

ROUND 1 INTERVIEW
June 23, 2017



Brian Henninger (-7)

Q. Brian, where were you when you found out you were in this tournament and what does it mean to make the most of it?

BRIAN HENNINGER: Oh, my gosh. I bugged the tournament director Nate for a couple weeks really. I knew that I might be close but I didn't find out until Monday actually. I think Mark Wiebe withdrew and I guess I was next on the list. So I was really excited and made my plane reservation and flew over here.

Q. Were you just prepared to come out and play the way you did?

BRIAN HENNINGER: Yeah, I've been playing pretty well lately. Starting with the Regions, I finished sixth and then followed that up with pretty good finishes at the Senior PGA in Des Moines, so I felt pretty confident. But you never know, golf is kind of elusive. So I never know what I'm going to find when I get to the first tee, but I felt pretty confident and was hitting the ball pretty well.

Q. What was the key on this particular day and where did you feel you made your move?

BRIAN HENNINGER: I think it was the start really. I hit a couple good shots on No. 1. We're always a little bit nervous and a little bit of anxiety. On the second hole I hit a pretty good drive. It was pretty benign at the time, there was no wind, I hit a good drive and I hit a hybrid on the green about pin high and made it for eagle.

The next hole, I followed that up with I hit a 6-iron about a foot and that kind of frees you up a little bit. I made a good up-and-down on my fourth hole and then just kind of wound around. I made one mistake on 18 with that pin up front. I gave myself a bad yardage, spun it clear off the green, down the hill and made bogey there. But other than that, I felt really good.

Q. Is this your best round of the year?

BRIAN HENNINGER: Yeah, probably. It's my best scoring round, yeah. I've played some rounds like this, though. So it's been fun because I'm giving myself chances. This is really the first year that I'm kind of injury free, too. Every year that I've played on the PGA TOUR Champions, I've started with a surgery. I had two knee surgeries, an elbow, I tore an extensor tendon off my elbow. Something else, I think a shoulder or something. So this is the first year that I've come out feeling pretty strong. And I'm active in the gym, so I feel good.

My equipment's really good right now. I'm hitting the ball pretty hard for me so I've picked up a little distance this year with the new Epic driver by Callaway. So all that combined has kind of helped facilitate some consistent play.

Q. Were you a Nike club player?

BRIAN HENNINGER: Yeah, I was. I played the rest of the season last year playing Nike equipment and I loved it really. Then I've kind of come full circle. I started my PGA Tour career with Callaway Golf, so it was nice of them to bring me back on board and excited about the clubs for sure.

Q. Where are you status-wise then and how much longer do you have to do this kind of thing?

BRIAN HENNINGER: I don't know. I mean, I'm qualified for the U.S. Senior Open next week. I won the qualifier in California a couple weeks ago and I'm qualified for our PLAYERS Championship two weeks later, and then it's up in the air again. I mean, I really need support from the tournament directors. I'm really passionate about playing and I just kind of raise my hand for whatever they need me to do.

Q. When you're out on the course like today and you see Steve Stricker first year out here kind of crawling up your way?

BRIAN HENNINGER: Yeah, he just came off a great finish at the U.S. Open. He belongs back with the little guys, the young guys. Yeah, he's still a great player. He's going to do phenomenal out here. I think he's probably going to like blend his time I would guess because he's still got a lot of game.

Q. Do you anticipate 7 under will hold up given what you're seeing?

BRIAN HENNINGER: I don't know, there's some birdie holes even though the last two holes are pretty tricky, especially the par 3. The par 5, the pin placement's pretty tough on 16 because you've got to carry that mound and mine went over, it went right over the pin over the back and I couldn't get it up and down. So it's hard to say. You know, the conditions are soft, we're improving our lie. So just psychologically that gives you some kind of beneficial confidence by moving it. I would guess there's probably going to be somebody that makes a couple birdies coming in.

Q. Will you get to enjoy this at all tonight knowing that you're at the top of the leaderboard and now you have to think about it?

BRIAN HENNINGER: You know, I'm just kind of wound that way. I think about it too much. I've always wanted the opportunity to win out here. I've won at other levels and I haven't won out here, so it's exciting to be up there. You've just got to keep knocking at the door a

little bit. It was a little bit uncomfortable with the cameras right next to me. Bernhard Langer and Kenny Perry and those guys, Kevin Sutherland, they're up there all the time, they're comfortable with that. It's new to me right now, so that was good experience. I'm glad I had it so I know if I continue to play well, it will be there and I'll kind of have to deal with it.

Q. You were a couple groups ahead of the masses. Did you get some sense of the crowds following shortly behind you?

BRIAN HENNINGER: I kind of looked around, yeah. It's so cool to have Steve Stricker as the host of this tournament. And our title sponsor AmFam, it's just fantastic. And the community here in Madison is incredible. I remember last year when we showed up the first day, all the people that were already here. Yeah, it's exciting to have a community like this support us.

Q. So you got a taste of 17 last year. Was it similar out there?

BRIAN HENNINGER: Not quite as rowdy. There was a little bit of music playing, but no. Hopefully they just kind of pick it up and have fun.