

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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ZACH JOHNSON

MODERATOR: We are joined here with RSM team member and St. Simons island Resident, Zach Johnson.

Zach, you said it feels like a long time since you've been here, but you've been here pretty much every year, making your 15th start. What's it like to be back and playing in this tournament that's special to you?

ZACH JOHNSON: Fifteenth or 16th?

MODERATOR: Sixteenth.

ZACH JOHNSON: I remember the 15th anniversary last year.

It's hard to believe it's been that long. It still feels like a new tournament to me, to be honest.

At the same time, when you're around the people and certainly what RSM, the Davis Love Foundation and all the many people that they've established here, this thing's so well run, it's so fantastic, it's not hard to be at home for me and work, if you call it that.

And it's great seeing my peers want to come here and not leave. I love it. I just love the fact that RSM's taken ownership, made this a second home. Love the golf courses. We've got great weather. It's like this every week, every day, every day here. It's just 70 every day, it's perfect.

MODERATOR: It's been a while since we've seen you on Tour, since Sanderson Farms Championship. What have you been up to, keeping up with family and travel? Can you fill us in a little bit?

ZACH JOHNSON: How long do we have?

Yeah, I've got other duties and other responsibilities and other desires, so it's been great. Spent a lot of time with my family. Got one out of the house. Still two in there, so that's the focus.

Done a little bit of traveling. Went to Europe for my boy, he had a competition over there.

I'm a football junkie, so I've done a lot of nothing on the weekends and enjoyed that.

Couple other travels in there for my boy. It's been great.

You know, the reality of it is I'm winning when it comes to my bits and pieces, but my bits and pieces still hurt, so that's my focus. When it comes to work, my focus is the P.T., the gym and such. All of that is imperative and a necessity each and every day. I still want to keep playing and keep playing at a high level. That's my focus and that's my motivation.

Q. Why can't the Hawks push one of those over the finish line?

ZACH JOHNSON: Next question.

Q. You actually answered the first one I was going to ask you, the state of this tournament, your opinion of it, that's on the record. Given the changes on the PGA TOUR with field sizes and with number of exemptions, do you feel like the future of this tournament given the sponsorship, the strength there is still secure for the future and beyond?

ZACH JOHNSON: Obviously I'm not privy to all the discussions and negotiations and all that, nor should I be.

But what I am confident in saying is that RSM fully, entirely loves this week and the weeks leading up to it. That company is going to surpass \$15 million this year. That is by far No. 1 of any fall tournament in the last I don't know how many odd years, have to look it up, and that's the core of what they do and why they do it.

So from a stewardship and giving standpoint, my confidence is pretty high they want to maintain that because that's the fabric of their company and relationships.

Couple that with Davis and his team, it's a perfect fit.

My hope, nothing changes. Stays on track. But I understand the change. Going back to your question. I get it. I don't understand it all, I don't know specifics, but I understand that, the motivation and the why. I don't love change. At the same time I understand it and I get it.

From an exemption standpoint, that kind of stinks. I think there's only four now per week instead of, what is it, eight to 10, 10 to 12? I don't know, but the numbers are going down.

It seems to me, again I'm not privy to those meetings, those discussions, those committees, et cetera. They're trying to make our product better and I've got to trust that, whatever that looks like.

Q. Finally, you mentioned what you've been doing. Next year, what are your plans right now for how much Champions Tour golf are you going to play and do you have any inclination as to whether Tiger might join you out there?

ZACH JOHNSON: Of course, second part of the question, I have no idea. My response to

Tiger and golf I think is probably a pretty universal outlook on that: I just want him to play and I want him to play healthy.

I don't know what that looks like. Obviously he's a friend and I hope that we have not seen remotely the last of him. He's a lot older than me, you know, two months.

I don't know. I hope in some capacity he has the ability to compete. He's still going to be out here whatever that looks like certainly helping the PGA TOUR with a lot of things internally.

Hopefully he stands up for the PGA TOUR Champions and what that's all about. I'm sure he will, most of his friends are out there, too.

For me, I'm going to get used to sitting in a cart maybe a little bit. Kind of sounds awesome. Three-day events sound really good.

I say all that in kind of jest. I don't know. I'm not dodging the question. I do really operate where my feet are. I'm still like, I'm trying to get in the top-100. I know I didn't play a ton in the fall. I missed Napa because I wasn't feeling great and the other things I had other obligations that are what they are and I had to do them. So I didn't really chase it too hard obviously, but I've still got an opportunity.

I will love to have that problem of fully exempt, fully exempt, but if I don't, well, as a team we'll make a decision as to what's best. My body's a big part of that decision making, if I'm going to be honest. Trying to get as healthy as possible for 2026 regardless of which tour I play on.

Q. Would it be like a hybrid (inaudible)?

ZACH JOHNSON: I would love to go to Hilton Head, I think that's a signature event. Yeah, I get that question a lot. I've actually posed that question to some of my peers, one that's our host, and everybody's got a slightly different approach to it, I guess. We've seen, whether you're talking about Stewart or Stricker or Jimmy Furyk or whomever, it seems like more guys have told me, and this I really do appreciate, is commit. Which ever one you commit to, commit.

Maybe I'll go play Colonial or John Deere or something like that, but whatever I do I'm going to be both feet in, PGA TOUR or Champions Tour. PGA TOUR Champions, sorry. I'm going to commit. And I don't know what that looks like.

My wife is in full support of all of it, she just needs to know where I'm going ahead of time and hopefully she can go with me. We're a little ways away from the traveling together thing, I think.

Yeah, I don't like change. At the same time that's part of it right now. It's daunting and exciting at the same time.

Q. Zach, I read in Davis' transcript from yesterday that you were the one who actually introduced him to RSM. Somehow that's over my head. Can you talk to us a little bit about how that happened because it was obviously a successful introduction?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I think there may be a little bit of a stretch there, but there's also some truth there.

I have been an ambassador of RSM since 2006, so almost 20 years. Summer of '06, I think. Maybe spring.

Right off the bat we saw that it was a pretty darn good fit. It was a win-win, which is the only way we're going to go about doing partnerships. That win-win is certainly the business stuff, but most important stuff are the relationships, the desires and I would say utilizing the great game of golf and the platform which it gives us to help communities which we have a footprint in, right? That was apparent from the very beginning. RSM had some other initiatives prior to joining the PGA TOUR.

But to answer your question, we brought them here -- Brad's here -- a minimum half dozen of times to do events over about a three-, four-year period. In doing so they would bring their clientele in, they would bring some of their executives in and we would just showcase Sea Island, we would showcase St. Simons, we would showcase the Golden Isles and what it was all about.

And the common sentiment from back there and still holds true today is usually when you come here, you're going to come back, and they kept coming back, coming back, coming back.

They had a relationship with the PGA of America that was good. They felt they could make a bigger impact, my understanding.

So when you have somebody established like Davis, like Mark, their families in this community and already I would say proper pillars grounded here, that introduction kind of just happened organically.

Our Tour construction, right, the architecture of our Tour is about giving, so you've got a foundation that's already based here. The gentleman which we're talking about in the last 40 years is one of the model pros of all time. Everything just started falling into place.

I don't think it was necessarily an introduction, it was more of kind of an engagement. Like we just kind of hit it off. And Davis is a dear, dear friend. So to have one of my families in RSM join hands back in 2010 -- well, technically '09 but 2010 with the Love family, people, foundation, you can't write a better script. And it's not slowing down. So win-win.

Q. Congratulations on your engagement to Davis, by the way.

Just give us the state of your game, what's the best part and what part would you like to really fine tune a little bit more right now?

ZACH JOHNSON: I'm sorry, I was stuck on engagement.

Q. What's working the best and what needs to be fine tuned a little bit more?

ZACH JOHNSON: Good question. In talking to my coach, who's here, and my caddie, who's here -- when I'm able to practice, the duration is not as long unfortunately just given the state of where I'm at, but the quality is really still good in my work. I mean, my fundamentals are pretty ingrained. There's been some things we've altered which I think helps me shake rust off a lot quicker, has helped me get more into a systematic repetitive mode.

Even going back to Jackson, between Greensboro -- I didn't make the Playoffs, so between Greensboro -- yeah, Wyndham and Jackson, I wanted to play Napa but I couldn't, that's a pretty significant -- I don't know how many weeks are there, you have to look it up, it's over a month.

I took some time off. I did all the PT, tons of MRIs, I did all of it. I had about five or six days prior to going to Jackson where I practiced every day not really knowing what would happen in Jackson. I felt like I played OK. I don't know what I finished, top-25, top-20. It's one week, I get that, but it was one of those where it was like, man, if I can get healthy and put my due diligence into what I'm doing, I don't know what my ceiling is. Out here, out there or anywhere.

That was really encouraging. I'm not surprised, it was encouraging. Same thing kind of holds true with this event. Early last week my back was not great. I mean, my images are very good, thank God. That was a blessing. It's just knicks and knacks and things get tight, things get pushed and moved around in places they shouldn't. Getting back into a better posture and all that good symmetry is paramount for me.

Took a little bit more time off. By mid week last week I started practicing pretty hard and it felt pretty good. I'm kind of at that point right now. I would love to compete again without the help of antiinflammatories, and I'm confident that I can get there. You know, it's a necessary component right now.

I feel good, my game's good. To pick one part out of my game that's like really good or really poor, I don't even know how to answer that. I'm not trying to dodge the question.

Short game, the more reps I can get the better. The more pitching, the more flopping, the more even putting I think the better. But I say all that, I don't set over a shot like I don't know what to do. I am so encouraged with my golf game, it's just a matter of repetition and time.

Q. If you can get healthy, how reasonable or how difficult is it for you at this point?

ZACH JOHNSON: How difficult is what? I'm sorry, to get healthy?

Q. How big is that?

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh, I'm confident I can. I've got the right personnel, I've got the right outlook, a lot of great consulting, a lot of people that are selfless and in my corner. They just want to see me --

Q. Is there one body part that needs the most work?

ZACH JOHNSON: It's always that point between the ears, right?

My elbows, a year ago my elbow was not good. Beginning of last year it was really not good. Kind of put things off. I've not done any, I've not had surgery on anything to date and I don't intend to. But with great consultation and with great care, slightly different approaches, technology, I don't even feel it anymore even though I know there's still damage there if that makes sense. Going back to it, that's encouraging, I think we're on the right track there.

A lot of technology. It's not pleasant, it's really painful. Like I said, I've had a bunch of MRIs, knicks and knacks on your back. The common theme with my back was, yeah, you've got a little bit here, a little bit there, but for the most part you're a 50-year-old that plays golf. That's awesome. I'm winning in that department relative to a lot of folks.

I'm just at a really peaceful place right now knowing that this is the first tournament where I can't tell you how long where I'm not the oldest. I love you Davis, I love you Davis.

Q. I don't know if there's any more serious questions but I'm kind of interested in these weekends, obviously Iowa, but what games are you watching over the weekend?

ZACH JOHNSON: It's evolved and changed throughout the years. I have a freshman in college that played football so I'm having Friday night withdrawals. I never thought I would ever say that, I've got to be honest. I enjoyed it as a kid but I didn't play football, my peers did.

But having one of your sons play high school football is probably one of the biggest blessings I've experienced in my entire life. I'll be honest with you, it's amazing. I feel like I'm still invested in that team. His alma mater, which is right down the road, lost in the semifinals last week, which is great they got to semis but still stinks. So that was part of it.

But this fall my other middleman -- my middle boy travels around, jeez, we're not -- I'm not going to get into the weeds with this one, but he travels around the United States/world for martial arts. We were in Europe two weeks ago for it and he's going to Chicago, L.A. here

coming up. So he's highly involved in that, which is great, and obviously we're in a position where we can foster that and his love and his desire for it.

It's a pretty awesome endeavor. I know very little about it other than it is subjective and that drives me crazy. Scorecard don't lie.

And then yeah, college football's a passion of mine. I've been to Iowa once for a game this year. I didn't get to go to one last year because of high school football but love going back to see family. I've still got a grandmother up there too, so that's a priority. Love to get to more.

I was able to get to Athens this past weekend to see my boy that came in and then see some friends. That was fun just to escape to watch another football game. I'm just a junkie. I don't care who's playing, it doesn't matter if it's the MAC or the Big Ten.

Q. Is Will facing withdrawals as well?

ZACH JOHNSON: No. Yes and no. Personally, a small percentage of yes, he misses playing. He got to go to one of their games this year, which was good for him to get that fill, but he actually works for the Clemson football team so he's getting a full glass of one of his passions. It's pretty great.

Phenomenal organization. It's not like I'm privy to other organizations, I'm just saying they probably operate a little bit different. If you're a father with a kid that can be inside those doors, you would do it in a heartbeat. I'm really grateful for that. Obviously it starts at the top with Coach Swinney, but the trickledown effects of the other individuals there are amazing.

So he's rubbing shoulders with great individuals. Still has the accountability and responsibility that as a dad you want him to have, compound that with school of course, which is great.

I don't think he has any idea how good he has it, but he's loving life. And his girlfriend goes to Athens. Anyway.

Q. What do you think your college age self kind of still struggling to be the No. 1 guy on your own team, without thinking about PGA TOUR, would say looking at your career and what you've achieved?

ZACH JOHNSON: Holy cow, was not expecting that question today. That's a great question.

He would be in distinct shock knowing that he would be sitting right here, no question. I mean, obviously I remember those days. It was a long time ago but I remember certain elements of it. I mean, the mantra at that time was "no regrets," like let's rock it if we can. I didn't have any money. Probably had a little bit of debt if I'm not mistaken. If I can get the finances in order, let's give it a shot.

Looking back on it, my story's always been one of just seizing the opportunity, seizing the moment but also surrounding myself with phenomenal people, individuals that want to see dreams fostered.

I would be in shock, but had you told me, give me the litany of reasons as to why I'm here, I would be like, oh, yeah, I guess that kind of makes sense.

I don't mind work, I enjoy difficult situations, I enjoy being really uncomfortable, surrounding myself with the right people, a lot of faith, a lot of prayer, and obviously sheer athleticism, right?

I don't know if I would be overly surprised. Is that what you're getting at? I think he would be in shock. The beauty of me back then that still holds true today and it's not -- I don't mean to be cliche, is that I've always operated where my feet are or maybe two feet in front of me, never further than that.

So that's why I had incremental permits. Guys, I played golf for five or six months a year until I was 22. My peers certainly my age were playing 12 months a year for the most part. There's exceptions to that; you think about Stricker or Jerry Kelly or Tom Lehman or whomever, right? But we're the anomaly I think in that and I think we're also at smaller percentage.

I think you take all that into account, I mean, never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be here. So I feel like I'm not living my dream, I feel like I'm fully outside of a dream and in some other sort of parallel universe in some regards. I still pinch myself.

I was at Augusta Sunday and I walk in the doors there and they're like, "Oh, Mr. Johnson." Like, what is going on? They know me, that's crazy, but they want me there and that's even crazier. It just never -- my radar didn't go outside of central or eastern Iowa until I was 23, 24 years old.

Q. When you were 30, maybe when you were 40, was Champions Tour something that you were looking forward, thought you would want to do, and if so, when did it change?

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't know if it was like -- I'm sure there wasn't necessarily a goal or a motivation. I will say there's been times in those time periods where I'm like, well, man, if I can stay out here until I'm in my late 40s, I might have a chance to play out there. Technically, I still don't know how it works. I didn't know how it worked back then, I just knew there was an opportunity there if you could get to it.

I also heard early on that it's the hardest tour to get on, which speaks volumes to how good they are. Obviously speaks volumes to how great a lot of those guys had success out here, and then the beauty of it is you've got guys out there that are making a name for themselves 50

and over, it's great. Whether they played professional golf a lot prior to that or not, it's an opportunity tour.

No, it wasn't on my radar. I mean, at all. I can remember a few years, thankfully it's only a few of the 22 or 23 years where OK, January 1, I've got to keep my card. That was motivation. I was always like trying to better myself each and every year for the next year. Actually, each and every week for the next week. That's the way I operate.

MODERATOR: Zach, thank you for the time. We appreciate it.

ZACH JOHNSON: You got it. Thank you.