

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE  
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**PADRAIG HARRINGTON**



**MODERATOR:** We are now joined by defending champion Padraig Harrington here at the Simmons Bank Championship.

Just to start, how great is it to be back here in Little Rock and Pleasant Valley Country Club?

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** It's always nice to come back to a tournament you've won. I really enjoyed my event here last year. Pleasant Valley is a very nice golf course, Little Rock is a fun town to be in.

Yeah, so it's a very enjoyable week all around and maybe that's what contributed to winning last year. The golf course does suit me somewhat. Yeah, a lot of good things. I've enjoyed my week so far. I got here Sunday night, so I've had three days of practice. I've got the pro-am today and I'm kind of ready for it to start.

**MODERATOR:** Fifteenth start of the season, two wins, you ended the week No. 6 in the Charles Schwab Cup standings. How do you feel about everything coming into this week?

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** Yeah, you know, the two major wins is great, so that's got to be a successful year. I probably haven't played as well in the regular events. I just haven't been getting off to a great start. You've got to get scoring well, you've got to get low. I haven't been really holing the putts to shoot the 6, 7 under pars. I think I shot 20 under here last year or so.

Yeah, the (inaudible) tougher week where I'm not under as much pressure to make birdies, but I did it last year but I do need to get on a good run and see some putts going in, see some low scores. There's nothing wrong with my physical game at the moment, it's just I'm just not scoring low enough.

**Q. Welcome back. How familiar are you with the term "hat trick" because should you win Sunday, this will be the third year in a row for the second playoff event victory (inaudible)?**

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** Somebody said that I was on a three-peat and I was trying to figure out, I thought they got it wrong. Yeah, I won Dick's three times in a row so I have, I've won plenty of events, but -- not many events, I have won three in a row, I have done hat tricks. I'm sure scored a hat trick back when I was a kid.

Yeah, look, it's nice to think about but I'm not going to put myself -- to be honest, when you come into a tournament defending, you have a certain level of expectation. So it kind of feels

like on the first day that you're already on top of the leaderboard, so you end up being a little bit defensive. Anybody with a lead in a tournament on a Sunday, there is a little bit of, you get a little bit, don't make mistakes. When you're defending a tournament, you can start the tournament that way, which isn't a great way to be. You've got to free up and let it happen.

As I said, if 20 under par won last year, you've got to expect something like that this year. So yeah, you've got to go low and try and get all this -- nobody's giving me anything to start the week. It doesn't matter that I'm the defending champion, I don't start 1 under par, 2 under par. I don't get a handicapped start.

So everything has to be earned, it's a new tournament. So just got to go and play good golf like any other week and maybe try and get the fact that you're defending, it's not that you can't get it out of your head because obviously you get asked about it, but you've got to understand that that's the great thing about golf, nobody gives you anything.

Like if you shoot, you're six ahead going into the last round, you don't get to say "I'm the winner." You have to finish the tournament out, you have to play the golf. So nobody gives you anything, you've got to go do it. Being defending champion is nice, puts a little bit of extra pressure, a little bit of extra stress, but it's not of any help.

**Q. (Inaudible). Where is your mind from 2024 to 2025 coming into this event?**

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** Yeah, look, we are getting familiar with the course. When you play a golf course in practice it's one thing, when you play it in a tournament you see it in a different light. Yeah, one year is good, certainly two, three years in playing a tournament you really do know the golf course, you know certain mistakes not to make.

So I think we had a benefit from playing last year, but there would still be the odd miss this week that you go, "I really didn't realize it was so bad over here and I shouldn't have missed the green here," so there's still a little bit of learning in it.

And again, it's (inaudible) you want to play practice rounds, you can't learn a golf course until you really play it with a card in your hand. We're all still getting used to it. Certainly some really challenging greens, speed of the greens are really challenging here this week. And some of this is circumstantial when you do miss that you don't miss in the wrong place. You can hit -- you miss in the wrong place at these speed of greens, you really put yourself in positions that you can get up and down, so that's a little bit of good fortune as well as smart play.

But hopefully, as I said during the week, the PGA TOUR Champions posted a video of me chipping in in the rain last year for eagle on No. 7. When I think back, I hit my second shot in the (inaudible) I hit it way right and it could have been gone out of bounds, it could have gone in the red hazard and I chipped in for eagle. Those are the sort of things you can't legislate. That's what happens when you win tournaments, you get good breaks, you get those breaks when it counts. Certainly when I look back that was a big break last year and

probably strong (inaudible) me winning the event.

**Q. You mentioned that this course kind of plays in your strengths. Can you talk about that a little bit, why you think you can excel on a course like this?**

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** Well, it seems pretty tough, there's quite a bit -- 20 under par was a low score last year. I'm trying to think, was that an outlier? The greens are difficult.

So I'm not 100 percent sure how much it plays into my strengths, but to shoot 20 under par you're going to have to make a lot of birdies and you're going to have to hole a lot of putts. While I don't feel I'm putting badly, I'm certainly not scoring very well.

I played a few tournaments in Europe and when you go back to the regular tour, certainly for me, it really knocks the edges off you. You end up being more defensive on the regular tour, you end up trying not to make bogeys and you end up then when you come back out here you need to change gears very quickly here.

It's a different mindset on the Champions Tour. The Champions Tour is a sprint whereas a regular tournament can be much more of a marathon. That's probably while I've done well in the majors this year, I feel a little bit more relaxed in four rounds, I have more time to be patient.

Yeah, so four rounds suits me. I find this very, very quick, 54 holes. I think in a couple of tournaments, the last two tournaments I played, both times I got down on myself, my attitude was bad when I didn't get going quickly, when I put myself under too much pressure to get that, you know, low score going on the front nine of the first day.

**Q. With that in mind, when you look and see weather kind of in the forecast Saturday, Sunday, how does that change maybe the approach tomorrow knowing that that might be the cleanest day?**

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** I'm Irish, I do not look at the weather forecast. It changes every day. We look out the window and see what it's like the next five minutes. That's as far as I go.

So I don't have a weather app. I have heard that there is a forecast because people keep telling me, but I would never look. I have zero control over the weather. I will deal with whatever I get at the moment.

But I would say to answer your question, there's nothing worse for a player to react to what they expect is coming in, as in if you think it's going to rain Friday, or say Saturday and Sunday and say you thought it was going to be a washout on Sunday and you're trying to win the tournament on Saturday, I suppose you wouldn't with the last couple holes but you can't be expecting things. That's like looking at leaderboards. You make a lot of wrong decisions when you're trying to control the uncontrollable.

**Q. So we won't get into the weather, but it's going to rain.**

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** Are you sure it's going to rain?

**Q. Yes.**

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** See, in the States your forecasts are really accurate. When you live on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean as we do in Ireland, that forecast, it changes so much, yeah, we just don't rely on that. We look out the window.

I know, I must admit if I was living over here I would use a weather app. Still, I'm holding out that the weather forecast will change and we're going to have a beautiful sunny week.

**Q. We are not.**

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** So miserable.

**Q. This course in the rain, since you played it last year, how does it play (inaudible)?**

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** Golf is different in the rain. The drivers and the golf balls are designed for beautiful weather, beautiful, sunny weather. We're on the limit of spin rates, and when it gets wet you lose that grip on the ball, you lose that spin rate. So you can hit really wild shots in the rain.

So you just have to have the strategy. You do change strategy, you probably get a little bit more conservative. You've got to have a way of actually hitting the shots in the rain. There's a lot going on in the rain. It's a different form of golf.

As I said, you could have guys who will change the loft of the driver to give a bit more spin. I think it would be a bit late now but you could have guys changing the golf ball to get a bit more spin.

Basically, when a golf ball gets wet, if you lose the spin on it, it can go anywhere on its own. It's like hitting a flyer all the time.

Yeah, I've grown up playing in it, I believe I have a good strategy for it. Whereas I don't like it, I really do want to play in nice, sunny, 80 degrees, I do realize I have probably an advantage in it.

**Q. And this course in the rain?**

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** I think this course in the rain, it's probably fine all the way up to the last three holes. The last three holes around the lake and as I said, playing in the rain is nearly like playing with mud on your golf ball. Shots should go OK but they can go awry

when you have such a risk-reward as the last three holes that makes it quite intimidating.

Most of the holes are tree lined so if you do happen to get a water ball and it squirts off to the right, you know, it's not great in the trees but you're not taking a penalty, you're not out of bounds.

So I think the course is a good course to play in the rain but those last three holes can be very intimidating even without the rain.

**Q. Quick one, the caddie shoot, how did you like watching your caddie under the lights? What did you take away from that?**

**PADRAIG HARRINGTON:** Yeah, the caddie shoot, I think it went down very well, very popular with the caddies. I think it was popular with the people that came out to watch.

What was interesting from our perspective was we've had a few caddie tournaments in the past but this was on the tournament course, on the most dramatic holes on the tournament course, with grandstands, with people out watching. Yeah, it was a whole new level. It was very exciting.

I was one of the commentators and it was good to give a bit of stick to the caddies. I was surprised how high a standard it was. The guys played great. The winning group, they went, I think they went birdie, birdie, bogey, par, par, par. No. Birdie, birdie, par, bogey, par, par. They played great. They fully deserved to win. So the standard was pretty good but I think everybody had a good time.

And the caddies, which is important, the caddies felt appreciated. The caddies felt like they were treated well. They brought out a bit of food beforehand, they hit shots on the range, they warmed up. It was just really what it should be. It was exactly -- the caddies had a great night. The players who turned up enjoyed it.

My own caddie managed to get two holes so he was happy he didn't get knocked out in the first hole, but as he said, it was one of those nights, which is very important for I think all the players, that we want our caddies to feel like they're appreciated and very much a part of the show because they are.