

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
July 30, 2020



ERNIE ELS

THE MODERATOR: Ernie, welcome to The Ally Challenge presented by McClaren. Welcome back to Warwick Hills. How does it feel to be back on a course that you played on the PGA Tour?

ERNIE ELS: It feels good to be back at Warwick Hills. A lot of good memories, yeah, from the golf course and from the city. When I came here the last time, I was a young man. I was in my 20s, and now I'm in my 50s. So it's been a while. But the golf course really is still very much the same. It's in great condition, so really happy to be back.

THE MODERATOR: Last time we saw you out on PGA Tour Champions, you were the last person to win a tournament, and then our season went on a five-month break. How have you been able to -- what have you done to keep your game sharp? Because you ended on such a high note. What have you done to keep it sharp?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, it's unfortunate, but it was the same for a lot of people. And we are very fortunate to be able to play professional golf. So it feels like a very long time ago, which it is. It was almost four months ago in California when I won. So it was really a -- I was on a high.

But I went back home to Florida, spent most of our time down there. And I played quite a bit of golf, social distancing and all that, stayed corona free, thank goodness, and played a bit of golf and just tried to stay on the game a little bit.

And then I played some tournaments on the PGA Tour. Played a Hilton Head event where I made the cut, and I didn't make the cut at the Memorial, but feeling quite good. Feeling really good and happy to be back with my guys.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll start with Jonathan. Questions.

Q. Was that layoff between the last tournament and the last few you played on the Tour, was that the longest layoff of your career, at least in some time?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, in some time. The only other time I could think of such a long layoff, four months, was when I hurt my knee. I did my knee in 2005 and I had to do surgery and all that. I was out for about five or six months. But other than that, I have never really taken off more than maybe a month, maybe in the off season. So it's a little weird, but it was the same with everybody. And as I say, we are so thankful to be back, to be able to play. And a lot of sports are not coming back. So thankful to be able to play.

Q. Yeah, Ernie, is there any places at Warwick Hills where you might put the ball because there's no fans here, or is it just bombs away and you're going straight from tee to green?

ERNIE ELS: Mainly you want to keep it in front of you at Warwick Hills. It's quite a narrow golf course. But there are some holes where you can actually maybe really let it fly. And as you say, without any fans, we aren't going to hurt anybody out there, hopefully not get a volunteer or anybody. But you can go after the course a little bit. But you got to play it sensibly. I think that's the way you're going to make birdies, if you start just bombing away. The rough is quite thick and the greens are going to get firm and fast, so you want to be in position. It's a positional golf course, and a second shot golf course.

Q. I know you have got to experience a little bit on the PGA Tour, but without the fans and without the grandstands, how much harder is it aiming for the pin and stuff like that without the grandstands to frame it out? How different is that for you?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, it is a little different. I must say -- as I say, I played two events on the PGA Tour and they had some big stands at some of the events. But the most part, you kind of play it without any backdrop, so to speak. No people and absolutely no stands. So it's a little bit of a different feel. We are still getting used to that. But I kind of like it. I like the fans, especially when you're making birdies and getting momentum, they can really get on your side and help you. But on the other hand, it's kind of quiet and it's kind of nice.

Q. How nice is it to have this restart of the Tour on a course, even though it's been a while since you have been here, but a course that you are familiar with and know pretty well?

ERNIE ELS: I have been looking to coming to Warwick Hills for a while now. When I saw it on the calendar, even before I turned 50, I was like, I'm going to go play there. I had good tournaments here back in the day. I think I finished third one year and I had a top 5 or something. So I know you got to shoot low. And I think we're going to do the same this week. But it's always a nice feeling to be familiar with golf courses that you have played. As I say, I haven't been here for many, many years, over 20 years, but I remember how to play it, so hopefully I can do that.

Q. On 17, obviously that was always the big party hole. No fans this year. But I don't know if you saw when you were out there today that big, giant monitor that's there. They are going to be having fans doing like cheering videos and sending them in and they are going to project them on there. So how kind of cool will that be to not have fans but kind of have fans with that atmosphere?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah. I mean, I like what everybody's doing on the PGA Champions and at Ally. They are coming out with some great ideas to keep the thing interesting. And I think that will be a great exercise to do. We tried to get into that -- the A of Ally today. I wasn't really very close. But it will be nice and cool to keep people interested and have something new out there. I remember the hole back in the day, that was a rowdy hole. A lot of fans trying to get to the water from the stand, and it was quite a spectacle, it was a lot of fun. So it's a little bit different, but it's still a great hole.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Anything else for Ernie? All right. Thank you very much.

ERNIE ELS: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Good luck this week.