

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
November 20, 2019



ZACH JOHNSON

DOUG MILNE: Zach Johnson, thanks for joining us for a few minutes prior to the start of your 10th RSM Classic. That said, just a few comments on being back here. You've had top-10 finishes in both your last two starts here. Hopefully, that continues to carry over to this year. So just some thoughts on being back here this week.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I did not know that. Yeah, I mean, it's great. It's home, you know? Anytime you can go work a little bit and then head back and, you know, obviously have a six-course meal waiting for you at home, sleep in your own bed, it's pretty amazing.

I'm excited to be here. I love everything about this tournament. Everything. I love the golf courses. The new Plantation's magnificent. I think it's going to be really -- we're only playing it for one day, but really good for those that stay here on the Sea Island properties to be a great complement to Seaside in a lot of respects. Seaside's magnificent, as we all know. The golf courses are tremendous.

Pretty special that it's 10 years. Shocking to me. Seems like it was yesterday in some respects that we just started this event. But it's also, you know, certainly an honor to be an ambassador of this great company of RSM and I would say an ambassador of this community and everything that it has.

Sea Island Company, great as far as, you know, amenities and hospitality. They just do it right. It's a perfect combination of things here. Always great to be here. It's cool to kind of see some of my peers come here, like man, you get to live here. I just naturally take it for granted sometimes, so that puts things in perspective pretty quick that this is actually home. I applaud Davis and certainly his foundation and everything the Loves have done to make this a destination event.

DOUG MILNE: Last question from me and then we'll open it up. Coming off the top-25 finish last week in Mexico, another top-15 prior to that, just some thoughts on how your game's coming around for you?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I'm very encouraged, very encouraged. Worked hard, reassessed things, and actually when things aren't well, you've got to do something. Got the meeting of the minds together and my team of guys and hashed out a really good plan and I think the dividends of that plan are starting to show.

I'm not suggesting they're there yet because I don't feel they're even close, but I see the upward trajectory of that and that's encouraging but there's still more work to be done. Hopefully, it's this week. If not, I know it's going to come at some point, but I've got a great

plan of practice and a great plan Monday through Sunday during tournament week, too. So just trying to stay in the present, because the frustration can set in when you're not getting the results. If I just go day to day and keep working, I think it will show.

DOUG MILNE: Okay. I know these guys have some questions about a little event coming up next month. We'll open it up and take a few questions from you guys.

Q. I wanted to touch on you talked about playing this event every year, 10-year anniversary. Is there one moment that stands out for you over the last decade of RSM?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, the first year stands out right off the bat because I remember we were in a different date. Were we in Wales or Scotland? Wales. I want to say we had a Monday finish? It's like we're kind of kickstarting a new event here, especially Davis, right, not knowing exactly what's going to transpire. Then we get here Monday late, late Monday, or almost Tuesday morning because of the time change. I don't know, doesn't matter. Point is, that sticks out.

Certainly some of the playoffs stick out, some of the drama on the golf course definitely sticks out. I think the last four holes, five holes, yeah, I would say 14 through 18 really stick out as far as what can transpire during the tournament. There's been a lot of quality golf that's been played there in the end on Sundays.

Other things, you know, just the way RSM has made it their own. They've been the only title sponsor of this event and it's theirs. There's distinct ownership in that and that's pretty impressive. I don't think we have a whole lot of that on the PGA TOUR where there's a new destination, new title sponsor and it's still lasting and still going on. That's impressive.

I'm not trying to be a spokesman right now, but I am one in a sense that I'm honored to be a part of a company that sees the potential of using the golf platform to be great stewards and serve others. That's what stands out, is that they've eclipsed a massive amount of millions of dollars year after year. They eclipsed over a million bucks since September this year with their Birdies Fore Love, so many things stand out.

And then like I said, I live here, so seeing the community really behind this, a lot of like my close personal friends are in the Sales Club, it's just kind of strange but yet cool knowing that this community really loves having us here.

Q. This is also the last official event of the decade. Just in general for golf, not so much this event, but what do you feel like has defined the last decade in professional golf?

ZACH JOHNSON: Holy cow, Rex. What has defined professional golf in the last decade?

Q. What memories stick out for you, I guess.

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I mean, if you're talking about professional golf right now, modern professional golf, there's really one name that sticks out, right? I mean, that's obviously Tiger, and he's still very relevant and still very current, we know that. The last start he had, he won, so I would say that's beyond relevant. But when the time -- the portion of the last decade hit where he couldn't participate because of injuries and the like, the game moved on and it still was really good. The product was really good, the torch was carried by other guys, younger guys, studs, and that's impressive. That's kind of what sticks out in my mind is you add the J-Days, obviously the Roris, Jordans, JT's and some other guys now that are coming behind them that can carry the torch if need be.

I say all that, but then the best part about it for me as being two months younger than Tiger Woods is the fact that these guys get to have a taste of what we had forever as of right now. I'm not suggesting it's going to be like that forever, but I mean, I'm just glad they're getting a glimpse of what we had to go through.

Q. What have been the biggest challenges for you going through the past 12 months and is this the longest stretch of your career where you've had to deal with frustrations?

ZACH JOHNSON: I thought about that. I think somebody else posed a similar question.

I don't know. I mean, I remember I won my rookie year and then I had a hiatus from winning for at least two years maybe. Two and a half, three years. Well, Augusta was my next win, so it was just over two years. You know, decent finishes in that little span there, but nothing significant. So yeah, I would say this is by far the -- as far as results go, the deepest and probably the longest valley I've had. And I'm not going to sit up here and make excuses. I mean, I kind of know why. They're not excuses, they're just facts.

I'm not going to use age as one, that's for sure, because there's been many, many, many players, peers of mine that have had their best golf at 41 to 49. I can't use that. I'm still in good shape, probably in some of the best shape I've been in in a long time, so it's really just a matter of evaluating where you are and why and then continuing on trying to learn from it and move.

So yeah, the last 12 months have been frustrating. I haven't played as much as I usually do in a 12-month period, which was by design. I thought I could stay in a form, in a posture that would carry me through that and I just didn't do that.

Q. As the highest ranking Presidents Cup official here, I just want to get your thoughts on what transpired with Brooks pulling out and Rickie being on the team now.

ZACH JOHNSON: It's extremely unfortunate because of the individual that cannot play, Brooks. Is he No. 1 in the world? No. 1 player in the world on your team and he can't play?

There's nothing positive about that. It's an injury, nothing positive about that.

But as Tiger has kind of told us, I know he's talked to Brooks and said the same thing, he's got to be thinking long term for the betterment of himself certainly but also because he's got a lot of golf in front of him and more teams to play on. So it would be foolish if it's a coin flip to even try. I applaud him for, you know -- Brooks for at least taking the initiative to sit out. I know he phoned most of those players on the team, which is admirable.

It's just unfortunate. Now I say that, but this is the beauty of Tiger Woods is he's -- once we found that news out, once he found that news out, he turned the page. He's like, okay, we're going -- we were here and now we're going there. Rickie's coming in and this is our team. And the entire team has not looked back. They've been so receptive to it. Rick's been receptive to it obviously and we've still got a phenomenal team.

Q. Is it still possible for guys to do like what a Kenny Perry did in their 40s now, and how do you kind of keep things maybe fresh or keep stave off burnout at that age?

ZACH JOHNSON: Is it possible? Yeah, I think it is. Is it possible for me? I hope so. I don't know. Kenny Perry would be one example. Stricker would be another one, Jay Haas would be another one. There's a number of examples I can probably come up with, but yeah, I definitely think it's possible.

And if anything, those individuals and some other guys are motivating factors for me, but the biggest motivation is the fact I'm competing against kids. I mean, and they're good and they're hungry.

Sounds like we got new television contracts out soon. There's motivation there, too. Not major motivation, I'm just saying there's a lot of incentives out there. I want to play in more Cups. I don't want to be a vice captain every year. If I had that opportunity, it's a great honor, distinct honor, but I want to play.

I remember Tiger when he was vice captain, whenever he was vice captain, the first vice captaincy he had '15 maybe, '16 maybe. He wasn't in Korea with us, was he?

Q. No, it was Hazeltine.

ZACH JOHNSON: Prior to that, because we were buddies, we were talking to each other quite a bit at night. I don't know if Davis put it on his plate to formulate, hash out pairings. He's like, man, this is hard work, I just want to go play. I'm like, yeah, I'm glad I am.

I get that, you're a competitor regardless, but you want to play. I think I can still do that. Truth be told, I think there's still more in the tank in that regard. But I also want to contend more in majors, I want to win more golf tournaments and I know I've got the right team to do that. I know, you know, I've got the proper mindset from what I can tell and I'm going to keep digging, keep learning and keep working.

Q. How do you feel about the adjusted season here, starting in September? It was kind of compressed last year and still this year. I mean, you played in some fall events, a lot of people didn't. Now they've got the whole rest of the year to get in however many tournaments they've got.

ZACH JOHNSON: Right, right. I think you said it, though. I played in some and some didn't, and you have both options and I think that's tremendous in a sense that if you don't have a great year, using myself as an example, you have some forced time off because you can't play in all the Playoff events. Then whether it's two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, five weeks, whatever it is, you have some time off, reassess, work and go out and compete again.

I didn't go to Asia this year. I don't think I was in all the Asian events anyway, but it doesn't matter. I had more time off. I almost had too many offseasons and I was able to play, I think this is my fifth event this fall if I'm not mistaken, is that right?

DOUG MILNE: Yep.

ZACH JOHNSON: So I had the option. But if you have a great year and you want to take some time off, you have that option.

The facts are that every event in the fall has raised its level of everything, whether it's the course, the purse, everything is just, they're all great events.

There's just not really much of an offseasoon. There never really has been, it's just different. I like it, I think it's great. I think I probably have the old-school mindset that the Tour doesn't start until January because I've got to get out of that because there's a lot of competitive golf and --

Q. That's why I asked.

ZACH JOHNSON: -- and motivations to play in the fall and I like it. I'm still able to watch a lot of football.

Q. Can I ask one more on a different topic? When Tiger was making his picks, he somehow mentioned you as though you're headed toward a future captaincy of teams. I wondered if there was something going on in the background that we didn't know.

ZACH JOHNSON: Right. Well, I would like to know, too. If you know, let me know. Honestly, I'm being fully transparent. I'm not aware of that. Granted, I was fortunate to be a part of the team last year in France with Jim Furyk as our captain. Then obviously Tiger asked me to be the vice captain this year if I couldn't make the team. Welcomed that with open arms.

I want to play next year and the year after that and the year after that, but if my role is still to be a part of the team and the captaincy or whatever it is in the future, I'm certainly going to entertain that. I mean, I'm not going to say yes immediately because that's not fair, but I don't know where it is.

I mean, I'm part of this Ryder Cup committee now, so there's probably some merit involved there and some clout involved there, but to where that goes, I don't know.

I mean, if it comes about regardless of which Cup it is, I'm certainly going to process that and think about it a lot. Again, I'm not going to say yes off the bat because I want to do what's best for the team.

Q. Zach, how much input did yourself and the other assistant captains have in the selection of Rickie as the replacement, or did Tiger do this in a vacuum?

ZACH JOHNSON: No. I mean, he -- nothing was done in a vacuum from what I can tell. It was one of those where communication started, you know, if Brooks can't go or whatever, then what's our next option. Here are the options. And based on what all of us felt, corporately, we felt Rickie was the best option at this time.

I mean, no, to say that he made it solely on his -- no. Ultimately he made the decision, but it was based on other people's weigh-ins on that, or the other guys weigh-ins on that.

Q. Can you lend any insight as to why he announced this before RSM rather than see maybe how some people play this week?

ZACH JOHNSON: You know, I can't. I don't know why the timing is as such. My guess is that Brooks felt it was fair to get it -- once he -- you know, the longer he drags it out, the more difficult it is for the replacement to get in form regardless of who it is. Does that make sense? Whether they're playing or not, this week or the next or wherever -- I guess there's nothing next week.

I can't answer that, I don't know why the decision was -- maybe just because the doctors say you cannot play now, so it's time to get the announcement out. I don't know, I don't know why. I don't think there's a bad time. The earlier, the better.

Q. You guys play a number of events a year where you have multiple courses, different tracks. Can you talk about like the Thursday-Friday tee time wave advantages and in particular to here, you've got a new Plantation course after the renovations, kind of your thoughts and your strategy with these first two rounds?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, we do, we have quite a few tournaments now, probably a handful with multiple courses? One, two, three, four -- okay, I've got four in my head. Doesn't matter. Yeah, almost a handful of multiple course events.

Strategy involved there, I mean, obviously getting your feet on the grounds is priority. The luxury I have here is I played the new Plantation golf course, probably played upwards of 50 holes prior to this week, so I had already seen it.

Granted, I was in shorts and a golf shirt and sweating like a madman, but a little different today. So just getting out there is priority.

When it comes to tee times on Thursday or Friday, was that the second part?

This week we're playing two golf courses because we've got two championship golf courses here, right? What that lends itself to is a bigger field. So prior to having the two golf courses, how long have we done that, four years, five years? Four or five. It doesn't matter, half the time we had a limited field, right? It was only 132 and we barely -- I don't even know if we finished on Thursdays and Fridays. So with the split golf courses, more guys can get in and thus we can still finish on Thursday and Friday with daylight. And the tee times, there's not really an early wave, there's not really a late wave, there's just kind of a middle wave. I don't know what time the first tee time is tomorrow, but it can't be more than about 9:00.

Q. 9:15.

ZACH JOHNSON: And then 12:00-something, so this week the tee times are -- I don't think anybody's at a distinct advantage either way.

Q. Are you going to approach Plantation any different than years past after the renovation? Will you be as aggressive tomorrow morning?

ZACH JOHNSON: That's a good question. I think the greens have gotten bigger, but they're small in the sense there's quadrants and whatnot. The fairways are probably the same, maybe even a little bit easier to hit. I think there's moments out there you can be aggressive. I think the total yardage is going up a little bit, so you're hitting longer clubs into some holes. Wind pending, which is not supposed to be much tomorrow, yeah, you can be aggressive.

The greens still hold, that's what's astonishing to me. My caddie said, he went and walked it the last couple days and usually with new greens you get a lot of firmness and they're still, they're great.

But I'm under the mindset that you're going to have to take advantage of Plantation. I think there's more birdies to be had out there. You've got four par 5s instead of, well, there's only two on the other one, right? On Seaside. Yeah, there's probably a slightly more aggressive approach than Seaside.

DOUG MILNE: Zach, thanks for your time.