



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT: FRED COUPLES
Wednesday, June 6, 2012

PHIL STAMBAUGH: We welcome Fred Couples into the interview room this afternoon. Fred, second appearance here at Shoal Creek for the Regions Tradition. Obviously a few PGAs in the past. Busy stretch on the Champions Tour with our second major championship of the year. A few general thoughts. I know you had a nice day today playing with Condoleezza.

FRED COUPLES: We did have a great time, and I had met her a few times before. I played with Earnie Deavenport, who's awesome and obviously a member at Augusta who runs the Par 3; Lee, and another great guy, Jim, who we had a fun time.

But as far as the golf course, it's in absolutely perfect shape. Last year I was here and I was pretty much miserable off the course, on the course, at night, during the day. My back was pretty much shot and I didn't do very well. This year I expect to be right there on Sunday and to hit the ball well. This is the third week I've played without being home, which is rough, and to get to the tournaments on Sunday nights and wait until Thursday has been a little bit of a chore, to be honest with you. But last week was well worth it at the Presidents Cup announcement at Jack's tournament, and Jack invited me to play and I decided to play, and here we are at the Regions.

PHIL STAMBAUGH: I know you said it was important to get some rounds in, so you had four there, and then you made the cut last week, so you had four more. Is that a plus coming into this week?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, well, I had a bunch of time off. I missed Houston, the In斯perity, and then the TPC on the regular Tour, which I planned on playing. So I was home for maybe five out of six weeks, not playing any golf. So when I went to the Senior PGA, I knew I probably wouldn't be the guy to beat, but I really felt like I played well.

On the first day I was 3 over after four holes, and kind of played well after that and ended up shooting 4 over, and that's where he was mentioning that. It was a big time Friday to make the cut.

Now, obviously the Senior PGA, you're not really worried about making the cut, but opening up with 76 and playing in the wind in the afternoon, and I played a really good round and I've probably played some decent rounds since. For my age, to play last week on that golf course is very, very difficult. You know, I didn't make the cut. There

were a couple holes that I played horrible on that cost me a lot of shots, but I hit the ball well.

And then today I had a good practice session. I took Monday and Tuesday off and played today. Like I said, the golf course, I guess it rained here pretty hard Monday and that should dry up, but the greens are kind of soft, receptive. I would imagine by Friday, Saturday, Sunday, it will be playing very, very difficult. I'm not going to say it's a different course than last year. Last year was maybe a little bit rougher around the edges and some of the chip shots were harder. I missed a lot of greens. This year the course, for the third time I'll say it's immaculate. No one can complain. The golf course is a 10.

PHIL STAMBAUGH: We'll open up for questions, just wait for the mic.

Q. What did you make of Condi's game out there? Almost drove the green on the 14th green, made a good up-and-down, made a nice putt. Looked like she was pretty solid out there.

FRED COUPLES: Yes, she's very athletic, she loves sports. I've met her a few times and I've heard about her golf game. Last year they played in front or behind, so I did see a few of the shots she hit. You know, it's enjoyable. Like I play golf, so that's all I do. When I go to sporting events, I enjoy it. I don't sit there and heckle people because they miss free throws. Like I'm an LA Kings fan, so obviously we're up three-nothing. The one game I did go to, they lost. They only lost twice in the playoffs and I decided to go and they lost.

For her to come out and play in front of me, I'm sure it's a little nerve wracking, but she does very, very well. One thing I will say, she's an incredible putter. She drives the ball great and she's a great putter. Her teacher at the Birmingham Country Club said they've been working on her iron game for a while and she's getting better and she's a good player.

Q. (Question about Condoleezza Rice signing autographs.)

FRED COUPLES: That was nice, I have no problem. She can sign all the autographs. I'll worry about it tomorrow. But she's very receptive and people love her and I can see why. That's the first time I played with her, but she was at the LA open last year, Northern Trust brought her in, and she played and I got to be around her a little bit at a function one night. She's very, very nice.

Q. Forgive me jumping ahead to next week, asking this question about Olympic Club. A lot of guys are talking about the opening six holes now that they made No.1 par 4. (Inaudible.)

FRED COUPLES: Well, I know a couple members and I played with Tiger last week, and he went out and played Monday before Memorial and he said it was -- he played real early, it was cold and it played long.

I played two Opens there, I didn't do well in either of them, but it's a great course. You have to be -- I don't think it's irrelevant if you're a long hitter or not. Obviously if you hit it long, you can hit a 2-iron off some of the tees or a 3-wood, but anyone can win there.

Back to your question, without seeing, just hearing about it, I'm going to go up and watch Thursday and Friday, but I have heard that the first six holes are very, very tough. The first hole, I think it's great to play it as a par 4. It's a little bit on edge of too easy of a par 5, and I think the guys are good enough to step up there and hit a drive in the fairway and maybe hit a 4- or 5-iron on that green, but it's a very hard hole. It will be -- it will play over par, I mean obviously, but it could play 4 and a half, and there won't be many birdies on it. Then you go through six and good luck.

Yeah, a lot of good players will be 1 or 2 over, which I don't think will be bad. I don't think that's a horrible start. Then you get into some holes and obviously you finish -- now 17 is a par 5, correct? But I've heard Tiger talk about it. They shaved the whole back of the green and it rolls down over the green maybe 15, 20 yards, so it's going to be a tough par 5.

Q. Fred, as you said, you played with Tiger in the first two rounds at the Memorial. Could you see it coming? Could you see him closing the way he played those first two days?

FRED COUPLES: I did. The first two days, he didn't miss many shots on a golf course that I think was pretty demanding, it was windy, and he was right there. Was he 5 under and the leaders were 7 or 8? I can't remember.

But I texted him Friday night and I said just make a putt or two, that's all you've got to do, and keep hitting your irons like you are. So we texted back and forth and he went out and struggled a little bit. Coming in I think he bogeyed a couple and he was still right there. And then on Sunday he played inspired golf, he played great golf, he hit a lot of great shots on a tough course. He played well. I know he's won four or five times there, but he still went out and did it. And he putted well and that was a big key.

What I saw when we played, you know, I may never ever play with him again, I don't know when that opportunity might be. It's certainly not going to come on the Champions Tour and I'll be gone. So I said it was fun, but I said you're one of the best iron players I've ever seen play, and that's where his strength is. I've been told he's driven the ball -- he's way up there in distance and his accuracy for total driving, which anyone who hits the ball long and straight should be playing well. He's won twice, had a second, so those are great accomplishments that he's doing.

He's just, you know, not the player he was. It's hard to do something 20 straight years. I sit and -- you know, if I can continue for one second. I just sit and laugh when I hear people talk about him like they think he should win six or eight times every year. A, my caddie caddies for him now, so he tells me a little bit. He tells me he spends every

second with his kids when he has them, which I think is great for himself, his kids, his ex-wife or whoever. But when he's on the golf course, he's working extremely hard.

But in my time there's just nobody who has ever played like that. So when you look at it, you can name all these other top players. Rory McIlroy, you've got to give him time, too. They're beating him up because he missed a couple cuts in a row. He's 22 or 23 years old. Something might be going on, you know, that he's never experienced.

Where Tiger's 36, he may win five times this year, you know? He's won twice and he's got a lot of golf left. We talked about that. He's playing quite a bit. I just thought he was great.

Could I see it coming? Yeah, I can see him playing well and winning there, but he went out and did it. No one gave it to him. He went out and birdied three of the last four holes, one was a great chip in.

But he's a great, great player and I love the fact that he's one of my friends. I think he'd be an idiot if he sat there and think that he didn't do something wrong, but in my opinion that's all in the past and now he's a golfer and he's starting to win again. He played great when I chose him to play the Presidents Cup and he'll be on this Ryder Cup. So he's kind of, to me, back where he was, but he's never going to be that good. I think he's won 73 times and he wins once out of every four times he plays. They're just stupid numbers, but we sit here and harp on him because of what he did in his life, not his game. I think that's why people talk about it, because they have such a rush. But if you sit and look, he's won 73 times at the age of 36. That's stupid, makes no sense. And I think for him to win at Jack's place was great. Jack loved it and they talked about it. As a golfer, I thought it was great, too.

Q. Fred, let's talk about this event. Could you see this becoming a tradition here at Shoal Creek, this event putting down roots here?

FRED COUPLES: Personally, I hope so. I think it's -- I know -- I don't even know what it was called. Maybe it was the Regions when it was in Bend, Oregon? What? I was not on the Tour and I skipped it my first year. But this is what we need to play on. If we played here for a lot of years in a row, it would kind of become like an Augusta event like we play every year and it will become a tradition, the Regions. It's a course that's had two majors on it way before we came here, and a U.S. Amateur, I believe. It's got a lot of things that have happened here. So as a player, you know, if I'm on this Tour for another four or five years, I hope we get to come here every year. It's a great course.

Q. I'm going to go back to the Tiger question because it definitely gets interest and your point about the stupid numbers. There was a stretch where he was coming back that he almost became a little bit irrelevant. He missed a couple cuts, he finished 40th at the Masters. If he was borderline irrelevant to what's going on on the golf course, where is he now, where does he fit in the landscape of golf?

FRED COUPLES: Well, the ratings were out of site on Sunday. Where does he fit? You know, he fits in the spot where he's making his way back to being the best player. Is he the best player right now? You know, I think Luke Donald, Lee Westwood, McIlroy and Tiger are all right there. Luke just won the BMW at a very good golf course. Tiger just won the next week at a very good golf course. It's all right there. Somebody's got to continue to win and move down there. So if you're asking where is his relevancy -- well, when I say down, it's on the way down in numbers to become number one. It's on the way up in his life, but he's a great player.

I think the way he was hitting the ball, and I witnessed it, it was pretty sharp, it was long, it was straight. His short game is good; not like it used to be, but again, he's 36. It's hard to have your short game like it was when you were 25, 26, 27, 28, 29. A lot of things change. I'm 52, so I can attest that things do happen. He may become a much better ball striker and his short game may go down a little bit, whereas in the old days when he hit the ball really well, he won every single time. When he didn't hit the ball, he was right there. Someone may have backed down and he would have passed them. But when he played well, he literally won every time. I don't know anyone who's ever done that. I mean, Sam Snead, Jack Nicklaus, and then you go to guys -- I mean, Phil Mickelson, to win 40-something times, Vijay, those are again incredible players. Tiger's won almost twice as many times and he's five years younger than Phil and 12 years younger than Vijay. You pounce on him for certain reasons, but when you just sit and marvel at what he's done, they're ridiculous numbers.

Q. There were a couple players that had been around the game of golf for a long time, guys on the Tour here, now on the Champions Tour, who said it's great to see a player of his stature win again because it brings so much attention to the game. However -- these are their words -- he has a lot further to go to repair the damage that he has done to the golf world over the past couple years. What's your thought on those comments?

FRED COUPLES: Well, what damage has he done to the golf world?

Q. They were talking about the image of the game and what happened off the course and all of the negative publicity that went with it that damaged golf in their words.

FRED COUPLES: Right. Well, you know, I'm not one who talks about many people and then says "but," you know. Tiger Woods is a great player, but he did this and he did that.

I play golf for a living. I have never hung out with Tiger Woods. I text him all the time. I text Rickie Fowler, who I think is great for the game of golf. Rickie Fowler could break up with his girlfriend tomorrow; I don't think that's going to be bad for the game of golf. I hope they don't. They've been together a long time, they're young kids.

But I play golf. I don't go out there and beat up people in their lives. I can tell you, did he make a mistake? Hell, yeah, he made a huge mistake. But did he ruin the game that I play? No. I wish he never would have done that, he might have a hundred wins by now, and he would still be picked on because he's the best player. It happens all the time. But I'm not going to sit here and put Tiger Woods on some pedestal and say this and that, but I play golf, I've never seen anyone play golf like him.

My favorite baseball player was Mickey Mantle. Was Mickey Mantle the best baseball player to ever play? Of course not, but people loved him. I thought he was incredible, he was my idol, but there were 50 players that did better things. He did it in a short period of time, and he had bad knees and he didn't hang out a long time.

But Tiger has been around since I remember him coming on Tour, he has just multiplied win after win after win, and I think it's great for the game of golf. For me, there is no "but" after it. If he continues to win, we're going to get sponsors, we're going to get people to come out there. They want to see Tiger, that's their guy. If he wins, they're thrilled to death. If he doesn't win, you know, they want him to.

But there's other guys, too. I mean, there's the foreign players that come over; they're phenomenal players, we just don't see them every single week.

But the Phil Mickelsons -- you know, if you want to compare golf with apples and oranges, I mean, 14 majors and 73 wins. I picked the guy in the Presidents Cup. Did you watch him play? I mean, he almost won the week before in Australia. He knows how to get himself ready. I think when you give him something to do -- and again, I went out on a limb because people were shocked that I would pick him because they don't like him. But I would have him on any team no matter how he was playing, and he went there and beat Aaron Baddeley to win a clinching point. He got smoked in his first match, he lost 7 & 6 or 6 & 5, and he was great in the team room. So he knows what's going on and so does everyone else, but there are people who are going to beat him up. That's fine with me, too. I'm just not one of them.

PHIL STAMBAUGH: Fred, thank you very much. Good luck this week.

FRED COUPLES: Thank you, guys.