

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
9 October 2018



SHUBHANKAR SHARMA

MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us for the press conference interview for CIMB Classic. We have here someone which I'm sure you all know, you are very familiar with, Shubhankar Sharma, who won in Malaysia in February, I believe.

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yep.

MODERATOR: Shubhankar, this is your first CIMB Classic. Can you share your thoughts of playing here this week?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yeah, I'm really happy. I've seen this event on TV for so many years, and obviously Anirban won the Malaysian Open here a few years ago so I've seen this golf course a lot on TV and today was my first look at it. So really happy that I'm part of this event and looking forward to it.

MODERATOR: It's been a great start for you in 2018. I'm sure you have been thinking about playing this event for quite a while now, but once you really sealed your spot in the field, how did you feel when you found out you would be playing the CIMB Classic?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: I was really happy. I think I pretty much sealed it in February when I won in Malaysia, but there were so many things happening for me at that time. I got into the Masters and all the majors and WGC, so it was so much to take in. But obviously I knew that I was going to get into the CIMB and I was obviously very happy about it. It's a good thing there's no cut this week, so we can all enjoy ourselves and do our best. I'm really happy that I'm finally here playing with the best in the world and I'm really happy with the way the game is and hopefully have a good week.

MODERATOR: Now we'll open it up to the floor for some questions.

Q. You played 18 today?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yes, I played 18.

Q. What are your thoughts on the golf course?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: The course is fantastic. Obviously you can't really find similar courses anywhere in the world even in the U.S. The U.S. is a big country, you have different courses in different places. It's very different to maybe Ohio or different states, so can't really compare it. But this course is definitely right up there, especially with the way the conditions are, the way the greens are playing. I played nine holes with Scott Stallings in the

morning and he was telling me that he's been here for the past five years and the course is looking really good. Obviously it was (inaudible) after last year's tournament and I think changes that they made have been great. This is my first time so I don't really know what it looked like before, but the greens are firm and fast and hard and even the fairways are running really well, so the course is great.

Q. A couple of questions for you. The first one is you started the season in South Africa so well, have worked into form this season and the majors (inaudible,) but somewhere during this last four, five months you have not been really the self, the Shubhankar that we know almost every round. Have you tried to change something or what has really happened in the game and where do you think the game is now?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yeah, so a lot of changes came in the game. One of the reasons was that I've played so much. I've never really played so much in a year. I've just been playing constantly. I had (inaudible) weeks in a row in December, so I just played so much golf and I'm not used to playing so much and traveling so much.

I had to go so much to America this year, went twice there, and then playing in Europe. Also, most of the golf courses that I've played, actually 99 percent of the golf courses that I played are the first time that I played them. So I think all of those factors came into consideration for me.

Obviously we all know golf is a game that you can't really have your best every week. What I feel like in my short career, this is my sixth year as a pro, but what I learned is that it's only when you are not playing well that you learn more about yourself. You have things that you would not really look at when you're playing well, but when you're playing bad, you tend to look at the finer things. I think I've done that in the past month.

Right now I feel like my game is in a good position. I have my coach here this week and even he's really happy with the way I'm hitting it, and I hit it pretty good today as well. I think it's just about getting in one good round and when that happens I think I'll get confidence back and I'll be back at it again.

Q. The second question I wanted to ask is I know you were trying your level best to get your PGA TOUR card last year, you gave it your best shot. Again you have got the chance this year and what better than having three tournaments in a row where there are no cuts. Can you just tell us how starting from this tournament, how are you looking at this stretch of three weeks and how important it is for you?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: No doubt very, very important. Obviously all three events are big events. You have some of the best players in the world playing. Even next week in Korea and China, all these events are going to be really big. They're all PGA TOUR events and I knew this was going to happen at the start of the year.

Even if I don't make my card, I will have these three events at the start of the season on the

PGA TOUR. If I just play well in these three events, have consistent finishes, I feel like I'll get off to a very good start and obviously help my world ranking. Then next year again it will be the same scenario, trying to get into the WGCs and the majors. I feel like this start will really help me next year securing my card.

Also, the good thing is that all three events (inaudible) a major and I feel like we have a really good chance here and I feel like if I play well, in golf, anything is possible. I feel like I can win on a given day when I'm playing really well. So I'm not really thinking too much, I just want to get back to the same level that I was at the start of the year and then things will fall into place pretty quickly and you'll never know what will happen on Sunday.

Q. Have you set yourself any goals for the coming season?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: I haven't really since I've just been playing so much since January, I haven't really thought about anything. You know, just setting any goals until December because in my mind the season is from January to December and it's still going on. I feel like I'm still in the same season even though this is a new season for the PGA TOUR.

One of the goals will be to play really well in the next three events, and obviously I'll be playing the Race to Dubai in Europe and a few events here in Asia. So (inaudible) will definitely be a goal I want to achieve by December and playing well in this event will go a long way towards achieving that goal. So that will be the No. 1 goal for now. But again, like I said, it's a game of confidence and anything is possible. If you get one good round, you just get your confidence back and I feel like if I do that I'll have a good chance of winning.

Q. This is the first time four Indians are playing together in a PGA TOUR event, so how exciting, how much are you looking forward to playing the golf with a bunch of guys you have played with?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: I think it's incredible that four Indians are playing. It just shows that we have so much depth now in golf. In golf we've been doing so well and obviously it shows that we have been producing players in the past and we are producing more and more players who will compete on the world stage. It's great that Anirban also got in yesterday. And the good thing about all of us is we are all really good friends and very close, so it's always nice to see all of them back. Four Indians in an event I think is great. It's only like a 70-man field, I think, or whatever it is, but it's a limited field event and four Indians playing I think it's absolutely great.

Q. You have played the majors and the WGCs. Can you tell us which has been some of your best experiences or do you want to choose one or each one has its own experience?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yeah, I think it's every tournament has its own place. Just to play four majors this year was incredible for me. Playing the Masters was amazing. I've

seen it on TV on so many years, just to compete there was great. Mexico was actually my first big event where I was playing with the best in the world and to be leading that after two days was definitely something I'll remember. I felt like I was contending there and obviously I finished in the top-10, but I felt like I had the game to compete at that high level and really happy about that. Obviously playing the British Open was also amazing. That tournament is very close to my heart, I've been watching for 14, 15 years now. It was great to finally tee it up at that. That was also the only major I can make the cut, so that was also really nice.

Q. Where some of the key lessons that you picked up when playing on the PGA TOUR in America this year, what lessons did you learn to make you a better golfer?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Well, there were so many things that I learnt, but one good thing that I can say is that we try and -- I know in Asia and back home we just complicate things too much. We feel like if you want to play on the PGA TOUR, you've got to hit it very long, you've got to putt and make everything and you have to go low and everything. That is all right if you want to raise your level, but at the end of the day you're just playing golf. Wherever you are, you're just playing against the course. No one's really pushing you down, it's not like that, and that was my biggest lesson. All the tournaments that I played I didn't feel like I was playing my best and I knew that if I played my best, I would have had a chance in every single one of them. So definitely gave me a lot of confidence that my best is good enough to win on the PGA TOUR as well and that is one thing that just gives me more confidence the next time I go back.

Q. You were awarded the Arjuna Award back home in India. Can you just tell us how proud are you of that achievement and what it means to you?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: It means a lot. To be honest, when they told me about it I think the week before I got the award, there were so many things happening at that time so I just kind of brushed it off. I said yeah, it's a good thing that I've got it. But when I actually went to the ceremony and the president awarded me the award, you understand the significance of the award. Obviously I've seen so many people get the Arjuna Award, I've seen the ceremony on TV before. Just to be a part of that whole thing and especially when the national anthem is playing, it just fills you with pride. So I was really happy about it. And obviously my dad was there as well, dad and mom, my sister. My dad wore his uniform after six years, so that was very special day. Definitely I'll remember it for the rest of my life.

MODERATOR: Thank you so much, Shubhankar, and good luck for the weekend.