he looked strong and healthy. I didn't really imagine him being able to go flat out like I thought he was at that point. He was obviously ready to play and ready to go after it at full speed.

Q. And secondly, in a big picture of golf being a sport of entertainment, how would you balance a need maybe to come up with different formats without losing any credibility of the competition?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, that has been something the European Tour in particular has spent a lot of time and effort into the last couple years, and there's some different tournaments that we're seeing in Europe.

Yeah, it's a balance. It's been a chance and an opportunity for some smaller events to come up with a different format to make it more interesting to attract the viewers and the fans and also players.

Here we've seen the Zurich Classic's gone to a team event and I think that's worked out pretty well. I think there's an opening for a few of those. Then at the end of the day our biggest championships and our biggest tournaments have always been 72-hole stroke play and I think that's kind of what we tend to measure who's best for the week and I wouldn't lose that in too many events, but there's always room for some new ideas and some new concepts, I'm sure.

Q. Could I ask what that busy spring looks like from February to June?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, I'll be happy to meet up with you and talk that through.

No, it's going to be a lot of golf. I haven't set it in stone, but it's going to be probably a full month in Florida of some kind, then there's the lead-up to August, and then yeah, all the way to the U.S. Open. There's going to be a lot of golf, but I'm not going to tell you exactly where I'm playing at this point because I haven't made my mind up 100 percent. But you'll see me at a good few events. You'll just have to do with that.

Q. Kind of another schedule question, the changes here and on the European Tour, does it make it easier for a player like yourself that plays both to maintain status on both tours or harder?

HENRIK STENSON: I think for me it actually made it harder on the PGA TOUR because in a way changing the PGA from the end of July, early August and putting that into the spring, that would actually occupy a tournament that I potentially could have played before. The FedEx Playoffs going from four to three events, that's an opportunity gone at that time. And there was one other thing that doesn't come to my mind now.

But in a way it actually makes it harder for me because in the summertime I don't play anything in the America, so that's why I'm losing out on one there. So yeah, it's going to be pretty packed for me.

And because of the injury I didn't get that early one in in China this year that counts for next year, so that makes me have to throw another one in in the spring where it's already pretty busy. It's going to be a lot of golf, but I'll be ready for it.

Q. Having won THE PLAYERS in May, I'm just curious what your thoughts are moving it back to March.

HENRIK STENSON: I think it's going to be good. Weather is going to be, I wouldn't say an issue, but it could be cold as we know. We've seen that at Bay Hill the last couple years, it's been pretty low temperatures that week. So you can have cold snaps coming in and it can be windier as well, I think.

Golf course-wise, I think we're going to play it overseeded, right? The golf course is going to be playing -- which I think is going to be good, too. I think it's played all right pretty good with bermuda, but I think with a personal choice I probably might like the overseed than the bermuda. I played it once in '06, my first TPC tournament was in March and then it was the overseed. So I played in once in on the original date and then it's been the later date since '07 onwards. Yeah, I think it will be good.

Q. I haven't memorized the schedule yet, but where does the Nordea Masters fall this year?

HENRIK STENSON: That one falls against the TOUR Championship this time around. So I will be playing golf that week; where it's going to be, I can't tell you. In a way I hope it's going to be at East Lake, but if that doesn't come to fruition, I will be playing in Gothenburg, Sweden, that week.

Q. And last year it was opposite --

HENRIK STENSON: Wyndham. I was defending Wyndham, so it was always going to be disappointing faces at some place. I feel like when you win a tournament, you're very happy

and it's always the right thing to come back and defend whenever possible. So even though it was opposite my own national Open, I decided to play in Greensboro.

Q. What was the most interesting thing you did during the five weeks after the Ryder Cup?

HENRIK STENSON: It was just boring stuff at home really. It was great. I like to do -- everything you don't want to do, I want to do. I want to be home, I want to eat home-cooked meals. You live a similar life to me, I guess, but --

Q. Close.

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, close, yeah. I just don't wear the Hawaii shirts.

Just to be home, to be home, be part of the daily stuff with the kids, their routines, the soccer practice, the homework. Still had time to -- when they're away in school, I can do other stuff.

Yeah, just enjoy being home really. With so much time out on the road, I miss being home. It's almost dangerous when you're home for five weeks. Oh, is it really time to go again? But at the same you always have that kind of urge to get going. You're so used to it that spending too much time at home is, well, okay, it's ready to go. But it was nice, nice to be part of family life and be part of their day-to-day stuff.

Q. Lastly, you mentioned '19 being a complete change with the different schedules before we get used to it, but what about '20 when you throw in the Olympics?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, it's something I'm looking forward. I hope I can go back and try to win another medal in Tokyo. I don't think it's going to -- because of the move of the PGA, it's going to be an easier fix for 2020 sliding the Olympics in there at a busy time of the year. I don't see it as a problem in 2020.

JACK RYAN: All right. Thanks as always for your time, Henrik. Best of luck this week.