

**ERNIE ELS**

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**MODERATOR:** How are you doing today?

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah, good, thanks. It's good to be back at Firestone. Played nine holes yesterday, saw the South Course and it looks in unbelievable shape. Really nice to be back. People in the locker room, I've been coming here on and off since 1992, a lot of guys are very familiar to me, people still working in the locker room and clubhouse, so it's really nice to reconnect with them.

**MODERATOR:** Can you talk about the times you've played here and your experience?

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah. I mean, never really had great success around the golf course. Always played this time of the year either before or after the PGA Championship. I would like to say back in those days it was getting to the end of the season and I would say I was a little tired coming in. You can't be tired around this golf course, it's a beast. Never really played that well. Had a couple of top-10s here and there, but never got to win or be in contention. So I would love to -- saying that, I know a lot about the course, a lot of experience, so I kind of know where to go and not to go, so I'm looking forward to playing better.

**MODERATOR:** The winner of this event obviously gets to play in THE PLAYERS Championship in Ponte Vedra. What would it mean to you to be able to get back there?

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah, it would be great. Obviously it's a real nice perk for us guys. I know Retief won here last year and he was playing at THE PLAYERS this year, I know he was looking so forward to it until they canceled the event after the first round. Yeah, it's some of the nice perks we can get winning the right events. We've got four rounds around this place. I can see not a very low score winning. The rough is up and it's going to be a tough challenge. Those kind of things come with winning.

**Q. What did you do during the pandemic lockdown? Did you do anything besides play golf?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Well, we were down in Florida and, you know, down there, some counties we could play golf, they didn't quite shut it down fully. I just stayed home. My daughter came back from college from California, she came back home, so that was really great to have her around. I don't know if she enjoyed it as much, but I did. Then Ben, Ben's great, he lives with us in the house. He's going to be 18 soon. No school for him, our schools have been shut down. So it's just been a lot of family time. A lot of, you know, times you want to say with friends but not really because we didn't really hang out with friends. I would play the odd round of golf and then go straight home. We were pretty much in lockdown.

**Q. Did you develop any addictions? Like Stricker said Fortnite, anything you --**

**ERNIE ELS:** No. I watched a lot of shows. I had to watch the Ozarks, the Ozarks is one of the first series we watched. Then quite a few other ones. Recently the Most Wanted, that's a pretty good one. Yeah, a lot of shows. I don't think there's anything we haven't watched. That's kind of nice.

We really -- for us not having time off is very strange. The last time I had that much time was when I had an injury in my knee, I blew my knee out in 2005 and that was about a four-month layoff and this was pretty much the same. I mean, I'm going to be 51 in October and I've only played I think four events, so I would like to play more events. Hopefully, we can stay safe and keep it clean and we can keep playing.

**Q. I don't know what the right word is, but Furyk won on Sunday at Ally, just another new recently turned 50-year-old coming out here. This thing, it's a lot of big names and this field's stacked. What are your thoughts on him winning and just the fields?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah, we've got a hell of a class of guys coming through now. Our '69, 1970 group of guys are coming through and a lot of these guys have been very competitive. As you say, Jim Furyk still plays a lot on the PGA TOUR. There's a lot of other guys. There's kind of a new group coming through, so I'm sure they're going to bring a lot of firepower, which they're showing. Jimmy winning his first event, I got a fortunate one early on. So the guys are competitive and they're going to bring a lot of good game. It's really looking good for the Champions Tour, a lot of fresh faces, people have really recognized these guys because they've been around on the other tour for a long time, so it's going to be good for us.

**Q. Then just a random question, we've been asking the guys like if you were like, I don't know, not jealous but if you could pick one aspect of somebody else's game on this tour, like Fred's drives or Stricker's putting, like is there somebody that you really admire a particular part of their game?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Obviously we all have our strengths and weaknesses. I don't think there's a player in the world that doesn't have a weakness. Obviously, we don't want to reveal our weaknesses, but if I can grab another player's part of his game, it would be probably, as you say, Stricker's putting. He's been so solid under the gun with the putter. Lately I would like to drive it a little bit more accurate with length, so as you said, Retief seems like he's driving it really good at the moment. Freddie's always been so good, consistent. Yeah, those type of things.

**Q. Are you getting used -- I know you haven't been back that long, but getting used to these protocols and the tests or is it still kind of weird you can't go out to eat some places or whatever?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah, it's weird. We're so used to going out evenings, going to a dinner either with friends or with family. We're getting takeout, eating it in our room. That kind of gets a little boring, but we have to do that. I really like the protocols the Tour's put down for us to follow, I really like that. They're very strict and that's the way we can stay out here.

But yeah, the way we travel, traveling private quite a bit now. I don't know how long my hours are going to last, but for now I can stay on it. Yeah, just the basic way of life, the way we knew it is very different. Very, very different. We go to the fitness trailer, there's certain protocols we've got to be mindful of and I think the guys are getting more used to it. I think the guys are very disciplined out here. We know how serious the situation is and how we have to handle it. We have to keep it on track, otherwise we can't play so the guys are serious about it.

**Q. Where did your daughter go to college?**

**ERNIE ELS:** She goes out to Stanford, so she's going to be a senior. She's already made plans to get out there. The senior class is only going to be allowed back in January, but she's going to rent a house out in Monterey. Wouldn't we all like to be in Monterey? She and her friends. At least she's going to be in a good place and we'll see her out there. Hopefully the tournament will go on and we'll play Pebble Beach. I might get her out to caddie for me or something.

**Q. So she didn't get around to enjoy being with you by the end of -- you said she wasn't thrilled to be home, but did she come around?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah, listen, I mean, took her a while to get her out of the house and now she was forced back into the house. We gave her a lot of her free time, time out with her friends and so forth, but we eventually forced a mask onto her. She started using the mask a lot. I think she might be -- you know young kids, they might be complaining, but I think she had a good time.