

ROUND 4 PRESS CONFERENCE
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ERIK VAN ROOYEN (-27)

DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome the winner of the 2023 World Wide Technology Championship, Erik van Rooyen.

Erik, wow, that was quite the finish, quite the victory. Six birdies and an eagle on the 72nd hole to get the job done with a 9-under 63 today.

If we can just get some opening thoughts on collecting your second career PGA TOUR title.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Don't really know where to start, to be honest.

Quite numb after that putt went in on 18. You know, you imagine yourself full of euphoria and just being ecstatic and I was just numb. I think it's because of everything the past six days with my friend Jon being so sick. I guess just the moment just hasn't hit me yet.

But now it's slowly starting to sink in. I mean, what a back nine. It's just an absolute blur in my mind. Bogeying the first hole is never nice when you're in the final group. There was obviously a few nerves, but after bogeying the first hole, just hung in there all day, just hung in there through the front nine. Didn't hit it great, but made a few nice birdies.

Then when I stepped onto 10, I feel like that hole with the tee moved up was just sort of made for me. It's the perfect yardage. Flushed a driver, made birdie and we were absolutely off.

Incredible finish. I felt like with Camilo getting off to a hot start, with Matt making some putts, almost felt behind the eight-ball a little bit. I remember on hole 8 telling Alex, I was in the right-hand side of the fairway and I looked at him, I was like, you know, I really want to win this tournament.

But it's so hard to push. Sometimes when you push too hard in the wrong moments it goes the other way. Funny enough, we had the conversation, he told me just stay the course, just stay the course, hit the shot we were looking, be super clear with your intention, and then I sprayed right of the green. So it's funny how that works. Hit a really good chip.

And then the back nine just, like I said, an absolute blur. I thought Matt was probably going to make birdie on 18 and when he didn't, when I holed that putt, I'm just kind of speechless, to be honest.

DOUG MILNE: Well, it was quite impressive and fun to watch. With the win you move to 63 in the FedExCup. I know Jon obviously has been one of the, for unfortunate reasons,



certainly one of the big stories for the week with you. You mentioned that every shot today, whether it was tee shot, fairway or putt, before you pulled the trigger, you had him on your mind.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yep, yep.

DOUG MILNE: I know that's going to come up. If you would care to share a few thoughts about him and how he has inspired you. I know he was part of your wedding; best man, I heard?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yep.

DOUG MILNE: If you wanted to just comment on him.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: As a 19-year-old, when you leave your home country, it's never easy, and I left South Africa back in 2009. I grew up in a really small town. The golf course was not great.

So leaving home wasn't easy. Jon and his family lived about two hours away from Minneapolis. I arrived in Minnesota in September of 2009 and they were there at the airport to meet me, to say hi, because he was going to be my roommate and teammate soon after. We obviously became best friends.

So we were roommates for three out of the four years I was in college. I still think he's got one of the best short games I've ever seen. He pursued a career in golf up until recently obviously. He's really like a brother to me.

Jon was diagnosed with Stage 4 melanoma about a year ago, maybe a bit more, sort of end of summer last year. He was clean in April, obviously Heritage in Harbour Town when he gave me the call and he sent me a picture of the scan and he was free of cancer. So obviously that was an incredible moment for all of us.

Not soon after it came back. I knew it was going to be an uphill battle. On Tuesday he sent us a text, he's got six to 10 weeks left. They did a bunch of scans and cancer was in all his organs, everywhere. I don't think he's got that much time left. We're flying up to Minnesota tomorrow to go see him.

DOUG MILNE: Have you had a chance to speak to him via text or anything as of yet? I imagine he was watching?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah, I hope he's watching. We've texted. I've just told him how much I love him and how much I miss him. All I want is to go play nine holes with him somewhere, you know.

And extremely selfishly, that puts all of this into perspective. Is it fun to win golf



tournaments? Yeah, it's fun. I've been playing golf since I was 8 years old, extremely competitive and we want to win.

But it doesn't matter. When I'm -- you know, when I kick the bucket one day, whenever that might be, this is not what I'm going to be thinking about. I'm going to be thinking about the people that I love the most and Jon Trasamar is one of those people.

DOUG MILNE: OK. Well, thank you for sharing that.

Coming into the week, if I could just get some thoughts on how well you felt like you've been playing. It looked like your last 20 rounds, 18 of 20 have been at par or better.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah.

DOUG MILNE: So you must have been feeling good about the game coming into the week.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Oh, absolutely. It's been a trying year up until about two months ago. For sure, the worst year of my career to date. Struggling with golf and made a coaching change. Started working with Sean Foley the week of the U.S. Open and started turning things around. I went and played on the DP World Tour, played in Switzerland, I think we finished top-10 there; played Irish Open, finished 16th, and we've just slowly been building momentum.

I was sick last week, I was in bed in Florida, so I didn't even hit that many balls. I came here, I arrived on Monday. Tuesday I was hooking the ball 20, 30 yards left. You just go back to the basics. I've been doing such good things, I've been putting great. Chipping is not the best part of my game, but that's getting better. I've been driving it so well, and iron play is probably my strongest suit.

This course is a second shot golf course. There's wide fairways. Sort of a lot of the greens have sort of pockets where you've got to place your ball into. It really just fit my game perfectly. So coming into this week I knew I was playing well and yeah, you have a day like today and everything just goes your way.

DOUG MILNE: With that, we will take a few questions.

Q. You were talking about the process of coming in 2009, coming to America and you started playing PGA TOUR recently and there was a struggle. I wonder if it has to do with what happened to the PGA TOUR and finding your way here.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah, absolutely. I went -- I graduated in 2013, I went home to South Africa, started on the Sunshine Tour. In 2017 played Challenge Tour, then 2018, European Tour. So I certainly wasn't the Rory McIlroys of the world where you're winning majors in your early 20s.



But I've slowly been building my career and taking steps towards fulfilling my own potential. I think certainly -- I started playing PGA TOUR like midway through 2019. I think I played a few events in top-50 in the world ranking and playing some majors and I think I certainly -- it was certainly a sense to me when I got my card that I kind of have to prove myself. That's tough pressure to live with and play with because the best players in the world are playing on the PGA TOUR, you know.

I've kind of come to peace with that. I'm playing fantastic golf again. I know the caliber of golf I can play, so getting this win is very sweet.

Q. You've been in contention in the last few weeks. Do you feel like you're finding your way back to where you were a few years ago?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yes, absolutely. I think in 2020 at some point I was 40th in the world, so I think that was my best ranking to date. Then injuries happened and life happens and things go south.

It's such a funny game because when things don't go your way, you can kind of find yourself in a hole and you're like, you feel like I'm never going to play well again. Then when you play well, you feel like you're never going to play poor again. Just trying to stay level headed and riding the wave and knowing that regardless of what happened today, next week there's another tournament to compete in. Just trying to get a little bit better every day and chip away at this game called golf. I know I'm good enough to do what I did today. You know, things like this happened.

Q. That was quite a long bro hug on 18 with Alex. What did the two of you guys share at that moment?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: He was just crying, which is funny because I'm by far the more emotional one of the two. I kind of wear my heart on my sleeve and he is sort of stoic and -- where he is? He was in the room somewhere. He's outside. He's the one that keeps me somewhere in the middle, you know. I can be over here and over here.

So I just consoled him, to be honest. It's been -- like everybody knows now, it's been a heavy week for the boat of us. To win, just it all came out, consoling him and hugging him, yeah.

Q. You mentioned a music note that you had on the golf ball this week. What was the significance of that and Jon?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah. So I used to have a line on the ball when I used to putt or when I putt and I don't use the line anymore, so somewhere this year earlier in the year we decided to just change it up. So we each just took three balls and came up with something and he came up with the music note. And I've been playing guitar my whole life, so he came up with a music note and I loved it because guitar is something I do away from the course,



brings me a lot of joy. So that's what the music note's about. And I put "J.T.," Jon Trasamar, on the ball as well as just a dedication to him.

Q. Sean Foley most helped you with?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Perspective. I wasn't hitting it that bad when I started working with him, but I wasn't getting great results. I was missing cuts. I think at one point I missed 10 cuts in a row.

So I think what makes Sean so great is, yeah, he's got this awesome knowledge about the golf swing and the human body and how the body functions and how to get the club square on the ball, but just perspective.

When we talk, sometimes it's an hour and we don't even talk about golf. We talk about life and the person you want to be, how you want to be on the golf course, not being an idiot out there and being the person off the course and being the same person on the golf course. that's really the conversations we've had.

Q. First of all, congratulations --

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Thank you.

Q. -- for your win. What was the turning point for you where you thought for the first time you could actually win this tournament?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: No. 16, when I made that putt on 16. Probably 15 actually. You know, 15 is just a gnarly green, so much slope. The funny thing is left is dead, right? Obviously Kooch made 8 there yesterday. But if you hit it too far right up the slope, it rolls all the way off the green. So there's a small window that you can hit it in to get it close to the pin and that was the plan. I kind of pull drew it, and still to this moment I don't know how it stayed up. We both kind of looked at the sky and we were like, maybe it's written in the stars.

So when that happened, I was like, ooh, we might have a chance. And then you make the one on 16 and the adrenaline starts pumping a bit. Then you make the one on 17 and then now you're riding it, anything can happen on 18. I think 15 and especially 16.

Q. What do you think about the trophy?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: I think it's beautiful. It's quite a lot of detail actually. There's a whale, there's a dolphin in here. Yeah, it's absolutely stunning. I don't think I'm ever not going to like a trophy that I win.

Q. Can you tell us about your second shot on No. 1? It felt like it never left the pin, but it --



ERIK VAN ROOYEN: I kind of pulled that just a little bit. We talked about that bunker and where the pin is and the bunker was always OK. But I tried to hit it kind of up the chute up the right because the whole green slopes right to left.

The club I had was never really going to get to the flag, so I tried to play it right of it and it just overturned a bit into the bunker. A bit of a funky stance, tough to get to the ball, and it was so far up the slope with so much sand that it made the bunker shot quite a bit trickier. I mean, I just went straight underneath it, so much sand, left it in the bunker and made 6. You kind of wake up a little bit, a bit of a shock to the system. Then I made that putt on No. 2. So it's a funny game, isn't it?

Q. Why did you hit the driving iron on 18?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Because my 3-wood can reach the bunker on the left and that's just a no-go. It gives me no chance to get to the green. I didn't even hit that iron well even, it kind of flared out to the right. I tried to hit like a driving draw that rides the wind that gets maybe 20, 30 yards further down the hill.

Yeah, if I catch the 3-wood just well enough, it runs into that fairway bunker on the left and that's just dead. Even if I miss the 2-iron like I did, it still gives me a chance to go for the green.

Q. What does it feel like to hit the shot you want to hit when you've got to hit that shot, you feel like anyway, on 18?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah, there's nothing quite like it in life. Yeah, that shot will be with me forever, that 3-wood I hit. It's a hybrid but it's like my 3-wood. It goes like 268 in the air. We had 272 to the front and I was thinking 2-iron, the same club I hit off the tee, but there was no chance it would get to the green. You're trying to win a golf tournament so you've got to step up and hit a golf shot. Feely -- that's his nickname, his name's Alex, but his nickname's Feely -- told me, he's like, dude, you've hit the shot a million times, right? On the first hole of the tournament, on hole 1, hit a perfect little fade hybrid in there onto the green. He's like, it's the same shot. When he said that, I was like OK, this is easy, go time and I flushed it.

Q. I want to ask you what Mexico has that you play really well here. I remember in 2012 you finished third at WGC in Mexico City.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: That was 2020.

Q. 2020, and now you win here.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Well, I was going to say something like it's got to be the tequila, but that's not the real answer.



If I think back on the WGC in Chapultepec, that golf course was so similar to the type of golf that I grew up playing in South Africa, especially in Johannesburg. Tree lined, it's at altitude similar to Johannesburg so the ball goes same distance, same grass, kikuyu grass, bentgrass greens, so I just felt right at home.

This week, like I mentioned in my opening statement, it's sort of a second shot golf course. Everybody's going to hit fairways. From there it's getting it close to the hole. Iron play is a strong suit of mine. It really just played right into my strengths.

Yeah, I love coming to Mexico. I love Mexican food. It's honestly just a great place to come and play golf and now I've got a trophy to go with it.

Q. Following that, not just Mexico but Los Cabos, what was your favorite of Los Cabos?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: I guess just the fact that it's by the ocean. I love the ocean, you know. I'm going home to South Africa in like a month or so and I'll be by the ocean. I absolutely love, especially where I live, I live in Jupiter, Florida, go to the beach all the time. It's extremely beautiful, the sunsets are amazing. It makes for a beautiful setting for a PGA TOUR tournament.

Q. Erik, does it make it like a little bit more special the fact that you are the first champion in this course designed by Tiger Woods?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah, it does. I saw Tiger was here earlier in the week kind of with the opening ceremony. You know, he's obviously an absolute legend of the game and to play on a golf course that he's designed and to win a PGA TOUR tournament that is somehow in a small part linked to him, it's extremely special.

DOUG MILNE: Erik, congratulations. It was an extraordinary week. I know you would prefer to be a better best friend than the winner of the tournament, but it's still incredible that you won the tournament in the fashion that you did.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Thank you, guys. Gracias.

