

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
August 12, 2020



PAUL CASEY

MARK WILLIAMS: We'll jump straight into it and welcome Paul Casey to the virtual interview room here at the Wyndham Championship.

Paul, you're coming in off your best finish of the season obviously, a T-2 finish at the PGA Championship last week, congratulations on that. You must be riding a little bit of confidence coming in here. You played this event last year obviously trying to keep your position in the Wyndham Rewards. A little different position for you this year. Talk about coming in here off some good form.

PAUL CASEY: Yeah, thank you. Yeah, last week was great. Yeah, confidence is good. I was so far down in the FedEx rankings that I called Mark Brazil last week and said I would be here, kind of thinking I would still be sort of chasing just to make sure I was getting into Northern Trust, and here I am having made a big jump last week up probably 50-plus spots, 60-plus spots probably after that great result.

So I said I was coming, so I'm here. So I could probably do with a week off because I played four or five in a row, but I'm going to play a few more hopefully after this in a row as well.

This is a great tournament. Wyndham has been good to me in the past and yeah, so I'm here to support it and do my best and try to, you know, to be honest, Mark, try to get up there. I want to get to Atlanta, that's obviously the big goal. So I've still got a bit of a ways to go, so some points this week would be very, very helpful.

MARK WILLIAMS: That was going to be my next question before we take some from others. You did mention you jumped from 121 to 54th, so that's quite an improvement in the rankings, but the last five consecutive seasons you've advanced to East Lake and you're looking to do it for the sixth season as you mentioned. Can you just talk about how would that sit in your career? That's a pretty decent display of consistency and achievement. How do you rate that reaching East Lake six seasons in a row?

PAUL CASEY: Yeah, I rate it highly. In fact, I was the oldest guy last year as well. Honestly, I take pride in that. The fact I'm old enough to be Collin Morikawa's dad is kind of scary, and true.

I like it. I kind of wear it as a badge of honor. Having missed that big chunk of the season where I typically play some of my best golf like my two wins at Valspar the last two seasons, I tend to make an awful lot of FedEx points in the springtime and missing that this year as everybody else obviously has.

But I was a long way down and I was slow to kind of get going when we restarted the season. So, yeah, I would love to keep that streak going, I really would. I'm proud of that streak. I've done it before, I've come from kind of the outside and made my way in. I think the challenge now is the fact -- another reason for being here this week, we've only now got two Playoff events before the TOUR Championship, so you've really got to kind of make hay while you can. I obviously know Boston well, I've played it well. I think I've been runner-up there before. Olympia Fields, I don't remember it very well. Is that where Jim Furyk won?

MARK WILLIAMS: Yeah, in 2003, yep.

PAUL CASEY: So it was one of my first major championships, so I'm kind of unfamiliar with it, to be honest.

But yeah, I'm excited to really just, yeah, I just really want to make it to East Lake. Like you've got no chance of winning if you're not there, plain and simple. So screw all the keeping the streaks going, I just want to be there because I want a chance to win it because I think I can, I play East Lake well. You've got to be in it to win it.

Q. Yeah, hey, Paul, good playing at Harding Park there. Was wondering, there's so much talk about guys who hit it a long way and there was a lot of talk about Bryson's weight gain and all that stuff, but of course Collin Morikawa was the guy who ended up winning last week. He's a multiple winner this year, Brendon Todd is a multiple winner this year, and Webb Simpson, who was sitting there right before you, is a multiple winner this year. What does it say sort of about the game right now if you could have three guys like that, none of them in the top-100 in driving distance, still win multiple times in a season out here?

PAUL CASEY: It just shows, as you know, there's more than one way to skin a cat. I'm not a massive stats guy, so you would have to look them up and clarify this, but Collin's performance on the greens last week is really where he kind of dominated. I think he was like eight shots gained to the field or something in strokes gained putting. He obviously wasn't to shabby the rest of the game because there were people saying the rough was patchy. Rubbish, the rough was gnarly. So Collin still hit the ball beautifully to put himself in that position as shown by his great tee shot on 16.

You're right, length isn't -- it isn't everything in our game, but it certainly is becoming the trend in the way guys attack golf courses now. It's just going to be much harder if you're -- you know, actually, I don't think I've played with Collin, so I can't comment on his game. I've obviously played with Toddy and Webby a lot. In order for those guys to perform at the highest level, they almost kind of have to be flawless in everything else they do brilliantly. They've got sort of no way of bailing themselves out. If you get someone who's a hell of a ball-striker, if they have a slightly off day on the putting green or something like that, they can probably still compete.

I think my point being, yeah, it's amazing what they do, but I think you're going to see fewer

and fewer of those kinds of guys on Tour. There's just going to be the sort of more firepower you have, just the greater your chance of being up there week in and week out.

Q. As a quick follow-up, you've said that you're peaking at age 40, which it certainly looks like that, that you are. Do you think -- you've not lost any distance, but now you're actually -- you actually know how to play the game more than you ever did?

PAUL CASEY: I mean, nobody commented on my weight gain, I've gained five pounds in the lockdown. Probably a different diet to Bryson.

What was the question?

Q. Have you not lost any distance at all, but you basically learned how to play the game better than you ever have?

PAUL CASEY: Yeah, I think -- look, I don't -- yeah, my knowledge of how to manage my own game is better than it's ever been. My knowledge of how to manage my -- manage golf courses and attack them and my strategy is always getting better and better. You know, I don't actively pursue distance, it's not anything I've ever done, but I've always worked incredibly hard on the fitness. Not too much where I'm kind of injured, but I take care of myself.

And I was happy with the fact that I was kind of hanging with Brooks for some of the round on Sunday. I'm certainly one of the longer guys on Tour, certainly for my age I would be considered long, I guess. If I didn't have the length I have currently, I would probably be pursuing it. It's a culmination of things, Cam. Probably the management is the thing which is why I'm playing probably the level of golf I'm playing. Yeah, management of myself, management of my own golf game.

Q. Paul, after Sunday's round I asked you about how comfortable you felt and you said that you did a lot of thinking during the break. Just wondering if you could elaborate about that and also what you meant by saying you're kind of in the sweet spot right now?

PAUL CASEY: They probably go hand in hand, to be honest. When I say I'm kind of in a sweet spot, I mean I'm in a place where I'm thoroughly enjoying my golf, I'm still playing great golf, I enjoy it, I don't feel any pressure to prove anything to anyone. I'm incredibly demanding of myself, what I expect and the goals that I set, and that's more than enough kind of pressure for me.

And the period that I had at home, which, you know, I've never had that opportunity to kind of sit back and sort of give the body a break and give the mind a break. Sometimes I kind of -- I love this game, but it can wear on you a little bit, everything that goes along with it. I really regained my kind of love for it, enjoy playing social golf. And again, I guess what I've just said, realized I have nothing to kind of prove, which is a very kind of freeing, positive

place to be. I think that showed on the golf course last week.

Q. Just wanted to ask you quickly the news about Augusta today, obviously no fans this year, just how that changes that tournament. Obviously it's something nobody's experienced in that way, but curious what your thoughts are on that and how you think it will impact the event?

PAUL CASEY: Yeah, I've only just started thinking about it. Do we even know, are family members allowed? Does anybody know?

Q. Yeah, that wasn't clear.

PAUL CASEY: Because I don't know who's out there. Members and maybe our family members? I don't know what's going on.

Q. I don't think it's even members.

PAUL CASEY: I don't know. It's going to be surreal. I heard somebody mention are they going to pipe in roars, mentioned somewhere on the practice ground early.

Part of me is very much looking forward to it and part of me is kind of, I don't know. It's so special that yeah, will it be -- what will it be like? I don't know. What will the experience be like? It's the one place I truly feel like the players are rock stars. You stand on that first tee and everybody pays attention to the golfers that are in front of them and you feel very, very special as a player playing there. That's clearly not going to be the case this year. It's special to play there, the golf course is amazing, but I don't know what to think yet, I honestly don't. It might be quiet, it might be eerie, I don't know.

Q. Just a quick follow to that, you obviously experienced it this week at Harding Park, the first major, which is different than -- no disrespect to other tournaments, but just your thoughts after having gone through that in a major championship and any impact that that may or may not have had?

PAUL CASEY: That was -- Harding Park was the quietest event I've played so far, which again is slightly strange being a major because all the other events I've played on the PGA TOUR, there have been residences around the golf course, houses around the golf course or apartments and little groups, pockets of people turning out and cheering and waving flags and having a good time, barbecue and whatever, and there was nothing at Harding Park, obviously because of the location.

So it was a very, again, a very eerie kind of experience. No reaction on the first tee when your name is called, very strange. But it did feel -- you know, the simple things, the golf course that we were presented and the setup and everybody's acute kind of focus, we fully understood that it was a major and the pressure built, which was great.

You know, hats off to everybody who made last week happen. It still sort of lacks something, though, because you miss that kind of -- that true energy, the pressure of the first tee or the energy of the first tee and the pressure coming down the stretch just can't be compared to what I've experienced for the last 20 years. It's just not the same.

Q. Hey, Paul, I just have a quick question about the golf course and specifically your short iron play. With Sedgefield being a Donald Ross design and the course featuring his small and undulating greens, I was wondering for you specifically, what are the keys to accurate short iron play and distance control specifically around this golf course?

PAUL CASEY: For a lot of it, the main thing I always focus on here is quite often spin control. I mean, assuming guys have done their homework and know how far they hit their clubs, which hopefully everybody knows, I think the guys who come out on top this week are the guys who can really control distances down to a yard or two and even shape the golf ball with those wedges just a yard or two here and there, because this architecture around here is so beautiful, but if you get on the wrong side of things, it just makes it infinitely more difficult once you get to the putting green.

So precise, controlled irons, to be honest, all the way through the bag. But as you said, a lot of short irons are really going to be what sort of separates the guys at the top from the bottom. You know, I've never seen this golf course in this good of shape. It's always in good shape, but it's impeccable this year. The greens are fast, there's a lot of grain.

Again, it's just positioning. That's why we saw -- it's probably never talked about enough, but to me Tiger has been the greatest that I've seen of positioning the golf ball with approach shots to give himself the easiest possible putt that he can. That was something that would be really sort of, if somebody understands how to get the golf ball -- has the ability to get the golf ball on the straight and uphill as often as possible, then the pressure's off around this golf course. It's a difficult task.

Keys to doing it? A lot of off-camber sidehill lies around here, so maintain posture, maintaining height through the swing so you don't fat or thin it, that's probably one of the keys.

MARK WILLIAMS: Paul, that's it. We appreciate you coming in and making the time and sharing your thoughts. Good luck this week.

PAUL CASEY: Thanks, mate.