

ERIK VAN ROOYEN

NICK PARKER: Hello, everyone. I would like to welcome Erik van Rooyen to the media center.

Erik, just talk to us a little bit about obviously a bit of a homecoming of sorts for you. Your caddie went to Minnesota, you went to Minnesota, met your wife there. What's it like to be back this week?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: It's really special. You know, I've received a ton of text messages from people from around this area, fellow golfers, people that are Gopher fans. We played this golf course a ton when I went to school here. Played the back nine yesterday and all those memories came flashing back, so it's really special for me to be here. And like you said, it's somewhat of a homecoming.

NICK PARKER: Just talk to us a little bit about what shape your game's in coming into this week. T-22 last week at Memorial. How do you feel coming into this week?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Feeling good. There's obviously a sense of comfortability being here. I'm staying with my in-laws this week and they're fantastic, so it's easy.

My game's in good shape. It's been a little bit of an up-and-down stretch ever since we've restarted at the Colonial, but I worked my tail off during the time period where we didn't have any golf, so I'm doing all the right stuff.

Last week was definitely a step in a good direction for me, I thought I played some exceptional golf. I didn't convert all the opportunities I had, but it shows to me that my game's in really good shape, so I'm looking forward to put it to the test this week.

Q. I know this year has been strange for everybody, but being your second run-through the season, how much easier and how much different are things with the familiarity of what you had last year?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah, it's definitely experience. Experience is a big factor, right, with anything we do. I've been around now for a while where I have gained some experience playing against some of the best in the world and really playing golf all around the world. I've seen pretty much everything there is to see. So with it now kind of being the second time around, I'm much more comfortable. Again, like I said, I've seen everything, so I'm in a good place.

Q. How much did last year's top-10 at the PGA really springboard you and kind of

give you that feeling like, okay, I'm going to be able to do this?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah, exactly. It gave me a ton of confidence. It's a really demanding golf course, Bethpage Black. It tests every facet of your game, which a major championship will. I think I proved there that my game can definitely stand up to a test like that, and then you're competing against the best players in the world, finishing top-10, it gives you a ton of confidence.

Q. How different is this course from the one you remembered after the changes that Tom Lehman has made the last couple years?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Well, I've only seen the back nine, I've only played nine holes yesterday, and I'll do the front nine this morning. I'm actually going to play with Tom and Angus Flanagan, the Gopher superstar.

What I could see from the back nine, it's not a ton different. No. 18 is probably the most significant change, the tee box used to be more kind of behind 17th green and you're hitting straightaway towards the water. with the massive landing area, it's somewhat more demanding now of a tee shot, but he's done a good job with maybe adding some length to the golf course, 16 comes to mind, maybe a couple more holes. But all in all, from what I remember as a student here, not much has changed. The greens are relatively big compared to some other courses we play. I think it's going to be -- you're going to see a lot of birdies and a lot of low scores this week.

Q. Have you had any encounters with people these seven weeks, people who own property like next to the course and have put up bleachers or tents to watch the action when people can't actually be on site?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: I haven't actually been in contact with anything like that, but yeah, people come out of their homes. Last week at the Memorial people kind of gathered at their homes throughout the weekend and they would stand around the fence and cheer us on. It's actually quite neat and I've enjoyed it.

Q. Just wondering, looking at especially these last couple years of your career, what is it about the big events that brings out the best in your game from Open championships to the PGA to third at the WGC. Just seems like anytime there's something big, your best game shows up. What is it about you, I guess, where that's the case?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: I don't know. I enjoy the big occasion. Not that these events that we're playing at the moment aren't big, but perhaps there is a tendency to build towards those events, to peak at that time. The goal every week I tee it up is to go and win that golf tournament. Perhaps some of those tougher layouts or setups, perhaps it just suits my game really well.

Q. And then looking at how nice is it to not only come here, but come here at this point in your career where you're on the brink of Tour membership and how you established yourself and now to be able to come here at that point in your career?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah, I think it's the perfect time to come. I really wanted to play last year. Unfortunately, it coincided with the Irish Open on the European Tour, which is a Rolex event, so it's a big event on that side of the pond. But I'm really fortunate to be here this year. I've got a lot more experience under my belt and it really just fit the schedule well. Like you said, I'm on the brink of getting my PGA TOUR card for next season. It's sort of coming towards the end of the year even if that's kind of strange with all the golf we've had off. I think it's great timing.

Q. You were obviously playing well before the break, played well in Mexico and then a couple weeks later everything stops. How much of kind of a momentum killer was the break for you? Secondly, what's been the toughest part for you in terms of when the season did start back up?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: You're spot on, Brian. I was playing some really good golf. A lot of that was building towards Augusta National, my first Masters appearance. I played -- I think I shot 4 under on the front nine of THE PLAYERS and then 4 over, but I still felt like I played well, and obviously Mexico comes to mind.

So yeah, it was definitely, it felt like the momentum all of a sudden came to quite a sudden stop and it was unfortunate, but life's going to throw you curveballs. And I know how to play golf, so I'm sure I'll pick it -- I feel like last week especially was a step in the right direction for me momentum-wise.

Sorry, what was the second part of your question?

Q. Just what the challenge has been since you came back. Talked about no fans being an adjustment, other elements. What's been the hardest thing for you, I guess?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah, if I look back, ever since I turned pro, we try and take off a couple weeks over Christmas and usually I would start back up with the South African Open at home, and if I look back, it's probably something I've got to get better with, but I've always been kind of a slow starter getting back into the season. I don't know if it's a question of shaking off rust or just getting sort of stuck in with tournament golf again. It's definitely different playing competitive golf than playing a social round with your friends, we all know that.

I'm definitely a bit of a slow starter and I think that's the case again now since we started back up with Colonial, but what's wonderful about all these events, I think I've learnt a little bit every single time, even if it is something that I learnt in the past. Learning how to deal with my own expectations, learning how to play under the pressure of tournament golf, et cetera.

So I can see that common theme, but there's also a common theme of me finding my form a few events into it and playing some really good golf, so I started seeing that last week.

Q. Lastly, just a follow-up, what do you make of what Bryson's been doing in terms of you bulking up and distance? Obviously it's been a popular topic and curious to hear your thoughts, if that's something you would ever pursue?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: First off, you know, I've got a ton of respect for Bryson for what he's done, for his incredible level of -- levels of conviction to make such a big change. And I think Bryson was top-10 in the world. He is again, I think, but when he made these changes, you're one of the best players in the world, he had five PGA TOUR victories under his belt, your career is going this way and he goes ahead and changes his body in such a short space of time to gain more distance. I've got a lot of respect for him for what he's done.

Will his body hold up? I don't know, it's not me doing all that heavy lifting. I certainly do work out myself, but will I do the same thing he's done? I don't think so. Myself and my coach and my strength and conditioning coach, we certainly have a plan in place. If I look at myself the last two, three years, I've definitely gained probably six, seven yards already. And it's not something that's on the forefront of my mind, trying to gain another 30 yards, but I think as I get better and as my swing mechanics improve, I'll definitely gain maybe a couple more. But no, I don't think I'll do something as drastic as Bryson has done.

Q. We talked about the Tour membership and being on the cusp of that. You've played golf all over the world. Has PGA TOUR membership been a long-term goal of yours and what does it feel like to be on the precipice of it?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: I think it's been a goal since I was a kid, reason being you see the best players in the world playing out here. It's not so much a goal being a full-time PGA TOUR player as it is a goal of wanting to compete against the best in the world. However, the best in the world play here. So that's why I want to get my PGA TOUR card.

We also live here now. My wife's from Minneapolis, from here, so we live in the U.S., we want to raise our family here, so I think long term it just makes sense. But again, I see myself as one of the best players in the world and I want to compete on that level and that means I'll play here. It's definitely a goal of mine. It's been on my mind throughout these last few months, but it will take care of itself. I know that I'm a good enough player, so if I put the scores up, it's going to happen.

Q. And then you're playing with Angus and Tom it sounds like today.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Yeah.

Q. Is there a bit of, between you guys, even Alex, is there a bit of a Gopher fraternity, I guess?

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Maybe not a sort of fraternity of sorts, but I played with Angus for the first time yesterday, it was a ton of fun. Thomas Longbella, his teammate, is caddying for him. It's good fun to reminisce about the days we were there and to talk about the stuff they're doing now. You know, I'm 30 years old, but I still feel like I'm 21 years old. It's really fun to connect with them. I'm looking forward to it.

I've never played with Tom Lehman, so I'm looking forward to playing with him today. And then myself and Angus, it's almost a couple generations of Gopher golfers that will play together, so I'm looking forward to it.

NICK PARKER: Well, thank you so much for joining us, Erik. Best of luck this week and we'll see you soon.

ERIK VAN ROOYEN: Thank you, guys. Cheers.