

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
August 25, 2021



ERNIE ELS

CONNOR STANGE: We'll get started with Ernie Els here. Can you start with just some overall thoughts on being back here in Michigan and at Warwick Hills?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, I mean, last year this time, this was our first event back since the epidemic started in March last year, so it was good to play.

The year's gone very, very fast and we're back at Warwick Hills. I haven't played the golf course yet, but I'm going to go out and play today in the pro-am and check it out. I'm sure things haven't changed. I came here 25 years ago for the first time and playing it last year seemed like, you know, it was pretty much the same golf course. Looking forward to playing it.

Q. How nice is it for you guys to come back to a place that you are so familiar with?

ERNIE ELS: It's great. I mean, you familiarize yourself with the surroundings, restaurants, hotels and so forth, you see old friends. And then obviously the golf course, as I say, they haven't changed it too much, which is great. So you just kind of get your game plan that you used to do back in '96 was my first time here and probably hitting the ball the same distance as I did back in '96 with technology helping out. So pretty much the same the way I envisioned it back in the day.

Q. You say you haven't been out on the course yet, but with the grandstands back and everything here, how much does that help your approach to this course whereas last year you had none of that?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, it was a little different last year, looked a little too clean, you know. This year it seems like they've got everything back. They've got kind of standing bars around and the stands are back and hopefully the fans will be back. It will be a very different atmosphere, kind of more like normal.

Q. Do you ever look at the Money List and seeing where you are, because you're fourth right now, and if you win this, you move up a little bit. Do you ever look at that?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, we're kind of familiar where we are in the standings. It's not quite crunch time yet, but this is kind of the stretch you want to start playing good golf. There's quite a few events coming up and then the playoff events and then obviously the final in Phoenix in November. You want to stay close to the leader. It would be great if you can overtake the leader, but you can't be thinking that, you've got to think about playing a good round of golf, putting good rounds of golf together and hopefully that will be good enough to hopefully be

No. 1 at the end of the year.

Q. Now you still play a little bit on the regular tour. Can you see very soon you're going to move on over to the Champions Tour, or as long as you have exemptions, you're going to go back and forth?

ERNIE ELS: You know, I think I'll play the majority of my golf on the Champions Tour. Here and there there will be a tournament, like if we go to Hawaii, there's a tournament on the regular tour the week before we play the Champions Tour, I might play Hawaii. In Florida there's some events that overlap. So I'll see, but most of my -- bulk of my golf will be on the Champions Tour.

Q. Could you take just a minute and talk about your autism foundation and specifically the importance of that organization to you?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah. So our son has got autism. He'll be 19 this year. We started the Els for Autism Foundation in I guess 2008, 2007. We moved to the U.S. specifically to help Ben get into proper schools because we were living in England and since then we've built our own school, our center down in Florida. We can have a capacity for 300 kids. We have 287 kids that we help down there and the building keeps going. We're planning an adult services building for the kids now. Kids from age 21 and past 21, we want to facilitate them and help them into their future. It's all still a work in progress, but it's been a lot of fun.

Q. What keeps you -- what's sort of the motivation for you? What keeps you coming out here and keep trying to play your best round of golf?

ERNIE ELS: It's just competition. There's enough competition out here to really have you committed to playing good golf. These guys, I've competed with them most of my career.

We're in a unique situation, not too many sports can we do what we do. Football, all the main sports, you're kind of done after a certain age because of the physicality and so forth, but in golf it's different. It's a game for life, you can play it from when you're a youngster and still going at our age. It's a wonderful place to be.

Q. What makes Warwick Hills a great course for Champions Tour players as well as they advance through the Tour?

ERNIE ELS: Well, as I said earlier, the golf course hasn't changed that much. I'm hitting the same distance today with all the technology as when I was 25. I'm playing the exact same distance, so the golf course to me 25 years ago to now is playing very similar. I'm not hitting the ball 30, 40 yards further than I did when I was -- in '96. For the most part we remember this course the way we played it in our heyday, so that's great. A lot of golf courses change, they put 30, 40, 50 yards on certain holes to make it longer. They haven't done it yet, so we're playing pretty much a similar golf course.

Q. On 17 they've extended the breachers and where the fans will sit even further down on the tee box so it's almost starting to feel even more like Phoenix. Is that something you guys enjoy or is it a little annoying, intimidating, whatever it might be?

ERNIE ELS: It's kind of become a theme I guess with Phoenix doing what they did. Quite a few events have followed suit. I remember back in the day here it was quite a rowdy hole in any case on 17. A bit more stands and a bit more atmosphere, a bit more beer, I think it's going to get nice and rowdy. I think it's all good for the fans and the tournament. I think the fans want to come out there and have a good time and cheer good shots and hopefully not boo the bad shots, but I think it will be good for the event. It will be fun.

Q. Every birdie, cheaper beer, whatever it is, more pressure now with them?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, I'd love to make birdies and get the fans to get really after it. I'm sure all the guys want to make birdies and get the fans to down a couple. We'll do our best.

Q. Does that fire you up when you get that crowd involvement as a player?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, it's great. When you're coming down the stretch and juices are flowing and the crowd's there, loud, that's the atmosphere you want to play in and that's why we play professional golf, professional sport, you feed off the fans. It would be great to have a nice loud crowd.