

**PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW**  
**August 12, 2020**



**ZACH JOHNSON**

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**DOUG MILNE:** Like to welcome a very special guest to the virtual interview room this week here at the Wyndham Championship, the 2020 Payne Stewart Award presented by Southern Company.

Zach, congratulations. I can't think of anyone more deserving of the award than yourself. The award started the year after the passing of Payne and it's annually gone to someone who shares the same type of values, and between your character, sportsmanship and charitable endeavors, we couldn't think of anybody more deserving than you.

With that said, just a few comments on receiving this year's award.

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Sure. I would argue with you, Doug, that there's others worthy, other contemporaries and peers of mine that might be worthy, but that aside, I am beyond honored. I will never forget the moment when Chelsea, Aaron and Tracey filled me in on the news that I would be the honoree this year.

And I say that because, you know, I've always dreamt of winning golf tournaments. I've always -- as a kid you have this five-footer to win whatever event it may be. You know, some of those have been realized, but I can sit here completely being honest and say since my rookie year when I saw the event at East Lake, I'm like, this is a dream right here. I didn't necessarily believe or think it would be realized, but this is a dream. I just -- I feel like this is what golf's all about, this is certainly what the PGA Tour and professional golf is all about.

I've been a -- it's pretty documented that I'm a massive fan of the Stewarts, but specifically Payne and certainly how he lived his life. So to honor him and keep his fantastic family legacy going, I applaud the Southern Company. It's part of their legacy as a company certainly now. So to just be, you know, one of those honorees, it's hard to put into words.

I just think of the many people along the way that have been with me since day one and I think of, you know, certainly again what it means to play proper golf inside the ropes and then utilize the game of golf outside the ropes. I am humbled.

**DOUG MILNE:** Okay. Well, we know you are a busy man today, so we won't take much of your time. We'll take a few questions.

**Q. Zach, thanks for doing this. Obviously you heard the news today, no fans at Augusta for the Masters. Can you imagine going back to 2007, what it would have been like to have no fans there, and what did they do for you when you were holding on and striving for that title?**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Yeah, I really can't fathom it, but that being said, I can't fathom not having the Masters tournament this year. It's unfortunate. I, like my peers -- I don't like to speak for them, but I guarantee you they'd say specifically Thursday through Sunday, we would love to have fans out there. There's an entertainment value in our product, in our game, in our sport that's immense and it's fun knowing there's energy out there. You want that energy.

Specifically in 2007, yeah, I felt like I was being pushed with high energy by the fans. Granted, I had, you know, the greatest player of the modern era two groups behind me pushing me as well, but I felt it on 13, 14 all the way down the stretch. That putt on 16 I made, you can't really replicate that and you can't put -- it's hard to measure.

That's the beauty of our sport is that it's very relatable. They can play the same game we play with the same equipment essentially on the same facilities that we play, so the relation there with the fans is much more intimate and I want it back sooner than later.

**Q. I just have a question about the golf course and short irons. So Sedgefield Country Club is a Donald Ross original and the golf course features Ross' signature small and undulating greens which require accuracy. Just personally for you, what are keys to accurate short iron play and distance control specifically on this golf course?**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Yeah, this one's -- this one could not be more cliché golf. I remember competing here in I think it was a Nike event. I'm dating myself now, but it was way back when. You have to hit fairways here. If you want to have loft in your hand, have those wedges in your hand, out of the rough there's minimal to no control because the greens are Bermuda, they are firm and they will not hold unless you have spin out of the fairway.

So I don't want to say it's a first shot golf course, but man, that first shot is crucial. You can still make pars pretty easily if you hit the fairway. I think the emphasis for me is going to be more fairway. And after that, yeah, there's some loft. There's a couple par 5s that are gettable, but it seems like on every one wedge hole there's a really, really good par 3 and a couple holes you've got to really step up and hit some quality shots.

So I love it. It's old-school, hit the fairway, stay below the hole, everything you would want out of a tournament. And usually we see, I mean as far as stats have said here, I kind of looked at them, the best ball-striker typically rises to the top, or at least one of them.

**Q. Zach, you say that your fondness for Payne Stewart is well documented. I don't know it too well. Can you share a little bit of that for me?**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Yeah, no. I mean, documented in the sense that, well, the question -- the question you may get from somebody, anybody, a fan, a media type, "Hey, what's your dream foursome?"

I've always said that it's my dad, because it's my dad, Ben Hogan, because it's Ben Hogan, and then Payne Stewart for me would be my fourth. And I say that in complete admiration. a Midwest guy kind of like myself, but more so because, well, how he played the game. I felt like he's kind of a grinder. His best golf came in the most trying and difficult of circumstances, two-time Open champion, PGA champion, Ryder Cup mainstay for the most part. So execution down the stretch in difficult circumstances seem to be an area he flourished. I love that.

But taking the golf aside, I love the fact that he understood what golf was all about. He made it basically about this award, a high character individual, a very giving charitable guy, and then obviously a guy that lived inside the ropes with high integrity, and outside the ropes, with sportsmanship. I love everything about that. I just think that's what this game's about, and if you fully understand that, you can use the game to serve and help others. Payne did that. I love the fact that his faith was paramount, you know, and you could tell that he loved the Lord and he loved his family day in, day out based on talking to his contemporaries, and actually meeting his family, it was beyond evident that that's how he lived.

**Q. There's a video out there of you finding this out today.**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Great, that's funny.

**Q. What did you think you were getting a call about? Can you give a little back story?**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Yeah, I can. My manager said, and he did a good job, grouped two ZOOM calls together and I can knock them out in 30, 40 minutes. I remember we had some friends in town so we were hanging out with some friends and I had to step aside. So I thought it was just another interview about the Ryder Cup because it was probably three, four weeks ago and somebody wanted to get my reaction to, you know, what was going on and next year and that kind of thing. I thought, okay, whatever, I'll be happy to do it.

My wife comes into the bedroom at the desk there and she's like, "I just need a break, I'm just going to sit here and just watch." I'm like, that's fine, it's kind of weird but that's okay.

I got on, and I struggled getting on but she helped me get on. Next thing I know, I recognize him, I certainly recognize her, I was like that's Aaron, that's Chelsea, and I'm like, oh, my gosh, there's Tracey.

At that point it dawned on me that I'm not doing a Ryder Cup interview, this is a little more heavy than that for me and that's when the emotion flooded. Those that know me well, whether it's my foundation board, certainly my family, my team of coaches, anybody that's been associated with me in the game of golf know that I've always held this trophy in the most extreme and high of regards. I just think it is one of the coolest things on the PGA TOUR. I love everything about it.

**Q. Hi there, Zach, from Iowa. How are you doing?**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** I'm all right, buddy. Hope you guys are hanging in there. That was brutal.

**Q. Yeah, there's still like a quarter million folks without power up here. Livelihoods affected, but not lives lost and that's the important thing.**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Amen.

**Q. Thanks for asking about that. I suppose there's a continuing of irony in asking a humble man what he's proud of, but I'm going to do that. Away from the course or at least course adjacent, this is what has you here and being honored with the Payne Stewart Award. What comes to mind, whether it's the foundation work or just how you try to carry yourself away from the course day to day? You do have to be proud to be representative of that in some ways, so maybe just describe that a little bit.**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Well, yeah, I think if I do have pride, which I do, I think there's -- it can have a negative connotation, but the positive side of pride, the pride that I have comes from a lot of the things that I've been blessed with. I mean, I'm proud that I'm from where I am from, not just because I'm talking to you, but there seems to be great values and ideals out of that state, specifically my hometown in Cedar Rapids. I love the fact of that. And I'm proud of the fact that my parents showed me the proper way to live and work, go about life as a parent, as a husband, et cetera.

I'm proud of the fact that I was able to put the work into the opportunities I was given in this game of golf. I take all of that -- I think the thing that I'm most proud about -- well, I shouldn't say that. One of the other things I'm most proud about, just the people I've been associated with. I cannot stress that enough. This award highlighted immediately just who I've been associated with in the game of golf and in life. I mean, whether it's, you know, my team of coaches, being an ambassador of great sponsored companies here that I have, and there's so many individuals along the way, I wouldn't know where to start and end.

But obviously I'm proud of my family. I'm proud that I've got an unbelievable wife with unbelievable kids. I think this award, it brings up, and it should, it should highlight the legacy of Payne and the Stuart family without question. For me, it makes me dwell on, embrace, fully understand and highlight the fact that, you know what, my true legacy is my family, too. If I can live with those three pillars of this award, character, charity and sportsmanship, showcase that to our kids, then I'm probably doing something right.

So that's where my pride probably starts and ends. I know it's a long-winded question, but that's what I'm most proud about. Yeah, I want to win more trophies. Yes, I want to continue to compete and, you know, hone my craft. But at the end of the day, it's the big picture. This award certainly gets your mind right in that regard.

**Q. A very golffy question, though, in the context of Webb and Brendon and Collin all winning multiple times this year and being outside the top 100 in driving distance, do guys who maybe aren't the longest take pride in beating longer hitters or do they get tired of being known as guys who aren't the longest and talking about distance?**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Right. I don't know if there's pride there. I haven't really had -- discussed it with them necessarily, but if anything, it just shows that, you know what, good, consistent quality golf, hitting fairways, hitting greens and making a few putts every now and again is still very effective in this modern day of bombing of the ball. We've seen that in numerous venues, too. It's not just a course like last week Harding Park where the rough's brutal. We've seen it at Hilton Head with Webb, we've seen it at a number of our golf courses.

If anything, for me it's motivational. I played with all those guys you mentioned and that's, you know, it's impressive. It's impressive what those individuals have done this year and will probably continue to do. Granted, they're really, really, good, there's not many flaws there.

I go back to one of my models in the game and that's Jim Furyk. He's 50 now and there's absolutely no reason why he can't still keep winning. He and I are very similar in how we approach it, I think, as far as plotting our way around the golf course and game planning and that sort of thing. Unfortunately, he's more of a contemporary than those other guys to me.

I don't know if it's pride. I think, again, you just know that your golf's good enough, whatever you have in your golf bag, your arsenal's still good enough to go out there, compete and give yourself a chance to win on Sunday.

**Q. Hey, Zach. Congrats on this horn. I just have two things for you. First, how do you think no spectators would have impacted Tiger's win last year at the Masters, good or bad, or just the whole scene?**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Yeah, wow, that's a really difficult question. And I'm not dodging it. It is a hypothetical, we know that.

I can say this: When it comes to Tiger Woods, when it comes to his mark in the game, you're going to think about the many times that you see a fist pump, that you see some sort of emotional reaction and that is the beauty of Tiger Woods, too. I mean, it's real, it's genuine and that's how he competes.

So my guess is it's fueled on by the fans because he is the draw each and every week, rightfully so. I love it. I mean, I love watching it. I remember being down there towards the scoring area and seeing that swarm and then a tunnel forming that was, you know, essentially like nothing I've ever seen.

Now, I say all that. Could he still have won last year? Absolutely. I mean, we're talking about Tiger Woods. Now, it would have been different because that is a moment in sports that a lot of us will not ever, ever forget, especially if you were there, but even if you watched

on television you're never going to forget that. Two years, a year and a half prior to that he was wondering if he still would be able to compete again. It is one of the best comeback stories that, that April back in 2019, I will never forget.

**Q. Just quickly, I don't know how much you've discussed this with your peers, but what will make you comfortable to have even any, just a small amount of fans come back like we might have had at the Memorial say? If that's the first step back, what's it going to take?**

**ZACH JOHNSON:** I don't know. I'm not smart enough to know that. What I do know is that the PGA TOUR, specifically Jay and his colleagues and our constituents, whether it's the health constituents or just the internal executives of the Tour, our board, that kind of thing, they're doing everything to get fans back out there.

But we do know that at this point in this world, specifically in this country, that there's an element of uncertainty and we've got to be -- we've got to do it smart, we've got to make the right approach. Obviously, this is the right approach right now.

Now, I hope it's sooner than later like everybody. I guess the beauty of the game is that there's still great entertainment and value when you can watch it on television. I mean, there is. I love it. I don't mind watching it and I know the amount of people whether I know them -- fans, friends, whomever -- have said, man, I'm just so glad live sports is back on television. I get that all the time.

And it is, it's different, it's different each and every week because there's not that many spectators. I say that, but there's been a couple venues where it's lined with homes and next thin you know you've got a grandstand over here and a tent over there, but they're social distancing and doing it the right way off property. This week it could be similar here in Greensboro.

I want it flooded with people, I think we all do, but I also want to make -- I want to listen to the experts and I'm not one of them.

**DOUG MILNE:** Okay. Well, Zach, September 2nd is the big award ceremony, the TOUR Championship. Again, well deserved, congratulations on the honor. Have a great week this week and we appreciate your time as always.

**ZACH JOHNSON:** Yeah, thank you, Doug. Appreciate you all.