

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
January 22, 2019



TIGER WOODS

DOUG MILNE: Like to welcome seven-time winner of the Farmers Insurance Open, Tiger Woods.

Tiger, thanks for joining us, we appreciate you being here, and certainly didn't mean to cut short your U.S. Open victory here as well. Making your first start of the season and first start since East Lake, so with that all said, just a few comments on being back.

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, it's great to be back. I haven't played on the Tour since September, so it's been a while. Looking forward to getting started, looking forward to getting out there and playing. This is a golf course property that I've always loved.

Jordan asked me today as we were playing, he said, "How long have you been coming down here?" I said, "Well, 10 years longer than you've been alive." I've been coming out here quite a bit. This is the first PGA TOUR event that I ever attended with my dad when this was the old Andy Williams tournament. To have won on this property and had the success I've had, it's been a lot of fun and looking forward to getting out there this week. The rough's up after the weather they had last week and it's going to be important to really hit the ball well.

DOUG MILNE: Shifting gears one second, looking at the Round 1 and 2 pairings, you've got Xander and Tony Finau, who are Nos. 2 and 6 presently in the Presidents Cup standings. Just some thoughts on being with those guys for the first time.

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I've never played with either one of them. I got a chance to know Tony quite a bit, we were both on the same team last year at the Ryder Cup and got a chance to spend some time with him. Fantastic. And Xander I've only met in passing. So it will be nice to go around there for 36 holes with these guys and hopefully we can all play well.

Q. You talked a lot last year about not knowing what to expect through the west coast, getting through it, playing out of the rough, et cetera.

TIGER WOODS: Yeah.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about just how different expectations might be this year?

TIGER WOODS: Oh, way different. I know what my body can and cannot do. So last year was very fluid and it was like trying to hit a moving target last year. It was quite interesting to try and figure it all out as the year progressed and it evolved. This year I have a great

understanding of what I can and can't do. There's not uncertainty that I had going into the year last year after what I did at the end of last year. Playing seven out of nine weeks was quite a bit. Body held up better than I thought it would, even though I got pretty tired at the end. Overall, it held up pretty good.

Q. Will you be putting with the flagstick in, have you practiced your knee-high drops and just your overall thoughts on the new rules?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I've done one knee-high drop at home, hit the ball in the hazard on 18 at Medalist and did it and it felt really weird, but I understand that's just the way it's going to be.

I've seen a couple guys do it so far early this year as I watched some golf and they've had to re-drop. Hopefully I won't be one of those guys that does it. Hopefully I won't have to do it, period. Won't be -- is it a hazard or is it a penalty area now? Penalty area. See, I almost screwed that up.

As far as the flagstick in, probably some of the longer putts I like having Joey there as a reference point, so the flag will be there. He'll obviously have to take it out. Some of the putts where the hole is kind of visible, you know, as it comes up over a rise, I can see it but it would be nice to have a reference point, so I'll probably leave it in for those kind of putts.

I've been experimenting trying to hit putts downhill at home and see how that feels, and I didn't find that I hit better putts, it just felt like I could hit it more aggressively, which I did. Then it started running it eight, nine feet by, so that was -- I understand how some of the guys are doing it. It might be more advantageous when we get on faster greens, a little bit more slope, i.e., Augusta, have that sense of security on a three-, four-footer down the hill, you can just take a cut at it. But here the greens are going to be a little bit bouncy, a little bit bumpy, so who knows.

Q. Tiger, welcome back to San Diego. For the first time in nearly three decades, Phil Mickelson will not be at this event. Your thoughts on what you will miss with him not being here this week?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, Phil's been playing here for, what, 28 years and then going back to his Junior Worlds as well? Yeah, that's unfortunate. I mean, he has a busy schedule, he has commitments to other events, he's played a few events, a couple events this year, I think. Also, he's got to defend in Mexico, so I understand him not playing this week. There's going to be a lot of adjustments that players are going to have to make with their scheduling this year and trying to figure out what the right balance is.

I think by the time we get through Honda, half the season's over. I remember when Norman and Faldo didn't play the Tour until Doral, which was the first Florida event. They never even entertained playing the west coast; they stayed in Europe or played in Australia. That's a very different animal now. The guys are going to be making some adjustments this year

and I'm one of them.

Q. Tiger, if I could tell you your worst hole on the PGA TOUR, would you want to know? Why or why not?

TIGER WOODS: My worst hole?

Q. Um-hmm.

TIGER WOODS: It's probably No. 1 here at Torrey. It was during the '08 Open.

Q. In general, would you want to know something like that?

TIGER WOODS: Nope, keep it to yourself.

Q. But why not? It can't help you?

TIGER WOODS: No. If I'm having that bad of luck, I don't want to know, no. Tell me what the best hole is, yeah.

Q. Do you know what your best hole is?

TIGER WOODS: No.

Q. With the limited practice that you've been able to put in now because of the new body that you have and what you learned last year, what have you been working on the most leading up to this first event of the year for you and what do you feel is the most rusty going into this week?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, it's going to be probably my feel is something I'm going to have to figure out. Just like anytime I come back and start the season, it's getting into the flow of the round quickly, how fast can I feel the flow of the round. The times I've struggled it's been two, three holes and that's too long, it's going to be on that first hole.

You know, the offseason for me, a lot of it's been training, trying to get stronger. Last year towards the end of the season I got really tired because I didn't expect to play that much golf at the end and I didn't train for it. This offseason I spent a lot of time in the gym and I've got a lot stronger and I feel like my legs are there where they need to be, which they weren't at the end of the season.

Q. Tiger, when you reflect on the TOUR Championship, what are you most proud of and did you think you would be able to get to that level? Obviously you didn't know at the start of the year, but as the year wore on, did you think that you would get to a winning level by the end of last season?

TIGER WOODS: I did after what I did at Valspar, coming in second there, one shot back, and then playing my way into a chance to win at Bay Hill. I struggled in the spring, but then I put it together in the summer a bit. I had two good runs at winning major championships. I knew my game was good enough to win.

Now, could I be consistent enough for four days to do it? I just can't have those lapses and can't have the number of bad shots that I was hitting and I was costing myself towards, I guess, the spring and early summer I didn't putt well. Made a shift to a TaylorMade putter and I putted a little bit better and got the flow going again, saw the ball going in the hole, and next thing you know I had a chance to win two major championships. I played well at BMW and I won the TOUR Championship.

Q. On occasion you've pushed past what your body was telling you you could and couldn't do. How have you taught yourself now to listen to what is capable of your body now?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, going through what I went through the last few years, I don't really wish that on anybody. You know, there was a long period of time where I couldn't sit, stand or walk. It was a tough way to go. And that's from me trying to get better, and the fusion surgery was the last ditch effort to give me a quality of life. Now that I have that quality of life and I've been able to return to a working environment, in the back of my mind I know what I went through for those years and how difficult that is and I don't ever want to go back to that again.

That's why I've been so diligent about training, about how I've worked to give my body the best chance to do my job, but also there are days when I just don't -- I just don't practice and I don't train. Those are the days I've just got to rest. That's probably been one of the lessons I've learned through all of this is there are days where I just have to shut it down and just not do anything and just relax. That's been hard because most of my career's been spent on, in order to get better, I've got to work at it. Now there are times as I've gotten older now and I've gone through what I've gone through, I've got to take it easy so I can work harder on the back end of it.

Q. You mentioned one of the kind of peculiar things about the TOUR Championship, it was such a big moment for you and for golf and then it was gone. We're at the Ryder Cup 12 hours later, that week's over and then you're out for two months. I'm just curious, did you ever get a chance to soak it up? I don't know what kind of feedback you normally get for yourself from tournaments, but did you get a chance to really appreciate that the way you've talked about how gratifying it is?

TIGER WOODS: I did post-Ryder Cup for a couple months there where I didn't play. After I had won, we went straight to the hotel to sign all our items before we left for Paris. So no, I didn't get any time to really celebrate or really reflect on the TOUR Championship because we had a job to do this week and that was to win a Cup. So we all were collectively focused on trying to win a Cup, but when that Cup was over and I got back home and I got a chance

to be around my friends and my family, to hear some of the stories of how nervous they were and how emotional they were.

Q. Kids or players?

TIGER WOODS: Players, friends, people who saw what I went through at home, saw the difficult times and just to see that I made it that far back, that was touching to me because I didn't really expect that because I'm inside the ropes. I know what it took for me, but I didn't know it would have affected anyone else like that.

Q. Had you ever felt that before?

TIGER WOODS: No, no.

Q. U.S. Open, right before the knee surgery, any of that stuff?

TIGER WOODS: No, because, I mean, the U.S. Open I was pretty banged up. That was different. No one really knew that my knee was that banged up. For the last few years people have known my back was in bad shape.

Q. Tiger, when you talk about chilling out and sort of relaxing over the offseason, I don't mean to be personal here, but what's the best thing you did over the offseason?

TIGER WOODS: Oh, no, the fact that I'm able to go diving again and be able to do some spear fishing and free driving is something that I truly missed. Even tank diving, I haven't tank dove in years; I just can't afford to have that weight on my back and compressing my disk and my disk was already screwed up. So whenever you put any weight on it, it made it worse. I haven't tank dove in years and to be able to do that again, to be able to get in the water and free dive, put the fins on and load the body up and drop down like that, that was something I truly missed. I love being in the water.

Q. Whereabouts were you diving?

TIGER WOODS: Primarily in the Bahamas or just right off the coast there in the back of my house.

Q. Welcome back to San Diego.

TIGER WOODS: Thank you.

Q. I'm glad to see everything's working well for you and your health is doing good. How is your body? You mentioned how you're resting more. How are you training differently now than before all these injuries happened to you? What's the difference now?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I can't move weight around like I used to. I certainly can't do the type of cardio that I used to do. I can't run. I guess I suppose I could, but I don't. You know, everything's been geared to let's get you back to playing golf. If you want to do these other things, let's do it after you return to golf for a little bit. Now that I have and, as I said to Bernie, I've been able to get in the water again, start free diving and spear fishing, things that I've missed. But as far as moving weight or being as strong and fast as explosive in the gym that I used to, hell, no, I don't do any of that stuff anymore.

Q. There's no reason to.

TIGER WOODS: I can't. Even if I wanted, I can't. I'll let all those young guys do it.

Q. Tiger, a year ago at this time I don't know what kind of expectations you would have had for the year, you've talked about many times just trying to get through Florida and such. Now maybe there are some expectations and in any way do you feel like you're already behind? We're like 10 or 11 weeks into the season and it's a condensed schedule, so forth. You said you might play a little bit less?

TIGER WOODS: Um-hmm. Yeah, the points race, I'm way behind, but I look at the fact that I'm just getting started this year, which is nice is that I'm in all the big events, so that part's going to be nice.

Yeah, I get to build my schedule around that and not have the uncertainty. Like last year it was let's see if we can get to Florida, let's see what the schedule is through Augusta, how much do you think you can play during the summer, and it just backloaded at the end, which I didn't expect. Yeah, I am behind, I'm way behind in points, but I'm not really looking at it that way. There have been a number of years where I've only played 15 to 17 events. If I play well in the big events and win some here and there, that will take care of itself.

Q. This year's going to be the 25th anniversary of your first U.S. Am. When you look back at that week, what's your favorite memory or favorite moment from that win?

TIGER WOODS: My first U.S. Am or my first win?

Q. First U.S. Am at TPC.

TIGER WOODS: Oh, my first win?

Q. Yes.

TIGER WOODS: Well, dress code being one, it wasn't very good. The straw hat, no, I'm not bringing that back. Let's see. I think it's -- I beat Vaughn Moise, he was one of our rules officials out here. I don't think he ever gave me a good ruling after that when I got out here on Tour. Buddy Alexander was the head coach of Florida at the time. He recruited me and I ended up going to Stanford. He didn't like that very much and then didn't like me beating

him on the last hole. And then to be getting absolutely drummed by Trip and somehow figure out a way to come back and basically kind of build my way into that second round and then pull it off at the end at 17, that was one of the great breaks I got.

But more importantly, I had that same putt in the morning, so I knew it broke a little bit more. I was on the green in the morning session, I missed it low, so I gave it a little bit more break and ended up making it.

Little things like that I'll always remember. And then one of the things that I will always miss and I still get emotional about is I'll never get that hug again from my dad. That's something that I'll always miss.

Q. Hi, Tiger. You've said 2018 was one of your best years yet. Do you use that momentum going into the 2019 season or are you approaching this year with a fresh start, clean slate?

TIGER WOODS: Definitely not a clean slate. Fresh start, yes, but there is some momentum from last year because there's a better understanding of what I can do. It's hard to describe. Going into this event last year, I really didn't know. I hadn't played out of rough in years. That's what's weird, it's hard to imagine that but I really didn't. I hadn't played out of long rough in I guess it was, what, two years. That was a big uncertainty.

And the fact that I was able to get through, I didn't have any zinging down my leg like I did before, I didn't have any problems at night recovering for the next day. Those are big accomplishments. Even though I finished 30th or 25th, whatever the hell I finished, but those were big accomplishments for me. Now, this year it's totally different. I know what I can do, I know what I'm feeling, so now it's about finishing a little bit better and winning some events this year.

Q. Tiger, just like the West Coast Swing, there's an Asian Swing this coming October, which is three consecutive events in Korea, Japan and China. I remember you've been in Asia in 2011. I know it's really hard, you're still working on it, but is there any chance that we can see you in Asia this year?

And on a lighter note, since you like fishing, have you heard about a fisherman, Ho-Sung Choi, who's bringing a little different buzz to the attention to the golf, so any thoughts on that?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, we were looking at the fall schedule for this coming year and seeing if I -- what events that I possibly could play. Also, I'm trying to figure out myself right now as the Presidents Cup captain where the line is before we draw -- decide on our four picks. So that's something I'm working on with my vice captains and the Tour as well, where's the best place for us to end the points system -- I'm sorry, the best place to decide what our four guys that will be added to the other eight guys who have been decided on points. The fall, it's a lot of moving parts and I'll have an entire spring trying to figure that out right now.

As far as what he's bringing -- I think he's playing Pebble Beach?

Q. Yeah.

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I saw Aaron Rodgers wanted to play with him and he's playing with Jerry Kelly, and I'm hoping that they do get to play in the same group because I don't know who begs more on a shot, Jerry Kelly or how he finishes through a golf ball. It's quite remarkable, my back hurts just watching it.

Q. Tiger, you mentioned reflecting on the year over the holidays. Was there one shot in particular when you do that reflecting that you really savored, that was really special, and one shot that you thought about a lot that you really wish you would have had back from last season?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, there are probably a couple shots that I thought I pulled off last year which were pretty damn cool, one being, I've said to you guys, the shot I pulled off at the 10th hole at the Open Championship out of the bunker.

A shot I wish I had back was the next damn tee shot, sticking that thing in the ground and making double bogey. But also one of the shots that people don't realize was how big at the time it was for me to pull off an up-and-down bogey on the 16th hole on Saturday afternoon at the TOUR Championship, that front pin. I tried to play 40, 50 feet right on the first pitch, didn't get it up there, hit it high on the face, came back down. I hit a driving spinner up there to a kick-in. At that time for how much that meant to pull off a shot like that, keep the lead in the tournament, keep the hammer down on those guys, that was a big, big up-and-down for us.

Q. Real quick, Tiger, I'm just curious if you've gone back and watched any highlights or replay of Sunday at East Lake?

TIGER WOODS: I have, yeah, quite a bit.

Q. What stands out to you? Surviving?

TIGER WOODS: No, I had a four-shot lead. I just played methodical. I birdied the first hole, three-shot lead, ended up getting a four-shot lead. But I just played methodical, I just played the way I would normally play on a very tough venue. I didn't have to go out there and shoot 7 or 8 under par to win the golf tournament. Now, if you watched the Desert Classic, that's what they have to do; you go out there like Phil did and shoot 69 and get beat.

Well, there at East Lake was very similar to what we play at major championships. It's about the grind and that's what I did. Made a birdie on the very first hole and I just -- I didn't really have it I would say in drive, I just had it in neutral all day, just plodding along, plodding along. If I happened to get out of position, take my punishment, move on, try to give myself the

correct angles and that's all I was trying to do. Force those guys to come make a run at me on a very difficult golf course and I was able to pull it off.

Q. Is it fun to watch that closing scene?

TIGER WOODS: It gives me chills almost every single time I see it. At the time it didn't seem like that because I didn't really look back, I only looked back a couple times over my right shoulder. I didn't really get a good look until I went to the green. After I hit my pitch shot, I got on the green, I looked and I'm like holy cow, there's a lot of people out there.

But the rush and the commotion that happened, I've experienced things like that; '97 Western Open, The Open Championship at St. Andrews. I've experienced things of that nature, but not that energy. That was very different. The energy of the crowd was at just red line and they were so into it. I don't know, it was more special than those other -- okay, two Open Championships at St. Andrews is pretty special. It has its own aura and its own energy, but this was different.

Q. Do you think it could be repeated?

TIGER WOODS: I don't think so. Maybe one day it might, who knows. I never thought I ever expected it to get to that level and nobody in this room ever expected for that to even happen, so who knows.

But all I know is that it was really loud and very special and when I look back on it, seeing more so some of the -- I wouldn't say the TV angles of it, but more so the still photos of it because I didn't realize how many people really had their phone up and screaming and yelling. When you see like some of the photos I have at home where there's like 70, 80 people in this one little shot and everyone has their phone up, it's a different time.

Q. Word on the street is you tried out Rickie's Cobras yesterday, if that's true or not? Don't know?

TIGER WOODS: Did not. I got in late last night.

Q. Wondering if --

TIGER WOODS: I played Rickie at home last week and he was -- he just had put in the new TaylorMade ball and he was testing it and we played a couple rounds together. He was hitting it well and he felt like some of the changes he's made in the offseason to training and some of the things he's done has gotten him ready for the start of his season or the start of his year and we're both excited about playing.

Q. Any good side bets in that round?

TIGER WOODS: There's always wagering. Sorry, match challenges.

DOUG MILNE: And on that note, we'll wish you the best of luck this week.