

**PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW**  
**June 10, 2021**



**MARIO TIZIANI**

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**Q. Mario, you're making your PGA TOUR Champions debut this week here in your hometown. Just your thoughts on getting back to professional golf.**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah, pretty exciting. What a place to do it for me. This is home, this is where I grew up, this is where I went to school, played college golf at this golf course, so kind of full circle to say the least.

I'm excited. It's going to be a fun week. I'm stressed, for sure. I want to compete, I want to see what I have. I haven't played a lot of competitive golf, so this will be thrown into the fire, I guess.

**Q. It's been about 10 years or so since you last played a professional event, is that right?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah, except for last week. I competed at home in the Minnesota Senior Open, so that was the first one for a long stretch. And it felt good to compete. I had a week where I was up towards the top and felt the butterflies. Yeah, it was exciting and I'm ready to go.

**Q. When you stepped away, were you anticipating this day? Were you hoping to get to this place?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** You know, like you said, it was 10 years ago at least. Not really, no. Didn't really think about it. Didn't really have a lot of love for the game, to be honest. I played for a long time, was very marginal in terms of success and just really needed to get away from it. Didn't really enjoy it for the right reasons I got into it. I think over the past 10 years I found the love for golf again and I think that's probably helped me.

**Q. How often do you still caddie for Steve, and have you learned a lot doing that?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah, so I've caddied for him for probably 30 years here and there, but on the Champions Tour, the past few years I've probably done four or five events. I step in for Nicki. It's nice to get out there, it's nice to see how one of the best players approaches the game. It's fun being in the mix where he's been fortunate to be a lot. It's amazing, you feel those butterflies on that side of the clubs, too. I've learned a ton. I've learned that these guys hit bad shots and get nervous just like everybody else and I'm not sure everybody really understands that, so I learned a lot. Patience is very important and you just have to try to clean up your mistakes the best you can, so I've learned a ton.

**Q. How are you approaching this weekend playing with some of the best golfers in the world over 50?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah, I'm trying to control me. Like I said, I'm nervous already. I'm excited to get out there. I usually feel better once I'm inside the ropes, but leading up to it, it's anxious, mostly because I care and I want to perform, so I know that's why I feel the way I feel. But I have high expectations of myself, I do. As long as I can take care of me and not get caught up in the moment, I think I'll be fine, but that's the wildcard.

**Q. How much did caddying for Steve sort of whet your appetite for playing again? Did you watch guys hit shots and say, I can do that, I can hit that shot, that kind of thing?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah, for sure. I know it's in there. I've said before, it's in there, it's just bringing it out at the right time. I played against a lot of these guys. I've played at the highest level on the PGA TOUR and these are the same guys. I feel like I'm probably a better golfer now than I was then in terms of mentally, and maybe even physically to a degree. Yeah, it's exciting. I've been watching these guys play for several years that he's been out here. I guess what the appetite is a good way to put it.

**Q. Are the nerves amplified by being in your hometown at a course you've played or does that help relieve some of that nervousness or anxiety of coming back?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** I think it amplifies it, for sure. These are all the faces I've seen growing up, including Gary and Rob. Honestly, since I was in high school. So I'm seeing a lot of people that I've seen for many, many years. Yeah, I want to put on as good, I don't want to call it a show, I want to perform for sure for my hometown. And I know they don't care, but it's -- there's some motivation there.

**Q. I'm sure over the years you've seen how, whether it was at the Greater Milwaukee Open or here, you've seen how local people will support Steve or Jerry or a handful of the others.**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah.

**Q. How does that -- like have you pictured what it would be like, whether it's the whole round or just a great shot, what kind of reception you're going to get?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah. I mean, certainly look forward to that. I think already just people are happy that I'm here, happy that I'm back playing. That's pretty gratifying for me. There is that support there and they are behind you, and they have been even though I've been absent. I'm excited for the cheers, but they've showed already that they're excited that I'm here, so that's pretty gratifying.

**Q. You've got a career, you've got a part-time gig caddying for Steve, your wife has a successful practice, you've got a family. How much do you want to play moving**

**forward?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** I don't know. That's really, you know, I'm kind of one week at a time. I think about what comes with it. I've done the travel, I've done, you know, the practicing and the grind, I guess. For me it's going to be -- I think it will depend on the success that I have. I was a middle-of-the-road guy and the work just wasn't worth it for me. If I was a player that was in the mix, in the upper echelon all the time, that would absolutely -- I would do it, but we don't know.

**Q. And how are you balancing your career while doing this?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** I'm not doing very good. I'm on my phone a lot during the day still this week. I know I have to shut it off tomorrow, which will be good. Steve, it's a busy week for him, it's a busy year for him and I've been trying to handle that for him as much as I can and make sure he's ready to go this week. I'm second fiddle, but like I said, I'll be ready. Once I get in the ropes, I'll be ready to go.

**Q. I don't think caddies are supposed to be in the players' locker room on most weeks. Obviously that must have been a little bit weird going in here?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Well, the guy flagged me "this way" when I walked up, so I said, "Actually, I'm going to go this way this week." It's been a little different.

**Q. In your time caddying for Steve, obviously you absorbed -- the successful guys on this tour are all guys that all kind of look like you do, they've maintained their physical strengths and everything. Do you feel that you're in a position to do good things out there?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah, I think physically I feel good. I feel like the length is there. I was one of the longer ones back when I played the Tour and I feel like I would be one of those here. That's only part of the puzzle, but length helps, I think that's been proven. I'm in good shape right now today, so I think that's an asset, for sure.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about your caddie on the bag this week, and he's got a pretty rich history here, too, doesn't he?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** He does, yeah. Wally, he was with me for a real long time. He's the caddie master here. He's excited to go, probably too excited. We probably need to get a little air out much his tires currently.

Yeah, he's excited. I'm happy to have him back and we'll see if we can't stir something up.

**Q. And one other question, Andy North's in the field and maybe his last time ever competing in a PGA TOUR-sanctioned event. Can you speak to the impact maybe he had, especially given when you grew up in this town and that was kind of his prime?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** For sure. Watching him win the U.S. Opens, I was a teenager, even younger than that when he won in '78, and he was a hero here. We're happy to have him here.

I actually had a quick conversation on the phone and I know he's super motivated on how he's going to perform, and I think he'll do great but ultimately I just assured him from my perspective I'm glad he's here. I'm glad he's doing this. This is huge for Wisconsin and he's huge for Wisconsin golf. For him to be able to tee it up I think is amazing. I'm going to be watching. And again, another guy that I don't think anybody really cares how he does besides him, and I think he'll do fine. It's huge to have him here, huge for me personally.

**Q. Mario, is there like a first time you and Strick met fun story that you can share with us?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** I'm not sure there is. We've bet quite often, I'm on the short time most of the time.

**Q. I meant met, when you first met.**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Oh, when we met, is there a story?

**Q. Yeah, yeah.**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** I thought you said a bet, sorry.

**Q. If you want to share that, you can, too. I don't want to get you in trouble.**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah, you know, he was a guy again who I looked up to. He's three years older, he played junior golf here, so when I was 14 or 15 when I kind of started to become a little better golfer, he was winning everything. I was fortunate to -- he's such a nice guy. Him and Skip Kendall both were so great to the younger juniors.

When we first met, it was probably on a recruiting trip for my dad, who was the coach here and tried to recruit him. That was the first time we really spent some time together. For whatever reason, we just kind of hit it off. That was kind of the first meeting was just kind of steps along the way, I guess.

**Q. Mario, were you and Jerry ever in the same school building at Madison East together? Did you overlap at all?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah, he was a senior when I was a freshman. We were on the same team together, yeah.

**Q. How did he treat you?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Well, like a senior would treat a freshman, how's that?

**Q. How different is the course now in the last few years, some of the changes they've made, improvements?**

**MARIO TIZIANI:** Yeah, improvements are great. It was a lot firmer. Being a new course, that was kind of -- that's how courses come, they're brand new, they're firm. So it's softened up a little bit, it's matured, the trees are much bigger, they've made it longer.

I think this is a great test. I think it's a unique course with the front and back nine being completely different. I think it's just an awesome facility and one that you need to play when you come to Madison, for sure.