

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
17 October 2023

MIN WOO LEE



MICHAEL BALIKER: Like to welcome Min Woo Lee to the media center here at the ZOZO Championship. Min Woo's playing on a sponsor exemption this week. Making your first PGA TOUR start since The Open Championship in July, so I guess just starting out, how's it feel to be back on Tour here this week?

MIN WOO LEE: Yeah, it feels amazing. Coming off a win last week on the Asian Tour, so I'm really excited to come play here. Haven't been back in Japan in a while, so I'm really excited that everything's been so good so far.

MICHAEL BALIKER: And you mentioned the victory on the Asian Tour, wire to wire fashion, what did that do to your confidence with that being your first victory going back to the Scottish Open in 2021?

MIN WOO LEE: Yeah, it's been a while since my last win so it's nice. I guess we'll see how my confidence is this week, but I'm feeling pretty good.

Thirty under on any course -- it's a fun, short course, but you've still got to do it and 30 under was a really cool achievement. I don't think I've ever gone that low before. Yeah, it was a really cool week.

MICHAEL BALIKER: And you were able to get on the golf course here at Accordia Golf Narashino Country Club, just some of your first impressions being out here and what the challenge is going to be like this week?

MIN WOO LEE: Yeah, it's definitely a challenge, there's a lot of tough holes. It's going to be fun. I think it suits some long drives just because some of these holes play really long and some of these par 3s are quite tough. I played the front nine and that was a good challenge. I don't know how the scoring will be this week, but the greens are soft so you can attack them when you get wedges in your hand. We'll see how it goes.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Just looking ahead to 2024, you're in position to be a full member on the PGA TOUR. I guess what are you most looking forward to being able to play against the best in the world in that setting on more of a week-to-week basis?

MIN WOO LEE: Yeah, it will be amazing. I enjoyed this year, played when I could on the PGA TOUR and loved every second of it. Played really well this year, so hopefully I can keep going until next year. Yeah, it's going to be fun, I guess, living and staying around America a bit more. That's always been a dream of mine since I was a little kid, so I'm really excited for that to happen.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Min Woo, you mentioned the strong starts on Tour this season, right there in contention at the PLAYERS Championship, a T-5 at the U.S. Open. What aspect of your game, be it mental or physical, do you think contributed the most to your success this year?

MIN WOO LEE: Yeah, I think I really -- when I get that question asked, I always answer it pretty similar with like the first few years I was trying to find my feet a little bit, and then the last year and a half I've felt like I found my feet and I'm just kind of working on that craft a little bit more. But I'm very comfortable now, I guess, in that situation, being with the crowd and being up there on the leaderboard.

Yeah, it's been really fun the last year and a half. Social media's gone really crazy as well. That's been a really good support everywhere I really go, so really excited about that.

Yeah, I think just being a bit more comfortable physically and mentally. Yeah, just listening to my body a bit more. It's quite tough with the travel, so yeah, I think I've always done that pretty well. Just finding my feet a little bit more every time I play.

MICHAEL BALIKER: What's the schedule look like between now and the rest of the calendar year for you?

MIN WOO LEE: Yeah, I'll finish off on the DP World Tour, I've got a couple tournaments there, and then two in Australia, the Aussie Open and the Aussie PGA, so I'm really excited for that.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Lastly, just some more exciting news that you'll be joining the player roster for TGL, so exciting stuff there. What is that going to be like and what led into the decision there to be a part of this new league and new initiative in the game?

MIN WOO LEE: Oh, it's amazing. Look at the roster, it's crazy. It seems like everyone and then there's me. I'm trying to do my best and compete with these guys. These guys, obviously major champions and best in the world. I guess a bit of my fun personality and hopefully I can play some good golf there, too. I really like that, like type of format, team event. I'm not sure what team I'll be on, but yeah, I'll be really excited. Hope I can get a couple of big boys and we can up winning.

MICHAEL BALIKER: And hopefully try to trash talk Tiger a little bit? What's the trash talk game like?

MIN WOO LEE: I was going to say I hope to be on his team because I know his trash talking with him and J.T., it's pretty funny, all the stuff. I don't know if I'll be trash talking him because I don't have much to back up against his words, but maybe I can try and throw him off a little bit, but I know he's a man of many talents, so I'm sure he'll be fine.

Q. Obviously you have full membership within reach assuming beyond attaining that goal when you look at the 2024 schedule, what other tournaments, what other goals do you have that you would love to reach? What stands out on the schedule?

MIN WOO LEE: After watching the Ryder Cup, the Presidents Cup definitely rose up in the ranks. I wanted to be on that team last year, but I just missed out I feel like, so that was a bit of a kick in the gut. Ever since then I've kind of played well. I love, as I said, I love the team format and I love playing match play, so I think that will be an achievement as we can -- yeah, I've always wanted to be on that team. I just love match play and there's not much of it out here, so I would love to be on that team.

Q. Have you met or interacted with Mike Weir or Trevor Immelman or any of the assistant captains?

MIN WOO LEE: Yeah, Trev a little bit. I think I met Mike ones, but I haven't really got to meet them too much. I had the dinner at Bay Hill last year with all the Internationals. Yeah, it was a cool time. Didn't have enough golf to back it up and get on that team. Yeah, as I said, it was a bit of a motivating boost and hopefully I can do enough to get on that team next year.

Q. Min Woo, through your time on the DP World Tour, you've played all around the world. What do you think a rising player like yourself benefit from playing in different venues, different grasses, different weather, what brings the best out of you in that experience?

MIN WOO LEE: Yeah, I think it's good because I think like obviously the competition's a bit better in America, but in Europe it's pretty competitive, too. To start out a little lower competitiveness, I guess, it was definitely a bonus so I can learn my way up the ranks a bit.

When I first came out on the PGA TOUR, I thought I was a pretty good player and then thought I couldn't play golf after playing Bay Hill. It was one of the toughest courses I ever played, I shot like 30 over for the two days.

Yeah, it was nice to, I guess, play on the European Tour, the DP World Tour and kind of learn a little bit that way. Different courses, different culture. When you're playing on the PGA TOUR, you're in America most of the time. In Europe, you're going literally to every country in Europe, so there's a lot of traveling to do and a lot of I guess you learn a lot about yourself. That's the big key, I think. A bit of discipline is pretty good for me because I'm not that disciplined, so it was quite good to start out in Europe and learn my way there.

Q. Assuming that you're going to be playing a lot on the PGA TOUR next year, have you thought about where you're going to base yourself from and maybe the reason why you will pick the place?

MIN WOO LEE: Yeah, right now I think it's going to be Vegas. Every time I go there I

always play well afterwards. My good mate Kurt Kitayama, I always stay with him. He was nice enough to offer me a room in his place for the first few months and see how it goes.

Yeah, I always love going back to Vegas and enjoying my time. The golf courses are really good there and I have a lot of friends there, too.

Q. What do you think will be key for you to do when you get to the PGA TOUR?

MIN WOO LEE: I guess keep playing well. I feel like I've slowly gotten better every time and got good results, so next year's going to be, I guess, more of a full schedule and hopefully I can get to the TOUR Championship, stuff like that. I'd like to do as good as I can. Not in the elevated events yet, so I'll try to get into them, too, but it might be tough from my position right now.

Q. You mentioned being excited to be back here in Japan. Just wanted to get your thoughts, I've heard quite a few players mention the fans, the atmosphere, just your thoughts on playing in Japan?

MIN WOO LEE: Oh, it will be amazing. Just today the fans are pretty nice and they're always polite. It's always nice to come back here. It's clean, it's organized, the food is unbelievable. It's probably the best player food we'll have all around, there's sashimi and steak and rice. I was saying this last week just playing in Asia, just the Asian food as I'm Asian, I love Asian food and there's not amazing Asian food everywhere we go, so when we come to Asian countries it's definitely a bonus.

Q. Is there anything specific you want to do this week, any places you need to hit, restaurants, things like that?

MIN WOO LEE: I would like to shop a little bit. I know the fashion's pretty good here, so I want to buy some shirts and pants and stuff like that, but that's high on my list. We're going to go into Tokyo tonight with a few of the boys and check it out there.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Min Woo, we appreciate the time and we wish you the best of luck this week. Thank you very much.