

ROUND 1 INTERVIEW
January 25, 2023

AARON RAI (-8)



Q. Aaron, a birdie on the first hole and kind of a couple birdies towards the end of that front nine, but then set it alight on that back nine for you. Just talk about that round a little bit. Great way to start.

AARON RAI: Yeah, definitely played great all around. Really drove it great off the tee, which is probably the most important thing to at least give ourselves an opportunity with those approach shots. As soon as you miss the fairway here with anything more than a short iron is very, very difficult. So that was key today, drove it very well. Hit a lot of real good iron shots and made a few putts around the turn there, so all in all a very good round, very good start.

Q. You played well here at this event last year. What did you learn from that event coming back here again this year?

AARON RAI: It's a great question. It was nice in preparation to not have to do as much as I did last year through playing the course and knowing some of the spots out there. It obviously helps with strategy and having an idea of how I'm going to try and play the course, what kind of shots are required. So I think just course knowledge certainly made a difference going into the start of this week.

Q. Your caddie, Jason, mentioned that you were excited to come back here not just because you've had the experience here already, but your game kind of fits it. I asked him what he meant. I know you drive it well and drive it straight and that's important here. Is there anything else to add to that that makes you like it so much? Is it different grasses or just the atmosphere?

AARON RAI: That's a great question. I was actually thinking about this a little bit on the way around, why do I like it.

I think the temperature and also how the wind affects the ball is a little closer to what I would have grown up with in the U.K. The ball doesn't travel quite as far here compared to other places in America. The wind feels a little bit heavier also. So I guess I just see the shots a little bit clearer where sometimes when it's hot in the States and when there's 5, 10-mile-an-hour wind, the ball can just fly straight through, whereas here I feel like you can use the wind as a little bit of a buffer, which probably just suits my eye a little better, so that probably helps me tee to green.

And the greens are a nice speed as well. They're not lightning fast, but they're not slow either at the same time. So again, I guess it's just a little closer to what I grew up with and



what I'm used to in the U.K.

Q. Since you're kind of discussing the wind, we have forecasts of 30-mile-an-hour gusts tomorrow.

AARON RAI: OK.

Q. And you head to the South Course. Do you think that is perhaps an advantage having played the North Course already and getting a good round in to go to the most difficult course it would appear with conditions like that coming up?

AARON RAI: I think you can look at it one of two ways. From a positive standpoint, you're spot on there. I think having a good round under the belt, getting off to a good start on the North Course will certainly lay good foundations for tomorrow.

Equally, the South can be difficult enough on a very benign day let alone if it's blowing 20, 30 miles an hour. There will be a test out there, there will be a test on the South, there will be a test on the North as well. The North certainly is no pushover.

So we're all going to face the same conditions. So again, it's just about playing good golf, putting the ball in the right spot and trying to stay as patient as possible.

Q. You mentioned about having that course knowledge helping you out getting around today. Do you think that having the course knowledge after playing your rookie season will help you more this season?

AARON RAI: I think so, I think so. That's probably the most difficult part of any rookie season on any tour. Every city is new, every course is new, especially in this stretch of events where there are two courses to learn this week, there were three courses to learn last week. It's just very heavy from Monday to Wednesday to try and feel like we know the course. It just takes a little bit of pressure off, it allows me to spend more time on areas of the game to be a little bit sharper, to practice a little bit more in order to try and give me self the best chance come Thursday. I guess it's helped so far this week and hopefully that helps moving forward during the rest of the year.

