



**AUSTIN COOK**

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**JOHN BUSH:** We'll get started. We would like to welcome Austin Cook into the interview room, our defending champion here at the RSM Classic.

Austin, first of all, welcome back. If we can get your thoughts on defending this week?

**AUSTIN COOK:** I'm looking forward to it. The golf course sets up great for me. I'm just happy to be back here and with a great field and hopefully the weather holds up and it will be a great week.

**JOHN BUSH:** Take us back to the win last year. Spurred on by that 62 in the second round, but just talk a little bit about your recollections of the week.

**AUSTIN COOK:** Unbelievable ball-striking. Can go back and think about that and know that when I'm struggling that I won a golf tournament with my ball-striking, playing in the wind on Friday and shooting that 8-under 62 was pretty remarkable. I know that those 8 unders aren't going to come every day, but I just hope to play good, solid golf this week and be up at the top of the leaderboard again.

**JOHN BUSH:** And you carried that win on to a 38th place finish in the FedExCup, not quite getting to your goal of making it to East Lake, but just comment about your second try here and what your goals are for the rest of the season.

**AUSTIN COOK:** Yeah, obviously coming in this week I would like to be in the final group on Sunday again, but last year it kind of kick-started me to a great season. Didn't finish it off like I wanted to, but this year I'm hoping to play good again here, play good again the beginning of the year next year and make it to East Lake this year.

**JOHN BUSH:** Awesome. We'll open it up to questions, we'll get a microphone to you.

**Q. Austin, the winning is never easy at any level and it's really hard out here. Did you learn anything about how difficult it is to get that second one and, you know, was there ever any impatience with the fact that, "I won one, I should be able to pick up another one"?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Definitely. Kip and I have had some conversations about that. I expect too much now, or like whenever I don't hit the ball great, I get really impatient pretty quick because I know when I won here, my ball-striking was incredible that week. Everything was really good. I just feel like I put a lot of pressure on myself whenever I got my ball-striking down a little bit.

Yeah, I had quite a few events last year where I was getting close. Palm Springs, I was leading going into Sunday and ball-striking kind of went away early in the final round and I just got really impatient and didn't try to find my swing again, I just tried to force things.

**Q. What impact did winning early and the exemption and everything that comes with it have as far as development, just because there's so much security now that you have that you've won?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Yeah, that was pretty much it, just security. Knowing that until the 2019-2020 season I had a place to play guaranteed into tournaments, it gave me a little confidence and comfort knowing no matter how I played this week, I can play next week.

A few years ago when I was doing Monday qualifiers, I had a little different stress level than a lot of the guys out there because they could go at some pins coming down the stretch and it may not affect them, they're playing the next week. But me, when I was playing then, if I went at that pin, making bogey, finished outside the top-10, there goes my chances of getting in the next week.

**Q. Just kind of a follow-up on that, how do you kind of balance the need to not overexert yourself on things when you know you've already won and to still keep taking chances and have that hunger to win again?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** You know, it is kind of a fine balance. For me, I just do my best to play the way that I know I can play and play my game, which is try and hit a lot of fairways and a lot of greens, and when the putts go, I'm going to be in contention, and when they don't, then I'm still hoping to make the cut.

You know, goodness, I just went blank, I am so sorry. Next question, I guess.

**Q. I just went blank, too, so do you got one, Sean?**

**What do you consider to be the coolest thing that happened to you on the golf course this year?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** The win here.

**Q. That was last year.**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Oh, this year?

**Q. Um-hmm.**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Okay, okay, touche. Talk about like just starting in January?

**Q. Yeah.**

**AUSTIN COOK:** I mean, one of my tops was playing with Tiger at the first playoff event, getting to do that and play with somebody who I've looked up to my whole life and getting to pick his brain a little bit, that was a lot of fun.

**Q. Secondly, of the new places you saw this year from Kapalua forward, what stood out and why? What was memorable?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Pebble Beach was probably one of my favorite events this last year because, I guess, of the venue, but we also had perfect weather all week long and I got to play Pebble when it was 75 degrees, no wind and sunny. That's just kind of something that is rare during that event.

**Q. This event obviously meant a lot to you. Have you talked to any other players who are relative newbies that they haven't won yet to tell them how important it is to play in the fall series?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** I have not, but I think a lot of them understand the importance with understanding the reshuffle. You know, I didn't realize this until we went, but Vegas was shortened to a smaller field and some guys who their number got in last year, they didn't this year. When you get the opportunities and you're a rookie, you have to play no matter if you're not there and you're fifth on the alternate list and they call you Wednesday night, you've got to do your best to get there.

**JOHN BUSH:** Before the next question, with that talk about your season up to this point, started off with a tie for 13th at CIMB, just talk about your play.

**AUSTIN COOK:** Yeah, the two in Malaysia and South Korea, the first one, T-13, I played really well that week in Malaysia. The last round I didn't finish as strong as I would have liked to, but that's golf.

Then we went to Korea and had another decent week. It was a little colder and I didn't play great, but hoping to build on the play from Malaysia.

Vegas, missed the cut, and that was something that I'm not quite used to and it's not something I do very often and I don't look forward to making that a pattern. Hoping I can come this week and play well and get back on the right train.

**Q. The guys who were rookies in the PLAYERS Championship last year, your first opportunity in May and now you've got to go to March and it might be a little more of an adjustment because it was like whatever body of work you might have picked up playing in those conditions is going to change a little bit. First of all, do you look forward to playing that event in March? And how have you been in the past in a high wind, maybe a little bit chilly-situation golf course?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** I am really looking forward to seeing it with rye and we'll have a little bit more control over speeds and moisture level. I think it's going to be very firm and fast just from kind of word of mouth, and courses I've played in the Florida area, wind that time of year. But high winds and firm and fast, it was that way here last year. I do pretty good in the wind because I feel like my ball-striking is solid, so my missed shots don't have as much off spin as a lot of other guys so I can hit the ball low when I need to, I can flight it, I can kind of do the things I need to be able to do to play well in high wind and I think that will actually be an advantage for me.

**Q. Is there a way to describe maybe how you felt going into events at Safeway last year compared to Kapalua, where when you're a rookie, you don't know what to expect and now you're a winner with an exemption?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Say that again?

**Q. Describe how you felt going into Safeway your rookie year and how you felt going into Kapalua a couple months later.**

**AUSTIN COOK:** I didn't play Safeway last year. Jackson was my first event as a tour -- or card-holding member. Definitely a different feel when you walk on the driving range and you see all these guys you looked up to, seeing them win, you're now in the winning category. A little more confidence.

When you're coming on as a rookie, you don't really know a lot of people. That's why I think it's been great for me to have Kip on the bag. He kind of knows everybody and so it's nice when he walks onto the driving range, he'll say something to somebody and I can join in a conversation and get to know a lot more people a lot quicker than I would all by myself.

Then going to Kapalua and you're there with the winners and some of the tops on the tour and just kind of rubbing elbows with them. It really boosted my confidence and I think it just gave me another level of confidence in myself that I can go out there and play good every week.

**Q. Are there any differences in the way you approach preparation to a week and the season overall on the PGA TOUR, compared to the Web.com Tour considering the goal of the Web.com Tour, of the 25 versus here, the goals might be a little different, I guess?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Yeah, I think for me personally, I try and do a little more resting than I did on the Web.com. Web was a lot -- everything's different on the Web, the travel, the courses, the venues. So I try to rest my body a little bit more now than I did. I found out real quick last year that if you push your body, I mean, it's going to fight back.

At the end of the season I know mentally and physically I was really tired, and I think that

kind of had a little bit to do with my play. I'm trying to do a little better job of, I guess, body management, give myself rest when I need it and just listen to what it's saying.

**Q. Do you recall, Austin, what kind of goals -- or if you don't set them, what kind of expectations you had going to start your rookie year last year compared to when you started this year in Malaysia?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Yeah. A win was a goal last year and I still had the goal to get into as many majors as I could. I wanted all four, but as many majors as I could, Rookie of the Year and making it to the Playoffs, or Playoffs/the TOUR Championship.

This year, a lot of the same goals. I still want to win, I want to add more, I want to win twice, I don't want to be satisfied with one. I definitely want to make it to the TOUR Championship and I want to play all four majors.

**Q. Justin and Koepka, for example, when they talk about goals, some of them talk about goals that you should be able to tick off, some that are medium and some that are out there in another galaxy. Are there any as a rookie, did you consider, man, that is lot of work but I'm still going to --**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Yeah. Oh, yeah. Getting into all four majors, you know, I don't know if a rookie has done that, but making it to East Lake, I didn't feel like was an astronomical goal. Rookie of the Year, I felt I had a really good chance to do that. But yeah, if I would have said win 10 times, that would have been, "Okay, really?"

**Q. So what happened at U.S. Open qualifying?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Oh, Lord. I thought Kip was in here. We just didn't play well. We had a chance after nine holes or after 18, but it would have taken about an 8 under in my second 18, and I got to -- I think I got within 4 or 5 of what the number was and it just didn't happen for us that day.

**Q. It was the only one you missed, though?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** It was, yeah.

**Q. Well done.**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Thank you.

**Q. Three out of four's still good.**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Looking on last year, I wouldn't change a thing. It was a great season and a great rookie year.

**Q. How much did playing SECs here help with the winds last year? You're a rookie on enough courses, was it confidence or did it help having some familiarity?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** Yeah, it was definitely beneficial. I didn't quite do my research coming to this event and I forgot that they played two courses. Last year, my wife and I stayed in Mexico an extra day and were coming here on Monday and I wasn't in the Wednesday pro-am, so I was like oh, crap. I had seen Seaside a few times, but I had never seen Plantation. So we played that on Tuesday and just went off of past experiences on the other golf course and it worked out.

**Q. How would you describe your struggle to get a PGA TOUR card, and then how much more did you appreciate finally winning and having the two-year exemption because of what you had to go through?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** I feel like it was going to happen, I just didn't know how long it was going to take me to get the card. My first couple years, the Web.com, I had a card but I finished like 120th or so at Q-School, so I wasn't going to get any starts and that was the year I did the Monday qualifiers. I was close to earning my card that year, I think that was 2015, I was close to getting my card that year as a nonmember. If I would have played better at the Wyndham I would have had a chance to do that. Then the next season, going through the full year of the Web.com, getting to the web finals. And then Hurricane Matthew, I was 27th on the Finals list and Hurricane Matthew canceled that event. That was really tough, felt like kind of the opportunity was ripped away from me. But then that third season on the Web or having a Web card, I knew -- I knew that was the second year that I would play the full tour of the Web and I was kind of more comfortable, knew the courses, had seen them before, knew the people, was just more comfortable with the whole experience of playing Web.com golf. I really felt like it was going to happen that year, and during the middle of the season I kind of hit a six-tournament stretch that propelled me into the top-25 and I was able to stay there the remainder of the season.

But I know when I wasn't on the PGA TOUR and I was kind of watching these guys that I had been growing up playing with getting to the PGA TOUR, I was like, man, I need to hurry up. You see it getting younger and younger that the guys are getting out here. I was getting a little frantic, but I knew that if I just played my game, I would get out here.

I know that my path, a lot of people would take the way that it happened for me. Three, four years it took me to get out here. But I wouldn't change what had happened to me, the years on the Web, because it helped me grow and become a better player and then really prepare me for this moment.

**Q. What's the best thing Tiger told you at Ridgewood?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** I don't know, just, you know, kind of -- we talked about a lot. I would say one of the best pieces of advice is just keep a good, solid team around you, keep people that will keep you in line, in check with the things you need to do to help keep yourself

playing the best golf, whether it's your caddie, he's there, he's helping you week in and week out with your swing, just making sure that you don't kind of slide off of, you know, moves that you're trying to get in your swing. But really just keeping a good team around you that keeps you humble and keeps you driven.

**Q. I'm curious about this, Austin. That's all really interesting. I'm trying to figure out how that conversation even gets started in the middle of a round.**

**AUSTIN COOK:** You know what, I was so nervous in that round. I was more nervous then than I was on Sunday here because I was playing with Tiger. I told Kip on the first tee, I said, "Dude, I haven't been this nervous since I first got in my first PGA TOUR event." I couldn't tell you how that conversation got started, either.

**Q. Did you ask for advice -- not ask for advice, like, "Give me some advice," but a conversation about --**

**AUSTIN COOK:** He was awesome. Honestly, it was like going out with any other guy; hey, where are you from, all the typical first conversations.

**Q. You said that to him?**

**AUSTIN COOK:** No, no. He asked me where I lived, and everybody kind of knows where he lives, those kind of conversations. How are your kids, blah, blah, blah, where did you grow up, those things.

**JOHN BUSH:** Austin, we appreciate your time. Best of luck this week.

**AUSTIN COOK:** Thank you.