

PADRAIG HARRINGTON

Q. Padraig, last year you made your Champions Tour debut here at FURYK & FRIENDS. What's the last year been like playing on the Champions Tour?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, it's obviously been very good, particularly the last -- I suppose since May I've really hit some good form, pretty much in contention every week. It's a nice place with your golf when you're going into Sundays with a chance of winning. You know the pressure's on, you know you're alive and it's exciting. Certainly enjoying that element of it.

Q. And then you were commenting on the course, what you see out here. What are your takeaways?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, obviously they've made a few changes. They've lengthened it, which is nice for me. It's an interesting course in one sense that I suppose I have a certain skill set and this one, I don't like hitting to the middle of the green and that's what you've got to do this week. The greens are so difficult that if you miss on the sides of the greens, your ball runs down 20 yards away. You know, you've got to be really disciplined to hit the middle of the greens and I find that difficult.

It will be interesting to see. I know that's a task the winner's got to be good at. You've got to hit lots of greens in regulation this week. It's kind of bogey avoidance in a lot to do with it. I know 14 under par won last year. It seems quite low, the course seems tougher than that, but certainly it really will be a case of putting from the center of the greens out to the pins rather than firing at all pins here.

Q. What's been working well for you? You said since May, but what's been clicking?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Look, my game -- there's a long answer to this. In the end I would have been burnt out in 2016. I think the six months I would have taken off during COVID really helped me come back strong. Before the start of this year, like in January, February I was looking at my tournaments and I was thinking I could get back into the top-50 in the world, so my game was strong as regards playing with the juniors.

You know, I did expect -- I could see how my game had turned around and I did expect some really good performances. I would say my first two tournaments last year were outliers rather than anything turning around. This year I would have said those are the ones that were the outliers. I certainly expected to come out and contend. There's no doubt I sharpened up a bit by being on top of the leaderboard a lot. When you're up there, you turn up at a PGA Tour event, you finish 20th, you're six shots behind the lead. So you go home

and you think to yourself, God, I've got to hit the ball better. You go start working on your technique and things like that.

You turn up at a Champions Tour event and you lose the tournament and you're two shots back say. You go, I just wasn't good with my routine on that 14 tee shot that I missed, my short game isn't quite as tight as it should be, I should have chipped and putted that hole. So you tend to, when you're close to winning, you tend to focus on I suppose the finer details that get you playing well whereas when you're six, eight shots away from winning a tournament, it's so vast that you start thinking, well, I've got to work on this first before I start working on my mental game.

So I think being on the Champions Tour has helped me not realize, I always realized it, but it has helped me commit more to being -- realizing that how I'm thinking is much more important than how I'm swinging a golf club.

Q. You played here last year, you mentioned, for your debut. Was it an easy decision to come back here and play again?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Of course. I'd come back here with my friends. This is -- it's a surprise to me, I hadn't heard of the course, I didn't know anything about it, yet this is a golf course that if I was going playing with my mates, I'd like to put this on the rota. You'd have great fun here actually with your friends. I think you'd have more fun playing here with your friends than you actually do playing a tournament here because, you know, as your partners or your friend's ball rolls off the green 20 yards down into the rough, you can laugh at them. This week it feels pretty miserable, you can't do that with the opposition and it feels pretty miserable when you do it.

It really is a great layout and a fun golf course. It's a hidden gem, no doubt about it. I don't know if that's how it's thought of in Jacksonville or in Florida, but from an outsider, I was shocked how good this golf course is.

Q. How much of a role, if any, did having Jim as the host play for you?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Oh, 100 percent. No, I wouldn't -- once Jim and Tabitha asked, I was coming. That was it, no questions asked. I would support their tournament and what they do in golf, so it was an easy decision to say yes to that.

Sometimes it does take that, a lot of times we have a lot of choice. You know, I've got lots of places I could go and play, so it does take the right person asking at times for you to go, yeah, OK, I'll come and play. Once you're there, obviously I've seen this golf course and think it's really good, so it's likely I would choose to come here, but it definitely came based on Jim and Tabitha.

Q. How do you explain the continued success of Miguel?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Miguel has kept his game, he competes with the young guys. I think the biggest key, if you want to be good on the Champions Tour, is you've got to try and keep an eye on the main tour and go back and play and push yourself that little bit. The best players who are going to play here 50 years of age are the ones who are still playing, are trying to play against the regular guys at 48, 49 years of age.

Miguel, of all the players out here, and he's 58 now, of all the players, I think he's the one who hits it as hard, he does it exactly as he did eight years ago. He probably hits it harder than most guys out here. He's really making an effort to keep himself relevant and keep himself going. I've seen that with a few. I've seen the opposite with a few players and I think me coming out now has pushed a few players on.

You know, if you stand on a par -- like I go back and play with the junior guys, if I'm standing on a par-3 and thinking, well, this is a 6- or a 5-iron and the guy beside me hits 6-iron, I'm going to hit 6-iron, whereas what happens sometimes to some of the guys on the Champions Tour, they're standing on a par-3 and they're thinking, you know, is it a 5- or a 6-iron and the guy beside them hits a 4-iron. Well, they're going to hit an easy 5-iron.

Sometimes that's not what you need to do. You've got to push yourself and hit the hard 6 and get on with it. Miguel, I think, is like he hits it really well. He's 165 ball speed, which he's pretty long, and he's pushing himself, which is a good thing.

Q. Could you see getting a win against those guys, those younger guys? You were a top-20 at the --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I fully believe I'm going to go and, yeah, I did not -- like just a boring average week last week. It was not like anything went -- I played well on the tough days as I usually would, but physically I hit it further and I'm as good as I can be and what I'm finding is the Champions Tour has really helped me mentally. Really helped me.

There's an element of, as I described earlier on, I'm in contention so I'm hitting a lot more shots under pressure and feeling that intensity and I feel that's really going to help my game. I think I need -- there was an element going back last week and playing the regular tour event, it's a one-off. That's not easy to go and play one-off events.

So if I want to win on the regular tour, I have to play a few events. I'm not going to be able to target one event and just turn up. Even when you do target one event, not only are you a little bit out of -- you're in a different pond in that sense. You're in a different sort of area. Everybody else is talking to you because they haven't seen you, so it just jumps out as being a different week.

So if I want to win a regular event, I'm going to have to play a few more. I intend to. I'm going to play 33 events this year, I have no problem with playing events. Hopefully, I'm in three of the main majors next year. Kind of difficult getting into the Masters barring winning a tournament. I just don't play enough events to get myself back inside the top-50 in the world.

It will have to be a win, so we'll see.

Q. Maybe go win the Honda again?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Hopefully, yeah. I need an invite for Honda. And hopefully I play a couple events on the PGA Tour and a couple on the European Tour early next year, get a run at it.

I know my game is good enough, it's not a physical issue. Look, everybody out here on this tour, we've all gone through that phase. You know, your career's lasted 20 years, you do get burnt out and you do have mental issues. But I think just the more I've played out here, the more comfortable I've got. I'm working on those sort of things and I think I'm -- I'm hoping I'm going to be better than ever.

Q. Do you think your first year on Champions Tour has been overall successful? Is it what you hoped it would be?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I actually, I hoped for this. There's no doubt about it, I did hope for it, but it has been everything I wanted. I'm saying I set my standards and hopes quite high, so it has lived up to that.

I had a little inkling or sneaky suspicion that if I could get myself out here and get in contention, which I'm doing, that I would -- it would improve my game by just being in contention. Massive difference from playing when you're under pressure and the intensity that brings and the learning you get from that from being in the middle of the field.

It's tough. If you're on the PGA Tour, it's the hardest thing on the PGA Tour is to consistently have a chance of winning tournaments. You can have a great year and really only have a chance of winning once or twice a year, which isn't good for your golf. You need to be in contention a lot to improve as a player.

Q. Leave your major championships aside, but when you won out here, did you feel just as much a sense of satisfaction as winning a Tour event?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Winning is winning. We're very fickle, golfers. Everything about is how we played our last round, how we played our last hole, how we played our last tournament, whatever way you want to look at it. Yeah, I just want to win.

Like, honestly, I prefer -- I'm not joking with this: I would prefer to win here than finish second at a PGA Tour event. You know, winning is winning, there's something about it. OK, it's a smaller pool out here and, you know, you can look at it like that, but the fact of the matter is putting yourself under pressure out there and having to hit the shots when people are watching when it counts is what's exciting. No amount of -- no amount of finishing top-10 and somebody patting me on the back will do. I couldn't tell you when I -- I wouldn't remember a top-10, but I'll remember a win out here on the Champions Tour.

Q. So you're not one for moral victories, right? Second place is not -- is just --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, I had over 30 in my regular career, second places. You know, there were all sorts. Some I messed up, some I played great to finish second. You learn a lot. They can be bitter, there's all sorts of things going on with those second places. I don't count -- obviously somebody else counted them up. I couldn't tell you what my top finish is, I couldn't tell you my finishes in the majors bar the three wins. I don't -- it doesn't make any difference to me.

Winning is winning and that's it, there's nothing else of any relevance. And it's very bad for your golf to take satisfaction out of, which I often see somebody finishing 10th and they say "well done." I'm absolutely raging. If somebody tells me "well done" for finishing 17th last week, I'm raging with them.

Q. Following up on that, the next couple weeks or four weeks leading up to the Schwab Cup, any extra pressure, speaking of winning?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, I think, yeah, there is pressure. You know, I said I want to win the Schwab Cup. There's about five of us in real contention. I didn't understand how it worked with double points over the last three weeks. It really is everything to play for. I think the best any of us can do is get ourselves in that leading position, but it will come down to those three double points events and probably come down to the last event.

Hopefully I'll be in enough of a position -- you want to be in a position that a win would certainly win it for you, if you know what I mean. So that means you would have to be within 400,000 of the leader and ideally you would be more than 400,000 so that if even if somebody won, they can't pass you if you finish second. You're trying to get it within your own control, but ultimately -- they actually probably -- it's my first time obviously in the Schwab Cup. They probably got the system right. It will lead to a lot of drama and come right down to the wire.

Q. Do you look forward to that drama, that extra pressure?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, that's why we play. We're here for no other reason but trying to be alive and live. This is the greatest thing about the Champions Tour, it gives us all a second wind that we can walk around and pretend that, you know, remember the past in some ways and pretend that we're the same and as good and really enjoy the idea of trying to win and hit a great shot when it's needed. The Champions Tour's great like that, it just gives us a second run at it.