

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
January 27, 2021



TYLER STRAFACI

JACK RYAN: We will go ahead and get started here with Tyler Strafaci at the Farmers Insurance Open. Tyler is the reining U.S. Amateur champion. he's made two starts on the PGA TOUR prior to this week.

Tyler, if we can just get an opening comment from you. How does it feel to be teeing it up this week at Torrey Pines?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, it's great. It's always a dream to play in a PGA TOUR event. I've got a couple lined up and going to try to make the most of it, but this week's going to be great just to get my feet wet and see what I'm all about.

JACK RYAN: I mentioned you made two starts on the PGA TOUR prior to this week, both coming in 2018. What did you learn from those experiences that you feel like could help you this week?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, so just everything I learned in those, like the Valspar and the U.S. Open, was just about managing my game, just kind of staying within myself and playing kind of what got me there. I feel like I kind of changed a little bit when I played in those events. This time I'm just going to be Tyler and just play my game and add them up at the end.

JACK RYAN: And there's another former U.S. Amateur champion from Georgia Tech in the field this week in Andy Ogletree. What's your relationship like with him and have you made any other connections with some of the other Georgia Tech players out here?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, so me and Andy were roommates for three years. He's a really good friend of mine. We actually played yesterday on the South Course and we had a great time. I hadn't seen him in a couple months, so it was good to catch up and share some memories and give each other some tough times. Yeah, he's great. He's a good kid, really good player, he's playing well this week.

And I also saw Vince Whaley. I was on a team for one year with him. He's a great guy, someone I've kind of looked up to in the past kind of being a young kid on the team. It's going to be fun kind of reconnecting with those guys over the next few events.

Q. Hey, I don't imagine the decision to skip the last semester at Tech was that hard for you, right? Was it tough?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, it's always hard kind of leaving your friends and a coach that's

meant so much to you, but it's just one of those things that I kind of knew I was ready after talking with my parents and my support system. I just felt ready.

Again, it didn't feel good leaving my roommates there and some of the guys I was mentoring on the team, but it's what happens. We're kind of living in a weird time and sometimes you've got to make somewhat of a selfish decision.

Q. I wanted to find out, too, about you have a pretty ambitious first half of the year here. What are you hoping to get out of this start? How did you stay ready, I guess, for what's coming here?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, so I didn't really have that many events leading up to this. I played in a couple minor league pro tour events down in south Florida and a couple amateur events, but I feel good. I just -- I mean, I'm probably going to be a little rusty when I tee off, but the quicker I get into my round the better it's going to be. I'm sure I'm going to have really good stretches of golf over the next few days and just learn from it and hopefully make the weekend, kind of make some noise out there. But the next four or five events are just getting my mind and game ready to where when I turn pro, I'm ready to accomplish some of my goals.

Q. Where are you making your home?

TYLER STRAFACI: So I live in Ft. Lauderdale with my girlfriend. Kind of moved out of the parents' house and joined a club and kind of starting to be an adult. It's nice.

Q. Welcome to adulthood.

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, it's different.

Q. And what was your conversation like with Bruce? I'll wrap it up with this. When you were getting ready to go, what was the conversation like?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, Coach, to be honest, he kind of was -- he was questioning why I was making this decision. He thought it was best that I would come back. He kind of wanted me to be there for the young guys, but at the same time I think he knew I was ready. So I know he was proud of me for the decision I made and I know he's in my corner. I love the guy to death. But anytime you lose Andy, Luke and I, the top three guys last year, it's tough for him. He's a great guy, great mentor and I'm looking forward to being part of the program moving forward.

Q. Do you still got any Tech stuff on your bag this week?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, I've got a couple Tech head covers. I don't have my staff bag yet, so I'm waiting to put my GT on it. Tech's always going to be near and dear to me.

Q. Tyler, wanted to find out what is your experience at Torrey Pines? Have you had much before this week?

TYLER STRAFACI: I'd been in San Diego once, I played in the Junior Worlds when I think I was maybe 11 or 12 years old. It was a long time ago, but it was cool to just come out here. I remember I walked with my dad out on the South Course after the tournament had finished, and just such a special place. It's beautiful. It's very -- playing, it's very scenic. The North Course is also very scenic, it's very cool. I'm looking forward to walking down the fairways, looking over the cliffs and kind of just having a nice relaxing round of golf.

Q. So no rounds until yesterday here?

TYLER STRAFACI: No. I mean, I played nine holes on Sunday, but yesterday was kind of my first round on the South Course.

Q. Who's caddying for you?

TYLER STRAFACI: My buddy, Brett Benjamin. He caddied for me in the past. I met him at the Junior Players I think six years ago and he's just been a great friend. He knows a lot about golf and he's worked -- I mean, he's caddied on Tour a couple times and stuff like that, so he's definitely someone I can kind of lean on for advice and kind of keep me loose throughout the round.

Q. You spoke earlier that in those first two pro events you didn't necessarily feel like yourself. What did you feel like out there in those first couple and what are you trying to kind of progress on as the starts go?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, so I mean, when I was -- I played in them when I was 19, so I mean 19 playing the Tour, all I was thinking about was making the cut. And I was playing well enough to make the cut and have a pretty good finish in both of them, but I was so focused on making the cut that I kind of gravitated towards the cut line. That's not how I usually play golf. Usually I play golf to win and put myself in position on the last day of the tournament to have a good chance to win. That's kind of what I'm going to do this week. I'm sure there's going to be some growing pains. Winning out here's going to take a lot better golf than winning in college or amateur golf. So I'm going to learn how to do that and hopefully I can learn how to do that very quickly so I can accomplish the goals.

Q. Do you feel different as a golfer as the U.S. Am champion? Do you feel different out on the course?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, I feel more confident. It almost frees me up in a way just because that's something I've wanted to accomplish for a long time and it's just a cool thing to have on your resume when you're older and something to look back on. It's more confidence, I feel freed up. I feel like I've established myself in the game of golf, now I've got to establish myself on the PGA TOUR, so it's going to take some time.

Q. Is your family out there? Have they been able to get out there and follow you?

TYLER STRAFACI: So my dad's out here. He was not planning on coming because he had a vaccine scheduled on Thursday, but it got canceled so he came here and he's keeping me loose. And I said if something happens, I would love to have you here because it's one of those things, my first time in a Tour event in quite some time, it wouldn't be a bad thing to have some familiar faces. But I'm missing my mom and brother and my girlfriend, wish they were here, but I'm sure down the road in the season we'll have them out here and we'll have a good time.

Q. What is the comfort level having Andy there, too, somebody you know so well?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, it's weird. It's kind of like, I told my caddie, it's like my first day at school, I'm excited, but I don't really know anybody. So it was good to see Andy. Andy asked me, hey, do you want to go play 18 on the South, I was like of course. So playing with him really freed me up yesterday. It's good to have some sort of common ground with people out here, and I'm sure over the next whatever the next events I get in this season I'll develop some relationships and some friendships hopefully and it'll be a good time.

Q. I've got to ask you about the Masters, too. How much have you circled that and how much of what you're doing the next few months to get ready for that, because you saw what Andy did there and I'm sure that was -- that had to get you going a little bit, too?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, it's definitely in the back of my mind. It's not everything I'm focused on right now, but it's always a good thing to go to sleep at night knowing you're playing the Masters. I'm really looking forward to that, but mostly I'm just focused on the next couple events before the Masters and trying to put myself in position where I can compete and hopefully have a chance to win.

Q. Did you watch on the last day, see him in the cabin and everything --

TYLER STRAFACI: Oh, yeah.

Q. -- and say I want to do that?

TYLER STRAFACI: It definitely gave me some fuel. It gave me some fuel last time when he won the Am because I was like, here's a guy I've been competing with for four years and he won something I've wanted for pretty much my whole life. So that kind of lit a fire under me. I think him getting low am at the Masters kind of did the same thing. Again, we're both friends, both competitors, I want the best for him and he wants the best for me, so it's been great.

Q. Did you beat him yesterday?

TYLER STRAFACI: We didn't play a match. He played better than I did, he looked a little more comfortable out there. We didn't really play a match, but we just had a good time catching up.

Q. I think I was a few minutes late. I just wanted to know, have you talked about the Walker Cup already, Tyler?

TYLER STRAFACI: I have not, Julie. It's going to be fun, it's going to be a good time.

Q. Maybe you can just kind of tell me a little bit more about the decision. The last thing I read, you were planning to wait for that, turn professional after, so obviously it's very important to you and I think we kind of know the history of why you were gunning for that, but maybe talk about why that's important to you.

TYLER STRAFACI: I mean, it's important to me because it's something that my father's been talking about ever since I was a little kid. I never met my grandfather, but my grandfather always talked to my father about him not being able to make the team because of his last name was tough and it really bothered my grandfather. It kind of led into my father and that's something I've been kind of planning for since I started playing amateur golf. So I definitely want to be the first Strafaci to play on the Walker Cup and that's something I've wanted to do since I was a little kid.

Q. Do you know Seminole? Do you have any experience there?

TYLER STRAFACI: Yeah, I've been playing a lot of practice rounds out there. I've been going out with Captain Crosby and this guy, Mr. Sanger and a couple other guys. I've probably played five rounds there since I finished -- since I knew I was playing on the team, so I've gotten some good prep. It helps that it's about an hour drive. We have some sort of in and out privileges where I can go there once a week and do some prep work, so I'm going to be ready for that tournament.

Q. Where are you based and practicing right now? Where are you spending most of your time?

TYLER STRAFACI: I'm based in Ft. Lauderdale but I play a golf course in Delray Beach, which is just north of Ft. Lauderdale, kind of south of Palm Beach called Pine Tree. Pine Tree's a great place. Gary Woodland and David Hearn are out there so it's got some really good competition. The course is really tough and it's kind of one of those courses where if you play well there, you can play well anywhere else. Really good prep for the next couple tournaments and I feel ready.

Q. Now that you're playing Tour events, do you imagine that you'll go back and play anything amateur? You could play the Jones Cup, you could warm up for the Masters at the Azalea. Are any of those on the table?

TYLER STRAFACI: I think the Azalea's probably the most possible one for me to play in. Right now I'm just kind of focused on a lot of the stuff over the next couple months. I'm going to take a couple Augusta trips, that would be kind of during some amateur events and I think that'd be a little more valuable for me. I feel like I've pretty much done a lot of the stuff I wanted to do in amateur golf. Right now I'm in kind of a weird position, but I feel like I'm ready to move on. But I kind of have to wait for a while before I turn pro, so I'm in kind of an interesting situation. Yeah, if an amateur event comes up and I have a free schedule, I'd love to play in it. Right now I might play in the Azalea, but most likely not.

JACK RYAN: Tyler, those are all the questions we have. We appreciate your time and best of luck this week at the Farmers Insurance Open.

TYLER STRAFACI: Thank you so much, appreciate it.