

**CHRIS KIRK (-12)**

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**JACK RYAN:** We'll go ahead and get started here with Chris Kirk. Chris, great playing. If we can get an opening comment on your round today.

**CHRIS KIRK:** Sure. Yeah, it was a really fun day out there. I've had a lot of -- I had a blast this week. I've got a really close friend of mine, Sam Straka, who happens to be the twin brother of Sepp Straka, who plays out here. We're all really close. Obviously they're closer, they're born two minutes apart. But yeah, two of my really good friends in the world and have had a blast.

Got off to a great start today, hit a lot of really good shots on the front nine, made some really nice putts. The back nine, I was trying my best to stay aggressive and keep firing at flags and keep making birdies. A few times may have gotten a little bit too aggressive with some of my iron shots, but was able to kind of scrape it around. unfortunate bogey on the last hole, but I think if you had told me I was going to shoot 7 under at the start of the day, I probably would have taken it.

**JACK RYAN:** If we could, going back to that relationship with Sam, is this the first time he's ever caddied for you, and just some history between you guys.

**CHRIS KIRK:** Yes, it is the first time he's ever caddied for me. We've talked about it numerous times. a lot of people know that I switch around caddies a good bit and enjoy having friends come out and work for me for a little bit here and there, so he'll be with me for the next month or so, something like that.

Yeah, it's been a really fun time being able to spend some time together. He and his brother will come visit me in Athens every now and then at the farm and we've definitely become good, close friends. obviously Sam's a great player himself, he's played professional golf, played golf at Georgia as well, so definitely someone that I trust out there.

**Q. Chris, welcome to Detroit. More on the caddie thing. So who's your caddie rooting for?**

**CHRIS KIRK:** This week he's rooting for the guy that's paying him.

**Q. Right, as we can imagine. Can you --**

**CHRIS KIRK:** He's rooting for his brother, too, though.

**Q. Can you give us a little bit more -- you say they'll come visit you down in Georgia.**

## **What do you guys do when you hang out?**

**CHRIS KIRK:** Plenty. I live on 40 acres just south of Athens and I have a driving range at my house, I have a few old cars, a Gator and I've got a pistol range down in the woods behind my house. You know, nice pool in the backyard. You can keep yourself pretty busy around my place without having to go outside the gate.

## **Q. And then on the round today, those two hole-outs from around the green, can you take us through those two?**

**CHRIS KIRK:** Yeah, sure. No. 11, par 3, I was telling myself in the forefront of my mind to hit it over there at the left side of the green, middle of the green and give myself a good putt for birdie, but I'm typically not very good at that. So obviously I had a high draw right at it that just came up a little bit short in that bunker, but thankfully it was up in front of the bunker on a little bit of an upslope, so pretty straightforward shot. Came out a little bit hotter than I meant to. Maybe it would have gone five feet by if it hadn't gone in, but went in right in the middle.

No. 12, I missed the fairway right and had to hit a little low punch under the tree and around the tree. I hit a really good shot, but just I think trying to hold off the face so much to get it to curve right around the tree, just hit it a little bit too hard and just ran over the green, but another very straightforward shot. Ball wasn't sitting too bad considering how long the rough is there, so I just had to hit a little flop, just toss it on the green. It's a downslope that's going to release right to the hole, but obviously very fortunate to see the ball go right in the middle of the hole.

## **Q. When you did return to golf, how comfortable were you in that first tournament back or did it take you a while to get comfortable back playing again?**

**CHRIS KIRK:** I would say it's still a process, to be honest. Yeah, I remember my first tournament back at Mayakoba, Jeremy Elliott, who's my agent and another very close friend of mine, he came down there with me and caddied for me.

Yeah, I remember hitting -- I think I hit a hybrid off the first hole because I just wanted something I felt like I could hit in the grass, I was so nervous. Hit a 9-iron from about 170 on my second shot because I was a little bit jacked up.

Yeah, I think I'm slowly getting there. Am I at the comfort level that I was five years ago? Probably not. But as far as my life in general is concerned, I'm probably at an all-time high comfort-wise. I think a lot of that carries over to my golf game and how I feel on the golf course. Definitely even after we really got it going today, Sam and I were just kind of joking around and, you know, laughing about how -- trying to make some birdies coming in so I could beat Sepp in the Nassau we had today.

Yeah, I think that I just take all of this a little bit less seriously. Obviously I want to play well

and I want to compete and I want to try to win tournaments, but I don't think it feels as much of life and death as maybe it used to.

**Q. Chris, you talked about Sam and obviously the Georgia connection. Can you talk about the bond between players? And during the whole process last year, did you lean on any of these folks? I know Coach Haack is pretty influential in a lot of players' lives. It seems like there's a stronger bond. Obviously, of course, it's a great program over the years, but what's that meant to have folks like that to kind of lean on?**

**CHRIS KIRK:** Yeah, during my time off last year there were certainly a lot of players out here, not just Georgia players, that were, you know, very tremendously kind in just reaching out to me and checking on me and seeing how I was doing, and yeah, I would include Coach Haack in that as well.

Yeah, it's definitely one of those times where you find out who your friends are, as they say. I was very thankful to have a lot of guys really take time out of their days and check in on me and it really meant a lot.

**Q. Obviously you played great golf for two days, yet Webb's right there, there's a whole bunch of folks at 11. Do you get that in your head, especially when you haven't played as well as you wanted to the last few months, that I've got to get out here and shoot a number, or is it different because you're just kind of in that different mindset now?**

**CHRIS KIRK:** Yeah, I'm not a big "shoot a number" guy. If I'm in contention with a few holes to play, I'm going to look at a leaderboard to see what I need to do, but I'm just all about -- all about the process.

Really, another close friend of mine who's been really influential in my life, Grant Cardone, he's a sports psychologist but he acted as my therapist basically last year. We would talk a few times a week when I was at home not playing and I think for at least five, six months golf was never mentioned. He was really helpful helping me sort through a lot of the thoughts that I was having and a lot of struggles that I was having.

I always love one thing that he says: The objective never changes, only the story you tell yourself. Every shot you hit, you're just trying to hit a good shot, you know. If I keep it as simple as that, then I think I'll be all right.

**Q. Chris, good playing. I know we talked a couple weeks ago in St. Augustine, you mentioned when you were on the range at Colonial you didn't feel like one of the best players there. How much of that feeling came back to you this week after that win in St. Augustine?**

**CHRIS KIRK:** Some, I guess. I still probably don't feel quite like I did five years ago, if I'm being honest. It doesn't come back overnight, that's for sure. I think two weeks August in

St. Augustine, it's just validation that my good is good enough and it's something that I already knew, but knowing and doing are two very different things.

So to be able to do that, and then these last couple days I definitely think that this week I've had a little bit more confidence in just the way I feel and the way I'm walking around. So yeah, but it's definitely still a process, but it's a process for everybody. There's no such thing as perfect in this game physically or mentally. Just trying to improve and trying to do the little things right and get to where I can really believe in what I'm doing.

**Q. I was wondering when you had your time away, did you ever think that your golf career might be over? do you plan to use your platform at all to help other people going through the same struggles or is it just about trying to take care of your own self right now?**

**CHRIS KIRK:** You know, when I stopped playing, I didn't really know what to think about my future. I kind of just didn't care at that point. I was focused on doing what I needed to do to be healthy, to be a good husband for my wife and a good father to my kids. I was thankfully in a place financially where my career could wait.

I definitely had feelings for a number of months there that I just had no desire to play golf. It wasn't that, "Oh, I hate golf, I never want to do this again," I just had no real desire to do it. I felt busy working on what I was working on. But then eventually I started playing golf around home about once a week or so and pretty shortly after that my love for the game came back and love for competing after that.

But as far as my platform is concerned, you know, I do hope that people will hear my story and be inspired by it, but I wouldn't say that's really the purpose for why I'm doing it. I would say really I just -- I'm very open about my situation and my past because it's just nice to be that way. It's nice to have nothing to hide, it's nice to have nothing to be lying about or keeping anything from anyone because that was the life I lived for a number of years.

I do see how I can be helpful, people can hear my story and possibly decide to do something different in their own lives and maybe people that are on the same track as me can help them in their sobriety and help them stay the course, but it's not necessarily my intention, but I'm excited about that opportunity.

**Q. Chris, you spoke a little bit about it seems like maybe you have a little bit of a better balance, work-life balance, but you're obviously out here for a reason, you're competing. I don't want to make you get too far ahead of yourself with this tournament, but what would it mean to you to notch a win now that you're back on the PGA TOUR after having a win on the Korn Ferry Tour? What ultimately would that mean for you?**

**CHRIS KIRK:** I guess I'll have to try do it and see. I don't really know. I can't really predict what it would feel like. Winning on the Korn Ferry Tour two weeks ago certainly gave me a

great sense of validation that I am doing the right things. I feel that on a daily basis, I feel like I'm following the right course that I want to follow with my life, that I'm doing the right things to be helpful to others and my golf career comes secondary to my relationships with my friends and my family, most importantly.

So, yeah, you know, it's difficult for me to really even think about it, of what exactly it would mean. It would be something that would be hugely important to me and probably pretty emotional, but we're a long ways away from that.

**JACK RYAN:** All right, Chris. We appreciate the time. Best of luck this weekend.

**CHRIS KIRK:** No problem, thank you.