

FRED COUPLES

Q. We'll just start with how does it feel to be here this week?

FRED COUPLES: It feels great. Love the course. It's probably our best event. The winner gets to play in THE PLAYERS Championship, but when you win on a course like this, you've played some pretty good golf. It's nice to be here.

At home, everyone's shocked that when I tell them I'm going to Akron. They don't even realize that the Tour players don't play here anymore and that the old guys play here, so it's kind of funny. But we're lucky to be here thanks to Bridgestone and the local charities. You know, it's one of my favorite places.

Q. You've really been on a roll this year.

FRED COUPLES: Well, yeah, I was on a roll a couple weeks ago and bogeyed the last hole to lose to Jerry Kelly, but I played very well. And I played in Des Moines before that and way back, I don't even know when it was, in April I was in the last group in Naples and there were a couple really, really good scores the last round and I had kind of a so-so last day.

But I mean, on a roll, yeah. I'd like to win, but I'm playing pretty well and this is a course that is four rounds, which I think is fun for a lot -- fun for all of us. But I look at it, if you have a mediocre nine holes, you're kind of okay. If you have a mediocre nine holes in 54 holes, it really puts you behind the 8-ball. Here, there won't be a lot of crazy low scores, so you're always in it if you're playing well. You've got to hit good drives off of every hole, you've got to putt well. This is a very demanding course, but I am playing well and I look forward to playing.

Q. Last year you were tight for 8th, but it was kind of a two-man thing at the end.

FRED COUPLES: Was it Jay and Goosen?

Q. Scott Parel.

FRED COUPLES: And Jerry Kelly, I think.

Q. They were the only two under par.

FRED COUPLES: It was brutal. It was rock hard, and I don't even know, I think I had a pretty good last round to move up, but it was hard. I drove it in the rough a lot and it's hard to play this course out of the rough, that's for sure.

Like I keep saying, it's one of our best driving courses. You cannot play from out of the rough, you cannot stop it on the greens, so that dictates not many under par. I don't even know what they shot, but in years past --

Q. I think it was Jerry was 3 under.

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, you know, that's not a lot under par. It's like a U.S. Open course. You're correct on all that. It doesn't take a lot of birdies. You just can't make doubles. You're going to make bogeys out here, you've just got to watch for the doubles, stay away from those.

Q. So what do you -- I mean, it doesn't sound like being in the top-6 like four out of the last five tournaments really -- I mean --

FRED COUPLES: No, no. I mean, I don't play that much, so my rolls are just getting to the tournaments and getting going. No, I've been -- I worked hard to go to Augusta and what I shot, 78, 77 or something crazy, and I practiced and played and I ended up saying I can't do this.

Then I went to Naples and really liked the course. Going to Sunday, honestly, I was I think tied for the lead and I played pretty well, I just didn't putt very well. So I changed putters and since then I've started to putt pretty well, so it makes the game a little easier when you're making four-, five-, six-footers for pars. I'm going to definitely have to putt well here.

A roll is, yeah, you know, when you get going, I need to play better on a Sunday. Even if I'm behind this Sunday and I come out and play a good Sunday and move my way up, it's always a good feeling. A couple weeks ago in Madison, Stricker's event, I really played very well on Sunday. I hit the ball great, had a great pairing with Jimenez and Goosen and I thought one of us was going to win. Next thing I know Kelly starts birdieing every hole, and that's what happens.

It was fun, I enjoyed it. A lot of people were there, a lot of people will be here, so it's fun to be playing. Just like the regular Tour says, wow, we're playing in front of people, it's a nice feeling.

Q. So you said your friends back home don't realize it's a Champions Tour event?

FRED COUPLES: No. Well, I told the guy who won the California State Open, he's my age, and he said, "Well, where are you going next?" I said, "To Akron." He said, "Akron? You're not in the World Series?" I said, "No, I'm not, but I'm in the Bridgestone event there." Then I told him the winner gets to go play in THE PLAYERS Championship, so that got a rise out of him.

But what is this, our fourth year maybe? Third or fourth year? Third. Honestly, I'm sure there

are a few people that don't know, but we all know and we're very lucky. Like I said, I was getting an award here a couple years ago and this is amazing that we're playing here. We have a lot of great tournaments, don't get me wrong, but we don't play golf courses like this. They had a PGA event here for, I'm going to make it up, for 50, 60 years?

Q. Sixty-eight.

FRED COUPLES: Sixty-eight years, and now they're gone and we're in here on a course like this with all the winners, so we're lucky. We're going to shoot some high scores as we get older, but we're lucky to be here.

Q. When you pull in here, though, as many times as you've played, do you get flooded with memories?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah. I never won here. I played on Sunday with Tiger when he won one year, that was crazy. Crazy fun just to see that. You know, I just think it's a great golf course. I know right now standing here before I go hit balls what I have to do well and that is drive the ball well. I feel like I am, so I just have to play smart and not panic if I make some bogeys and start thinking, oh, I'm going to hit a driver on this hole, because I played probably 25 events here and hitting driver on holes you shouldn't doesn't work out very well in your favor. It may one day out of the four, but not if you're going to play four rounds.

It's a good memory. And like I say, for one lucky guy that gets here, he gets to go play with the young guys at one of the top courses on the PGA TOUR.

Q. Having the fans back, did you not realize how bad it was without them until they were back? You know what I mean, like --

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, no, no, it took a while to get used to. It was kind of crazy to go play golf and not have -- even at home you do that. I've been doing it for 41 years. So I go play rounds of golf and unless I'm playing with Phil Mickelson at home where some members will come watch us, no one follows you. Then you go to a tournament and sometimes you just want to have someone around. I'm in the rough a lot, so I'm usually where people are and I usually like to make some kind of comment, whether it's smart alec comment or to a buddy, but you don't get to do that.

So I can see on the regular tour where guys like Justin Thomas and Rory and Phil, all of them were making comments that they really miss them. For us, we miss them too, we just don't have 30,000 people a day around us. We have six or eight or 10. But still, it's fun to play. And there will be people out here. This is fantastic.

Q. I know this doesn't only apply to you, but when Phil won the PGA, some people thought that guys about to turn 50 won't come to the Champions because they saw Phil could win --

FRED COUPLES: Well, Phil is a unique individual. This Richard Bland who just won at 48, he played almost 500 tournaments. I was sitting there, I had tears in my eyes just because it's a very special thing to win.

Phil, was it surprising? I guess so, but once he got near the lead Friday and Saturday playing with Brooks, it wasn't surprising because he's done it so often. So getting there I thought it was surprising. Winning against them was not because he got himself in contention and won not easily, but he played phenomenal golf. I don't think that's -- the only person it would stop is Phil.

So he's playing this week. You know, he's trying to make that Ryder Cup team, which is something that he should do, so he won't be playing out here much. You know, in a year or two he might. I don't see many 49- and 50-year-olds saying, "I'm going to win a PGA." Can Steve Stricker? Of course he can. Can Jim Furyk? Yeah. But I think as they get a little older, they'll fall into out here and love it. Stricker's not playing much out here because he's Ryder Cup captain, so he wants to say hi to everyone. But we miss them all. I don't know if they're all playing here or not, or if they're in Hartford. I only pay attention to who I'm going up against and try my best.

Q. I heard Stricker picked here over Hartford.

FRED COUPLES: Okay, good. Yeah, I like that.