

## PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCES

March 3, 2026



### RAFA CAMPOS

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**MODERATOR:** We would like to welcome San Juan native Rafa Campos to the Puerto Rico Open.

Welcome home, Rafa. If you can just open it up with how special it is to be here and play in front of a home crowd this week?

**RAFA CAMPOS:** Yeah, obviously extremely special to be here. It's been two years. Last year I got a chance to play the Arnold Palmer at Bay Hill and that was a dream come true for me. It's a tournament I always wanted to play and it required me to not play this event.

I played every year except for one year that I was injured, so I believe this is the 17th edition, 17th year approximately, so I played 15 of those.

Kid you not, I've been struggling the last year and a half so it means the world to me to be back home to really try to feel the support of the local fans and hopefully that can start building on some confidence and trust everything that's going. So extremely important for me to be here and really happy once again to play in front of the home crowd.

**MODERATOR:** You welcomed your second child a couple weeks ago, congratulations.

**RAFA CAMPOS:** Thank you.

**MODERATOR:** Right back into it with Cognizant and then this week. How are the kids doing and how important is it to have a good support system at home?

**RAFA CAMPOS:** Kids are doing great. My wife is doing an unbelievable job. It's obviously a job I could not do.

It means the world to me to have their support. They're all coming in today, which is awesome. It's the first time we're going to take the baby out of the actual house. But I have a year and three month old daughter, which is just so cool. Beautiful, talking a little bit, walking around everywhere. I love being next to her.

Obviously we've got the new addition to the family, Rafa Jr. He's two-and-a-half-weeks old and doing great. Everybody's healthy. My wife is healthy.

Honestly, it means the world to me to not only have them but have my mom, dad, brothers, sisters, cousins, friends come support me and other Puerto Ricans that are playing in the event. It's awesome.

I won't lie, I love being a dad. It's been kind of weird having to focus on one because I can't focus on the newborn basically. But it's so cool, I love being a dad and I hope to give 'em like really good weeks coming up.

**MODERATOR:** You earned your first win on Tour the same week that you had your first child. Was that something that you have been thinking about the past couple weeks at Cognizant and --

**RAFA CAMPOS:** Yes, that is something I was thinking about. Obviously God gave me the biggest gift in the world when I had my daughter and then all of a sudden being able to become a PGA Tour champion that same week was a week there's no way I could surpass it.

I started thinking, having another one, is this the way it's supposed to be when you're going to have a kid, all of a sudden you win again?

I was at Waste Management and my wife was due like six days after the Waste Management. I thought, I prayed, I'm like OK, it's going to happen again. I know we're struggling but it's going to happen.

It didn't happen, I missed the cut. I'm like, you know what, next one's Cognizant. I won as soon as my first baby was born, so I'm like yeah, my baby wasn't born yet so I'm not due yet. So I figured, I thought Cognizant was going to be it and absolutely did not happen.

It's something I think about, but honestly, I honestly just want to provide for my family. I want to do as good as I can, and I really want to start seeing the work that I've put in the last three months, the amount of work that I've put in is unbelievable. So much compared to what I used to put.

It's a little unfortunate. I'm not frustrated, I'm -- it's the other way around, I think. I'm not angry, just kind of frustrated. I'm not seeing the results yet. I know we're definitely working on the correct things and it's not there.

My main goal is just to play as good as I can, give myself opportunities to win and provide as much as I can for my family. It hasn't happened yet, but I have a really good feeling that hopefully after this week I start getting some momentum. I feel the support from the local crowd and good things start to happen.

**MODERATOR:** You're making your 16th start here this week. That's the most of anyone at this event. What does that mean to you?

**RAFA CAMPOS:** It means the world. I say it every year, and for me to have -- when I was, I believe I was 19, 20 years old when I first got the chance to play in the Puerto Rico Open, since the first event. It opened up a lot of doors that I probably never would have imagined

that were going to open. It actually was a steppingstone for me to realize that I can play professional golf.

It definitely changed -- because of the Puerto Rico Open, that kind of kickstarted my ambition to really work hard and become a professional golfer because it was the first time -- I was an amateur. I played Puerto Rico Open I believe twice as an amateur and that first time was the first time that I realized like, man, my game is really not that far from the best players in the world, so I really feel that I can -- if I work hard on it, I'll be up there. So it kind of kickstarted everything.

Yeah, it means the world to me to have this event not only to me, but also for the Puerto Ricans, for tourism. It's the only week out of the year that we can showcase how beautiful this island is. Not only that, but the talent that we have, and hopefully we can help and build on inspiring other generations to kind of pick up the game of golf. They see us on TV and they're like motivated, hey, I want to be like him.

So it's a very important week for me. Sixteen years, that's a lot. I didn't realize I'm getting this old. This event means a lot to me and my family and golf in general here on the island.

**MODERATOR:** You touched on this a little, but one of your goals has been to promote the game in Puerto Rico. Last time you played here in 2024 you mentioned young talent like Evan Pena --

**RAFA CAMPOS:** Yes.

**MODERATOR:** -- who's playing again this week. Can you just talk about how proud you are of the young talent playing this week and the growth of the game in Puerto Rico.

**RAFA CAMPOS:** I got goosebumps right now because I really do think -- I'm extremely impressed, first of all, with the amount of talent that we have. We have a good five to 10 kids that, kid you not, if I had the talent that they have, if I had that talent back then, this story would have been a lot shorter and I would have been on Tour I believe like quite some more years right now.

Yeah, we're playing with Evan. Evan is probably the biggest future right now at that age category that we have. You see him hit the ball, it's unbelievable. It's a beautiful swing, great demeanor, things that I did not have back then.

But the game has grown significantly, junior golf here on the island especially the last 10 years. One of my main goals is always to promote the game of golf. I realize I do this not only for myself and my family, but I really do want to leave a good impression and a good inspiration for other younger generations. It motivates me because I see their talent and I see how good they are and I just wish I could be playing on the PGA TOUR with five, six other Puerto Ricans. That time will not be far from now. I do believe that there's significant talent here in the island and I just want to inspire them and kind of show them that hey, if I

was able to work hard on it and get up here, you guys can. Not easily, but you guys can get here because you have tools that I did not have.

It's pretty cool, the game has grown a lot, and like you said, it's one of my main goals, one of my main reasons why I do play golf. I want to make sure that I try to inspire as many people as possible. If it's not to become a professional golfer, I still want to inspire them to pick up the game of golf. It really does promote a good human being. So many values that the game gives you and you learn from those things that I really think it's truly important.

**MODERATOR:** Shifting gears a little bit, last year you played at the Arnold Palmer Invitational so this will be your first time playing with the course re-routing, they flipped the nines. Can you just talk about your thoughts on that change and the improvement that it brings to the event?

**RAFA CAMPOS:** Thoughts on the change. Yeah, it's obviously very different. I grew up here, I played the same layout forever, and it is funny because there are some tough holes in certain areas on the golf course. Personally, for me, I prefer the other version.

It creates -- the finish on what now is the front side, what used to be the back side, it presents more opportunities for somebody coming from behind to win. We've seen it a few times before. You kind of have a couple par 5s, a short par 4 and a par 3 if you were the original route. Now you finish in four tough holes. I don't think you'll see a big change in the leaderboard. You won't have somebody coming from four or five behind and all of a sudden ending up winning.

But I do see why they changed it. As far as a fan's perspective, you have everything right there, it's close by, you have the village, you have like the grandstands around, they can see the first tee shot, the 18th -- the 10th tee shot, the 18th hole all in one place.

So I definitely understand why. It's something different, it's something cool to see a change. Tougher finish, though. It truly is a tougher finish so you've got to try to take advantage as early as possible now.

Back then you tried to start off strong and then kind of hold your ground because you knew that those last four holes, you were going to have some looks and you could move up. Now it's a little bit different. You really need to try to take as much advantage as possible at the beginning because you know at the end it's going to be tough to make some birdies.

**Overall, it's a change and we're all for it, and I believe for the fans it's definitely going to be better at the end.**

**MODERATOR:** You played nine holes today. Can you talk about that and how the game is feeling heading into this week?

**RAFA CAMPOS:** So, game is trending, you know. I'm not going to sugarcoat anything. I

honestly have not been playing good for the last year and a half. No excuses whatsoever. I've put in the time, I'm putting in the work, making changes. They haven't clicked yet and this is a sport where it's such a fine line between playing the worst golf of your life and probably playing the best golf of your life.

I do feel the last two days here practicing, although I've been practicing a lot on my swing, I tend to go back to feel. I'm more of a feel player. I've seen some really good things the last two days. I'm really happy, I just finished nine holes in the pro-am, didn't feel I struck it that well but I was in play, I was in the right spots. I kind of know where -- it took me some years to actually get used to this course and kind of understand how to play it.

So I'd say the word is trending. I'm working extremely hard on not fixing, on getting better and getting my swing. Like I said, no excuses. I've had a horrible, absolutely horrible year and a half of golf. My team really sees that we're getting better. I might not feel it. My team really believes we're extremely close to actually having everything change and go back to some great golf.

And I miss that, I really do. It's been a huge struggle. Like I said, I've got no excuses. I'm really happy with the work I'm putting in, it just hasn't clicked yet. I do have a feeling with good support from my family, good support from the crowd here in Puerto Rico, everything can change in one second.

So yeah, it's trending. I do believe I can win no matter what. I really do believe even with how it feels, we know we hit it good enough to give ourself chances.

Hopefully between the crowd, between me playing here for 16 years and having honestly local knowledge about the course and wind and how it reacts, I really do feel that we have a great chance. Beautiful chance.

I hope to get off to a good start, that's my biggest aim right now is hopefully get off to a good start. That kind of eases my way into a great week.

**MODERATOR:** Well, we look forward to watching. Good luck this week.

**RAFA CAMPOS:** Thank you.