

**PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW**  
**February 20, 2019**



**PHIL MICKELSON**

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**MICHAEL BALIKER:** Phil, bienvenidos. Welcome back to Mexico City.

**PHIL MICKELSON:** Thank you. It's nice to be back. I enjoy it here. It's a fun golf course to play and I'm really excited about how the response has been to this tournament from the people here. It's just been so supportive and it's fun to be here and play.

**Q. And 600th PGA TOUR start this week. Just put into words what that must feel like.**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** It's just a number. I haven't really thought much about it. It seems like a lot, though.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** We'll open it up for some questions.

**Q. How long does it take you to dial into the altitude?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** I have pretty good notes from the last two years, so I have a pretty good idea of how far the ball is going. And the success I've had in the past in Denver at Castle Pines and some of those events, I seem to adjust well to the altitude.

The challenge is learning the greens, how the ball's being received by the greens, how far the bounces are, how much the ball's backing up. And that's kind of the biggest question mark, not so much about how far the ball's flying because I have pretty good notes on that.

**Q. Going back to that 600th, do you remember anything about '88, playing your first event at Torrey Pines?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** I do. I was 17 and played my first event, and on Tuesday there was a fellow lefty, Ernie Gonzalez, that was a friend of mine that kind of looked after me a little bit. We played a lot of the same courses where I was growing up, and he arranged a practice round with Seve Ballesteros and that was the guy I just looked up to and he meant so much to me.

We played a practice round together and it was awesome. He couldn't have been nicer, he couldn't have been more engaging. I was able to watch how he played a practice round. He didn't keep score. He would hit shots, practice chips. I got to watch that. For a 17-year-old, it was an incredible experience especially given how much I looked up to him as a kid.

**Q. Just a quick follow-up. You seem to be a fan of the new policy about shorts. Can I just get a comment about that?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** Yeah, I'm a big fan of it. I think that we've been making some really great decisions. I love the new schedule, I think the schedule has been a real plus for a lot of guys. I think the schedule with the end of the year is incredible. Trying to make the pro-am a nine hole pro-am for the pros, giving it a two pro experience for the amateurs and not wearing out the same guys week after week with five, six hour rounds in the pro-am is a great decision. I think the Tour is doing a lot of great things for the players and helping us be our best and showcase our best product to the public.

**Q. How many kind of advice do the new players, the younger players, ask you and how difference -- what difference do you see between these generations and other generations you used to play against.**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** I try to be as helpful as I can, but really the advice always comes down to finding out what helps you be your best, and it's always different for each person. Whether it's playing your best in majors, playing the week before or taking a week off and being fresh and ready. You have to find out individually what is the best way to prepare.

How to play practice rounds, how to -- when you should fly in, what courses you should play, all that stuff is very personal. It's kind of a process of learning it and that's really what it boils down to. I try to be as helpful as I can, but really that's what it comes down to.

**Q. Do you see too many difference between these new generation of players and players who used to play 15, 20 years ago?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** You know, they were really good during my generation, they're really good now. There's a lot of really good players now, there was a lot of really good players then. It just seems to keep refilling itself.

**Q. Coming into this week you're in a complete different situation than you were last year when you had a title drought, and now you have not only the WGC Mexico, also the AT&T. Like how do you feel people around you in this two practice rounds? Following you, I saw you signing some autographs. How do you feel your reception with the fans here?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** Well, here in Mexico City it's been amazing, the reception, and it started really last year when I ended up winning. And coming down the stretch and feeling the support was a special feeling, especially when I had not won in a number of years. So this tournament was a big event for me to kind of reignite my career.

It's nice to have some early success this year as well at AT&T heading into this week. This is a golf course I play very well at. The people have been very supportive and I'm optimistic in having another good week here.

**Q. Have you figured out your schedule leading up to the Masters, specifically your**

**tendency to prefer to play the week before with the change in course?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** So this -- as much as I love the schedule and I think that having three weeks to play three FedExCup events and having it end before football and having three weeks off before we start the season, all these things are great. For me personally there's a few things that aren't the best, and that is the weeks before the majors aren't really the best courses to get ready for those particular majors.

So I'll have to adjust some of my own stuff. That's more of a personal preference. But if you look -- if you take your own individual views out of it and you look at what the Tour did as a whole, it's phenomenal for the Tour, it's phenomenal for the game and for the fans.

For me individually, I might have to work around a few things. But again, you have to be able to take yourself out of the equation and see if this is the best thing.

Bottom line is I'm probably not going to play many of the weeks before, this year, because I don't feel like they give me the best chance to get ready for the majors.

**Q. I'm trying to think if you played any course before the majors previously. Probably not this year, have you?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** No, I haven't. Well, I played Valero, I've played there before. Windy, tight conditions is not conducive for Augusta. But again, that's a personal thing you've got to kind of work around.

Maybe the need for competition outweighs the preparation aspect of it, I don't know. I'm not really set, to be honest. I'm kind of navigating through it as well to what works best for me. As a whole, I think it's a great thing for the Tour.

**Q. And the other thing was something Justin said the other day that was kind of intriguing, that he hates losing far more than he enjoys winning. I wonder if that's typical of most players?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** I think it is. I can certainly relate to what he's saying. I can identify exactly where he's coming from.

**Q. Did you lose much as a kid, and if you did, was there ever one loss that just tore you up?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** Well, I think you learn more from your losses and get a lot more out of it. I think you get a lot more motivation out of losses. Also, overcoming losses is just as big a part of the game as being successful and winning because it's a process of -- winning's a process. So you have to use those losses as motivation to play better.

That was certainly the case for me in 2013 when I lost the U.S. Open there. I felt I had every

opportunity to win it. Then came back and after being so disappointed, making a comeback and winning arguably the most difficult for me to win, The Open, the British Open there at Muirfield. Sometimes it's how you overcome the losses that are every bit as important.

**Q. So there this wasn't one kid that's now working at some accounting firm that beat you?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** No, there were a lot of them. Losing is such a part of this game. Even if you have the highest win percentage, you're still losing a heck of a lot more. It's like baseball, if you fail 67 percent of the time, you're still one of the best hitters in the game. It's just part of it.

**Q. Phil, the pressure is bigger with Tiger Woods on the championship?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** I don't know if it's more pressure. I think it's a bigger crowd, bigger crowd with Tiger here.

**Q. Does your mentality or does your preparation change when you return to a course that you won last year?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** No, it doesn't change my preparation. In fact, it adds to your feeling of confidence, a lot of great memories and knowing that I've already hit the shots on these certain holes I think helps your performance. I think finishing 7th two years ago was very important in my success in winning last year.

**Q. Phil, what do you think Steve will bring to the United States Ryder Cup team room as a captain?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** He's awesome. I mean, he is just terrific. He was phenomenal at the Presidents Cup and I think he's an ideal choice and just a great leader. And he does it quietly, he does it through example, he does it through soft-spoken words. He's just a guy everybody looks up to and respects and everyone listens to what he has to say. I think he's going to be a great leader.

**Q. What moment last year in the back nine got you? I know you had the birdie at 16, and JT bogeying the playoff hole, but what moment on the back nine that kind of got you to the win?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** There was a shot on 14, the par 4. I had missed my drive to the right and there was a window -- and I mean, it was the size of an actual window -- through the trees that I had to go through, and if I didn't hit that, it would have hit the trees. I could have easily made double. Instead it got through and I ended up making par. That moment was that one shot that you look back on and you say, "I've got to pull this shot off if I'm going to win," and I was able to do that.

**Q. Phil, what does it mean to you like have back Tiger competing at the highest level with you?**

**PHIL MICKELSON:** Yeah, it's fun. It's a big reason for my success is having him back and having him back playing well. It motivates me and gets the best out of me, too.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** Thank you, Phil.

**PHIL MICKELSON:** Thank you.