

ROUND 1 INTERVIEW
November 19, 2020



ZACH JOHNSON (-4)

Q. Zach, it has to be satisfying for you to finally get off to a good start at this tournament in your hometown like this. I think it's the lowest score you ever shot in the opening round.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I'm not sure. Granted, this is the 11th RSM Classic Championship that I've participated in.

Yeah, today was brutal. I mean, I don't know what other guys are saying, but I played really, really, really good. I mean, I had opportunities that I didn't even capitalize on, but I made some. I made two bogeys from the middle of the fairway straight into the wind, which you're going to do. It was just very difficult, difficult to judge distance, trajectory. Is the wind at noon, is it at 1:00, is it at 11:00, all that was trying.

Yeah, it was survival, a short game test. Knowing where to miss it, knowing where kind of not to hit it was obviously key. And then there's holes you could take advantage of.

Q. This has kind of been trending if you look at your record. I mean, you don't have a win, but you haven't missed a cut in the wraparound portion of the schedule, and once again, you're putting well. You had 96 feet of putts in this round.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, that is good to know because I think last week I had 96 feet of putts for four days.

I worked hard on my putting the last three days. Actually was going to try something, I didn't try it, but I think it kind of helped. It was kind of a training aid.

Today was just hard. You had to commit to a line. Obviously speed was the utmost. Putting was the hardest part today and as the day went on, the wind got worse. Early on I actually made a few putts, like you mentioned, and that obviously kept the momentum going.

Yeah, my game's been trending. What that means, I've done this enough to know that I've been confident, maybe even overconfident and it's gone south, or I've been pretty steady and content with where I'm at and things can happen. That's kind of where I'm at right now. Hopefully I keep doing it, control my ball, doing everything good. It's not great, but I'm not so sure it needs to be.

Q. You mentioned something -- (inaudible.)

ZACH JOHNSON: This is going to sound mundane, but I was behind the cut line

substantially and I put a Sharpie line on a golf ball to line it up and kind of committed to that and I made it. The last six holes I made the cut. I birdied 18, 17, 15 and maybe 13 or 14 to get -- anyway, I've been struggling on getting just set into my line and trusting that.

So I'm like Monday at my house I fiddled with it. Oh, something different. So Tuesday and Wednesday, yesterday in the pro-am, I'm like, I'm doing it. I got done with my round yesterday, grabbed a bite, went to Stewart Cink's little 600 career starts thing, ate a cupcake, came back out on the putting green and said no, I'm not doing it. But it was one of those things that it kind of -- like I like to use a chalk line. I see a parallel line, use the face, the line is parallel, whatever, not perpendicular. I'm not -- (inaudible) It certainly didn't hurt. It freed me up today.

Q. You're still using the same putter, though, right?

ZACH JOHNSON: I'm using a PXG putter. I have since December.

Q. So like a year?

ZACH JOHNSON: Almost a year. It's a blade putter. I think my speed is better. (Inaudible.)

Q. Zach, can I ask you a quick Ryder Cup one? Kind of out of left field a little bit. I'm just curious, this kind of stutter step, obviously you're delaying a year, it changes your plan to kind of peak at the right moments. Do you view that as positive, is it negative, is it neutral?

ZACH JOHNSON: We've kind of discussed that. We're not going to get lazy on discussion, we're not going to get overly hyped up though and try to reinvent the wheel, either. I think Steve has done a great job of kind of keeping everything kind of where it needs to be. I mean, for me, I want to play on the team. Now I say that, is that farfetched? I don't know. I kind of know what it takes. If my game starts trending and my back gets younger, maybe I can, you know, play.

From a strategic standpoint, captaincy standpoint, if there is any negatives, I feel like we kind of discussed them and we're going to try to turn them into positives. And the players that we've discussed, certainly the vice captains are all in agreement. The players that we talked to get it. They've been -- well, the ones that I've talked to I feel like have been (inaudible) so it's good.

Q. How often do you talk to Steve about the Ryder Cup?

ZACH JOHNSON: As the last -- since the postponement, I think maximum twice, maybe three times. But those were heavy discussions, like okay, we changed this, we altered this for this year. Are we going to keep it, maintain it? And we're conversing with a couple different -- well, guys, a group of individuals.

Q. Thanks, Zach.

ZACH JOHNSON: You know what, if I'm going to get really specific, I would say -- this will sound bizarre, but it was Thursday at PLAYERS, Bay Hill was the week before, I played so good. I drove it like that and I was using the wrong driver and PXG gave -- I might have had it seven, eight, nine months, I just never really gave it a lot of opportunity.

No, that's not true, I probably had it four, five months and I'm like screw it, THE PLAYERS Championship, I put it in play Tuesday. I played with Jim Furyk Monday and I went out and played nine holes Tuesday, nine holes Wednesday, and I was like it's pretty good. We played 18 holes on Thursday, I missed one fairway and it was 18 and it went into the pine straw three feet, which isn't a bad tee shot. Okay, here we go. The driver was the thing that was missing.

Q. Zach, I apologize not having the numbers in front of me, but I think this would probably rank as one of your better starts?

ZACH JOHNSON: That's what another gentleman told me, too. Yeah, I would imagine, I mean, I don't know as far as numbers go, but as far as like where I'm sitting based on conditions, yes, yes.

Q. I think everyone wants to hear the locals say how hard it was.

ZACH JOHNSON: It was very, very difficult. This is as hard as I've ever played it, without question.

Q. So out of that first -- well, for you it was your back nine, the first four holes on the front nine (inaudible).

ZACH JOHNSON: Very, very trying. I hit a really good tee shot on 1. I almost hit 7-iron, I think it's a hard 7, left pin I could draw it. (Inaudible). That was hard. Right down the middle of the fairway on 2. No. 2's a driver sometimes and 3-wood (inaudible) and I hit driver 7-iron. 7-iron was the right club, I hit a little short, made bogey.

No. 3 was about 190-some yards. At that point it's all based on what kind of gust you get, where you start it, any side spin, the factors are endless there. Solid shot, 30 feet right of the pin. Managed somehow to make a par there.

No. 4 I hit a really good 3-wood down the middle of the fairway and now I'm straight downwind on my second shot to a front pin and I've got a downhill lie. I can't hit a pitching wedge there. If I hit a good 9, it's going over the green. Front bunker I knew was a bad place to be and somehow I made 4.

Q. Why do you think over the years there hasn't been a lot of people (inaudible)?

ZACH JOHNSON: I guess I didn't know that, but I guess it depends on your definition of success, right? You know, first of all, all us guys that play or live here don't always play here. This is -- I mean, I would argue Seaside's probably the best golf course on the Golden Isles. You can argue some other ones, but I think you're wrong, but it's also one of the busiest. Plantation with the redo has now basically gotten to that point, too. Rightfully so. Sea Island Company does it right.

I don't play (inaudible). Now, do I have course knowledge? Absolutely. I've played here 11 years now, 10 and a half. I don't know. Maybe there's pressure of trying to perform in front of others. I don't feel like I have that, certainly not this year because there's no one out there. There's also maybe expectations set. I've played a lot of golf where hey, I love this golf course, game feels pretty good, I should have a good week, and when you have expectations, sometimes that can have an adverse effect. I don't know, I don't know.

Q. Just your level of comfort right now with your game, think about your level of comfort here versus the last couple years coming into this event and where your game right now compares.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I would say my level of comfort is probably 8 and a half or 9., so confidence is there. I feel like I can control my trajectory, I feel like I'm seeing the line I want to start it on. It's just a matter of execution. I think any of my peers would say it just comes down to execution, it's a pretty good thing. But I know I've got to stay -- I've got to stay in the right now. That's kind of where I'm at.

Q. Thanks, Zach.