

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
September 16, 2021



FRED COUPLES

CONNOR STANGE: Here with Fred Couples, we'll just get started. How's it feel to be back here at the Sanford International?

FRED COUPLES: Great. I played last year and I've told a few people when we played Tuesday, I have not been to a golf tournament in a long time on a Tuesday, but played a practice round with Furyk and Davis and we were all talking about the course and the shape it was.

It's tricky in a sense if you don't really know it that well, but I enjoyed it. It reminds me a lot of Seattle where I grew up. In Seattle we don't have courses that are 9 million yards long. They're kind of tricky if you miss it in the wrong spot, and with the wind blowing, it will be difficult. Any course is difficult with the wind blowing, but this one is in perfect shape and fun to be here.

Q. Last year you talked about the fact that you pick and choose where you play and you play where you like where you're at. So I assume the golf course, obviously from listening to you, is part of why you came back, but could you maybe talk about the experience in general with the fans and everything else?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah. Well, I don't know if I'm exactly right, but I think it was the first tournament we had fans back and it was cold, so they probably will have a heck of a lot more this week. It wasn't ridiculous. Yeah, so I couldn't tell you how old this tournament is, I couldn't tell you how many years I skipped it, but now that I've come, you know, I'm getting old, but I plan on playing it for a few years. I really, really like it.

Pro-ams are great. Just bumped into a couple guys that I played with last year, so the whole thing's got a nice feel. Most tournaments do. But for me, even on the PGA TOUR, when I didn't feel like I could play a course if I was playing well to the best of my ability, I stayed away from them, and there were a lot of them. Then the ones that I liked, I seemed to do well. This is one, I didn't play well last year on Sunday, but I plan on playing much better this year and hopefully I have a shot at winning.

Q. How excited are you for next week?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah. You know, when someone asks, you know, are you going there? Well, I played there last year, I'll play a lot, but next week's the Ryder Cup. And again, Jim and I and Davis are assistants. Both of them have been captains before, so we've had a lot of fun talks. We're going to go to dinner tonight, keep talking about it. We're trying to figure pairings out with Stricker. It's really not our job, it's Steve's job, but it's always fun to talk

about it.

They're great players, amazing when you really watch. Like the only time I've ever watched golfers play is when I was a captain or assistant for Presidents Cup or Ryder Cup and I've got to tell you, they're incredible players on both teams, but I'm paying more attention to our team. It will be a lot of fun next week.

Q. And to have fans, I know last year they considered doing it without fans, which was crazy.

FRED COUPLES: Yeah.

Q. What's it like to play in that, because to me having covered it and being there with the swarms of fans and how much fun they have, there's nothing quite like it.

FRED COUPLES: No, there really isn't. To be honest with you, my first one was in Europe. It was hard. The only have a thousand people rooting for you and everyone's not against you, but next week it will be very difficult for the European players because with travel and all that, they're going to -- I don't know how many people they'll have. They'll have enough to make a lot of noise, but we'll have 90 percent of the fans there. I think that helps our team, obviously, anytime you play at home.

But the feeling really is like every point you make, if you can get them, it's like winning a major. I'm sure if you're up there on Sunday night and you talk to Patrick or X Man or Harris, they'll tell you, oh, my God, I don't know what winning a major is, but if that's what it's like, it's gut wrenching.

Q. I'm guessing when you walk up to the first tee for the first time into Ryder Cup, it's got to be the scariest moment ever on the first tee.

CONNOR STANGE: Yeah. Real quick, I was with my teachers months before and I said, you know, come on, I feel loose, I'll be nervous tomorrow on the first tee here and it's a 4-iron shot, but all of a sudden you just go, oh, my God. Then again, it's like every shot has to be hit perfect.

So what I try and tell our guys is, look, we all know you know how to play golf, you do not have to be perfect out here, this is not what the Ryder Cup's about. They're going to mis-hit shots, you're going to mis-hit shots, just a putt here or there. If you've ever watched the Ryder Cup, they all talk about Europe makes more putts. Well, when you win a tournament -- if I win this week, I'm going to make more putts than Furyk or Darren Clarke or Ernie, it's just a given fact.

So when you look at it, you're definitely correct, it's a wild feeling. And I don't know if you've seen pictures, but the first tee has maybe seems like 8,000 to 10,000 people in the grandstands, so it will be incredible.

Q. I was up at Hazeltine in --

FRED COUPLES: I went too, yeah. That was wild.

Q. -- and I was surprised that I wasn't inebriated just from being around everybody.

FRED COUPLES: Right, yeah. I'm not a drinker, so I'll try and stay away from everyone. As long as -- look, when they miss a putt and you cheer, when you start throwing the extra words in, even for me as a walker or a captain, it's not fun to listen to. And it happens over there, too, but that's one thing where you just look at them and say, just calm down, because it's not life or death for any of us, but when you start picking on a guy because he missed a putt or he didn't hit a good shot.

But Hazeltine was wild. I think they had 60,000 people. I flew there just to watch and I was like, I've never seen anything like it, I've never seen that many people watch four groups.

Q. Last year when you played here, you dunked one on 9.

FRED COUPLES: Yes.

Q. Talk about that, because you can make holes-in-one. How many holes-in-one have you had?

FRED COUPLES: I've had six and only two in tournaments. The rest of them were just --

Q. Okay. So I'm a golfer. To me, a dunk is more rare than even --

FRED COUPLES: You know, if you asked me how many times I've holed irons on par 4s, it's not many more. I hit them kind of close like everybody, but I'm not someone who said I made a 7-iron last year and a 9-iron and a wedge. But I did hole on 9.

There was a family to the right and I pushed it over to the right rough and actually it was in a great spot to be in. I was just kind of staring at them while the other two guys were hitting and I holed it, and then the kid came up to the green and I think -- I didn't walk all the way to him, but I threw him the ball and then I signed it afterwards, so it was kind of fun because they were as excited really as I was.

It's a weird feeling. You don't ever -- a hole-in-one is really weird, but even on the golf course, a sand wedge, I don't make -- I think (inaudible)

Q. On the fly.

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, that was even weirder, yes. Yeah, no, it was luck, let me tell you. The hole's this big and it flew in the hole.

Q. That's pretty cool. So how much fun has this Champions Tour become for you?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I'm 61. It was a lot more fun when I was 50 when I could really roll and play. I enjoy it, I really do. Tomorrow I'm playing with Ernie Els and Jim Furyk, so I get those groups. Then I've got to earn a better group, if I can say that, or a good tee time the next day.

I've been playing with these guys my whole life, so the number one thing for me is the players and who you get paired with and how well you play. My goal is to win one more time. I feel like I can definitely do that, and then when I do that, I'll figure out how much more I'll play, but I do want to win one more time.

Q. Are you glad to see the rookies come on this tour to strengthen it?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, they build it. I heard Pdraig Harrington, with everything that's going on, he may not play this year, but he just turns 50. David Toms winning last week and then Doug Barron, who beat me in New York and he just won in Calgary. So it's not all big-name players as they like to say that dominated the PGA TOUR. We have strong players. When you get guys who work hard, play a lot, they're going to play real well. So if you win a tournament here, you're not just beating Langer and Ernie Els and Davis Love and Furyk, you're beating 20 other guys that can really I think play golf and have a shot at winning out here.

Q. One more question. Talked to a guy yesterday, Jay Jurecic, I don't know if you heard his story, but he was a teacher in Michigan, a math teacher for 20-some years in his hometown. He just quit to come here and try to be a professional player and he qualified with a 61 on Tuesday.

FRED COUPLES: Sure.

Q. How cool is that to see somebody like that?

FRED COUPLES: It's very cool. It happens not all the time, but there are guys that can play and when they get to a certain age and people kind of egg them on.

Scott Parel, have you heard of him? Scott Parel played mini tours, and I don't know his background that well, I should, but I love it. We've played a few times. He beats me every week. He's probably not a better player than me, but he's more polished because he's playing all the time, but there's a guy. This guy can come out here and do well. I mean, 61 is just not easy to go out and do that, so there's a name to look for and maybe he'll continue to try and, as they say, Monday qualify and get out and play a few more events, but it's cool.