

**PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE**  
**October 5, 2023**

**ERNIE ELS**



---

**Q. All right, Ernie, thank you for joining us here at the Constellation FURYK & FRIENDS. Just to start, how does it feel to be back here at Timuquana?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Great, good to be back. Jacksonville is nice. The golf course is a brilliant, old, traditional course, great club. And the Furyk family, I mean Tabitha and Jim, everybody involved is just doing such an excellent job. In a very short period of time it's become one of the favorite events of the players. It's amazing what you can do with a good venue and good people and a great club behind it. Good to be back.

**Q. Did you see the damage to the trees out there and what did you think about how fast they were able to get that taken care of?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Amazing. I mean, I saw some video AI actually showed me this morning and it looked really bad. They really went in there. Somebody was very, very, angry obviously. For them to do what they've done already, it's just amazing. You're not going to see much in two weeks' time, but the next couple of days we might see it a little bit. But we'll get past it, we know what it's all about. The tournament will continue to be a success. They've done a hell of a job this morning.

**Q. How do you treat your schedule for the year, just decide places you want to go, places you like?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah, yeah, I'm still playing quite a bit. This year I've been working on quite a few things in my game, so it's nice to do that out here. I always enjoy being with the guys. I do a lot of other things, but I like to make time to play professional golf still. Still gives us a little bit of pleasure even now and again.

**Q. So it's on your top-10 list of things to do, playing golf?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Absolutely. It's in the top 3 still. Doing quite a bit of work, you know, design and other stuff, but this is what I like to do.

**Q. Ernie, the players, the membership (inaudible) this tournament is the best experience, I forgot exactly the word, last year. In three short years or now the third year, what have Jim and Tabitha been able to do that keeps you guys happy?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Well, I think what they've done is just they're experienced. We've all played many, many tournaments on the PGA TOUR and around the world, so you know what works. I like what they do. They listen to the players. They listened to the players through the

first couple years and go from there. But they haven't had to do much because from day one it's just been a fabulous experience.

As I say, the venue helps so much, too. Drive here from downtown, normally we play in Ponte Vedre, so it's nice to be here. Everything works. The food's good, the course is good.

**Q. How many course designs do you have?**

**ERNIE ELS:** We have quite a few. I'm very excited, we just signed one in Austin, Texas, so we're going to get started there soon. And then some other ones. It keeps us busy. That Texas one's going to be good.

**Q. Do you have a particular design philosophy or have you borrowed from other architects that you've respected, like playing on their courses?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah, I mean, you go according to how you play, so fairly wide fairways for me. I've been a pretty good iron player in my day, so second shots (inaudible) par 4s a little bit. I like short, short par 3s, at least one, and a longer par 3. I like to have at least maybe two drivable kind of par 4s, and bunkering is quite something for me, strategic bunkering. I got into trouble earlier in my career putting too many bunkers in, especially at membership golf courses, they gave me a lot of stick for that. You know, with experience you get better. I love the MacKenzie, Donald Ross I've done kind of style greens here and there. You take what you played.

**Q. One of the architects told me that one of the easiest things to do when you're starting out as an architect, whether you're an ex-player or not, is to make a course that's too hard when you first start out. So is that something that you evolved in?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah. The one we did in Hawaii, you know, that was one of my first ones and I was -- that was kind of my time period where I was really liking my bunkers. The ladies play there, they played there the last two years and I just feel sorry, I'm like I put my hands up because I see some of them hitting in those bunkers and it's like, man, it was kind of a period of my life. It's like 50 years ago when I was a bit younger, so you do things and then you move on.

**Q. It just depends on resort or private course?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah, you like to get it playable for all kinds of players. I always have the golf course that's going to have a tournament in mind, that's my first thought. But then I've got to kind of tone it down around the greens and some bunkers and fairways. You want everybody happy.

But it's like wine, you know? Some people are going to like your wine and some people are not going to like your wine, and golf is the same. Some people like certain kind of golf courses, some people don't, so you're not going to satisfy everybody.

**Q. I've never heard anybody say they didn't like your wine.**

**Q. Whether it's wine or whether it's golf course, do you take criticism well?**

**ERNIE ELS:** Not really. We took a bit of it -- you have somebody criticize you, you take it personal, but I think with time your skin gets a little thicker and you understand where they come from in many instances when they explain what they mean.

But at first glance, like no, what do you mean, you're an asshole or something. You're not going to -- as I say, you're not going to satisfy everybody. You can only do what you think is best.

**Q. Do you remember the maddest you've ever been?**

**ERNIE ELS:** There's been so many. Every day I get -- I'm joking. There's been times, you've been around me. I think golf --

**Q. I think like something you've done with wine or golf course, something --**

**ERNIE ELS:** I've made stupid mistakes everywhere. Hopefully I've learnt from them, but I have thankfully surrounded myself with good people in the industry. Wine, I have a really good winemaker and some investors that helped me out, so that was good for the most part. And then design work also, I've got Greg Letsche involved. He was with the Nicklaus company. He's been with me almost 20 years now and we've done some courses. I've been surrounded with quality people, so they've kept me on track.

**Q. Let me flip this around positive as I'm standing behind this greatness right here, what's the favorite shot that you've ever hit in your career? When you look back on your career, what's your favorite? Give me one.**

**ERNIE ELS:** Well, there's always a shot that you remember when you win a tournament, there's something special that you do. I mean, you know the ones I'm going to mention, the 5-iron at Congressional still, even after all this time goes back. The putts I made in '94 at Oakmont, that still blows my mind to think that I could have made all those putts. And then the bunker shot at Muirfield. So I'm going back to majors here. Yeah, Muirfield Village, winning there was very, very special. The shot into 18, it was Freddie jumping at me, 7-iron in there. Yeah, we can go on and on.

You shouldn't ask this question to Bernhard Langer, you'll be here for three hours. He's won over 100 tournaments.

**Q. One other question I had, coming off of a Ryder Cup, this is an old question for you and I apologize, but why didn't you want to do it again? I'll just leave it at that.**

**ERNIE ELS:** The captaincy?

**Q. Yeah.**

**ERNIE ELS:** I felt I could not do more. I felt, I really felt tired after that week. Me personally, I just -- one mistake I made, because I had to be perfect, I knew it. I needed to have every match go my way, and I did that analytical thing and it worked. I just should have put somebody else against Tiger, because my hot player was Ancer. Abraham was my hot player. I could have played him with anybody but Tiger. Then obviously Hideki had that big lead that he lost. That thing could have been our way.

I just felt I did exactly what I wanted to for the most part. I could not do more. The tension I had in the house with Liezl and just putting everything together, changing the thing around, putting the emblem on and all that, it was a lot.

Looking at Charlotte, obviously I could have done it if I wanted to. I could probably still do it. It's time to let the guys --

**Q. You don't have any second thoughts?**

**ERNIE ELS:** To be honest, I have. I've had second thoughts, but I have to stick with what I've done. I did what I did for that event. I think there was a lot of great changes, the guys bought in. They've got to get it over the line now. I think we're in good hands. Mike Weir and the guys, we talk a lot. I did have some second thoughts, but I needed to respect what we decided on and leave it at that.

But that will burn me for a long time. We had it over the line, we really did, and just -- the one thing that got me was after the press conference on Saturday, we had some issue, whatever, and I think it was (inaudible) or whatever, kind of stood up for my guys and the guys really enjoyed what I said.

I walked into the tent, there was this big cheer almost like they're celebrating something. They were just saying thank you what you did for us, you really stood with us.

On our way back I said to them, guys, tomorrow's going to be the hardest day you've ever had in your life, you don't even think about winning now, we've got still a big session left.

I just feel that they -- doing that big cheer for me coming in was great, but I would really have enjoyed it on Sunday, you know what I mean? Sunday would have been great, but that Saturday...

I was never like that. You don't celebrate until the job's done, until you're finished, done, got the trophy. Then I'll party for a week with you, I will, and I have. But get it done. That still burns me.

It was a great event. Most of the players thanked me. What happened after that, all of them became superstars. Marc Leishman started winning, Cameron Smith started winning, Adam Scott won again, all these guys won. That was my message to them. I said if you can do this under this pressure, any other tournament's going to be easy for you. I had them listening.

**Q. Everybody but Haotong, but let's not go there.**

**Q. However you wanted to judge the crowd response when the Presidents Cup was at Royal Montreal last time, do you think what Nick did in the Canadian Open and he's on the team and Weir's the captain and everything, do you think that the atmosphere next year has a chance to be really, really good?**

**ERNIE ELS:** We need to have that. I think the guys need to have that and that's why I think being in Canada, Canada can be a golf crazy nation. I mean, if we can get some of that hockey kind of camaraderie coming in, it could be really something.

That's what we're going to need. We're going to need something big from the people in Canada. They need to really buy into us, the Internationals. The U.S. team has a bunch of superstars. You don't want the crowd to be asking for their autographs and like, oh, my gosh.

That's great, but I want them to really be behind the International Team because the more we can make good for our guys and a little bit uncomfortable for the U.S., I think that's kind of the way to go now.

If you look at what's happening in the Ryder Cup, you know, because what happened in Italy, you know, what goes around, comes around. You're going to go to New York, that's going to be uncomfortable for the Europeans. It's just the way team competition is going nowadays. We really need the crowd in Canada to really buy into the Internationals.

**Q. If more Canadian guys can make the team on points, the better it's going to be.**

**ERNIE ELS:** Yeah. I'm sorry, I'm drifting. You're right. The more Canadians make it, I mean, Mackenzie Hughes, Nick Taylor now, you know, there's five of them I think, Adam Hadwin, Svensson, you can go down the line and they've all become really great players. The more Canadians we can get on the team, I think the better.