

ROUND 3 PRESS CONFERENCE
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ZACH JOHNSON (-18)



MODERATOR: We are now joined by our 2026 Portugal Invitational champion, Zach Johnson. Congratulations.

ZACH JOHNSON: Thank you.

MODERATOR: How does that sound and how special is this victory for you?

ZACH JOHNSON: This is amazing. Very special to be the inaugural champion, certainly to be the champion of a tournament that is directly associated with Ernie and Liezl and the whole Els family, obviously The Els Club. I consider Ernie an absolute role model on and off the golf course. To have my name somewhat associated with his is distinctly an honor.

Q. In the first interview told you anything about (inaudible)?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, Stewart's, you know, like one of my best friends in the world. I want him to win every week, especially if I don't. That's legitimate.

He came up and said -- we were here together as a team, I don't know what year it was. I think it was over 20 years ago.

MODERATOR: 2005.

ZACH JOHNSON: 2005, OK. And we played the World Cup and we played so bad. He came up and goes, who would have thought that we would have finished 1-2 considering how poorly we played 20-some years ago.

Yeah, I got off to a good start. Obviously, he finished nice. That start for me really was a nice catapult and gave me some freedom on the back to just keeping hitting fairways, keep being aggressive when given the opportunity and I feel fortunate.

Q. Zach, on 18 (inaudible) and you had a bomb of a drive there. Did you think that hole -- was (inaudible.) Walk us through it.

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, fortunately, I saw -- well, I didn't know. I know Stewart birdied 15. 15? 15. I don't know if he birdied 16. We were teeing off on 18.

Then I knew if I gave myself a nice wedge on 18, I could be aggressive. Obviously the tee shot set that up. I mean, I hit a 60-degree wedge from 103 yards. Not exactly where I thought it would end up, but I was grateful. I hit an OK wedge. It's not like I stuffed it, but



given the circumstances, just give myself a look and man, I read that putt so well. I took my time on it. It was a double breaker, so I felt that out. And as I was getting ready to putt, I saw that he hit a really good shot on 17 probably, I don't know, 12, 15 feet. Under the assumption he would probably make it, you know?

So yeah, that was my mindset. I've got to keep the pedal down. I'm not here to lag it up there and tap in, I'm trying to make putts. Fortunately, I had a good read and good speed.

Q. Zach, I remember from your (inaudible) I was wondering (inaudible) Portugal, if you're going to celebrate with maybe some jumbo tiger prawns or some other specialties?

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't know if I'm a foodie, but I don't eat to live, I live to eat if that makes sense. I really enjoy food. I have been not disappointed this week. I had amazing food whether it's here at the hotel, at the Victoria, gone into the marina, a couple local places around here. I've had it all. I've had seafood, I've had surf and turf, I've had it all. Amazing food. I would argue the seafood is spectacular whether it's sushi, sashimi or prepared fish or prawns, it's been outstanding.

And I'm going to eat a lot tonight. It's going to be embarrassing, but that's OK.

Q. Zach, you make 1-2 with Stewart, as you said you're both great friends. How special is it to share this Race for the Charles Schwab Cup and allow you to close the gap as much as you could to a second place? What's going through your mind for the next month?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I've been asked that question and I mean this sincerely, like I'm so mentally preparing right where my feet are. My focus is going to be the next tournament and everything else will take care of itself. Obviously Stewart has had an amazing year, I think he's won four or five times. He's won multiple majors, too. He's a champion in his own right.

The truth is, if I have an opportunity to win the Charles Schwab, I'm going to work like heck to get that. At the same time, if I don't and Stewart does or somebody else, I'm going to be the first one to take my hat off and give them a handshake.

There's a lot of great competitors, a lot of great players out here and you just never know come the fall. My focus is still getting better and staying healthy. Like I'm 50, I've got to stay healthy, that is paramount. I've got a good ensemble of physios, PTs, chiropractors, great coaches that help me get better.

Whatever happens, happens. I've had a nice year and I look forward to every opportunity I've had. Still getting used to golf courses. Thankfully this one was new for everybody, but I'm getting used to some of these new courses that I hadn't seen in a minute. But that's exciting, I enjoy that. I enjoy that work, I enjoy the grind and excited for the remainder of



2026.

Q. Zach, I know you're friends with Stewart, but I wonder how (inaudible) to play a Champions Tour event outside America?

ZACH JOHNSON: Amazing. We've got a handful roughly, if you count the Senior Open, Morocco, Calgary. We've got a few that are outside the States.

I think our product is tremendous. I heard that before I came out here. So I think having the Champions Tour travel is great. It's great for the game, it's great for us selfishly to see cool new places.

So yeah, I think this tour's exceeded all my expectations, if I had any, all across the board on and off the golf course. Competition on and certainly the laid back, you know, just kind of chill off the course has been a nice welcome as well. And I love three-day tournaments. Man, I love three-day tournaments.

Q. Tell me, what's the biggest challenge of this Portugal Invitational for you?

ZACH JOHNSON: Biggest challenge. I don't know. I think it was probably a matter of being patient. I was putting well coming into the week. I played OK last week in Scotland? Scotland. But I had some good preparation this week. That was my key, getting my feet on the grounds because it's new. It's new to me, it's new to everybody. I had two practice rounds, I played Tuesday and I played Thursday, which were key just to kind of get some different winds, different vantage points, trying to figure out targets, trying to figure out how to attack this place and put a game plan together.

I think it's probably been well referenced, I think the first five holes in particular, that's where you've got to kind of put the pedal down. I didn't really do it yesterday. Well, that's not true. Today I got off to a great start.

So getting off to a great start with these par 5s, I don't know if it's paramount but it certainly helps. It gave me some freedom coming down the stretch here going into the back nine. Making a birdie on 7 and 9 was huge. I could just hit -- I think I hit every fairway on the back. I didn't hit 16, but that was not going to go right.

I drove it great today, I putted great, that was the key.

Q. You playing on the Champions Tour, are you surprised at the level of the players (inaudible) that you already won four times?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah. I'll say if you take -- obviously I played nice, I played well. I started seeing some things at the end of last year that I was really encouraged with in my game and it just never really surfaced on the PGA TOUR. So once I got out here, it actually started to manifest quicker for whatever reason.



So I've played a couple Tour events this year. I just played John Deere a couple months ago and I had a top-10 finish on the PGA TOUR. I had a chance there, I could have won that golf tournament. So I've been playing nice and that's the bottom line.

Stewart's been playing great obviously. I'm not surprised by the level of competition because these guys, you're talking about major champions through and through, Hall of Famers through and through. You're talking about really competent players that continue to work at their game and continue to get better.

I've always felt I'm a competitor first, golfer second if that makes sense, and there's a lot of those out here. They want to win, they want to get better, and they're great dudes. Man, just great guys. It's an amazing tour.

Q. So I asked you at the first day after you finished what were your feelings on the 18th green. So question now is I think it was on the 15th green you were stopping your routine for a putt, you stepped back and started in. So what's going on --

ZACH JOHNSON: Fifteen? Not on 15. For par?

Q. Yes.

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't know what hole it was.

Q. Fourteen, OK.

ZACH JOHNSON: I didn't stop on 14, either. Whatever.

I mean, yeah, the wind plays havoc. It's hard to hit shots in the wind and it's hard to putt. Like you're taking wind into consideration whether it's three feet or 25 feet.

Oh, you're referencing 13. I hit a pretty good chip and I was about ready to hit it and the wind is blowing right into my face. So it's a downhill inside right putt, down grain into the wind and the wind just died. So I backed off, it just didn't feel right. Then again the wind picked back up, went back into my routine and hit a quality putt.

You know, ideally I'm not going to execute a shot until I'm perfectly committed and ready. When you have greens of this pace with this amount of wind, you've got to be committed and today there was a lot of great committed putts.

Q. Zach, the birdie at 7 (inaudible)?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I'm glad you asked that. That hole right there, that's the hardest hole on the golf course probably most days. 17's really hard, too but -- 16, 17, but for the most part that's the hardest hole day in, day out.



I hit a beautiful drive. Hit a really good drive yesterday that went in the trap, so today was more into the wind, it was strong. I had 214 yards to the hole on my second shot and hit a punch 4-iron, 4 hybrid, whatever, and when it left my face I'm like, I don't care where it is, I know it's on the green.

I managed to get up there to five, six feet and that was a gift. I executed it perfectly. But to have that distance for birdie on that hole was massive because that's a hole all of us would take 4 and just go to eight. We would take a par and go to the eighth hole. I don't know if anybody else birdied it. Somebody probably did, but I felt like I gained a half a shot there at least.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Zach. Congratulations.

ZACH JOHNSON: Thank you, appreciate it.

