

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
November 15, 2022

SEPP STRAKA



JACK RYAN: We would like to welcome Sepp Straka into the interview room here at the RSM Classic. Sepp is making his sixth start of the season and enters the week No. 18 in the FedExCup standings.

Sepp, a place you've made four starts here before and obviously played in a few SEC championships here, just an opening comment on returning to the RSM Classic and Sea Island Golf Club.

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, I love this place. Played junior golf here, played SECs here, always loved coming to this tournament. I've never played well here, but I'm hoping this is my year. Yeah, I'm looking forward to it, it's always a great place to come to.

JACK RYAN: And you've had a nice start to the season, obviously a runner-up at the Sanderson Farms Championship. What are you looking to accomplish this week to wrap up the fall and as we enter the next part of the season in 2023?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it's always good to get off to a good start. I've always played a lot in the fall. The break just seems easier and nicer when you get off to a good start. Looking forward to just one more good week because all the FedExCup points matter and the more you can get early, the easier scheduling comes.

Q. Sepp, talk about right about how you're feeling to be back to Valdosta, but what kind of a culture shock was it to go from Austria to Valdosta? What kind of adjustments did you and your brother have to make?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it was big, the school's very different. We had spent a decent amount in south Georgia, my mom's side of the family is in south Georgia, so we always went and visited them. So we kind of knew what we were getting into, but yeah, the difference is huge, mostly in the school side.

Q. And your dad designs what?

SEPP STRAKA: He's an architect.

Q. What does he -- buildings, homes?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, just about everything. Mostly in Vienna, there's a lot of old buildings so he would kind of redo a lot of those.

Q. And finally, you talked a little bit about your experiences here, junior golf, college golf and as a professional. I know the points are the same and the money's pretty good, so everyone's going to take this seriously, but is there a different vibe here being the end of the calendar year, there's a little bit of a break? Is it in any way more relaxing for you and maybe do you think for other players to come here?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, I think just coming to this place is more relaxing because it's the island, awesome place, it's beautiful, great golf courses. I've spent a decent amount of time here, a lot of my friends live here. So yeah, I think it definitely is a little more relaxing, but come Thursday I think everybody's going to be just as focused as ever and trying to play a good tournament.

Q. So when you think of like kind of how you are now established as a PGA TOUR player and the things you do and your routine into a week as opposed to a rookie season, what are kind of the things that are different in how you feel just as a player and how you approach a week in general from when you come out as a rookie?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, I think you hit it, the routine is a huge difference. When I came out I didn't really know what I was doing, I would just come out and hope my game was good and if it was, good; if not, probably wouldn't be so good.

Now it's a lot more structured. I've got a couple of guys that help me out with my short game and my swing and they come out a lot. Kind of structuring time around that and just making sure ready kind of going into Thursday.

Q. Is that different in any way in terms of working with certain people than when you were on the Korn Ferry Tour? Like when you were on that tour, were there less people around or are you still talking to people? Was it more remote? Kind of how does that differ on the PGA TOUR than when you were on the KFT?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it's very different. On the Korn Ferry it's hard to travel. You can't pay people to travel with you and help you out, so I'd say access to your coaching is a lot limited. Yeah, in your off weeks you're kind of working more around going to see your coaches and kind of sharpening up during off weeks. You know, it's kind of constant out here because coaches travel a lot and it's not very big changes, but just staying sharp is a lot easier when you have that constant second view.

Q. Last tournament of the season. Has there been a moment or memory that stood out to you?

SEPP STRAKA: Playing in the Masters, yeah, that was a lifelong dream come true. There's so many. The whole season was kind of a dream come true. Playing 150th Open at St. Andrews was amazing with my brother on the bag there. Yeah, I mean, there's just so many tournaments that I've always kind of dreamed of playing and was able to play last year that really were dreams come true.

Q. Can you name the coaches that you're working with?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, John Tillery on full swing and Tim Albertson (sp?) on short game.

Q. What did you take from the experience of being in the playoff in a FedExCup event?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it was my first playoff, so definitely drew a lot from that. Things just, I realized things just happen really quickly. You finish, you sign your scorecard, next thing you know you're on the tee box hitting your tee shot. Things just kind of moved pretty quick in that one.

Then obviously the playoff I was in a couple months ago against Mackenzie at the Sanderson, didn't work out either, but I definitely felt a lot more calm, kind of knew what to expect. Anytime you can kind of put yourself in situations that you haven't been in I think's just huge learning experiences whether they go your way or not.

Q. What did you do with the trophy that you did win?

SEPP STRAKA: It's in the house, yeah. Trophy case. It's got two in it right now, I've got a Korn Ferry in there, too. Yeah, hoping to grow that a little bit.

Q. And when did you start feeling a little more comfortable out here?

SEPP STRAKA: Still working on it. Yeah, it's just a work in progress. You just keep trying to get better. I'd say my -- kind of the summer of my rookie year is when I started kind of getting more comfortable with going to the bigger tournaments. That's kind of when I started getting more comfortable with just being on the PGA TOUR and that being a reality. Takes a little while to sink in.

Q. I've seen a little bit of a pattern here in your career. You won at Honda, difficult conditions, difficult golf course. You had a good week at Riviera the week before. Played well at THE PLAYERS again with some adverse weather conditions, Monday finish. You played well at Hartford, you played well in Memphis, you played well at Hilton Head. Is playing at a difficult course where you really have to drive the ball accurately, does that play into your game in any way? Why do you think that you played -- at East Lake, too. Why do you think you played so well on these tougher courses?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, I definitely think when I'm playing my best, my driver's very accurate. I'm generally a very accurate player, so left, right is not a big problem to me when I'm playing well. I think that definitely plays into my hand. Those courses where it's pretty tight, but you're still having to hit a lot of drivers, because my driver is obviously, it can get off some but when I'm playing my game, that's probably one of my biggest strengths.

Q. Is there a moment you can pinpoint when you felt like I'm comfortable on the PGA TOUR when you think back to --

SEPP STRAKA: Not a specific moment. It kind of came on an extended period of time. I'd say the summer of my rookie year, started playing a lot of tournaments, getting in a lot of tournaments, seeing some bigger guys, got to play with some bigger names, that's when I kind of more realized that I was playing out here and it definitely felt a little more comfortable. Yeah, somewhere in that summer stretch where I played a bunch of tournaments in a row and just kind of got used to playing out here.

Q. I know Brice Garnett, you guys have been close for a while. What was it like seeing him kind of go back to the Korn Ferry Finals, get through that and get his good status back and just what's it been like being out here with him?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it's awesome. He's been kind of a mentor to me back on the Korn Ferry. He lives in Valdosta where I went to high school and have a lot of family, so I get to see him a lot off the course, too. Yeah, he's just a stand-up guy, he's a great guy. I knew he was playing well going into those Finals events, so I knew he would have a pretty good chance of getting his card. To go down there and do it and have him back out here is awesome. Selfishly for me, I get to spend more time with him.

Q. What are your thoughts starting next year there will be five cards and ties at Q-School for the PGA TOUR, so there will be direct access to this tour from Q-School?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, it's pretty cool. When I came out from college I didn't -- they didn't have that anymore. I think it was a couple of years where we had been just for Korn Ferry cards. But it will be cool, it gives guys a chance to just kind of leapfrog the Korn Ferry. I think the Korn Ferry was huge for preparing me to play professional golf. I was definitely not ready to be out here when I finished school, but yeah, guys are coming out of college a lot more ready I'd say. That's what I've seen even since I've graduated. Yeah, it would be a nice jump start for a lot of guys.

Q. Lastly from me, any offseason plans, any Georgia games or trips or anything you're looking forward to doing?

SEPP STRAKA: Yeah, going to the SEC Championship now that we've locked that up and then going to Austria for a couple weeks, which will be awesome because I haven't been there in a couple years. Yeah, it will be a good time.

JACK RYAN: All right, Sepp, those are all the questions we have. We appreciate your time and best of luck this week.

SEPP STRAKA: Thank you.