

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
April 30, 2019



HAROLD VARNER III

DOUG MILNE: Harold Varner, thanks for joining us for a few minutes. You are coming in this week making your fifth start in the Wells Fargo Championship obviously in an area that you're familiar with, a lot of ties to the area. So just some thoughts on being back here at Quail Hollow this week.

HAROLD VARNER III: It's crazy this is my fifth time, but same thing, just I love playing in front of a lot of people that have just helped me out so much and just they get a thrill out of seeing me play, but I get a thrill of them being able to watch me play, something I love doing and they don't have to go really far to do it. So it's exciting. I'm just ready for Thursday to be here, so just try and be patient.

DOUG MILNE: Coming into the week, how are you feeling about your game? You've had a couple of top-10 finishes this year. Just kind of bring us up to speed about how you're feeling about the game.

HAROLD VARNER III: Pretty simple. I played really well in the fall, didn't miss much at all. Then played okay in California, west coast, and then just been playing pretty terrible lately. But I feel good. I don't lack confidence and it's just a season for a reason, so I just need to keep playing and what better way to do it than right here.

I always go through a phase where I don't play great and I've played -- after this tournament it usually turns around. So I just need to keep doing what I'm doing, keep trusting that something good's going to happen and keep working.

DOUG MILNE: Okay. With that, we'll open it up and take a few questions.

HAROLD VARNER III: Is it not weird like talking and you asking questions and like me looking this way?

DOUG MILNE: No, I'm used to it.

HAROLD VARNER III: Every time I do this it's always really weird.

DOUG MILNE: What you want to do is put somebody on the spot and just make direct eye contact with somebody no matter who asks the question.

HAROLD VARNER III: I know, but like if you ask the question and I'm looking at Steve over here, it's like really weird. "Hey, Doug, it's great."

Q. So what does a week look like for you at home? What are you doing?

HAROLD VARNER III: I've got it pretty dialed lately. Monday I get here and just get the tickets, get that situated, and Johnson Wagner's brother actually runs it, so it's awesome. He takes really good care of me.

Then usually I won't do anything, and I'll take my caddie and yesterday I took my finance advisor to Gastonia and I saw my parents and messed around. I got a few toys. So we don't do anything on Monday.

Tuesday, play nine holes usually and then obviously in the pro-am every time I've played. By Thursday I'm ready to go. But today I have a dinner. I had a PAC meeting, but they've been really nice to let me off of it, so I'm just going to sit on my couch. I'm looking forward to it.

Q. You talked about your game kind of coming and going. How challenging is that to find your game again? Golf's a game of comebacks in a sense, you're gone and you come back. How do you stay patient? How's that work for you?

HAROLD VARNER III: No, I'm very impatient. I don't think we have time to be patient. I think time is -- you know, you just don't get it. So, no, I'm not patient, but I think it's okay. It's not really a challenge.

I love playing golf, so even when it's bad, it's not bad. Damian Lillard had a great post yesterday, I don't know if y'all saw it. They asked him about pressure. He said, "Pressure's like a single mom having to provide food." That's pressure. That's like a struggle, a challenge to me. But I've always said this is easy, playing golf. I love playing golf. I don't know, I'm going to play it whether you guys show up or not. I love it.

So no, it's happened every year. I'm trying to make the bad times shorter and that was one of my goals. So we just keep moving, keep growing, keep learning. As long as I love playing golf, I'll be all right no matter where I end up.

Q. Having played a few practice rounds over the years with Tiger, I was just curious where you were when he won, how you reacted. Were you openly rooting for him or how did the whole thing go down for you?

HAROLD VARNER III: Oh, it's easy. Yes, I was rooting for him. It's great for my wallet, it's great for the game of golf. It's great for you guys, it's great for me. I just don't -- I don't see how you can not root for him. We need that.

I was at home, I was at my parents' house watching it. I was actually waiting for a golf cart that I bought to come in, but it was like delayed. So my dad's over there. I love him, but I was there to get a golf cart.

It was super -- it was really good. Earlier that week something happened and it just, man, it was so good. Just a good friend of mine that's been struggling and I asked Tiger to make a video for him. It took like two weeks and he sent it on Wednesday and this guy replied and he said, "I think good things are going to happen because my birthday's on Sunday," and just what he's going through and how that happened was way more important than Tiger actually winning. He's supposed to be out here today, so I hope I get to see him.

Q. He sent that on the Wednesday of Masters week?

HAROLD VARNER III: Yeah. It's pretty awesome.

Q. Who is the guy?

HAROLD VARNER III: A guy named Daniel Meggs. He actually got the Arnold Palmer Scholarship at Wake Forest, my class. Dude, he's awesome, just a great -- like it's just giving me chills right now just how it went down. I called him after he won. Man, gosh, I can't wait to see him, we'll just leave it there.

DOUG MILNE: Is he playing tomorrow? Is he coming out tomorrow, walking with you?

HAROLD VARNER III: No, he's coming out here, he's going to try to caddie two holes. But he said he got a fever last night and he's going to the doctor this morning. He's going to try to meet me out there today. I can't wait to see him because I've talked to him on the phone, we trade texts and his -- you know, he doesn't know it, but like the way he carries himself through a time like this, I don't think many people will or would. Talking to him just gives me so much like, you know, excitement like for life. He doesn't have much of it, but like the fact that he gets that much excitement over just the little bit that he has makes this easy. Like you ask these questions, like I can't do any wrong.

DOUG MILNE: Just for those who might not know, can you give us a little bit of a back story on what the situation is?

HAROLD VARNER III: So, a kid named Daniel Meggs, we grew up together playing junior golf. He got the Arnold Palmer Scholarship at Wake Forest. Such a great kid. He was such a stud growing up, but never treated, not the lesser players but the players that weren't as good any different. He just played the CGA stuff, just a super awesome guy.

Then we crossed paths in college and I get a message from someone close to him. They're like, "I knew he had cancer for a couple years." Weirdly enough, I saw him after this tournament last year at Selwyn Pub because it was just really weird, I was sitting there, I was like, "That's Daniel."

We were talking back and forth, and I didn't talk to him for like a month and someone said like the doctors gave him like a time limit, X amount of time. I didn't ask him, ask any more questions.

They're like, "It'd be really cool if Tiger could get a video or call." Well, I'm like for sure he ain't calling, that's just not happening, but we'll see. I've never asked him for anything. I asked him the week of Tampa and I got it the Wednesday of the Masters, and I sent it to him and he sent the greatest reply ever. He said, "Well, I can die now." We're laughing. He's like, "No, man, it's really cool. I needed this."

From what I hear, the updates that I get, that he's having trouble, like can he have surgery, can he have chemo and how it affects his body. He's just fighting, man. Every time I talk to him on the phone, it's just so encouraging. Never worry about anything, just full speed ahead. It's easy to say you would do that, but for him to be in that position and actually do it is something else I think.

So he sent that and he says that he's going to win on Sunday, and you know, I'm thinking like, I don't really care if Tiger wins on Sunday, like how are you doing. Then he won and I called him. For like a good 20 seconds, we didn't say anything. We just cried. Like I'm just glad he wasn't in front of me because I would not have said anything. It was just super awesome. Like I didn't do anything, but the joy that I got out of like seeing him talk to me, I just can't put it into words.

Q. I want to ask you a little more about that. I understand you guys have known each other since you were like 10?

HAROLD VARNER III: Yeah. And he's just an awesome kid. Yeah, we grew up together. He's never changed, he's always been the same. We played -- so when we got out of school, he tried to play professionally and it didn't work out. He found his calling in teaching kids, which at the time I hated. I didn't like really being around kids. It's obviously changed now because I'm way more mature than I was then, but he's got a really good knack for that. Just seeing him being so happy and knowing what he wants to do, being around golf still.

So we just always kept in touch that way. We played some good matches when we got out of school. But it's just weird because all I really want to do is just play golf with him like when I'm at home. Hey, man, whatever, let's go play.

Q. Do you remember the gist of what the message from Tiger said?

HAROLD VARNER III: It pretty much said that Daniel was an inspiration, we're pulling for you, keep fighting.

I mean, I've talked to Tiger a few times. This was really genuine. It was very thought out. It wasn't just -- he just didn't put the phone in his face and just whatever. I thought that was really cool.

I haven't seen Tiger since then and I can't wait to see him. I told him thank you. Also, his manager, they run a tight package, I'm sure you guys know. And for him to do that, I

thought that was very -- I mean, who am I? I'm nobody.

I just shouted out there and it worked. But this guy's still fighting for his life, though, no matter what. For him to be excited about Tiger, you know, just kind of -- I don't know, man, it just messes with me. I think it's pretty awesome.

Q. How long was the video? Are we talking like 30 seconds?

HAROLD VARNER III: I don't know. I'll tell you exactly, hold on. I want to say it was like 30 seconds, something like that. I'll find it real quick.

Sorry, you can ask another question while I look it up.

Q. I have another Tiger-related question that's kind of off topic from this.

HAROLD VARNER III: Fire.

Q. Was 19 in play before the Masters? Is 19 in play now?

HAROLD VARNER III: I think it was -- I thought it was always in play, but that's just -- I mean, I'm one of the biggest Tiger fans ever. I've never dealt with an injury, so I don't really know what he's really been through. I think there's unbelievable doctors out there, so I always thought that like he would figure it out.

But for him to actually do it, you could tell that some people have doubted him, which made it even cooler, like I love that. I love when things are against you and you just fire it up. That's what it's all about. That's what made it -- when he was winning the other 14, everyone was on his side. What made it so cool about this one, everyone was like, "I don't think he can do it." I'm like, "Piss off, dude." I love it.

DOUG MILNE: What's the length of the video?

HAROLD VARNER III: Seventeen seconds.

Q. There's been, since he's come back, a lot of sort of the hope among the younger generation of players that they might see Tiger at his best. Is that maybe some thinking that maybe they didn't know what they were hoping for or wishing for? You've played with them a bunch. Is there a sense of maybe be careful what you wish for?

HAROLD VARNER III: No, no. If I never won a tournament, I'd be all right. I just think he's really good at what he does. I don't care how many times he wins, I'm still going to treat him as Tiger. I just want to be really good at golf, so I ask him everything under the sun. That's why I wanted to get close to him.

He's made it easy for a black golfer to play. When you guys ask questions about being black, he's always answered them to the utmost respect and it's made it easy for me, so I always thank him for that. So things like that go a long way in my life. So yeah, I want to be close to that guy. I want to know how he became the best golfer to ever play.

Q. Heard a story about you trying to get his autograph here.

HAROLD VARNER III: Here, yeah. Pissed, so mad. Yeah, right there walking from -- so before when it was the Wachovia, that wasn't raised up, it was just like a walk-through. I waited right there on the road right there and I was like, "Dude, come on," and he walked right by me.

I'll never forget the first time we played together, we were walking up 18 and I was like, "Man, you didn't sign my autograph." He's like, "That's probably why you're here right now, you probably got mad." I was like, "You right."

So it was a great story, but like, man, you don't understand until -- like I don't even have that many autographs to sign. I enjoy signing them, I love it, like I go out of the way. But when you walk from -- when you're walking to the range, they put you in such a bad spot to where you have to be a butt or you're not going to get any work done. I'm getting better at it, but I should, I'm 28, about to 29, I should be like, "Hey, I'm so sorry, but I can't do it." It's hard, but I get why he walked right by me.

Q. So did you get his autograph?

HAROLD VARNER III: No, I never got it. I only asked him for one thing and that was that video.

Q. Do you remember when that was?

HAROLD VARNER III: I would have been 11, 12. I'm 28 right now so you can do -- I'm not really good at math, I don't carry a yardage book, but you fire away.

Q. What happened with the driver at THE PLAYERS?

HAROLD VARNER III: Oh, great story. Can you be more specific?

Q. You got penalized.

HAROLD VARNER III: 100 percent I was penalized. I still don't know why I was penalized. The short version is, at the time you could not -- if your driver cracked on the course, you couldn't replace it. So I'm on the range and I have this same driver I've played since I've been on Tour, and I've seen them crack and they start with the paint chipping in the middle, which is whatever. I've had the driver for over a year.

So I was trying to get another driver before I teed off. There was only 18 minutes left. I asked all the rules officials and there was a miscommunication, that's what happened.

The walking scorer picked up -- so they told me not to start with the shaft, so we put the shaft on the ground. I didn't know the walking scorer couldn't carry the shaft. She asked, "Do you want to carry it until she gets there?" I'm like, "I don't really care. I want to play golf and I want to get my driver in there." It shouldn't be that difficult, I wouldn't think.

So me and my caddie couldn't put it together. We got on the course. My agent put it together outside the ropes. I never touched it until it was completely together. I hit a golf shot in between, talking to the -- I hit the shot, then I saw the rules official and that's where -- I didn't know this, you can't assemble a club on the course. You have to be out of bounds or in the clubhouse. Did not know that.

I'm asking these rules officials. The best part about golf is I don't think there should be any gray area because when there's gray area, you get in this thing of intent. Like there shouldn't be intent. If it's on the piece of paper, it is what it is.

So we talked. I didn't handle myself great, I couldn't control it. But the thing that gets me is I've always been taught if you're in the wrong, you hold yourself accountable. So I didn't think the rules officials did a great job of also being like, hey, we didn't do right, you know. And that's fine, but just say it.

I've been able to talk to every rules official, apologize for how I acted, but it's in the past and I'm better for it. Obviously the game of golf is, because now you can replace the club. So I walk around with a smile and proud that like, hey, it was in the wrong, but the next time that it happens, I will be able to talk to that rules official the correct way and also be able to be like, "Hey, are you sure," because I've always -- I've never had a real ruling. Like man, just tell me what it is and we move on. So I'm learning just like everything.

Q. How bummed are you that Tiger isn't here this week?

HAROLD VARNER III: Really bummed. I like the crowds, I like the people he brings. Oh, yeah, I was supposed to play with him. Yeah, I was bummed. I gave him a good text, he hasn't replied yet. But yeah, I'm pissed.

Q. When is the last time you saw him, your friend?

HAROLD VARNER III: Sunday of this tournament last year. I was headed to Marc Leishman's event and I played so poorly that I teed off so early that I was like in between times, I'd take -- you know, just have a few friends, go to up Selwyn Pub, sit there until we had to leave. He was sitting in there with his wife and I was like, what the hell? Like why am I not talking to him, because I didn't see him, and I walked over there. We just sat down and we talked. So crazy.

Q. You talk about the great advice Tiger's given you. What's been the best piece of advice?

HAROLD VARNER III: He said playing golf is like reading a book with the TV on, because when I was growing up, I've always thought that he was so zoned, zoned in like didn't listen to everything. He's like, "No, I hear everything."

Because when I was growing up, I'm like, man, am I the only one who hears all this crazy stuff? Freaking me out. That made it so much easier, because when you're reading a book, you can hear the noise of the TV. Especially if it's a good book, you're just like you don't know what's going on. Like what everyone does every day, they text and walk and don't have no clue what's going on. Like exactly what I'm about to do when I walk out this door and walk to the room. Someone might say something and I'll be texting.

DOUG MILNE: One last thing. We understand you also have some special kids coming out tomorrow from the foundation, is that right?

HAROLD VARNER III: Oh, yeah. So yeah, we did a foundation event. It was a high school event. It was super cool. I didn't do much. This is the coolest thing about being successful I think is that you have awesome people -- if you have the right people around you, they can do things that you envision. I've always wanted to help people in golf, so we started our foundation, we ran a high school tournament, and the kids that won from Fort Mill are going to come out and just hang out tomorrow. I'm super excited because I think I'm playing with Denny Hamlin. He's also a Jordan athlete, we've crossed paths before.

But the cool thing for me is they get to do something I couldn't do, and if I keep doing that the rest of my life, I think this community will be in a better place.

DOUG MILNE: Sounds like it's going to be a busy few days, but all good.

HAROLD VARNER III: Man, busy's good. One day I won't be able to be busy, what are you talking about.

DOUG MILNE: Harold, thanks for your time as always.