

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
November 18, 2020



STEWART CINK

DOUG MILNE: Stewart Cink, thank you for joining us for a few minutes prior to your 10th start here at the RSM Classic, obviously a tournament that means a lot to you for a lot of reasons. Just a few comments on being back here this week and kind of assessing the state of your game as you're heading into the week here.

STEWART CINK: Well, we're getting into wintertime, so I think it's a little harder for us all to assess our games because just naturally with the cold air and windy weather and wet turf, it's a little harder to sort of assess how you're playing until the bell goes off and you start competing. So that's always kind of a fun part of this time of year, there's a little bit of uncertainty I think with every player.

But it's always nice to come back to St. Simons and Sea Island. It's one of the best places in the country. I live in Georgia, we're here in Georgia again this week, so this coastline is really special.

DOUG MILNE: We've had a lot of players comment on how much Davis adds to the event as the tournament host. A lot of people moved to the area, a lot of people don't miss the event. If you can just touch on how much Davis has meant for not just you guys, but for the tournament as well.

STEWART CINK: Well, Davis is kind of affectionately known by all of our friends as Uncle Davis and he kind of treats everyone like that. He's kind of a put-his-arm-around-you, tell stories, kind of a "come alongside" friend. That's the way he's always been ever since I've known him for years and years and he kind of treats this tournament like that, too. It's a special place for him being a resident here for so long. He's tied to this community and he has his heart in this tournament and you can tell that he's a first-class dude and this tournament is first class.

DOUG MILNE: Okay. I've just got one more question and then we'll take a few questions from our guys online. Obviously you're off to a great start this season having collected your seventh win at Safeway Open and you followed that up with a 4th and a couple of others. Just what's connected, what's clicked, what's going right for you to start the season off?

STEWART CINK: Well, golf-wise, we're all so close out here, even the 47-year-olds can compete. If you just elevate a couple little areas in your game and just get a little bit better, then you find yourself in contention or winning or finish really high and having some consistent runs. If you go the other way, you find yourself on the outside of the cut or having a bunch of 50th-place finishes. It's just that close out here.

If you can find a little tiny bit of extra performance, you can just pass a lot of people, and I was able to find a little bit of extra performance in my game before Safeway started. As I sat out of the FedExCup Playoffs in the last season, I was determined to try to get a little bit more and I was able to find some and it translated immediately, it was really amazing.

Q. Stewart, so the 40-somethings, is it something in the water that you, Sergio, Brian Gay are all winning all of a sudden? You would think maybe Tiger, but for you guys, what's going on?

STEWART CINK: I don't know what's going on other than the fact that I think golf sort of lends itself to success later in your life. It's just one of those special types of sports that physically you can keep going. I think where you struggle more when you get in your mid to late 40s and beyond is not necessarily physically, because you can take care of yourself for a long time, I mean, look at Bernhard Langer. But mentally I think and also like almost chemically in your body, it gets a little harder to really like lock down that focus and you let other things in your life kind of bother you. It's a little easier to have that "give up" mentality and you have to fight that stuff.

So it's a different type of challenge than it was than I was 27 now that I'm 47. Just like any kind of challenges, there's a way to sort of attack it and understand it and try to move past it and sometimes you have to live and perform within it and do the best you can.

Q. How did you personally fight it?

STEWART CINK: Well, I think the biggest step for me anytime I faced challenges in my career, which has been plenty -- I've not been exempt from any of the challenges that any golfer faces -- I think the biggest step for me has always been first understanding it. I'm a "why" kind of person. I like to know why things happen, why I behave in a certain way and get to the root of why things are going on, and when I understand that, it makes it easier for me to see a path forward. Whether I'm putting poorly or I'm driving poorly or I'm getting more nervous than I used to or something like that, I've got to understand why first and then we can go forward. That's been a big key for me for my whole career.

Q. About your caddie situation, I know when we talked in Sanderson Farms, your son was going to go back to Delta, but I guess things have changed. Take me through all of that.

STEWART CINK: Well, we finished high again in Bermuda, had a good round on Sunday and we didn't have to leave until Monday so we were kind of sitting around the room with nothing to do. Reagan was there and he caddied, and my wife was there, all sitting around.

Probably like sort of how nothing good happens with idle time and idle hands, we all sat around and said, "Hey, this has been really fun. You're supposed to go back to work next week, but maybe this is the right time for you to push work back for a year. I like you caddying and I think you're having a good time and you're good at it, and it's nice to spend

time with our son."

So we just got it worked out, he got it worked out with Delta Airline that he was going to be able to just sort of push his job back. He'll go to work next year after he gets married in July and he'll caddie the rest of this season. So a change for us, but something I'm really looking forward to and I think he is, too.

Q. How much do you credit the way that you've been playing to having him on the bag?

STEWART CINK: I actually credit it a lot. He's not just a guest caddie, he's not just a family member out there carrying the bag. He understands golf really well and he understands me and he's been a real asset to me in maybe like a little bit of an intangible kind of way.

I just feel really calm out there with him. I know that when he's standing across with the bag and after we've made our decision, I know that he has like full trust and 100% confidence that I'm going to be able to do what we just talked about doing. That's just a big asset, to know that your caddie is just really behind you and believes in you and also has that sort of unconditional relationship with you that if it goes great, it goes great, if it doesn't, then hey, we're still father and son. I think that's been a real big asset and it's helped me to be calm and to be confident and really to just be myself.

Q. Stewart, when you look at the season you've had and obviously the success that you've enjoyed this season, how do you balance that with kind of the rest of the year? How would you assess what has been a strange year for everyone?

STEWART CINK: You mean the rest of the year going forward or looking back?

Q. Looking back.

STEWART CINK: Yeah, well, it's definitely -- when I think back to 2020, I'm going to have probably a little bit better feelings about it than most of the rest of the world's population because 2020 hasn't been that kind to many of us, but there's definitely been some bright spots.

Both my kids got engaged this year. My wife and I both had COVID in March and my wife, being a stage 4 cancer -- in treatment right now, that was a big deal to us that she had it and went right through it. So that's something we'll remember for sure, the nervousness of that.

Then my win at Safeway and having Reagan sort of transition into caddying for me. We hope to have a really great experience between now and the end of this season. That's just something that I think any parent would never want to miss out on, it's such a unique opportunity.

So 2020 will give us some great memories and some relief, but also obviously like the rest of

us, 2020 has stunk.

Q. A little bit different question and I'm not trying to age you at all, I know you're not in that category, but when you see the success Phil Mickelson had on the PGA TOUR Champions and how close that you are, kind of sneaking up on it, do you ever look in that direction or are you still just entirely focused on the PGA TOUR?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, I haven't looked in that direction at all. I felt like you've got enough stacked against you when you're 47 or in your late 40s on the PGA TOUR that if you -- if you were to look ahead and start to focus on that and start to sort of dream big about one day I'm going to be 50, I'm going to be out there, then you're just going to stab yourself in the back out here and just going to add one more thing to your list of challenges. I've not let myself do that.

I don't see myself being a Champions Tour player ever until I'm not exempt on the PGA TOUR anymore. I'm not saying that I won't, I'm saying I don't see myself that way. I see myself competing on the PGA TOUR and trying to win out here.

Q. Stewart, I've heard a couple different perspectives. Some people think that each tournament on Tour has kind of its own atmosphere, some of them more relaxed, some of them more intense, and then other people have told me that everything's kind of the same because you're competing day in and day out, because you're going from a house or a hotel to the course.

Where do you fall on that, and if it is the case that everything is unique, can you tell me what you think is unique about Sea Island and this tournament?

STEWART CINK: I think everything feels a little bit different. Just like if you walked into a company, you would experience and feel that culture pretty quickly. You would start to understand what the culture's like in that company.

If you play at RSM versus if you play at Waste Management Phoenix Open, you will understand there's two different cultures in those two events really quick, especially if you play the 16th hole at Waste Management. Every tournament has its own little culture.

This year obviously COVID has wrecked the culture of every tournament because we don't have fans for the most part, but under normal circumstances there's a lot of people here that you know, there's a lot of friendly faces, there's volunteers that have been here year after year after year that have been doing the same job and start to recognize and call out the volunteers by first name when they pick you up at the airport. It doesn't happen like that everywhere, but here it feels like a real community and a neighborly small event. It fits because that's what St. Simons is.

Waste Management feels like a big crazy festival and that's kind of what Scottsdale is in the wintertime; it's crowded, it's a completely different thing.

I feel like every tournament has its own culture and is unique. When you go place to place, yeah, there are certain things that stay the same. Whether you stay in the same place or you commute to the course and you do your practice routines and all that stuff, yeah, all that's the same, but all the tournaments have their own feel.

Q. Do you think this one bears similarity to Hilton Head in any way? I ask that because just by circumstance it happens to be the post-Masters tournament this year.

STEWART CINK: That's a good point, I didn't realize that. I mean, I didn't think of that.

This tournament does bear some similarities to Hilton Head in the fact that at RBC Heritage, you're coming after the Masters and you're during kind of a spring break environment. That tournament feels more like everyone's there on vacation and they're excited to see the golfers, but they're also going to the beach and it's part of a big vacation for people.

Here it feels more like the people who come out to the tournament mostly live mere, they spend a lot of time here, maybe they have a second home here. They love the island, they feel like they're welcoming you here. RBC Heritage, it feels more like we're all being welcomed in there by the tournament. To me the crowd at -- the fans at RBC Heritage feel like they're only there for the week just like we are.

Q. Stewart, I think that's the first time I heard you talk about having COVID. Can you share a little color on what that was like for both you and your wife?

STEWART CINK: Sure. Yeah, I haven't discussed it very much. Our friends and family know about it, but with Lisa being in her state of health, even though she's doing great and she's coming up on four years now of -- in remission, which is fantastic, when COVID came about we started to be very concerned about her because of the preexisting conditions and other just difficulties health-wise that people are facing if they already have something with COVID.

We went through COVID in the very beginning, before there was testing available, before we really knew that much about it. We didn't know we had COVID until about two months later when we both got the antibody test and we both had it, and then we both got retested and it was confirmed multiple times, and then we could just point back to a time in March when we both fell ill sequentially, like over about seven days.

Lisa had I'd call it moderate to pretty serious, not hospitalization or anything, but just pretty significant symptoms, very flu-like. I had almost nothing. I had just about a half a day where I felt a little bit sore in my back and my shoulders and that's it.

We didn't know much about it. Hers was the same week as when PLAYERS was canceled, mine was the week after. Like I said, we didn't really know. We just kept on -- I was actually on a flight coming back from Utah. I went skiing with my son. He asked me to come out with

his college friends to go skiing, which I was like, I'm not missing that. So when I came back from that flight, I flew round trip from Atlanta to Utah, I came back and I was sick. So I feel certain that I was probably spreading it on the flight, this is before masks or anything. Looking back, I would have loved to change that, but we didn't know much. So two months later we found out we had it. In fact, it was right before my first tournament back after COVID at RBC Heritage, two weeks before that is when we got our antibody tests and we found out we had it.

Q. Now that you've got this W and the exemption for a couple years, what is your 2021 part of the calendar going to look like? What are you most looking forward to getting back to that maybe you missed the last couple years?

STEWART CINK: Augusta, I did miss it in '19. I qualified for it in 19, but I played poorly. I was hurt that year and I shouldn't have been playing, but I just tried to squeak out into Augusta and that was a mistake looking back.

Obviously you look forward to Augusta, Kapalua, you look forward to playing at Kapalua. That's a tournament you just love to be part of.

Really for me, considering where I started this season in the 126-150 category, I wasn't guaranteed spots anywhere. I would say the most thing I'm looking forward to is just the ability to sort of play where I want to play and put my schedule together. I can schedule my stuff around when my kids' weddings are in July and September, so that's a real blessing to be able to do that, too.

There's a lot more than just play where you like to play the courses. We've got weddings, we've got all kinds of stuff going on, little parties here and there, showers that I want to be a part of. Now I can play when I can play and I can schedule those weeks off when I can be at those events.

Q. If your other son were to come out and caddie and join the ranks, what young player would you suggest he try to get on the bag of?

STEWART CINK: Well, my other son, Connor, he's older than Reagan. He's going to come out and caddie, we've already discussed that. I don't know where it's going to be yet, but he'll come out and caddie.

I don't know that I would want either of my kids to be on the bag of any other player because they're both too big of an asset. There's enough disadvantage I have, I don't want to give anybody else more advantage.

Q. Stewart, just using this opportunity to ask one that's a little bit off the beaten path, but you've played in five Ryder Cups; one of them was a win, the other four were not. I was just curious to hear from you what do you think was different about that one time?

I guess the broader question I'm asking is what would you do if you were captain or what things did you see from the captains you saw that you think should be incorporated and that worked during your playing career?

STEWART CINK: Well, in my 1-4 Ryder Cup career, since you brought that up --

Q. Sorry.

STEWART CINK: No, I'm kidding. The one win where Zinger was the captain in '08 there was just an unbelievable level of organization before and there was no uncertainty about who you were going to play with and who you were going to spend your practice rounds with, it was all set. There was a system that kind of paired up players together. There was just a lot of really in-depth personality matching and studies and I think that led to us being very comfortable on the golf course, and we played like we were comfortable on the golf course and we won.

The other Ryder Cups, you know, the captains all did a lot of work and did a good job, but I think Zinger just took it to another level with organization.

One thing I think, the brain, the mind of the human being seeks is like certainty and calm and we don't like surprise that much. So Zinger did a great job sort of taking that surprise and uncertainty down to an almost nonexistent level and it enabled us to just be comfortable with each other. And we performed really well, we really did. They did a great job.

I think if I was ever a captain or if I was -- if I was spoken to by a captain that asked me any advice, I would certainly just pinpoint that right away as an obvious -- that's an obvious something that I would definitely want to implement.

Q. Has the captaincy ever interested you?

STEWART CINK: Yeah, definitely, it definitely interests me. I think every player, it's very interesting to them. I would love to be able to do that sometime. There's a lot of people who are qualified for that, and I haven't been a part of any teams in an assistant captain way and there are a lot of younger players now that are parts of that every time, so it looks like maybe the ship's already left the harbor for me.

I would be willing to help in any way that I could. If they thought I could be part of a winning team or a successful Ryder Cup or Presidents Cup team, I would love to do it.

JOHN BUSH: Stewart, 600th official career start on the PGA TOUR, quite a milestone. If we can get some comments.

STEWART CINK: Yeah, the number is big and it just -- all it tells me is that like, wow, you've been doing this a long time, can you not figure out something else to do?

Seriously, though, seriously, 600 events, I've been really proud and privileged and blessed to be a part of the PGA TOUR for this long. Golf is a great game and it results in tons of really great relationships for me.

It's been a great job. It's something that I just love pursuing all the time. I love -- I still love to practice and play and keep myself in shape and just be the best golfer I can be because I love golf. I love playing golf.

The side benefits of playing on the PGA TOUR for this long are I know a lot of people, both players, caddies, people that work at tournaments, media officials like you, John. I've just got a lot of good relationships from playing this game and a lot of good memories. And I don't see myself slowing down anytime soon. The game just is really a special place in sports, the way it gives back to charity the way the PGA TOUR does and it's just something I'm proud to be a part of this long.

DOUG MILNE: Stewart, I think that about wraps it up for us. We appreciate your time. Have a great week.

STEWART CINK: You got it.