

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
November 20, 2019



CHARLES HOWELL III

DOUG MILNE: Charles Howell, thanks for joining us for a few minutes prior to the defense of your title from your third career PGA TOUR win last year at the RSM Classic. Got off to a great start, back-to-back 64s, and then if I recall, Sunday, a little bit of a hiccup right out of the gate.

CHARLES HOWELL III: Yep.

DOUG MILNE: But birdied three of your last four holes to get into the playoff, which you then obviously got the job done.

So just kind of reflect back for a minute on that win and how significant it was given the amount of time between the second and third win and just kind of carry us through that.

CHARLES HOWELL III: A year goes fast. I think the number one thing that I still take out of that week and the subsequent 12 months of golf or so from that is the difficulty of winning. I may be the poster boy for that statement, but the number of golf tournaments I've played and the number of years I've been fortunate enough to play on the PGA TOUR, I think I just have a much greater full appreciation of actually winning a golf tournament.

I mean, we live in an era of Tiger Woods and obviously now here Rory McIlroy and Brooks Koepka that has made winning look relatively easy, but from a different point of view, I would say that I see their wins as probably more impressive than most just based on my career and what's transpired over the last three, four years of my career.

DOUG MILNE: And moving ahead to this season, you're off to a good start, no missed cuts in six starts, a couple of top-10 finishes. Just some of the things you're feeling good about so far this season?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, I went to Asia, which I thought was fantastic. The events there were wonderful. The depth of golf worldwide, I think, too, especially evident in China was pretty amazing.

No, it's been a nice start to the year. I historically play well in the fall, I like the fall. Now I look at the schedule, there's almost a third of the year is played in the fall. I feel the need and a bit of the pressure to play in the fall. It's probably a good thing. You look at the strength of fields I think as the Fall Series has continued on is getting stronger and stronger. But yeah, you possibly could have played nine, 10 golf tournaments by now, so it's a big chunk of the year and I think it's a really important part of the year.

Q. Charles, you played in all of these events and it's the 10-year anniversary. I think I know the answer to this, but what's your highlight of playing in this event and what memories come to mind?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, the first thing actually is I remember when Davis announced the event and remember thinking how great this event's going to be, having come to Sea Island since I was a kid for so many years. And obviously the secret's out, right, of how great Sea Island is, but for the whole Tour to see it, et cetera, et cetera. So I was unbelievably excited they got an event here. I still remember that as sort of a highlight, that a PGA TOUR event was even coming here to Sea Island, number one.

But obviously over all the years I think the local community supported the event has been wonderful, the golf course. There's not many events you have where you don't hear players complain about something. I've never heard one complaint about this event. Possibly sometimes it gets a little bit cold, but other than that, I think this event is generally regarded as one of the if not the best event in the fall.

My best memory would obviously be winning the golf tournament last year, but a little more than just winning, I think coming from that was a good reminder at 40 years old to continue to work at my game and find ways to improve and get better knowing the golf I played. And then Patrick Rodgers I believe shot 64-64 on the weekend or whatever it was for us to go into a playoff. It was as much excitement as it was to win and finally win again was also a reminder of if I'm going to stay competitive and keep doing this into my 40s, I've got to keep finding ways to get better.

Q. If I can do a followup, this is the last official event of the decade. When you think back over the last decade, what stands out in your mind as far as professional golf?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, I would say Tiger Woods and then the resurgence of Tiger Woods has been a big standout. You're talking about all of golf, right, not just this tournament? All of golf.

Then the emergence of Rory McIlroy Roy and Brooks Koepka I would say. I mean, Brooks doing what he did, Rory did what he did a few years prior to that, but I think the story -- and just because I know him so well and we've spent a lot of time together in the early 2000s was Tiger where he was to a point of not really being able to walk. When an athlete is having surgery for quality of life well above even quality of golf and then to come back and win the Masters, I still say that stands out as a story that, I mean, obviously everyone in this room knows the game of golf really well and covers it and I think you can have an even better appreciation of how difficult that is of what he did. I know it's later in the decade, but I think that's got to be the story.

Q. You talked about realizing the things you had to do to stay competitive after 40. What were those things and what did you do this year to keep competitive?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, the way the game is going, I would say more so than ever the driver and the putter have become golf. There was a time a long time ago where I think you saw guys with iron play, I'm going to try to draw this into this flag, I'm going to try to fade this, a little off-speed this and that. I think what's replaced maybe a great iron player is a guy that drives it great and puts it great. If there was a kid out there wanting to play professional golf, I would say learn to hit it as far as you can and putt all the time.

I remember on the driving range a long time ago with David Leadbetter at Lake Nona watching Nick Faldo and Nick Price practice and they were hitting 3-irons 200 to 205 yards, because I remember there was a flag out there and they would draw some, they would fade some. Oh, yeah, look, Charlie, they're really great iron players, and they were and it was super impressive. But how the game has changed now is go watch Rory McIlroy and Dustin Johnson and Brooks hit drivers and watch Jordan Spieth putt and find a way to do that. That's just the reality of it, that's just the facts. If I was a kid growing up, that's what I would learn how to try to do.

Q. Is it still possible to do what a guy like Kenny Perry did after 40?

CHARLES HOWELL III: I think so, because there's better workout trainers, there's better physical therapists in and around golf, so yes, I think it is.

I think that equipment, too, is helping as well. I mean, but even Kenny will tell you what he did wasn't easy. Vijay as well, I mean super impressive. Fred Funk winning THE PLAYERS Championship late in his career, but it is still possible for sure. But I think the wave and the trend is going the other side of that. Phil Mickelson obviously did it as well.

Q. Can you tell me how you feel now about the new schedule? It was more compressed last year than it will be this year, but obviously starting in September and finishing in August, and like you said, we're a third or almost a third of the way through, how has it worked for you and what do you think the pros and cons are?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, there really isn't an offseason and I think the PGA TOUR is doing a phenomenal job creating opportunities to play golf tournaments, and that's their job is to have as many golf tournaments as we can to play.

I do think, though, unfortunately some events some time of the year are going to have struggle where I don't think -- you can't ask a, let's say, a top ex-player in the world to play all the places, you can't do it.

Me, I've always played a lot of golf tournaments, so I think it's great. This is my seventh event in the fall, so I'm generally in the range of 28-ish golf tournaments a year. Father Time I'm sure will slow that down, but I enjoy playing.

It's phenomenal what the purses are and the interest in the game of golf even globally. If I was a 21-year-old single guy, I would play every week. I mean, why not? But yeah, I think

that's wonderful. I think guys are going to have to pick and choose and make their offseasons.

Q. Do you think they've missed out by not playing in the fall, people who have just walked away for a couple months?

CHARLES HOWELL III: I think to each his own because if that's going to make them more rested and more ready, they can win an event on the west coast, that's an afterthought.

But I do think that the more this goes on, though, I think you will see more guys play in the fall, for sure. You know, the guys in Europe have a bit of pressure to go back over there obviously and play some of their events. But yeah, I mean, you can play 10 golf tournaments in the fall and if you play a 25, 26 tournament season, that's over a third of it. It's a lot of golf in the fall and it's super important. I've always thought it's important to get off to a good start going into January, but I do understand the argument making an offseason, but I would fall on the side of playing more.

Q. I think the streak is maybe 60, 70b years in a row, but the subject of slow play came up again this year.

CHARLES HOWELL III: Okay, yes.

Q. Are we at a point where something could still be done or it just doesn't even matter anymore as a viable subject to be discussed because there isn't anything that can be done?

CHARLES HOWELL III: It's a viable subject, yes. What the solutions are, I don't know. You know, you're trying to make the field size as big as possible to give the most guys the opportunity to play, and you know, I would say it would boil right down to just be ready when it's your turn to play.

I understand there's times where we have to back off a shot with a wind switch, et cetera, et cetera, but at the same time I remember Grant Waite, my golf instructor, was joking, he said one of the very first player meetings he went into 25 years ago, it was slow play and here we are again now, slow play. When I'm sitting in a wheelchair watching guys hit it 370 out here it's probably going to be slow play. I don't know how you fix it. And I don't know what -- I mean, like where do we want to get to? That's the other thing is like now -- like what should a round of golf take?

In defense of the other side of the story is that you go to the Honda Classic and you play 230-yard par 3s with water and a flag three off the left and it's blowing 30 miles an hour, how fast can you do it?

Now you look at last week at Mayakoba, we played there pretty fast, the greens are kind of close to the tees and you can kind of get moving. I think the Plantation course here is going

to move kind of fast, so there's so many factors involved. If you boil it down to guys just get ready to play so when it's their turn, they can go, I think the problem kind of goes away.

Q. One other thing, Olympic year next year. Does an Olympic gold medal mean anything to you as a golfer who grew up dreaming of winning a major championship or being on the Tour, whatever? Where do you place the Olympic golf achievement if you got a gold medal or whatever into the context of historically what golf has been?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, it was never something that we dreamed about as kids growing up. I mean, speaking of myself, I dreamt of winning the Masters. I'm quite sure a young Rory McIlroy grow up dreaming about winning the British Open. For a lot of guys, I dreamt of making this clutch par putt at the last to win the U.S. Open.

So maybe now kids will grow up dreaming about here's a putt to win the gold medal, because it wasn't even our realm of golf, winning the gold medal. I think it would be incredible to play for the Olympic team, and not just for the golf but to see the whole experience, to hang out with other athletes from other sports, see how they train, what they do, watch all that up close and personal. I think the whole experience would be phenomenal. I would more than love to compete for America in the Olympics. It's a tall task obviously to get on that team.

And I think the goal, too, to grow the game around the world. The Olympics touches a lot of places that maybe the PGA TOUR doesn't, et cetera, and you know, hopefully we'll look back in 30 years and say wow, that was a great decision to grow the game.

Q. Charles, we talked to Brendon Todd a little while ago about the struggles he went through and five years without winning. Right now the two of you both have three wins in your career, although you've done it in a very different way, model of consistency. Anything different -- you both have the three wins but such different routes. What were the frustrations for you of not winning for a long time before getting the trophy here last year?

CHARLES HOWELL III: I think -- well, the big frustration was I finished second I think 15 times. I think that was like, okay, what -- and then I keep looking at in professional golf, my competition stays 23 to 25 years old and so I kept looking at the generation coming up and the generation coming up and every guy that comes out, they hit it miles, they putt great, they're fearless. I'm like, holy cow.

I think my frustration kind of turned into will I ever win again, and okay, so what do I need to do to try to win again? Well, I'm already trying to do all those things because I have had a nice career. I wouldn't trade it for the world because I've learned so much. I've been around the world. I've been fortunate, this is my 20th year of playing golf for a living. I would have taken that as a kid and run if you would have said that. Winning obviously is how a golfer's measured in the big focus, et cetera.

Mine was different than Brendon in that I had a lot of opportunities and didn't take advantage of them but was still hanging around and having a nice career. Brendon I think is more impressive, far more impressive than mine because he in his own words lost his game and then came back to win. That's a lot more impressive than mine, I think.

Q. It was announced this morning that Brooks Koepka had to withdraw from the Presidents Cup team. How big of a loss do you think that is?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Did he pick Rickie?

Q. Yeah.

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, obviously it's a huge loss. Anytime you lose the No. 1 player in the world, that's a huge loss. And Brooks, like his mentality, the way he is, I mean, he seems made for match play, so I do think it's a big loss. But you're replacing him with Rickie Fowler, who's obviously a phenomenal player.

You know, yeah, it's a shame he actually got hurt. I would say is like the bigger thing, right? The frustration of going through that, going through an injury, the great golf he's playing, et cetera, et cetera. But, I mean, Rickie obviously will do great. But yeah, sure there it's a loss, there's no doubt about it, it's a loss.

Was Anthony Kim on the radar of getting picked? I mean, you've got to pick Anthony Kim, don't you?

Q. You've been playing pro golf for 20 years. How's your relationship with the game now compared to when you first turned professional?

CHARLES HOWELL III: Well, I still love the game. I've been a little bit rejuvenated because my son is playing golf and he loves it. So after school and et cetera, we're going to the golf course. He makes me play a bit more, gets me off the driving range hitting range balls, which is sort of my thing. But he makes me play more, chip and putt more. He's getting into playing the U.S. Kids golf stuff, so watching that, watching him go through that is really cool because I remember when I went through that.

I still love the game. I mean, Lord willing, if I stay healthy I would like to keep playing. I know that we're out here to compete and win and play golf tournaments, but it is our life. This is a traveling circus, so to speak. All the guys, you want to talk about your competitors or whatever, even you guys, I've known you guys for 20 years, it's a part of your life. I would love to stay out here as long as I can and play, but yeah, I still love the game. Hopefully, it stays that way. I hope I don't get too bitter. You'll have to tell me if I get old and bitter.

DOUG MILNE: Charles, we appreciate your time. Best of luck this week.

CHARLES HOWELL III: Thank you, sir. You've got it.

