

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



**TIGER WOODS**

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**MICHAEL BALIKER:** All right. We'll go ahead and get started. Ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure to welcome our 18-time World Golf Championships winner, Tiger Woods, here to the 2019 with WGC Mexico Championship. Bienvenidos, Tiger.

Tiger, you've played all over the world and this will be a first for you in Mexico teeing it up, first time as a competitor. How special is this opportunity for you?

**TIGER WOODS:** Oh, this is very special. I was scheduled to play here a couple times. Unfortunately, my back wasn't very good and I had to go in to have a couple procedures done. So this is exciting for me to be here in Mexico City to play it for the first time. This is going to be an exciting week. The people are into it, the golf course is going to be a challenge trying to figure out what we're going to do and how far the ball goes here. It's going to be an exciting week for all of us.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** And then you were able to get out on the back nine yesterday here at Club de Golf Chapultepec. First takeaways from the golf course in your mind.

**TIGER WOODS:** Yeah, it was a lot tighter than I had thought. The ball was traveling obviously a long way. Some of our numbers on the range were a bit surprising, even on the golf course, how far it was going. The most interesting thing is the ball just doesn't curve up here at altitude, there's just not enough resistance. Shots that I thought I shaped just didn't have any shape to it. That's going to be one of the things I need to get organized today and be ready for tomorrow.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** Lastly for me, coming off a long week, how has the body recovered physically and then just you mentally as well?

**TIGER WOODS:** Yeah, Monday was nice. It was nice to put the clubs away, not do anything. Yesterday was good to get the legs stretched out to come out here and play and practice a bit and try and get used to the altitude. Today is another day of that. Be ready come game time tomorrow.

**Q.** Hi, Tiger. Of course we know that every event you play, you are the main focus of the event, you are the main player that all the people want to see. Here in Mexico maybe 99 percent of the people have never seen you play. Do you expect even more gallery than you're used to? Maybe more noise, environment because the people are going to be seeing you for the first time?

**TIGER WOODS:** Well, I think from what the players have said before, the last couple times

they played, the people have been excited to be out there and to watch golf and watch the best players in the world. I'm excited to get out there and play. This is my first time playing a tournament in Mexico, so this would be exciting and fun for me as well. Hopefully I can play well, the people will come out and support the event, and I'm sure there will be some amazing energy out there.

**Q. Tiger, make any changes to your equipment for this week because of the altitude?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Well, I've kind of tinkered. I tinkered yesterday with adding a quarter of a degree to my 3-wood but I don't know if I'm going to go with that or not.

That's why today's important to keep testing, keep seeing where I'm at. I haven't changed my driver, I haven't changed my 5-wood. I was monkeying around yesterday with putting a 2-iron in but I just can't keep it in the air, it's not enough resistance up here so the ball just doesn't fly as far. I might need the 5-wood to be able to keep the ball up there and I'll continue to monkey around with the 3-wood to see if I'm going to go with the same loft that I have been using or go with just a touch more.

**Q. Stricks was officially named the captain today. Why was it a good selection and what will make him successful?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Well, he was the overwhelming choice by all of us on the committee. All of us felt that it was his time, he was deserving. What he has done as the leader both in the Presidents Cups and Ryder Cups has been tremendous, and we just thought that with his leadership and the way the guys follow Stricks, we thought that he would be the best captain there is for 2020. The players were unanimous, they wanted him on as their team leader and we felt the same way on the committee.

**Q. What makes him unanimous?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Well, everyone knows he's such a nice guy, but beneath all of that exterior is this fieriness and this competitiveness and he's also one of the more detail oriented guys that we know of. I think that he'll be prepared, he'll be understanding and he's very good at communicating with the players and getting their opinions but also putting his foot down when he has to. That's an important job.

**Q. Hello, Tiger. Two tournaments into the season, how has this season been different? How have you been feeling comparing it to last year?**

**TIGER WOODS:** There's really no comparison compared to last year. I was not in -- I didn't really know what my golf future would be, so to have competed at the level I competed last year, I'm just getting started this year. This is my third event. So just trying to get everything organized but I feel so much better than I did last year. Last year was a bit of kind of a quandary about how am I going to piece this together, how am I going to figure it out, what am I going to be capable of, and by the end of the year I figured it out.

**Q. Two things, Tiger. If you were able to take altitude out of the picture, does this course remind you of anything, layout?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Layout-wise? Yeah. It's very similar to what we would face in some of the places in SoCal or up in the Bay area where it's narrow, it's tight, trees overhang. Some of the these trees will swallow golf balls up. Reminds me very much of California golf courses. Again, kikuyu fairways, kikuyu rough, poa greens. The only difference is we're up here near 8,000 feet.

**Q. And it's warmer?**

**TIGER WOODS:** It's a lot warmer from last year.

**Q. Secondly, there's a lot been made of you over the years of courses where you won a bunch, from Bay Hill, Torrey, et cetera, et cetera, but this is one tournament that you've won six times on six courses. Can you explain that or is there any source of pride you take in being able to do these so many one-offs?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Well, I take a lot of pride in playing well in the biggest events. So that being obviously the majors, THE PLAYERS, and the World Golf Championships. I think my record has been pretty good in those events. So just because this event has been in different places, it still gets the best players in the world and I've always enjoyed competing against them and trying to beat them and win an event. I think I've had some success in World Golf Championships no matter where they're played.

**Q. Is Augusta yet on your radar in terms of what you're doing? If not, when will that happen? And if so, in what ways are you thinking about that?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Yeah, Augusta started probably back in October, November, so yeah.

**Q. When you're competing in different tournaments, in what ways are thinking about, if at all, the Masters coming up?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Shots I would need, clubs I would be using for the event, what kind of swings, patterns have I been struggling with or have I been doing well with, what shots, especially off uneven lies. And then obviously when you get to that event just trying to get the speed of the greens, and how they like to change them from Wednesday to Thursday and how they get a little bit quicker and harder.

**Q. To what extent does it excite you that you're going there this year with a completely different --**

**TIGER WOODS:** Last year was different, and in previous years it was nonexistent. This year to be able to ramp up a schedule and to be able to know what I can and can't do going

into the event is a lot more comforting than this has been in the previous years because it's been kind of an unknown going into that event.

**Q. Your greatness has been defined not only by the tournaments you've won but because of the revolution you've created in many kids and people around the world.**

**You know Mexico is a country known for football, for soccer. And now you're going to see from Thursday to Sunday many people started to like golf because of you. Why did you choose this time to come to Mexico? You could have come to Vallarta many years ago to the World Cup. Is that part of your decision to experience your effect in Mexico because you had Riviera, Honda and then Farmers? Is that in your mind?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Yeah, well that World Cup was back in 2002-ish, somewhere in there? That was a long time ago. I've had other opportunities to play in Mexico just because the Tour has different spots that it hosts events. I was scheduled to play here a couple times in America's Cup, but unfortunately my back wouldn't allow me.

But finally to be able to come out here and be able to compete here in Mexico City and be able to play at this event against the best players in the world, I'm sure as I was saying earlier about the energy, I'm sure the energy will be up, people will be excited. I think yesterday was a closed day, but there was a lot of people out there, a lot of members and a lot of kids that somehow just didn't go to school yesterday. I'm sure it will be like that the rest of the week and it will be a lot of fun for all of us.

**Q. Tiger, golf has changed a lot from your last (inaudible) to your comeback, lots of different players, new rules, how people consume golf, it's completely different. Now you have your own channel. How do you feel about all of these changes and which one is the one you like the most?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Well, golf has -- God, it's evolved so quickly just from how -- from the competitive side of it, the equipment has changed dramatically. We were using wooden and wound balls when I first came out here; now you look at these big drivers and balls that go forever.

And then just the way the game is consumed. It was only on a few channels when I first came out here and now it can be viewed live via your mobile devices. We didn't have mobile devices. It's just amazing how it's evolved and how the game of golf, the exposure, how much it has grown. The world has gotten more exposed to the game and I think that's fantastic. It's only going to grow. These new kids that are playing out here, they know how to talk to the public, be part of the social media world, and also just the culture that they have grown up in. So I think the game of golf's in great hands and we're excited about what the future holds for it.

**Q. Tiger, could you speak generally to the challenges the schedule has presented you this year, especially this upcoming stretch where there's a bunch of tournaments you might have played? And also, specifically, does this week impact next week or any of the others?**

**TIGER WOODS:** You know, it's been -- from here on out, it's very complicated. Next week's at home for me, then there's a tournament that I've won there eight times. Then another event that I've won a couple times. Then the week after that is where I had an unbelievable week last year.

So it gets very complicated. That's what I'm trying to figure out, how much to play, how much is too much, how much is not enough, and at the end of the day being race ready enough for April and making sure I get enough competitive rounds. That's one of the reasons why I put in Tampa last year after I missed the cut in L.A., to make sure I get some rounds in and be race ready. This year's even more complicated. I feel better, but I've got four events right there in my state that I live in and it gets very complicated.

**Q. Was that a yes or a no on Honda? I missed that.**

**If you go back over the last 20-plus years and think about the countries you went to for the first time, whether it was Japan or Australia or Thailand, what have you, what memories do you have of the wildest receptions you got or the most energetic, however you want to frame it?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Well, it would have to be -- well, I've been to Thailand prior to that because I went there with my mom when I was 8, but the time I was there in '97 was just off the charts. The amount of media that were there, this lei put around my neck. You know how the Bangkok traffic is, it's off the charts. It makes Mexico City look like it's a breezeway. So we had this entire freeway cordoned off and we just flew right from the airport down to the hotel. I've never seen anything like it. I know that's not my first time there, but I still have never experienced anything like that.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

**TIGER WOODS:** My mom said a few things over the years.

**Q. One of the reasons Mexico is hosting this event is to help promote golf in the country and especially among Mexican children. Would you be interested in helping this initiative to helping children be more involved in golf?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Yeah, that's what we're trying to do, we're trying to grow the game of golf. We're trying to help out. I think this event goes a long way to showcasing what the possibilities are. After that it's trying to get access, trying to get the kids -- we can get them excited about the game, but now it becomes problematic when the excitement doesn't really turn into participation.

So trying to get access is going to be the challenge, and we face that back home in the States. There's excitement as we come in through a Tour event, but creating access and then for the kids to play going forward, the sustainability of it, it gets a little tougher at times.

**Q. You have an extraordinary career, you have already won the World Championship many times before. Your first time here in Mexico, what will be the essential element in your game to win this tournament in Mexico?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Well, I need to figure out by tomorrow -- the practice round yesterday was nice. Today is going to be even more helpful, but I need to figure out how far the ball's going. It's a challenge. I hit a couple shots yesterday with a wedge on the course that flew 180. I'm 14 less -- on Sunday I hit a 5-iron from 171 and now I've hit a wedge further than that. That's going to be the challenge, try to figure it out because these greens are. They're difficult. You just can't go long, but it's hard to get yourself -- well, it's hard to get myself to hit certain shots because it's just, I don't see the golf ball going that far, but I've got to realize that it does.

**Q. Hello, Tiger. The first two rounds you are going to play with Mexican star Abraham Ancer. Can you tell us about your opinion about the Mexican star?**

**TIGER WOODS:** Yeah, you know, Abraham's played well. He played well in D.C. last year at my event and I think that he -- he had a chance to win the Deutsche Bank. He's got a lot of talent. You can see the way he hits a golf ball, just a matter of time before he puts it together and wins an event. He has the package to do it and it's just a matter of time.

I'll be playing with him and Bryson the first couple days and we'll have fun out there competing. I'm sure that he'll be probably under a little bit more pressure here being in Mexico and representing Mexico on a world stage like this, but I think that's only positive.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** Tiger, thank you so much for your time.

**TIGER WOODS:** Appreciate it.