

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
March 27, 2018

STEVE STRICKER



DOUG MILNE: Like to welcome Steve Stricker to the interview room at the Houston Open. Steve, thanks for joining us for a few minutes. Making your 16th start here at the Houston Open dating back to '99, I believe. Three top-10 finishes, most recently fourth place in 2011. Lots to talk to you about, but why don't we just start off with being back here in Humble, Texas, for the Houston Open?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, always exciting to come back here. This place holds a good spot in my heart. This is kind of where I -- back in 2006 when I started to come back, I think finished third here in 2006. So it was a good momentum tournament for me, a good finish, provided a lot of confidence moving forward through a difficult time that I had the previous three years. So it's always nice to be back here and I remember that tournament meaning a lot to me back in 2006.

DOUG MILNE: Okay. Well, you're coming into the week obviously playing incredibly well. You've made three starts on the PGA TOUR Champions this year, a second and two first-place finishes coming off the win last week in Biloxi. Feeling good about your game coming into the week?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I feel pretty good. I've had a couple of decent chances out here on this Tour, too. Finished 12th at Valspar, which was a good tournament for me, and then winning a couple times out there. Anytime you can win anywhere provides a lot of confidence, a belief in your game that you can do it. So I've done that the last couple times on the Champions Tour and it's been very fun. I have to tell you, it's fun winning. So I come here with a little bit of confidence. Totally different element here, different everything, but still, when you have belief in your game and you've been playing well, it goes a long way.

Q. Steve, given the way you've been playing, the success you've had, was it your plan all along to play Houston? I know you're trying to get into the Masters next week.

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, it's been my plan to play here all along at the start of the year. I don't think I made it here last year for some reason, but I always enjoy coming here. Steve Timms does a great job putting on the event.

Yeah, like I said at the start, it holds a special place with me. It means a lot to me here and the course is always in great shape, the weather is usually warm, and it looks like after tomorrow's rain, it looks like we're shaped up to have a good week of weather. And it's the last effort for me to try to get into Augusta. Played all four of the majors last year and I'm not in any of them this year, so I've got some work cut out if I want to play in some of those. It's

A long shot to come here and win, but hopefully play well and see what happens.

Q. Are you at all surprised by your ability to get off to such a hot start on the Champions this year?

STEVE STRICKER: You know, I played six times last year and had a couple opportunities to win and didn't win. It was kind of eating at me a little bit. I was feeling the pressure going out there, and I expect to play well no matter where I'm at, I guess. Like I said at the start, it's hard to win at any level. So it was kind of eating at me on the inside a little bit not winning and having a couple opportunities to win, so it was finally good to get over that hump. I think that allowed me to do it again last week in Mississippi. I felt a lot more calm coming down the stretch, had a little bit better control of my game coming down to the end.

Does it surprise me? To answer your question, yes and no. I mean, we're out here to try to play well and to win. I feel like I've kept myself in good shape and my game in decent shape as I got older. So I go out there not expecting to win by any stretch of the imagination, but to play well. Whether that leads to wins or not is another thing. But I'm excited the way I'm playing out there and I would like to carry that over to this Tour, too. I feel like both those Tours help me at each Tour. I come out here and play, it's bigger courses, tougher courses, tougher conditions, and then I go there, to the Champions Tour, and everything's scaled back a little bit. And vice versa, when I get in on the Champions Tour and get in contention, I get that confidence for when I come out here on this Tour. So I feel like it's been a good balance and I'm gaining confidence at both places.

Q. Two wins and a second, no rounds over par, 111 under par. What's the most important stat in all those?

STEVE STRICKER: I think my consistency. You know, I look back, I played nine times out there, been in the top-5 I think seven out of those nine times. That to me is very rewarding, that I've played consistently in the times that I've played out there and had more opportunities to win than just the two that I won. And that's kind of what I've -- after coming back in 2006, that's kind of what I've prided myself on over the years is being a consistent player and getting, I wouldn't say a lot of chances to win but having consistent play over those last 10 years of my career. So again, out there that feels good to me, too, with that consistent play.

Q. Going from Champions Tour, because you're still playing on both, you mentioned the courses being longer, rough being longer. Is there any sort of transition when you go from a Champions Tour event like this, is it just another week for you?

STEVE STRICKER: Actually, the greens were faster last week than this week that I putted on out here today. They were super fast last week. It's usually a little bit the opposite, they're a little bit slower out here than they are here, but fairly similar.

But I would say we're used to that, making adjustments from each week to the next. No

matter where we go, we've got to make some sort of adjustment whether it's green speed, grass, whatever. But it's still golf, you've still got to get the ball in the hole, that doesn't change. So I think that's what's helped me, too. It's still a game, you still have to shoot low scores and I'm taking it from each tour, which has been fun to see and do.

Q. Steve, what's your take on the PGA TOUR this year? Seems like after every week we have a new flavor of the week and the new greatest player out there. It just doesn't seem to stop. And along with that, are you surprised at all by Tiger's performance year to date?

STEVE STRICKER: I think what we're seeing is just there's so many great kids that have a tremendous amount of ability. There's a lot of talent out here, and they're showcasing it each and every week, and it could be a new guy this week. There's just the depth is there on this Tour. You have to play well, otherwise you get run over. These young kids seem to be fearless. They all play with each other, and when they see a buddy do well, it fuels him to go out there and play well and they spur each other on. It's fun to see and it's impressive to watch.

As far as Tiger goes, I played a nine-hole practice round with him at Valspar. This is for real this time, I think, this comeback. He's looking good, he feels good, he's talking good about his game and himself and how he feels. So it's exciting to see, it really is. He's walking with a bounce in his step like he did when he was out here kicking everybody's butt.

So it wouldn't surprise me one bit if he wins, wins again this year. It could be next time at Augusta, who knows, he likes that spot. It's fun to watch. You know, it's brought a lot more attention to our game again when he's in there playing, especially playing well.

Q. You're in a unique position straddling these two tours, but when you try and balance your playing opportunities, how big of a priority or how much of a role is there in trying to play your way back into the majors?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, that's a good question. It's getting harder. When I go out and win on the Champions Tour, should I be out there more? You can tell me, should I be out there more or should I be out here? I'm taking any advice I can get because that's been the hardest part, where I should play. I'm fighting with myself with that a lot of times. What's the right thing to do?

I still feel like I've got game enough to win and play well out here, and that's what keeps me coming back out here. I would dearly love to win again out here on this Tour, and that's my goal so that's why I continue to come out here. And the major stuff, that will all take care of itself if you play well. I'll try to qualify for the U.S. Open like I did last year and try to get in that way. If I can improve my world rankings up in the top 100, that usually gets you into the PGA Championship. If I play well, some of those things take care of themselves. Yeah, that's been the challenge, which tour to play and where I should be spending my time.

Q. Are you going to play Insperity?

STEVE STRICKER: That's Des Moines?

Q. No, here, the Champions Tour here.

STEVE STRICKER: No, I don't think so. I think I'm somewhere else.

Q. It's the first week in May. Is that THE PLAYERS?

DOUG MILNE: Charlotte.

STEVE STRICKER: It's a big stretch for me in there. I think I'm going to play PLAYERS and take Insperity off and play the Dean & DeLuca. I'm trying to get in the Memorial tournament on a sponsor's exemption. FedExCup probably I'm going to play, U.S. Open qualifier. So I've got a big stretch in there, so I don't think I'm coming back here.

DOUG MILNE: Everybody good? Steve, thank you.

STEVE STRICKER: Thank you.