

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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GARY WOODLAND

MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Gary Woodland into the interview room. He's making his seventh career start at the Valero Texas Open, first since back-to-back top-10 finishes in 2021 and 2022.

Gary, welcome back. If we can get some comments on being back here at Valero.

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, it's nice to be back. They do an amazing job here. Golf course I think is very, very underrated for where we play out here. It's really good. Obviously a lot of it depends on the conditions with the wind, we've had some wind the last couple days. But excited to be back. I've had some success here, it's one I look forward to.

MODERATOR: Runner-up last week in Houston, your best finish since winning the U.S. Open in 2019. Talk a little bit about how much fun that was on Sunday coming down the stretch.

GARY WOODLAND: It was nice to be back in the arena, right? I felt like my game has been good for a while, I just haven't been able to put it all together. I got off to a nice start and just really carried the momentum.

The fans, I'll say this about last week, the fans, I've been out here, this is my 17th year and I've had a lot of support, I've had a lot of -- fans have always been pretty good to me, but I haven't seen anything like I experienced last week. It was like I was playing in my hometown, like it was amazing.

And I needed it, too. I still battled some fatigue and their energy was absolutely amazing and pushed me and carried me. I'm very, very thankful for the crowd that we had last week and the support they gave me because it definitely helped me.

MODERATOR: And you moved up to No. 2 in the Aon Swing 5. I know that's big for you with RBC Heritage coming up. Just talk a little about that.

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, that's a massive deal. And I've fallen down from where I've typically been for a while out here. It's hard every week I'm asking sponsors for exemptions and writing those letters and begging and pleading to help me have a chance to get back to where I want to be and where I believe I should be. So playing well last week, moving up in that Aon, the Tour, they're giving you chances to play your way in and that was a big step for me last week.

Q. Gary, obviously we've seen the big round come out for you a couple times the last

few years. The consistency has been a bit of an issue with getting back to that major winning form, but with your feel within yourself, what has been the common thread when you've shot really low rounds and put yourself in contention? Like what's been the feel that you've had that has been maybe a common thread between those big rounds?

GARY WOODLAND: Last week, on Sunday especially, it was the first time really probably since the U.S. Open that I was in control, complete control. I was in control of my emotions, I was in control of my thoughts, and that's been a battle for me over the last couple years. It's one where I was able to slow everything down.

From a health standpoint, that's been extremely hard for me, so I put in a lot of work to try to feel better and I kind of saw all that come to fruition on Sunday there.

It was the most control I've been in. I wasn't ahead of myself. I obviously saw the leaderboard, I saw what was going on. I found out on 17 that Min Woo hit it in the water, but I didn't let myself get ahead of the next shot. That's a nice place to be in.

We all talk about trying to get in a flow out here and trying to stay in the moment, and we say it all the time but I was in it and I was living it. That's been a big difference for me out here. Especially when you look at the greats, the greats do it all the time. I was able to put myself in that position on Sunday and I haven't been able to do that.

Q. Describe the challenge that you face this week with that same idea of staying mentally focused where obviously you're trying to win this golf tournament, but at the same time you're not in the field at the Masters and that is the crown jewel of golf tournaments, who doesn't want to play at Augusta National? How do you keep your focus at winning here without thinking ahead of, man, I could get myself to Augusta?

GARY WOODLAND: Yeah, I think it's different for me because if I start thinking about August and what I have to do to get in, like I don't feel well. My brain's different, it is. I'm still recovering, I'm still healing. I don't have the luxury to think ahead because if I do, if I even think to the past, my brain's going to shut down.

I have fatigue. I have some -- yesterday I wasn't feeling good and I had to -- I told my caddie I've got to get out of here. Monday, he forced me to take off. He's been around and he's seen when I get fatigued, I really can't control my brain. So thinking ahead doesn't really do me any good.

Right now I'm trying to get better today, I'm trying to focus on right now to give myself a chance to show up tomorrow to be ready to go. I don't have that luxury to think ahead.

Obviously we all want to be in the majors. I've been a staple in the majors really since 2011 and that's what I'm out here to do is to play and win those tournaments, but right now I'm trying to focus and get through today.

Q. Gary, eighth or better in your last two starts here at Valero Texas Open. What do you like about this golf course?

GARY WOODLAND: It's a ball-striker's paradise, it really is. It's tough, it's not -- you're not seeing 25 under out here, especially if we get some wind. So for me to be able to control the golf ball, growing up in Kansas, I like to flight the golf ball and you have to do that around here. It's tough and I enjoy that. Coming in with some confidence in the ball-striking, I'm excited to be back here, for sure.

Q. Gary, I just wanted to come back to something you just said about your brain and that feeling of shutting down. You're going through something out here that no other player has. I'm just wondering what that means when you say your brain shuts down. What is it you're dealing with now week to week out here? What's that like?

GARY WOODLAND: I think the biggest hurdle for me is accepting where I'm at. The fact is I'm different than I was a couple years ago, I am. I've had an operation on my brain, I have scar tissue in there now, I still have part of the tumor in there.

So accepting the fact that I'm different, that's hard for an athlete or for anybody to accept that I'm different than I was. Realizing that maybe that's not a bad thing. Because I'm different doesn't mean I'm damaged.

I just, it's been a process for me to try to understand what I need to do each day. My caddie, my team, we've sat down the last couple weeks. I had some big weeks with a lot of emotions and stuff come up over the last month and I need to rely on other people more. I can't do this by myself. It's hard for me to ask for help, it's hard for me to reach out, but my caddie's taken a bigger role the last couple weeks. He's pretty much doing everything and I'm just hitting golf shots now.

But realizing that it's OK to do that, it's OK to rely on other people, I don't have to do this all by myself out here, that's different from -- I found out last week my caddie's trying to manage my energy levels, too. I found out he was dumping out half the bucket of balls on the range after the rounds last week so I wouldn't hit too many balls so I wouldn't practice too much.

He's been with me through this for the last couple years, so he's been amazing and he's understanding what -- I want to go, right? I want to work. I'm starting to have some success, I'm starting to feel -- I want to play, but I don't have that luxury right now. So relying on the people around me that it's OK to be different, and different's not always bad. Believing that and understanding that's been a big thing for me over the last couple weeks.

Q. What would success for you coming from what you've come from, well, you've had the battle and the challenges, what will you define a success at the Texas Open, in this particular Texas Open?

GARY WOODLAND: I think being able to, one, show up and compete, me to continue to slow everything down. The results I think will speak for themselves, but my goal is to feel well this week. I have to do a lot of work, I've done a lot of work this morning trying to slow everything down.

The support and love for me the last couple days, it's like I won a golf tournament. It's been amazing from the media, from my fellow players out here, it's been really good. So trying to slow everything down for me right now is a big deal. If I can come out and do that, I think I can have success on the golf course, but the goal and focus for me is try to get better each day and slow everything down.

Q. What's your caddie's name?

GARY WOODLAND: Brennan Little, call him Butchy.

Q. Yeah, Gary, people out here week to week know who the real fan favorites are, but what did it do for you to see the crowd really get behind you last week? I mean, they're always going to cheer for Scottie, Rory, whatever. What did it do for you to see the crowd really get behind you last week when that hasn't always happened to you?

GARY WOODLAND: It was different. Like I said, it felt like I was back in Kansas playing, it felt like I was at home.

There were chanting my name, every shot everybody's yelling. It was loud and it was amazing, and I fed off that energy. The weekend was, like I said, something I hadn't seen out here for me. I've seen other guys get a lot of love and support. It was special and I'm very thankful for that.

MODERATOR: Gary, we appreciate your time. Best of luck this week.

GARY WOODLAND: Thanks.