

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
March 27, 2018



CHRIS STROUD

JACK RYAN: We'll get started with Chris Stroud here at the Houston Open. Chris, tell us what it means to be playing in Houston given your involvement with the Hurricane Harvey Relief.

CHRIS STROUD: First of all, obviously the Houston Open, I believe this is my 12th or 13th time to play. Growing up in the Beaumont area two hours away, I used to come and watch this golf tournament, watch Seve Ballesteros and Fred Couples and all the legends play. So it's a very special event for me locally, and then obviously what happened here last August when Hurricane Harvey came through, it has been a steady, tough climb for a lot of people in this area.

So this is a huge, important event for us this week, the Houston Open, and gaining momentum for the Hurricane Harvey Pro-Am Relief Fund that we came up with, Bobby Gates and I. We had an all-star team of eight people. We had Steve Timms and Amanda Hansen of the HGA; we had Brian Naugle and Jane of Insperity, who run the Champions Tour event up at TPC Woodlands or Woodlands Country Club; and we had Casey Paulson and Josh Governale that took up the task of running a huge golf tournament up at Bluejack National. So that all-star team in two and a half months put a golf tournament and a huge dinner at Kirby's Steakhouse up in The Woodlands and raised \$1,097,000 and we're now able to write \$975,000 worth of checks in the next two months to about 40 families.

JACK RYAN: You've touched on how much this event means to you, but you got your first victory on the PGA TOUR last year, do you feel like this is a place you can come in and get number two?

CHRIS STROUD: I've been preparing for this for a long time. As soon as I won Barracuda Championship last year, obviously life-changing moment for me, a 20-year goal that I've had since I was a young kid, and to finally win out here after I think 290-something events. I had playoff losses, I've had second, third and fourth, fifth places, I've had everything but a win. To finally get one was a huge weight lifted off my shoulders.

And then literally that was in August and then maybe two or three weeks later this Hurricane Harvey hit and I think it was -- I'm a faithful Christian, so I think it was God kind of saying, hey, it's your time to help. This thing came in. I was unable to fly back in to help my family. We had 26 people at my house up in Spring. I had a generator, we had seven or eight dogs and cats, we had 10 kids all holed up, stuck inside for about six days. And then the 52 inches of rain that fell and then all the reservoirs that were released and just had feet of water all over this city and this area, devastated thousands and thousands and event millions of people.

So the first thing that came to mind is, Bobby Gates is a great friend of mine. We texted each other somehow in those few days, I was on the road, and I said Bobby, we've got to do something, let's give back, let's do a pro-am, let's do a golf event, let's do something.

Within a few days of me coming back, I was playing the first FedExCup event up in New York and the second one in Boston. My heart was here, my mind was trying to play golf. I missed both cuts, I didn't even want to be on a golf course. I was afraid for my family, I was scared for everybody here, and I knew all the devastating stories.

Fly back in town. Within a couple of weeks we had eight people involved, we got this thing running, and two and a half months later we raised a million bucks, and now this last couple of weeks we started handing out checks.

JACK RYAN: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. How many golfers participated?

CHRIS STROUD: We had -- no kidding, in one month, I had asked, because everybody I knew on Tour, all my buddies on Tour knew what had happened. It was all over national news, it was the talk of every week we were out there. Every single player came up to me and said, I know you're from Houston, are you okay?

I said I got lucky, my house was fine, but we have thousands of friend and family that were not. They said let me know if I can help. Within two weeks we had 27 people commit, we had 18 local pros, including Mark O'Meara, Steve Elkington, Patrick Reed, Jhonny Vegas, you name it. Everybody here, anybody here that was on the Tour. We even had Web.com Tour guys that lived here. Everybody said yes. They said whatever you need, we'll make it happen. We didn't even have a date yet, we didn't know anything, we just said we're going to do something soon.

And then two and a half months later we had the whole event set up. I had a few other guys come in from Dallas. I think we had a total of 40 guys, I think we only needed 28. I think we had 28 guys show up at Bluejack National, had an unbelievable event. Mark O'Meara came up to me after the dinner and then after the golf pro-am finished about 5:00 p.m. at Bluejack National, came up to me. I'm a good friend of his, we've played some golf together, we're members at Lochinvar here in Houston. He looked me straight in the eye, he said, Listen, I've been doing this all of my life. He said, I have never seen a better, more well-run tournament than this, you guys have absolutely nailed it. Coming from Mark O'Meara, who we all respect, meant a lot to me.

Five minutes later we had this really personal interview by Josh Governale. His family was devastated, he was in tears giving this interview, and Bobby Gates and I are crying on film talking about what we had done because I think all the shock and awe was over and now the true emotions are letting out after the event was done and we raised that much money,

and now we're like holy cow, this happened and now we get to get this thing organized and hand out checks.

It has been an incredible emotional event for all of us, and to be a part of something this big has been seriously one of the greatest moments in my life, besides my two children being born, me being married, this is way, way up there.

I've never been a part of anything like this, so I just hope we continue the momentum that we have and hopefully continue the tournament somehow, either annually or biannually, or get some people to continue to donate through our website and continue to write checks. It's going to take 10 to 15 years to get people back on their feet.

Q. I understand a lesson for one pro went for quite a bit?

CHRIS STROUD: So pretty interestingly, it was sort of a secret. So Casey Paulson and Josh Governale, who were the pro and the general manager at Bluejack at the time. Obviously I've been playing with Tiger since -- I got out here in '07 so I've seen Tiger many, many times on and off the golf course.

Tiger -- the secret was, hey, something -- Tiger's going to do something. We don't know if he's going to fly in and play, if he's going to come, just come say hi. I had been trying to reach out through Mark O'Meara, who knows him well. I tried to reach out through my channels. Tiger, as we know, is a very private guy and we totally respected that. But he did finally a few weeks out say, hey, I'm going to fly in, I'll spend a few hours with a couple of guys and just put that one on the table.

We had seven major silent auction deals. It started with a friend of mine, Dr. Devinder Bhatia, who donated his wine cellar. It's about the size of this room, up to 20 people, 10 couples. Started out at \$10,000, we sold two packages, two different nights for 20 different people, 40 people total if they wanted it for \$26,000 a piece. That was a good start, \$52,000 like that.

Seven items later with Tiger, the very last item was Tiger for a few hours at Bluejack National. Two guys got all the way up to \$200,000. We said hold on, stop. So we tried to get Tiger on the phone for 10 minutes. We couldn't get him to answer, it was pretty late. Obviously he's on the east coast. If he could have answered, maybe he would have said yes and maybe we could have gotten two and two and \$400,000. But at the end of the day Tiger basically helped us raise 20 percent of our money and we were so thankful.

I was able to see him on the putting green shook his hand, gave him a little man-hug and said, You have no idea what you've done for my area. He looked me right in the eye and he said, Seriously, anything I can do, I'll help.

So it meant a lot for a guy like Tiger to see what he's doing now, to come back to golf which we all love to see and be able to donate some time away from his kids and family and golf

and life was pretty special for us.

Q. You mentioned your first career victory last year. You talked a little bit about that weight lifted off your shoulders a little bit, but I don't want to use the word "career revival" because that sounds negative a little bit, but what does a victory like that do moving forward and did you see it as a turning point?

CHRIS STROUD: Definitely a turning point. For me I look at all these young kids, they've kind of followed the model of Adam Scott or Tiger Woods, Sergio Garcia. They've stayed single, they have played golf, they got on tour very early, stayed away from getting married, which is not a bad thing at all. Marriage is great, I'm not saying that at all. But they stayed single, they kept their focus on golf, had a lot of success, and then they got married and then they had kids. Sergio just had his first baby and Adam Scott had his first baby a while back. They kind of followed that model.

I'm a little bit different. I got married early at 25 when I first got on tour, I had kids early. I'm sort of thinking maybe I'm the opposite picture, maybe I'm the guy who's going to have the family early and then get everything stabilized at the house while I'm playing on tour, and then maybe everything flops for me. Maybe all of a sudden I become this late Vijay Singh kind of player that I come out and start winning late in my 30s and into my 40s. I've never felt better about my game than I do right now. I've honed my practice and my gaming skills to such a tight form that it really doesn't ever get off. I took three weeks off and I came out the first day and shot 6 under at a golf course that's really hard here in Houston. Not to say that you still have to go out there and work, it's not a PGA TOUR event and all that, but the older you get, the better you get at scoring and maintaining your golf game.

But I definitely think that I might be that next story. I might be that guy that hey, I'm going to be the guy that's going to win late in his career. But we all know how difficult it is to win out here. You could play great all year long and never win a golf tournament, too. It's very difficult to win. You have to have a couple good breaks in the end, you have to give yourself a lot of chances on Sunday, and at the end of the day put yourself in position as many times as you can to give yourself a chance on the back nine.

Q. You mentioned that you played this course a bunch of different times, you grew up coming here. Over the time that you started playing this course, has the preparation changed at all for you? Are you a superstitious guy, any weird rituals?

CHRIS STROUD: No superstition here, but there is something very unique about this golf course. I used to live two miles from this golf course for four years when I first got on Tour. I moved here in '06 and I've played -- Steve Timms gave me a couple sponsor invites before I got on Tour. I got on Tour, I played '07, '08, '09, 2010 and I didn't have much success. I missed a couple cuts, I was finishing 40th and 50th, just not playing that great. And we were playing the other golf course and we were moving to this golf course. I'm not sure what year that was, 2010, '11, '12, I'm not sure.

The thing I learned was, I would always come out here and practice, but the course was so different during the tournament, I wasn't gaining any knowledge or experience by playing all year long and all of a sudden the tournament comes and it's a totally different golf course. It plays shorter, it plays firmer, the greens are faster, the greens are releasing differently. That's when I said I'm not gaining anything by playing here all the time.

So we moved up north up in The Woodlands. A lot more courses to choose from, closer to the airport for us, and I quit playing here except for the tournament. I play a few times a year during functions, maybe the Astros, Texans pro-am I'll come play. I don't play here a ton, even though both course are really, really great.

I really just come to prepare just for the golf tournament, and specifically I built me a driver specifically for this golf course. For me, I don't really turn the ball over that much, which is right to left, a draw. I usually hit a straight to a fade. And this golf course, after hole No. 2 you need to hit every single shot high draw. Well, I built a driver a few years ago that specifically does that and it makes a big difference for me in these fairways. So that is one club I have built for this one golf course that it's helped me a ton. Ever since I put that in play, every year I've played very well here.

Q. You talked about the balance between playing and dealing with some of the off-course stuff with the hurricane relief. What's that been like in recent weeks as you get ready to write some of the checks and still focus on the day job?

CHRIS STROUD: That's a great question. There's been a lot of distractions obviously coming into the event. I brought my two girls, I have an eight and a five year old. The plan was to go during the week of Tampa, the weekend, we brought my girls during their spring break to Disney and then play Bay Hill.

Well, I knew the Houston Open was coming up, the Hurricane Harvey was going to be a lot on my plate. I withdrew from one of my favorite events of the year, Bay Hill, to spend time with them and to spend that whole week with them extra at Disney. We did every park there was and we did a couple other things. We went to Universal for the first time and we flew back all together.

And I'm glad I did that because it took my focus off golf, spent my time with the family and I've been working on getting ready for this tournament and Hurricane Harvey for two weeks. It's been really, really nice because of all the distractions I think I would have had if I would have played Bay Hill has minimized.

And it's been good distractions, too, because the energy is good, everybody's supporting me. It feels amazing to see all the people coming out. I've had people come up on the range and hug me because they received money from our fund, and just crying in tears. I've had five people call me this week, some people I don't even know how they got my number. They call me and say, Chris Stroud. They're on a speakerphone with the family, they're crying, they're in tears, their kids are in tears. You have no idea what you've done for us, the

Hurricane Harvey event. We're going to receive \$25,000 from your fund. I mean, it's just amazing. It's the greatest feeling a person can have, to be able to do what you love, create a golf event, raise money and give back to people directly that need it.

Q. Not to switch gears here, but you and Shawn Stefani, you've known him for a while, you two have golfed together at Lamar. While you all were there, was that the best Lamar team ever?

CHRIS STROUD: It's pretty amazing. A lot of people don't know this, but last year there were four players on the PGA TOUR from Lamar University: Andrew Landry, Dawie van der Walt, Shawn Stefani and me.

I was very fortunate, I got on Tour very early in 2007. I jumped through Q-School. I didn't really play the Web.com that long, just for a couple years, and then I jumped on. Shawn Stefani came on next, then Dawie, and then Andrew Landry. Obviously he almost won the tournament in Palm Springs this year, the Humana.

So we had one of the strongest teams ever. My sophomore year, Shawn won his -- he was a redshirt freshman. We're the same age, we've known each other since we were 10 years old. Shawn had the best golf swing as a 12-year-old you've ever seen. He was a six-foot-two, 185-pound 12-year-old and he could hit it 300 yards. This kid was a man-child, just a good old country boy, strong as an ox. He's worked his way up all the way to the Tour, he's done a great job. We've been friends for years.

He went to the University of Houston, left after a semester, redshirted at Lamar. My sophomore year he came on as a redshirt freshman, and then he won -- we had 13 events that year, my sophomore year. We were No. 1 in the country, we had six different people in 13 events win an individual tournament, and then we never finished out of the top 3. It was unbelievable. And then we all graduated and Brad McMakin, who was the coach at the time, had Dawie van der Walt, Casey Clendenon, who's on my bag, and Andrew Landry had come in and they were No. 1 again.

So I think in that six- or eight-year stretch, Lamar University has like the highest winning percentage of any college division 1 golf team in history. They had it on GolfWeek magazine, it was a really good cool deal. And then McMakin took Andrew Landry to Arkansas and two years later almost beat Bronson Burgoon, who's also from here playing A&M in a national championship. So pretty cool little story how it all ties together, but being at Lamar and Shawn Stefani, crazy good players, all goes back to Bradley McMakin, who was the best recruiter ever.

JACK RYAN: Any more questions for Chris? All right. Thank you, Chris. Best of luck this week. You know you're going to have a lot of people behind you.

CHRIS STROUD: Thank you, guys. I really appreciate it