

ZACH JOHNSON

Q. Zach Johnson joining us at the Cologuard Classic in 2026.

Zach, you just came off of that James Hardie win in your debut. How does it feel to be back out here? Are you feeling a little more comfortable on the Champions Tour now?

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't know. That's a hard question to answer.

I definitely feel comfortable inside the ropes. Like the first tee to the 18th green fortunately feels very commonplace, feels -- I mean, we're competitors and that's kind of our domain, right, so it feels pretty comfortable.

I think I'm getting some of it down outside the ropes. I mean, it's not the difficulty, it's just the rhythm of it. I think I probably mentioned that, I'm just not quite there yet. It's the cadence of the week, the Monday to Sunday. Then if you have three or four flight delays like I had this week, it adds a little bit to it. I'm used to that.

All that being said, as far as the welcoming and that being comfortable, it's been way better than I could have ever expected. These are my buddies out here, so it's been spectacular.

Q. Speaking of the flight delays, we know it took a lot for you to get out here. Take us through all the flight troubles.

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't want to bore -- you know what, it's first-world problems. I'm so fortunate obviously to be here let alone the trials in trying to get here.

There was a storm out east and it wreaked havoc, as they typically do, and it was pretty significant. It's the domino effect, whether you're talking actual weather, TSA issues, et cetera. There's all that.

But I say all that, you know, fortunately I didn't lose a second of sleep, I was not too stressed about it. Again, this is first-world issues.

Q. What did you learn after your victory?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I learned that I can compete out here, that's for certain. I learned that the golf courses do still have teeth. It's not like I didn't expect that. You've still got to show up and compete and play and work.

What else have I learned? I learned that whatever systems I have in place, because I'm very process oriented, I'm very much systematic in how I go about my work in all aspects, elements of it on and off the course, the physio, the technical, the mental, spiritual, all that good stuff, those systems I have in place are, I'm not going to say that they can't be refined still, but they are efficient and I'm grateful for that.

Usually it has everything to do with the people I surround myself with. I would say it's those notions that so far have stuck out. I've got a good thing going with who I'm doing it with and how I'm doing it.

Q. Speaking of that, did you redefine any of that to come out here?

ZACH JOHNSON: Let me think about that.

No. I did not redefine any of it. I've kept things in place. I think, and I don't want to say it's because I'm a creature of habit, but there is an element to it.

I've seen the fruits of it even on the big tour. It may not have shown up every week as far as my scorecard goes at the end of Sunday, but the fact that I was still making a fair bit of -- a lot of Sundays in some respects on the big tour at my age, I don't like saying it but it's a feat. It's not what I want, I'm not trying to go play there to make cuts. At the same time, it's not getting any easier.

Yeah, I think redefining things, there's a time for that, there's a place for that. There's certainly an area of the calendar where you've probably got to have some inner talks and get that microscope out. But fortunately, I'm not at that point right now.

Q. Does that win that you had change your scheduling at all?

ZACH JOHNSON: No, I don't think so. Probably a little still premature to answer that entirely, but I would say my schedule's fairly intact. I would say probably normal to any other year.

The latest discussions with my team, specifically my wife and everybody at home, has been OK, this is the maximum number of tournaments I want to play in, so how do we facilitate that? And that number is obviously directly attributed to what's going on at home, directly attributed to the golf courses I'm playing and obviously the bigger tournaments, but it's also dictated by where I'm at physically and fatigue-wise. In other words, my off weeks are just as strategic as my work weeks. I've got to take -- it's a hard balance, it's a hard equation, but I think we've got a decent formula.

Q. As the clock is ticking down to your 50th birthday and you know what opportunities come with that, what sort of thoughts were swirling around your head at that point?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, again, I probably operate I think from an efficiency standpoint, kind of where my feet are. I didn't dwell on it too much. Obviously it's inevitable if I stay upright that it's going to happen.

I'm a creature of like just control the controllables, let's get better today, objective based goals, nothing too -- nothing too stratospheric. I want to be right where I'm grounded.

And I say all that, I mean if there was any thoughts, if there was any mental preparation, it was just like, man, I never thought I'd be here. I mean, what I have in front of me is just a beautiful opportunity. So that's how I'm going to approach it each and every week, certainly each and every season.

And really the fact -- one of the questions I get often is how many are you going to play on the big tour, how many are you going to play on the Champions. The fact that I can answer that and actually have a dilemma is a good problem.

Now, I don't have full status, so there's obviously that fact. Everything I have in front of me is a great opportunity.

Q. When you say "I never thought I was going to be here," what do you mean by that?

ZACH JOHNSON: Meaning if you would have told a 22-year-old that decided to give this crazy, nomadic vocation, job, that kid, if you would have told me that kid is going to be standing here right now at 50 years old being able to compete with friends of mine that I consider really close, and mentors, I would have been like, I don't understand the words that are coming out of your mouth kind of thing.

I don't want to say it's all gravy because there is still work, but in some respects everything is gravy in some respects. I'm blessed.

Q. Do you think maybe later this year or by this time next year that Tiger Woods will be part of this tour?

ZACH JOHNSON: I think you understand the answer to this question. I can't speak on behalf of anybody else. That's not fair, it's an injustice and irresponsible.

I saw all that, but he's a friend of mine and I'm confident saying that a lot of us if not all of us want him back healthy, whatever capacity that looks like. If it means he doesn't compete, we can embrace that. He's doing a lot for golf, a lot for the PGA TOUR. That sounds cliché and kind of PC, but I cannot overstate that enough. He's done a lot.

So you may not see his face all the time, but he's been in the background doing a lot of work, and I'm grateful for that.

I would love to see him compete. I don't know what that looks like. I just don't want to assume or project because it's not for me to say.

Q. Do you have any memorable moments golfing in Tucson, and what do you think about La Paloma?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I've got a lot. I was fortunate, I played every match play event we had here. I played up at Dove Mountain. Played a couple different golf courses, I think.

That was great up there. There's a really nice, I think it's a Ritz, room at the Ritz hotel. My wife came to that one, shocker.

The one I remember, and this is no embellishment, no exaggeration, there was one year we were here, we're at like 2,700 feet, I think it's even a little higher up there, like 3,000 feet maybe, maybe a little more than that even.

I'm in my first match and it was single elimination, it wasn't pod based, and I'm playing Jason Day, who I adore. We get to 11, it's a par 5 and I'm pretty confident saying I was 5 down through 10. Maybe 6., I think it was 5. It's blowing, it's freezing, we've got four layers on, and all of a sudden this purple-bluish haze comes over us and then it starts to snow. We had about a 36-hour delay of snow. It was two or three inches, and then that evening it was three more inches.

That was not the fondest of memories. I mean, I got waxed so maybe it's supposed to be like that. When it rains, it snows, I don't know.

But yeah, great memories other than that. I love the topography, the undulations, the trajectory control. Elevation's difficult because you've got to control your yardages, but I love that challenge.

Q. Speaking of weather, what do you think about the weather this week?

ZACH JOHNSON: It's hot. I was talking to some guys who played here last year in particular; it was freezing, I guess. But I get it. Again, we're at elevation. I think it was a little earlier in the calendar if I'm not mistaken. You know, it is what it is. But it's nice. I mean, it's dry heat, you know. We'll be fine.

Q. Did you expect to come out and win your first event?

ZACH JOHNSON: I didn't have any expectations on that. I just wanted to go out, get comfortable and compete. I mean, I guess the short answer would be no, but I really didn't put anything on myself from an outcome standpoint. It was more let's get acclimated, let's get our feet underneath us and try to find some sort of rhythm to the week.

Q. And what did that win mean to you and how it kind of sets the tone for your next

chapter?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah. Well, I kind of alluded to it. I think it just highlights and probably lifts up the fact that I've got great systems in place. Whether you're talking about the elements of the game both on and off the golf course or the people I'm associated with, that's what it highlighted. I've still got a great ensemble of teammates, coaches, partnerships that allow me to have the freedom to go play.

I know that sounds very generic, but it does. I don't take any week for granted. I'm just grateful to have the opportunity.

Q. Were there some guys that you hadn't seen maybe in a little while --

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah.

Q. -- who you sort of like got reacquainted with?

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh, yeah, the list is long. I mean, there's still guys I would text occasionally but wouldn't get the face-to-face. There's a long list.

When I was a young, young pro kind of fresh-ish out of college, I lived in Orlando and Chris DeMarco, near and dear friend of mine -- he moved to Colorado and I was in south Georgia, so we don't see each other anymore. But seeing he and Amy is great. A bunch of guys, David Toms. It's probably not fair to mention them all because there's so many. Again, I like everybody, so everybody's giving me great little nuggets of advice. Darren Clarke's been amazing. Pdraig even. Stankowski, Paul's a dear friend of mine. The list goes on and on.

And names this week, faces this week that I haven't seen in a while. Just saw Freddie. He was the vice captain with me and I was a player under him a couple times. Those are the guys I've looked up to, those are the guys that have paved my way certainly and I'm grateful to have them as both mentors and peers.

Q. And just a few, two questions left. We had a few submitted. With this week with colon cancer awareness, does it mean that it's more to play for for you? What does it mean?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I just think it puts things in perspective. I mean, that's probably -- you can look at it from a number of different angles.

Number one, each and every week there's a bigger picture than just us hitting a golf ball and chasing it, hitting it again. Or driving after it, hitting it again. That bigger impact is the communities we go to. That's the roots and frankly the motivation for us to compete on the Champions Tour is the communities we serve are directly benefited, whether it's a children's hospital to cancer research to some other little local charity that needs a little boost, that's why we do what we do.

The second part of that is this game promotes that. There's a platform here that we have each and every week, both PGA TOUR and certainly on the Champions Tour, that makes it worthwhile, makes things -- there is an entertainment value, I'm not going to deny that, but also the value goes much deeper. You've got to be honored to just understand that, right, and again to have the opportunity to compete and play a crazy game but also benefit others is everything.

That's just the tournaments on tour let alone our own foundations and local charities we all support.

So golf's amazing. If you really reflect on it, you go back to the guys that started it, right? The Arnold Palmers of the world, the Jack Nicklauses of the world, I don't know if their vision got this far but it's pretty impressive.

Q. Did you know about the pairings with the pro program --

ZACH JOHNSON: -- I did not.

Q. -- that they come in and you're going to be playing for someone?

ZACH JOHNSON: I did not know that.

I've known Jerry Kelly for a long time. Good friend and a heart that is bigger than the state of Arizona, or Wisconsin for that matter. Obviously he's the ambassador this week.

It is beyond genuine as to his feelings on this. He's verbalized that, he's made that very apparent right at the forefront. Now that you have -- how that's manifested with each individual, each player honoring an individual that's gone through a lot. Some of my peers have gone through a lot in that regard whether it's directly or family or whomever. I think it's joining hands, it's understanding that, hey, we're going to go play, we're going to have fun, but there's a bigger picture and we can help. What a great way to honor individuals that have had hard times.