

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
August 1, 2018

FRANCESCO MOLINARI



BRIONY CARLYN: I'm delighted to be here today joined by the 2018 Open Champion, Francesco Molinari.

Has everything sunk in yet for you?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, I think it has, even though it still sounds a little bit funny when you introduce me like that. But yeah, I had a few days away from everything to think back and realize what happened. So really proud of what I've done and looking forward to trying to achieve even more.

BRIONY CARLYN: I know we have a lot of people here with a lot of questions, so I'm happy to open it up straight to the floor.

Q. So are you feeling refreshed? I saw that you tweeted that you had gone to the beach and had a little vacation. Are you feeling refreshed? It's a long season and you've done quite a lot.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, that's why we planned the holiday for last week, obviously before knowing what was going to happen, but it worked out well. Energies are good of -- I got a lot of rest last week. Like I said, now it's time to get working again. I've started working the last few days there hitting balls and just trying to get ready for this week. So yeah, we'll see. I know it's going to be a challenge, obviously now, to keep going what I have going, and I'll see how well I can deal with that.

Q. The smallest of the trophies, but the most fun to have from all the stories we've heard over the years. The obligatory question is, what's the first thing that went in it? And what have you done with the jug since we last saw you?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Nothing has gone in yet. No, well, I'm not a big drinker, so to fill it with water would be a bit of a blasphemy it feels like. I'm sure there will be times at the end of the season when everything comes down that something goes in it, but not yet.

Then my coach was there a few days last week to get ready and he put in a special request to sleep with the Claret Jug one night, so I was happy to share it with him. Yeah, it's just fun to have it around sitting on the table. Obviously, the kids love it and it's nice to have it with us.

Q. Are you the only Italian who doesn't drink red wine?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: No, I do drink red wine, but it's not my first passion, let's say. And last week there was a lot of recovery needed, so it didn't seem like a great time to get hammered. So maybe end of the season, you know, when everything quiets down, it will be more appropriate.

Q. Well, based on that, it might not have been a huge celebration, but I was going to ask you what the celebration was like immediately afterwards and the next couple days?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: There's been celebration. It doesn't have to be, again, drinking to be celebration. We sat down with the team on Sunday night, the part of the team that was still there, with my wife, just chatting about the week and how someone felt it was going to happen and someone didn't. But yeah, just sort of chatting. Some crying. Not from me, but from other parts of the team. Just spending time together and chatting about it. It's been really good.

Q. Right after the tournament was over, you didn't -- did the emotion hit later? You seemed to handle that pretty well, the ceremony afterward.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah. Well, I didn't sleep much that Sunday night, between Sunday and Monday. Like I said, it's taken a few days. We left Tuesday morning for the holiday, so there wasn't really time to do much apart from the packing and just waking up the first few mornings, looking for the trophy to see if it was really there.

But yeah, apart from that, you know, I'm fortunate to have a wife who is not really into golf that much. You know, two kids that are in an age where they're happy if they see my winning, but they don't really care too much about that. So after a couple of days, reality gets back and it's just normal life with the family and the kids.

Q. Did you hear from like any legends of the game or someone who really made an impression that they messaged or texted or something?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: A lot, yeah. Especially tweets from a lot of people. Tom Watson, Ben Crenshaw sent me a handwritten note. Obviously, real legends of the game. And to see that they appreciate what you've done, it's amazing.

Q. On the same lines, is there anything in terms of recognition in the last seven days, whether people are stopping you in the streets underlining the enormity of what you've achieved?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Not much, because I've flown away pretty much straightaway. So, yeah, at the airport, on the plane over to Bahamas, obviously the crew asking for a picture. You can definitely see it's changed and it's taken me in a different dimension. So like I said before, it's going to be probably a bit of a challenge for someone like me, but I'll try to deal with it as good as possible.

Q. Before Quicken, could you have imagined your season kicking off and kind of exploding the way it has the last six weeks?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: No, I couldn't, and I don't think anyone could, to be honest. Golf is a tough sport and you need to be good at not looking too much -- not reading too much into results. I think I did a really good job of not reading too much into results earlier in the season, when results weren't coming, and I don't need to make assumptions now that results are coming. It's going to be important to work hard, like I really did, and to work smart especially. Yeah, I think the goal going forward is just to keep getting better and see where that takes me.

Q. Well, Firestone South in no way resembles Carnoustie, so I'm wondering how big of an adjustment this is going to be for you, and will you be able to make such an adjustment after coming off such a high of winning?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Well, that's going to be the challenge. I don't think adjusting to the course will be much of a challenge. I adjusted from John Deere to Carnoustie pretty well, so hopefully it would be another good adjustment. I think the biggest adjustment is getting adjusted to the attention, to the distractions, if you want to call them like that. I'm not the kind of player that just shows up and shoots 62. I need to work hard at it and to be in the right frame of mind. So, that's the job in hand for the next few days and going into next week.

Q. Of the times you've played the PGA Championship, if somebody were to ask you back home what are the characteristics of a typical PGA, what would you tell them?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: In the last few years when I've played, I think it's the setup. The course setup has been pretty consistent. I think usually the fairways are not the tightest, but the rough is quite thick. Usually pretty long golf courses that put premium on tee to green, accuracy, and obviously length. Yeah, I mean, the ones I've played have been probably the -- one of the most consistent majors, I think U.S. Open, in the time I've played, has been more changes. Like, Olympic was different, Pinehurst was different, Erin Hills was very different. So I think of the PGA as a typical country club, American kind of course, and I think it's one -- up until now, it was one of the majors where I probably had the better results. So I'm looking forward to going to Bellerive next week.

Q. Have you ever been to St. Louis?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: No.

Q. Do you know where it is?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Roughly. Not exactly, but roughly.

Q. Francesco, generally speaking, what does it take for you to commit to a shot, and how has that process evolved, if at all, throughout your career?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, it's evolved a lot. I think I was much more one-dimensional when I was earlier in my career. What it takes is just a good process leading up to the shot with my caddie, visualizing the shot that we want to hit and then just trying to do it.

Q. Can you just take us through your shots on the 16th hole shot by shot, and do you do anything different in your practice rounds to prepare for that hole?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: 16?

Q. The big par 5 down the hill.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Depends a lot on where they set up the tee, the tee markers. If they are the front of the tee box, for me at least I can carry all the bunkers on the right, and then you can try and be more aggressive. If you hit a good shot on a good line, you have a chance at going for the green in two.

If the tee is at the back, it's really a three-shot hole for me, so it can also be a 3-wood off the tee, trying to stay short of the right bunkers and just playing it as a three-shot hole.

Q. After your coach slept with the jug, did you consider doing that?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: No, I did it the first night. I didn't "consider" doing it. That's why I wasn't so jealous about it, because I had it for myself for two or three nights, and I was ready to share.

Q. When you took the picture with the airplane crew, did they make you get the jug out of the case?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: They did, yes.

Q. You're 35, right?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yep.

Q. So you could have gone a long time in your career, become known as a guy who made good money, had pretty good finishes, but was not really that level of player. Then you win the BMW, then you win the Quicken, then you win The Open. How did you start to believe that you are that level of player, a different level of player?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Just a lot of work from the guys around me, to be honest. They probably believed already -- before the recent results, they believed in me more than I ever

did. It's taken a long time for them to keep telling me and to help me achieve things that were shown to myself that I was that kind of player. So I think for me personally, the key's always been results, but also, you know, when you go out on the course and you're playing with some of the best players in the world, you confront yourself with them. And I think a few years back, obviously I was competing against them, but I always felt like they had something that I didn't have, and now it feels like I can play with them and, you know, I don't feel intimidated in any way, or I feel like I can compete with all of them.

Q. What did your team see in you that you didn't see?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Just the potential to win majors and the potential to be in the top-10 of the world and, you know, now they're pushing the limits even more. So hopefully they will help me achieve even more in the game.

Q. I'm just going to talk clubs and equipment for a minute. Yourself, Tommy, Brooks, a few guys without deals have done very well recently. Can you speak to why you think that might be?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: It's hard to say. In my case I think obviously when Nike stopped making equipment, I just took it as a chance to test as much as possible and to find things that would help me improve my game. It wasn't easy, because it was a lot of work, especially for someone like me that had been 12 years with Nike, I didn't know what was out there. It's taken a little time to go through the testing, but then it's great to get the chance to pick and choose from different manufacturers, even though if you look at my bag, it's only two brands, I think. So it's not that complicated really.

Q. Has that been freeing, if you will, not being tied down, the ability to just sort of find whatever works for you?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah. Obviously, there was a lot of curiosity at the beginning to see what was out there. To be honest, it made me realize as well how good of a support I was getting from Nike and from the guys building the clubs. In the end, I think there's a lot of good equipment out there and it depends a lot on the relationship that you have with the guys building the clubs and how much they understand what you need. So the communications between us and the manufacturers, I think it's really, really important.

Q. Assuming you're goal-oriented, at the beginning of this season did you have a big goal in mind and how you exceeded that goal?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, well, setting goals, it's never easy. I think the main goal behind me and the team is getting better every day, even though it's probably not a specific goal. The specific goal was to get to East Lake. This last year I missed it by one shot, I think, in Chicago, missing a five-footer on the last green. So I don't know, to be honest, if I've got enough points to be safe already or not, but I'll try to make as many points as possible and get there, and then when I get there, obviously try to achieve even more.

Q. I'm just curious, has it helped you along the way to have a couple of your wins, whether it's the TPC Potomac or HSBC years ago, that tend to favor big hitters, that you can win and win with great scoring there? Has that taught you anything?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, well, I think I'm lucky enough to have a game now that can compete on almost any course, I will say any course. Obviously a big key for me is making putts. HSBC, I remember it was a time where I wasn't regularly putting so well, but I found something that week that made me hole putts and it made a whole difference.

Now, to be honest, I mean, I've been -- eight years has gone and I feel like a much more complete player. I feel my putting and my short game are much better. I'm a little bit longer. Even though I'm not one of the big hitters, I feel like I can compete with them. So at the time I probably didn't feel like I could compete on any course, but I think now I do.

BRIONY CARLYN: On that note, thank you, Francesco, for your time. All the best this week.