

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
February 13, 2018

TIGER WOODS



GENESIS OPEN

MARK WILLIAMS: Let's get under way. We would like to welcome Tiger Woods to the 2018 Genesis Open here at Riviera. Welcome back, Tiger. In 1992 you made your PGA TOUR debut here at Riviera, so just tell us what it's like to be back here playing as the tournament host this week.

TIGER WOODS: Well, it's fantastic. We come back to southern California, come back to the tournament that basically put me on the path to playing professional golf back here in '92, and to see the golf course has changed a little bit, it got a little longer, a little bigger, but it's still one of the most classic golf courses you can ever find. It still so much fun to play and I'm really looking forward to playing this year.

Q. I understand you have some big news about your foundation. Share it with us.

TIGER WOODS: Yes, we're very excited with the foundation. Through the course of the last 21 years we've evolved from a golf-based foundation to an educational-based foundation based primarily in STEM with 51 different curricula that we teach throughout the country, and it's something that we've been very excited about. We've done already kind of a preemptive change with our branding with the foundation, we have TGR, EDU and Create and our event staff, TGR Live, so the name of the foundation going forward is going to be TGR Foundation. It's something that I think that is important because the foundation and the work we do in my opinion is bigger than my name. And I want something to live in perpetuity that doesn't have to do with me, it's about kids and having an opportunity to get their education, to have the support that we give them and the resources that we try to provide for them to make something of themselves.

We're very proud of all those kids that have gone through our programs. With our new digital platform, we'll be reaching millions of kids through the next couple years, which is going to be very exciting. It's going to be free education online for any kid around the world, and that to me is very important and very special to me and we're very excited about this day.

MARK WILLIAMS: That's terrific news, congratulations. Before we jump into questions, just have you talk about the pairings for the opening rounds here which have just been announced. You're going to be playing with Rory McIlroy and Justin Thomas. I know you played with Justin in the Bahamas a couple rounds and it's been a while since you played with Rory. But if you could just comment on Justin talked about playing with you and how excited he was. You coming back here as kind of an elder statesman now, more of a veteran, what's that like for you with the younger guys that you haven't seen or played with yet?

TIGER WOODS: Justin flew with me out here yesterday and we were kind of watching some of the stuff. He asked me when did I play in this tournament as an amateur. I said, yeah, I was 16, 1992. He said, that was the year before I was born. I'm sorry, but that really put things in perspective really fast.

Rory, I played with Rory I think on Thanksgiving with his father at Medalist. He's off to a great start this year and he played really well in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Justin's already won this season when he won in Korea. We're going to have a lot of fun. I think that all three of us are excited about playing with one another in this event, and I'm looking forward to the challenge of not only competing against those guys but competing against the rest of the guys in the field.

MARK WILLIAMS: You could say you're already one up on them because you have two FedExCups and they have one each.

TIGER WOODS: There you go.

Q. Tiger, how will you measure success this week, and how do you envision, as you get more tournaments under your belt, that definition of success evolving?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I'd eventually like to win tournaments. I'm trying to get through that process, go through that process, get to that point. I was telling JT last night when we were flying out here that it's interesting that I'm making small little subtle changes in my posture and my game and my swing because I'm starting to understand my body a little bit more with this back that's different than it used to be, and those are things that I could never have figured that out on my own not in a tournament setting because in a tournament setting, things are ramped up and I could feel some of the things were off and was able to work on them. The more tournaments I play in, the more I'll be able to get a better understanding of that. But also I don't want to play too much. This is still all new to me and I just want to be real smart about it.

Q. You left Torrey obviously with some work needed on your long game and were planning to do that in the weeks between then and now. Were you able to do physically everything you wanted to do during that time, to work on that?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I was able to hit lots of golf balls, work on my game, try different stuff out, but mainly I just tried to clean up my swing. I felt we could all see how bad I was driving it, so I was able to clean that up a little bit and still keep my putting sharp. Coming back to this golf course, I hadn't played it in a while under a tournament setting, but I forgot how much tug there is down towards the ocean. A couple putts I hit just in a practice round here, I misread probably about three or four of them. I forgot how much it tugs, so those are some of the things I've got to remember about this event and this golf course.

Q. On that, Tiger, just kind of getting yourself familiar with Riviera again, what do you

do when you haven't been to a tournament and played a golf course in this long? Do you go back to old yardage books or do you kind of go back to the memory and talk to people and kind of remind yourself of elements of the golf course? And it's changed a lot, too, right?

TIGER WOODS: Well, the yardage book on No. 12 when I used to play is a 1-iron and a pitching wedge, now it's a driver and a 7-iron, 6-iron, somewhere in there. Some of the holes have really changed. So the old yardage books are out the window.

This is a whole new game, everything's bigger now. The bunkers are deeper, they seem to be bigger. The greens have gotten more pin locations than I remember, they've added a few sections around here. So I've got to do a little bit more homework tomorrow in the pro-am. I did some nice work on the back nine today. I'll concentrate pretty hard on the front nine and make sure I've got everything kind of situated, on the back nine I'll just do a little touch-up.

Q. One follow up on the foundation, is it mainly just sort of a branding change? Is there anything substantial with the way the foundation will interact with young people that will change?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I think that it's a brand change, yes, it's a brand shift. Under the parent company TGR Ventures. I just wanted to have everything be very simple, everything's under TGR. Obviously there's going to be a foundation, there's going to be EDU, Create, Live, my golf course design business, same thing. We tried to simplify it.

The interesting thing is I told my staff I think about the reasons why the name change I think would really work in a way, that it should fit with the foundation is I remember the mayor of Anaheim taking out some kids on a hike. He asked, "What are you learning?" They said, "We're learning rocket science and how to build rockets and launch it on our driving range." He said, "Do you know the name of the building?" Yes, it was the Tiger Woods Learning Center. He said, "Do you know who Tiger Woods is?" No.

To me, that's very important. That's the way it should be. It's not about the name on the building, it's about the people in it and how safe they feel and the curriculum that we're teaching them that they feel is now applicable to what they see in real life. That's why I think the name really does work, because a lot of these kids probably won't have any idea that I play golf or I used to play golf, so it doesn't really matter about that. We're trying to set up something for the future that's going to affect millions of lives all around the world.

Q. Tiger, you talked earlier about Rory, and I remember Rory's excitement as a teenager out in Dubai following you around. I know you've gotten to know each other pretty well, you had those sort of head-to-heads out in China. What do you like about Rory as a person?

TIGER WOODS: He's just a great kid, he really is. He's got a heart of gold. His dad's

fantastic and his mom's wonderful, so it's just a great family. I've loved playing with Rory over the years. We haven't played, unfortunately, as much as we would like. A lot of that's me because I got hurt and didn't play, but he's obviously gotten a lot better, he's worked on his game, he's won tournaments while I've been out. Yeah, Rory's always been fun to play with, will continue to be, and he's one of the players, when he gets it going, there's really not a whole lot of guys better than him.

Q. Do you see a chance in the near future going head to head with him down the final home on a Sunday?

TIGER WOODS: I'd love it, that's something we pray to have happen. I think in Chicago one year we were a little off the pace. At Augusta we were paired together not too long ago, but again, we're just off the pace a little bit. Maybe we can both play well and peak at the right time.

Q. Tiger, what needs to happen this week or what do you need to see in order to decide to play next week?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, just not to feel sore, to feel like I can play all-out again within, what, three days off kind of? Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, yeah, three days. To be able to go at it full bore again. That's something that I've been trying to do at home and trying to simulate rounds where I go full bore at it, but it's never the same as in a tournament. I try to get myself as fired up as possible to try and hit shots as hard as I would in a tournament or shape shots and do all the weird things I like to do, but it's just not the same.

Q. Is there any concern about that, and is it a bad sign if you can't?

TIGER WOODS: No. I think it would be a great sign if I do play, I think it would be a smart sign if I didn't play. How about that? Does that dance that dance pretty good?

Q. It's a smart answer.

TIGER WOODS: Did you like that?

Q. Two things, Tiger. Were you sore after Torrey?

TIGER WOODS: I was, yeah.

Q. Where?

TIGER WOODS: My feet. I'm not used to walking. I'm used to being in a cart playing 36 holes.

Q. Is that the only thing that hurt?

TIGER WOODS: It's a good sore, yes, but it's just different.

Q. Do you ever look back or did you ever look back and wonder why you couldn't figure this course out? Even your best golf in 2000 I think when your worst finish was second over like a nine-week stretch, you'd finish like 19th.

TIGER WOODS: I know.

Q. What was it?

TIGER WOODS: I love the golf course, I love the layout, it fits my eye and I play awful. It's very simple. It's just one of those weird things. It's a fader's golf course for a righty. A lot of the holes, you hit nice soft cuts and I used to love to hit nice soft cuts, and for some reason I just didn't play well.

Q. Tiger, especially coming off a very solid performance at Torrey, is it difficult right now in this process for you to manage expectations?

TIGER WOODS: No, not at all. I'm just starting back. I've been away from the game for a very long time. I've basically played two tournaments, and so I've got a lot of room for improvement and a long way to go.

Q. Coming back to the golf course here at Riviera, with your golf design business, have you or are you considering or will you incorporate some of the specialities of George Thomas and his designs?

TIGER WOODS: Oh, God yeah, absolutely. I tried to do that at Houston at Bluejack. I did a little bit of that, some of the bunkering, early in the front nine down at Cabo at Diamante.

Yes, he's one of the guys that I've always looked up to as a designer. I'm from the west coast, I'm from here. I went to Stanford, so not too far from SF Club. We used to play there every Monday. I love what he does and I love how it's very simple. The bunkers aren't hidden, they're right there in front of you. He makes it abundantly clear here's the bunkers, don't go in here. But it's very simple golf, but it's still very difficult and strategic.

Q. Tiger, mechanically speaking, what do you feel you've done to get back your distance that's come back so well? And second question, do you link golf and the STEM subjects in the curriculum because it's Tiger Woods?

TIGER WOODS: Say that again.

Q. The second part is, do you link golf because it's Tiger Woods and the STEM subjects that are taught in the curriculum?

TIGER WOODS: Yes.

Q. So you teach the two together, like synced?

TIGER WOODS: First of all, my speed's come back because my back is now good again. My disk is -- well, it's no longer there, so there's no more pain there and I feel great. So that part is why I've gotten my speed back.

And quite frankly, number two, the STEM curriculum that we teach really has nothing to do with golf; mainly forensic science or engineering, whether there's rockets or musical engineering. We teach a wide variety of subjects but basically STEM based because I think that's where the future of our planet's going. It is very STEM based and I want to have the kids, these under-served kids that really haven't had the opportunity to participate in subjects like that, to be able to do that and see that what they're learning is now applicable in their everyday life.

Q. Hi, Tiger. Getting back to your foundation a little bit, what has your work with the foundation meant to you through the years, and does it bother you that perhaps some of these kids don't know who you are?

TIGER WOODS: No, it doesn't bother me at all. I think the work we've done has been fantastic. We've helped hundreds of thousands of kids throughout our country. We're now with our digital platform, as I alluded to earlier, going to now go overseas with it. So we have the opportunity now to really affect the lives of millions of kids in a positive way and that's what I'm so proud of.

We first started this foundation with the goal in mind to use golf as the vehicle to teach kids, but after 9/11 happened, I made a shift and told my dad we're going to go into education because that's how I was brought up, education came before sports, so we'll put golf on the back burner and really focus on education and here we are.

Q. Tiger, 10th hole here is the sort of hole that mystifies some people. Do you go after it, do you lay up, and have you had good look over the years?

TIGER WOODS: I have done both, I've gone for it and laid up and I've been very unsuccessful both ways. I believe the percentage is right around 51, 52 percent who go for it make birdie. It's a tossup, it really is. I just find that the green over the years has gotten a little bit steeper than I first remember it, so it's a tough hole. I'm still trying to figure it out.

I was asking Bryson today and asked JT, what do you guys do. JT lays up every day except for the front pin. Bryson, he doesn't know yet, and I don't know either. So I'll have to talk to Joey about that, what do you think is best, what should we do. Quite frankly, if you play the hole in 1 or 2 under par for the week, I actually think you might do well compared to some of the guys who are making silly doubles or silly bogeys. That's one thing you don't want to have happen, you don't want to make a silly mistake.

Q. What did you do the first time you played as a teenager?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I couldn't get there, for one. JT was telling me, yeah, I've hit 2-iron on this thing. We couldn't reach it. We were hitting persimmon. Where were we going to go? So I remember hitting a 3-iron or sometimes a cut 2-iron to the left and then wedge it on. No one really went for it because at the time I first played here as a junior, most of the professionals were first using persimmon and balata balls, the balls weren't going very far. Obviously the game's changed. Today I hit 3-wood, landed on the green and it went over.

Q. Tiger, as you've been ramping up the return, you tweak equipment a little bit, you changed drivers at Torrey Pines. What have you done to the driver to get ready for this, what kind of changes or tweaks did you make?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I went with a shaft that's a little more stout. Now that my swing speed's up again, I went back to a shaft I used in 2015 when I played Wyndham, went back to that shaft. Because it's more stout, it doesn't have much play. I needed a little more loft, so I added a degree of loft on it. With the new head and one more degree, I found that I could then take off a quarter of a degree. Quite frankly, it's three-quarters degrees more loft than what I used at Torrey, but it's spinning the correct amount now. So it's a shaft that I knew from years past, but I still knew how it felt, so when I picked it up again, hey, you know what, this is something that's familiar and I know how it feels and now how it performs. I drove it great at Wyndham that year, and so that's about it.

Q. Tiger, in the last year many players in other sports have expressed concerns about Black Americans. It's Black History Month. I'm just wondering what your concerns are about the plight of Black Americans in this country.

TIGER WOODS: Well, I think throughout the entire history of our country, we've always had struggles. A lot of different races have had struggles, and obviously the African-Americans here in this country have had their share of struggles. Obviously has it gotten better, yes, but I still think there's room for more improvement.

Q. Tiger, you obviously have a great relationship with the young guys, a lot of needling, a lot of fun. Can you envision a time where competitively out there you turn, I guess, the cold shoulder to them and how do you think they might react given the great relationships you've started?

TIGER WOODS: I don't care how you react.

Q. Are you setting them up for this, is that what this is about?

TIGER WOODS: Hey, I'm trying to win a tournament. I'm sure they'll feel the same way, but it's winning time.

Q. Two things along those lines. I'm curious, do you have any sense of how some of

these JT, Berger, some of these guys perceive you in this kind of elder statesman role? Do they see you more as a legendary figure for what you've accomplished in the game, do they see you as a competitor, what sense do you have?

TIGER WOODS: I think now they're starting to see me as a sense of a competitor because I'm starting to come back again. For a while there that wasn't the case. I'm just a person that they could bounce ideas off of or what did I used to do and how do I feel these things, what do I do in certain situations, certain shots, and they would pick my brain, yeah. But now it's more of a playing competitor now. Yeah, we still give the needle and we still have a whole bunch of fun, but also they know I'm playing in a tournament and so are they.

Q. When did you get a sense of that shift because you've been out so many years stop and go? Was there a time when you start --

TIGER WOODS: I think at the Hero this year it changed quite a bit because, quite frankly, I told a lot of you guys at Liberty this past year during the Presidents Cup, I didn't know if I was going to play again, I hadn't been given the okay yet. Just been hitting wedges, and you saw what I was able to do and that's the only thing I was able to do, so I didn't know if I was going to come back and play.

Q. Lastly, speaking of Liberty and Hazeltine and your very strong involvement from what we hear as a vice captain, playing along with a hypothetical here, if you had a good year and not a great one and let's say we get to the end and let's say you're 20th as a Ryder Cup standing, do you think you're better off as a pick or as a captain? Which would you enjoy more?

TIGER WOODS: Why can't I have both?

Q. Play along here a little bit just once, just once.

TIGER WOODS: Both.

Q. Would you do that?

TIGER WOODS: I like both.

Q. Would they let you do both?

TIGER WOODS: That's up to our captain, what Jim says.

Q. Have you talked to him about it?

TIGER WOODS: I have actually.

Q. Did he say yes?

TIGER WOODS: He didn't say anything.

Q. Hi, Tiger. Do you consider feel as touch or as acoustic sound?

TIGER WOODS: I think it's both. Yeah, the feel of a shot or feel of a club, the shaft, the grip, whatever it may be of a golf ball also has to have a certain audio that I'm used to. I don't like some of these clubs that sound tinny or high pitched, that's just not something that I equate to as something that I can control. I've always -- if you listen to the guys I've worked with over all these years, I've always gone with a feel where the ball sounds a little more thuddy, a heavier tone to it. And the same thing with my drivers and my 3-woods, put a lot of rat glue in them just to make sure that that sound pitch comes down. That to me feels more solid, it feels more like it's a solid piece of mass as opposed to something tinny that can break.

Q. Tiger, welcome home.

TIGER WOODS: Thank you.

Q. A couple of local questions, L.A. sports talk, you were at the World Series last year. Today's pitchers and catchers for the Dodgers. What are your thoughts on them 30 years now since they've won it all?

TIGER WOODS: You don't have to tell me, I know. It's just amazing that this franchise hasn't gotten over the hump. I mean, we're loaded in our staff now, so we're fine there. But I just think it's all in match-ups, just get the right match-up. Quite frankly, Houston last year was rolling. All their guys were hitting, their staffs were solid, they trusted their relievers. Granted, we did, too. We had that whole analytics. Rich Hill got pulled after, what, the third inning or something like that? Yeah, it's a long season, it's 162 games, so we'll see how everything plays out first and hopefully you'll be there.

Q. I thought on your Lakers, what they've done lately, and also nobody would be able to speak on this better than you and your father, what's going on with that team and Lonzo Ball. What would your dad say, do you think, about what's going on with that, because he spoke his mind?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, he did. I think my dad would have a few different words than I'm going to give you right here in this press conference. I just think that the Lakers are situated perfectly for the next couple years. With the salary cap, they're 70 million under the cap I think right now, or more than that, or potentially 70 million under the cap, so they're fine.

It's a matter of just getting the guys to come. Hopefully they will come. Maybe one franchise tag -- not franchise, one max, maybe another max if we can get in there. We'll see. I'm excited about the youth of the team. It's going to be interesting if they keep Isaiah or not with this whole turnaround, with the shift in where they're going. As Lakers die-hard

fans, we're looking forward to it. I'm always looking forward to them winning games. I stay up late at night, go to bed at 1:30 in the morning watching the 10:30 games out here. So it's something I've always been a huge fan of the Lakers and always will be.

Q. I won't ask you about the Raiders, you know how their season's going to be next year.

TIGER WOODS: Hey, we've got Gruden back.

Q. That is pretty cool. I want to touch on what Benny was saying about the young guys, how it would be cool and even you said at the Hero, just once you want them to feel what guys like Ernie Els and Phil used to feel. But my question is, now you're a father, you have the foundation, you have so many other things going on. How do you get back or how do you have that balance to get back to a semblance of that person that used to be the dominant guy with so many different things going on right now, and how big of a challenge is that for you?

TIGER WOODS: It is a very big challenge. My priorities have shifted dramatically over the course of my life. My kids are the most important things in my life so that's a big shift than when I was playing in 2000, 2001, 2002, a good little run there, something in the mid 2000s. And Sam was born, Charlie was born and things started to shift. I don't regret that at all. I'm very lucky and very happy to have that opportunity. I'm excited -- they're excited to see me back practicing again because they knew how much I missed it and also how much golf hurt me, how much pain it caused me. So they're excited to see me playing golf with no pain. And then the guys on Tour that are young, you know, once I get into contention, I can handle myself. I just need to get there.

Q. Do you remember the time that it took for you to put in to get to where you were? You don't have that same amount of time.

TIGER WOODS: No, I don't have that same amount of time, but also again, I don't have the same body to spend that much time, either. You know, JT was asking me this on the flight, what did you used to do when you were about my age. Well, I used to get up in the morning, run four miles. Then I'd go to the gym, do my lifts. Then I'd hit balls for two to three hours, I'd go play, come back, work on my short game. I'd go run another four more miles, and then if anyone wanted to play basketball or tennis, I would go play basketball or tennis. That was a daily routine. I'm not doing any of that now.

MARK WILLIAMS: Tiger, good luck this week.