

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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CHRIS KIRK



MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Chris Kirk into the interview room, an RSM ambassador and along with Zach Johnson, one of just two players to play in all 15 RSM Classics.

Chris, can you talk a little bit about what this tournament and specifically to RSM mean to you?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, makes me feel old a little bit. Yeah, this tournament has always been really, really special to me for a lot of reasons. When I first turned pro, I moved here to Sea Island and lived here for seven years and loved calling Sea Island my home where I played and practiced and lived.

Davis and Mark Love have probably meant more to me, especially in my kind of early professional career, than anybody else. They were both just such great mentors. Davis was someone and still is someone that I can lean on if I had a question about absolutely anything and really helped me early on in my career kind of get my feet wet and figure out where I was going and what I was doing.

And then Mark was my swing instructor for five years. Even though he wasn't a swing instructor, he just kind of -- he and I became close and I kind of asked him like would you be willing to do this. So he took the time and did it and that was fantastic. Caddied for me every now and then.

So having them as such huge influences in my life and my early professional career especially, when this tournament came along, it kind of instantly rose to maybe the most important PGA TOUR event that there was for me.

Then winning the event in 2013 was a big moment for me, for sure. I won my rookie year and then, so that was in my third season on the PGA TOUR. The first win I think is a really difficult thing, but I think mentally the second one can be a little bit harder almost because you feel like, OK, am I actually that good? If you just win once and then disappear, whatever, you feel like you need to kind of validate that success.

So to be able to do that, to get my second PGA TOUR win and really feel like, OK, yeah, I belong here, to be able to do it at a tournament like this was incredibly special.

And then now my partnership with RSM that's gone on probably six or seven years, something like that, they just have been an incredible support system for me. The people that run that company, Bill Gorman, and Eddie Bozman and Brian, you know, Heather Fueger with the RSM team, they just are people that I've developed really great

relationships with and they just have been incredible for me. Through every high and low and every different part of my career, they've kind of had my back and always supported me and tried to push me in the right direction. So it's been a fantastic partnership.

Yeah, like I said, there's a lot of reasons for this tournament to be really, really special for me.

MODERATOR: We're wrapping up the season this week. You began the season with the win at the Sentry. Just talk a little bit about that and then also your season as a whole if you can.

CHRIS KIRK: Sure. Yeah, winning the Sentry at the very beginning of this year was an incredible week to say the least. Somewhat unexpected. I didn't play a whole lot of golf during the offseason last year, kind of the same as I have this year. I feel like I've put a lot of work in in areas that I needed to put work in on, but that hasn't been a whole lot actually on the golf course.

So to come in and, to be honest, I was looking at it sort of as a warmup week. The Sony Open, I finished second there twice and kind of had a number of other really close chances where I had a chance to win that tournament, so that's one that I kind of look forward to every year. And I hadn't been to Kapalua in a while, so I was like, oh, we'll just kind of go and get our feet wet a little bit and see how the swing's feeling. Then end up shooting 29 under and winning, I guess that's golf in a nutshell for you right there. Yeah, obviously an incredible way to start the year.

And this year was interesting for me, a lot of really big positives. Starting to have some stretches where I didn't play as well as I would have liked. I think playing a great final round in Colorado at Castle Pines at the BMW Championship was a huge momentum boost for me. The pressure of the Playoffs and playing to advance to the next week is such a unique thing for us. Just the mental challenge of that is not something that we face on a week-to-week basis, so I was really proud to be able to go and play a great round on Sunday when I needed to to make the Tour Championship, it was fantastic.

Q. Obviously, Chris, you've been out here a long time, you've seen adjustments to the Tour and everything, more coming or announced this week. Just interested in your perspective on the changes that are coming from 125 to 100. Do you like that? Do you see the point behind it?

CHRIS KIRK: I understand the reasoning, for sure. I don't really know if I like it or not and I don't really know if that matters.

I'll answer this and any other question kind of the same way that I always do when it comes to Tour policy stuff. I feel like, as a whole, the PGA TOUR has done an amazing job of running this organization from the time that I first made it out here. I believe that the people starting with Jay and the other people that are running the Tour are much

better at running an organization like this than I could ever think that I would be. So, knowing that, I tend to really just fall back into I'm just going to not really worry about that a whole lot and I'm going to focus on what my job is.

I have found over the years that when you play really well, it doesn't matter a whole lot what the Tour policy board decides, things will work out pretty well in your favor.

When you don't play as well, that's kind of when those things matter a little bit more.

So my focus is to just go and do my job and try to play to the absolute best of my abilities and stick with that.

Q. Just wondering, has that approach evolved over time in the last just couple years as things have happened where you really focused on your golf? Was that hard at the beginning, easy to do now? How has that changed for you?

CHRIS KIRK: I would say it's always been that way, but with all the turmoil and controversy and things that have happened in the last three or four years, I think I've really sort of dug into that a little bit more whereas I think I've seen some of my peers that have gotten really, really involved and to the point of being pretty emotional and really caught up in all this stuff. I just don't think that it really helps you do your job any better. Probably the opposite, if anything.

So yeah, I think the more has gone on, the more I try to stay out of it and just, you know, I just want to go play golf, I want to go play as good of golf as I can for as long as I possibly can. That's -- let the rest take care of itself.

Q. Chris, on the topic of living here in Sea Island, I was thinking about the dynamic of having your social circle also be your work circle in some ways.

What's good about that? What's challenging about that? Is it nice to be able to have a community that includes professional golfers? Does it become like, my God, everything about my life is about professional golf now? Talk me through the balance of that and the benefits and if there's any nonbenefits of it.

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, I'm trying to get sort of an accurate representation of that because it's been a while since I did live here full time.

Yeah, there are other people as in PGA TOUR players that live here, but I know exactly what you're saying.

I think -- I see what you're getting at, that there could be potential, you know, sort of issues with that of being around somebody too much or whatever. I think with the particular group of guys that live here, namely some of my really close friends, Patton Kizzire, J.T. Poston, Harman, some of these other guys, Grayson Sigg, I don't think that would be an issue for me because it's just a really great group of people.

Q. On the flip side of it, is there something nice about golf being an individual sport where in theory you're up against every single person out here, does it sort of mitigate that a little bit to say also these guys are my friends and they're my community, things like that?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, for sure. I don't live here anymore, but I do feel I have kind of a sense of that. I have a lot of other former Georgia players that are on the Tour and a lot of other -- after being out here for 14 years, I've managed to develop some really, really close friendships. Some people that we may not hang out with each other on off-weeks or see each other a whole lot away from PGA TOUR events, but are truly some of my closest friends, people that I really, really care about and I know really care about me.

So that definitely does help in a lot of ways where you end up with I'd say two -- you can look at a handful of my closest friends out here, Brendon Todd was my roommate in college. We've been playing and practicing with each other every step of the way since we were in junior golf even, 16, 17 years old.

So Sepp Straka, J.T. Poston are two of my other really, really close friends. Obviously we're going to help each other in any way that we can when we're playing and practicing together, but then once the tournament starts, I want to beat those guys even way worse than I would want to beat everybody else. Obviously golf is an individual sport, you're going to do your thing, there's no defense in golf, but that would be a dream scenario to come down the stretch on Sunday in the final group with one of those guys going head to head. That would mean so much more to me than any other situation like that just because we care so much for each other, but we also are so competitive against each other that it would be really awesome.

So it's a unique kind of blend, I guess.

Q. Would you also prefer to lose to one of those guys in that situation, or if we said I can guarantee you're going to lose on Sunday to somebody, would you want it to be somebody completely neutral?

CHRIS KIRK: I would choose anybody but one of them, yeah, yeah. If I knew I was going to lose, for sure, yeah.

Q. Chris, you kind of alluded to maybe not spending a ton of time on the golf in this break you've had kind of over the last few months. What has kind of the break looked like both personally and working on your game?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, so my -- my main two goals for this offseason were to break 80 left-handed, which I have not done. I shot 80, but I birdied the last hole to shoot 80 so it wasn't like really even that close. But I haven't played a whole lot. I haven't played nearly as much as I thought I would, I haven't played as much as I did last offseason.

And then just from a physical standpoint, I've kind of started to look at like, OK, I'm 39 years old, what can I do to try to mitigate Father Time as much as possible. So I kind of made the decision like, OK, I want to get bigger and I want to get stronger.

So Tour Championship I probably weighed about high 180s, 187, 188. A few weeks ago I saw 206 and am sitting right around 200 right now. Yeah, I mean, probably somewhere in the range of 10 to 15 hours a week in the gym and eating a lot of food and just really trying to get significantly stronger, so that's kind of where I'm at.

I don't think that I'll keep going beyond this. I think I'm 6-3, I think in that 200 to 205 range is probably where I'd like to be. But I feel like OK, if I can -- if I can get to there and stay there and do my best to maintain and even maybe slightly increase the strength that I have now, then that's really -- when I'm 45, that's what's going to really serve me well just kind of looking to those future years.

Q. Do you anticipate you'll lose some of that weight just once the season starts and you're walking constantly every day, that will naturally come down as you get into a season?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, I mean, I hope that somewhere in the high 190s to 200 is something I can maintain. Yeah, no, I don't think that where I'm at right now, 205's not really something I can maintain.

Q. What's the equipment setup look like on the left side of you, a little more game improvement to help you there?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, so the Callaway guys have thankfully been nice enough to indulge me and build me a full set of clubs. I think my shafts are definitely a little bit lighter.

So like my right-handed swing speed is 115 is like a normal driver for me and my left-handed is about 103 or 4, so it's obviously a lot slower. It's a little lighter, shorter shafts. Yeah, a little bit more forgiving irons. I need 'em. I definitely have the problem of -- I can sympathize with a lot of golfers out there that like if I hit a 6- or 7-iron and I happen to hit just absolutely flush it, it's over the green because I'm not expecting that, that's for sure.

Q. Just last one from me. Saw on your Instagram posted some videos of your boys playing. What's it been like for you to watch them get in the game?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, this fall and last fall, having the benefit of finishing in the top-50 on the FedExCup the last two years, I played twice last fall and I'll do the same this fall. I played in Utah and now playing here. So I think this year I had -- after the Tour Championship I had five weeks off, then played in Utah, then five more weeks off, then playing here and five more weeks off before next year.

My family is not used to me having that much time at home sort of in a row. It's been amazing just watching -- my oldest son played flag football, travel baseball and golf a ton this fall and the other two are doing golf and baseball and golf. At the ages that they are of 7, 10 and 12, it's just full on all the time.

It's really fun for me. None of them are I would say passionate about golf at all. They enjoy playing. Yeah, it's been a really, really cool thing for me to see them like take even just a little bit of interest in it and getting to the point where they can really hit the ball not flush every time but they're getting to the point where they can hit a driver and they can send it out there and they're hitting some solid iron shots and getting to the point where the game starts to get really fun for them. As a father of three boys, that's about as good as it gets.

Q. With the left-handed thing, and I say this in genuine curiosity and not snark, but why? What's the "why" behind it?

CHRIS KIRK: My kids had a lot to do with it. I've always done it a little bit. I did early on in my career, me and some buddies would go out and just kind of goof off and do it. Then the last few years has been more, because it's way more fun for me to play with my kids when I play left-handed. They like it better.

I think that when they watch me play right handed and they maybe seems unattainable to them or something. And also, like if I go out with a few of my kids and I'm playing right-handed, as a professional I always feel like even if it's a casual round with my kids, it still feels somewhat like work a little bit. Like OK, I feel like I need to get something out of it to feel like I'm accomplishing something.

So when I'm doing that and my head goes into a little bit of like a workspace when they hit like three tops in a row and are goofing off trying to find a turtle in the pond, you tend to be more like, all right, let's go, let's go.

But when I'm playing left-handed, like I don't care, it's just purely quality time with my children, so there's no -- the work and professional element has been removed. So it becomes like pure recreation with my kids and it's fantastic.

Q. It's funny to me that you have that perspective but then there's also that competitive part of you that you can't turn off, like I want to break 80?

CHRIS KIRK: Oh, yeah, yeah, I'm keeping score, you better believe that.

Q. Can you tell me the last course that you hit 80 on?

CHRIS KIRK: Athens Country Club I usually play. I play there a good bit, I play The Georgia Club every now and then.

I always play one tee up from the back tees because I don't hit it quite as far. Yeah, I was playing with my two oldest boys, Sawyer and Foster that day. I think Sawyer got up and down on the last hole to shoot like 99 from the actual like tee markers, you know. A lot of times they'll play from either the very front tee markers or they'll start from somewhere in the fairway. I think it was the first time he had broken 100 from like the actual tee markers, and almost for me. Yeah, birdied the last hole to shoot 80, so we were pumped.

MODERATOR: Is there one shot you would like to have back though from that round?

CHRIS KIRK: Thankfully, my left-handed rounds are really forgettable. I'm sure there's a lot of shots that I would like to have back, but I don't remember a whole lot of them.

Q. Just quickly, when did you first start the left-handed thing and what do you find more challenging, longer shots, full shots or shorter shots?

CHRIS KIRK: The first time I ever did it was right when I turned pro and living down here. Me and three of my buddies would go and just like goof off and yell in each other's swings and just have fun doing it. We were all shooting like 130.

Then after that I didn't do it for a long time, probably 10-plus years, 12 years maybe.

As far as the most difficult thing, I'd say probably like hitting really solid iron shots is hard and fairway woods off the ground, that's really, really hard. Like you give me that -- I drive it like pretty good, that's what makes it fun for me is that I can hit it 250-plus and hit a decent amount of fairways.

Yeah, that like hitting a 3-wood off the ground's pretty tough. And then the short game stuff, I mean, my short game's not like fantastic but I think that it's a way simpler motion than like hitting a 5-iron. And I always say it's like -- I'm like a beginner golfer in some ways, but it's like I'm starting over but like I already know all the answers, you know, so I just can't physically do it.

Some of the more simple motion stuff like chipping and putting is not incredibly difficult, I guess.

Q. I'm wondering as far as the off-course stuff goes, I know you're saying that you're in the gym, but is there anything that's a little bit more headspace related that you feel you've been -- you found you do every day most days that just keeps you in a good headspace to play golf and that you feel that you can rely on from a little more of a mental standpoint?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, I mean, there's a lot of things that being home has given me more time to kind of stay plugged in and focus on my sobriety and everything that goes along with that. So that, doing that work is fantastic for your headspace. No matter what I have going on the rest of my day, that's -- obviously there's certain things I can talk about and

certain things I can't, but being plugged in with that and focusing on that is huge for my headspace.

And then spending some time on the phone and in person with Zach, my mental coach, Zach Sorensen. He's a baseball guy, played a few seasons in the major leagues and works with a variety of different athletes, but he's kind of why I went and played the Black Desert Championship. He lives in Saint George, Utah, so I was able to go out there and spend the week with him and get out in some of the just incredible nature that they have in that area.

My wife and kids came out and we stayed for three extra days past the tournament. Went to Zion National Park, that was great. Yeah, a lot of the work that I've done with Zach has been fantastic. He'll come to Athens a week after next for a few days to spend some time with me.

Yeah, even talking about the Zion stuff, like that's always been a big thing for me is even if it's just me and the boys going on -- I live on 40 acres and we have a bunch of woods and creeks and stuff like that, it's a really cool place. So we'll kind of carve out time like we're just going to go for a walk and just spend a few hours in the woods. Like that is like such a peaceful mind-clearing thing for me. I've always felt that like kind of, I don't know, I'm not -- I don't want to like overemphasize it, but it's just that sort of connection with nature's always been really helpful for me.

MODERATOR: All right. Good stuff. Chris, thank you for your time. Best of luck this week.