

ERNIE ELS

MODERATOR: With us, Ernie Els from South Africa, four-time major champion, former World No. 1, World Golf Hall of Fame member and International Team captain for the Presidents Cup.

Ernie, welcome to The CJ Cup at Nine Bridges. I believe you just played the back nine in a practice round. Just talk us through it and how excited are you to be here for your first CJ Cup at Nine Bridges?

ERNIE ELS: I'm very excited, thank you very much. Very thankful for a spot in the field. It's quite a star-studded field and the golf course is in amazing condition. I played nine holes and really looking forward to the week. I've been to Jeju before, so it's not too unfamiliar, but I'm really looking forward to a nice week.

MODERATOR: And Ernie, playing a practice round with Branden Grace and Shubhankar Sharma, just putting on your International captain's hat, how excited are you about the Presidents Cup going back to this part of the world next year?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, very excited. I played with Shubhankar, who's had an incredible year. He's won five times around the world in one year and he's only 22 years old.

Played with Branden Grace, who's got a great pedigree already getting into the prime of his career. I mean, he's only 30.

Being captain of the Presidents Cup is a real honor and I'm really looking forward to it. It's going to be a very diverse team the way things are shaping up already. We've got another year to go, so we're going to have an interesting new group of players that's going to probably make the team. It's going to be a very diverse group from probably six, seven to eight nations, so it could be a very interesting time coming up. It's going to be exciting.

Q. So I understand you've been to Korea several times, so how many times have you been to Korea and what is the impression that you get of Korea each time you visit?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, I've been here quite a few times. I played the Korean Open got to be maybe 10 years ago. We've played the Ballentines event a couple of times and actually twice here on Jeju Island and once over near Seoul. I've been here for some other events related to golf and I find Korea and the Korean people very knowledgeable about the game of golf, probably as knowledgeable or even more than the rest of the world. It really shines through, their knowledge of the game. It's always good to come back here where people really understand the way we play the game.

Q. So how many times have you been here, are you keeping count?

ERNIE ELS: To play, probably five times, six times, and other events, you know, many times, 12 times.

MODERATOR: Ernie, this is the only PGA TOUR tournament in South Korea. As a global golfer yourself, how do you see golf growing in this part of the world through the years you've been here? Now with the PGA TOUR being here for the CJ Cup as well, give us your view of the progress that you see in Asia.

ERNIE ELS: It's been amazing, absolutely amazing, and I think Korea is the leading force of the popularity of golf in Asia. You know, through the ladies game, you know, start with Se Ri Pak back in the middle, early '90s who really showed the way. So the ladies I felt like were leading the charge there for a while and now it looks like the men are really coming through, obviously with KJ Choi being the longstanding world player out of Korea and now the young players coming through, it's phenomenal. To have big events like the CJ Cup come to Korea is absolutely fitting for where they stand in the world with the game of golf.

We've had the Presidents Cup here before, so they know how to handle big events and they do it so well, and this week is no different. It's a wonderful golf course and the facilities are wonderful, so it's a world-class setup you guys have here.

MODERATOR: Will you be keeping an eye out on players like Si Woo Kim, who's already a PLAYERS champion back on the PGA TOUR, and also the upcoming player from Jeju Island, Sung Jae Im, who's playing in this week's field as well? Give us your impressions about the Koreans who are coming through the ranks right now.

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, watching them a little bit. Obviously Sung Jae Im from Jeju Island, I think he's going to bring a lot of popularity to the event this week. Obviously him winning the Web.com Finals, he won twice on that tour and winning the Order of Merit and now fully fledged on the U.S. PGA TOUR and having a top-5 finish two weeks ago at the Safeway, so the kid is for real. He's only 20 years old and he's got a really unbelievable future ahead of him.

A lot of other players. I'm playing with Si Woo Kim the first two rounds this week. He was on our last Presidents Cup, so he had a bit of a taste of that. Obviously Ben An is here. There's so many Korean youngsters here this week, so I'm going to really see how they perform. Not only this week, we've got a whole year before the Presidents Cup starts and still a long way to go, but these guys, the young guys are going to be really the core of our team.

MODERATOR: What sort of qualities are you looking for in your players, Ernie?

ERNIE ELS: I just want them to be keen. I want them to be up for it. Obviously our team is

not renowned like the U.S. team is. The U.S. team is a well-oiled team, they play Ryder Cups together, they obviously play very well in the Presidents Cup against us, so they're a very mature team.

We are going to be a young team, inexperienced, but that doesn't scare me because I know the course very well down in Melbourne, I've played it many, many times. I feel I have a very good game plan to play the golf course strategy-wise and I'm going to share that with my players.

But I just want players that are keen, that want to be there, that want to play, want to learn and want to get better. I think that week will teach each every player something more about themselves, about their approach to the game and so forth. I just want players that want to get up and be shown.

Q. Last year unfortunately you were not able to play at the CJ Cup. Have any of the other players who have played last year given you any advice on how to take on this event?

ERNIE ELS: Yes, thank you. I mean, that's why I played today. I'm playing the pro-am tomorrow, but I wanted to get a feel for the golf course. I played with three guys who have played here before, maybe not Shubhankar, but Branden was here, Branden Grace and Pat Perez, we played as a four-ball this morning and they showed me some lines off the tee and so forth.

I'm really excited to play. I was very disappointed not to be able to come last year. I could feel it was a bit of the flu coming even the end of the Presidents Cup last year and then I went to Scotland, I could barely play there and I had to just withdraw. I'm very thankful to be able to come. They gave me another sponsor's exemption, so really excited to be here, so I really appreciate that.

Q. So obviously you have been playing all these years alongside Tiger Woods and recently he has made a comeback. So as a person who's watched him over the years, how does his comeback make you feel, any thoughts, any impressions?

ERNIE ELS: I think after the last back surgery where they fused his back, I feel that he in his own mind felt that now is the time for him to come back properly, meaning that he could hit the ball like Tiger Woods, he could swing the way like Tiger Woods can swing, and I think that gave him a lot of confidence that he knew that his body could hold up. That's huge.

And then he went to work. He went to work on his short game, got very sharp, putting got sharp, his ball-striking got very sharp, and his mind just kept getting stronger. Knowing that your body's holding up, the shots are starting to shape the way he sees it in his eye and that's when the genius can come back into the game.

His natural way of playing the game, he could do that again. In the previous comebacks, he

just -- his body couldn't hold up and that must have been very disappointing. So I'm really pleased for him, shows you how much he still wants to do it. He's proven just about everything in the world and for him to come back and really show how much he still loves the game is great to see.

MODERATOR: Ernie, many thanks and all the best this week.

ERNIE ELS: Thank you, sir.