

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
November 4, 2020



BROOKS KOEPKA

JOHN BUSH: We would like to welcome Brooks Koepka into the virtual interview room here at the Vivint Houston Open. Brooks, you last played this tournament in 2016. If we can get you to talk a little bit about your role as a player-consultant here on our course at Memorial Park.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, it was a lot of fun. Tom obviously I think did a great job with this place. From the moment we kind of sat down at Floridian to kind of discuss some things and what I thought would be good in a golf course and he had his ideas and I had mine and combined them and this is what you get. I think it's a very tough golf course. You know, with the rough being the way it is, you've got to put the ball in the fairway and then it's a second-shot golf course. You really have to putt a good strike on the ball, being able to spin it, be good with your long irons, there's quite a few long holes. But at the same time it makes it quite fun if you do miss the green because you have so many options. You could putt it, you could bump-and-run it, you could flop it. It really gives the player a lot of options where I feel like you're never quite out of it.

JOHN BUSH: You're making just your second start of the 2020-2021 season. How's your health first of all and the state of your game?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I feel great, I feel better than I did even three weeks ago, two weeks ago, whatever I did at Vegas. That's behind me now. I feel as good as ever and just go out and play. Need some reps just because it feels like it's been so long. That's why we're playing this week.

Q. Brooks, you talked a little bit about the redesign. Is there any part of it that now that on site looking at it you're like, oh, wait a minute, that turned out really great? Is there any part that you like better than others?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I think the finishing stretch. Obviously I knew it was going to be fun when you look at the map, I mean we walked around this place, I forget what it was, might have been a year and a half, two years ago when it was just dirt, nothing there. You could see the undulations on the greens. The greens were kind of built up. They had all the dirt basically, all they had to do was lay sod and it was quite interesting. I thought 15, 16, 17 was going to be quite an interesting stretch. 15, I told Tom I really just wanted a short par 3 that was very brutal where if you miss the green you could make double, definitely making bogey. Who knows, maybe even triple if you miss it in the wrong spot.

And then 16, gettable par 5, and 17, I think if they move the tee up, you could drive that green, you could feed it in off the left-hand side if you hit it a cut. It could be really an exciting

finish depending on where they put the tees, how the wind is. You could really lose a lot of shots there or you could make up quite a bit.

Q. Yeah, yeah. I've been calling that Amen Corner there, the Memorial Park version, 15, 16, 17. Do you think it gives you an advantage, Brooks, because you were part of the redesign here?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I mean, I've seen so many different versions of this place from the first I guess architectural designs to basically playing it today. I mean, there's been I don't know how many versions of it, but it's been quite interesting to see the little things change, the subtleties that maybe a lot of people would never notice. It's been fun, I've enjoyed the process, it's been cool just to put my, I guess, hand in something else other than just playing golf, the design -- I'll be honest, I give Tom all the credit. He came up with 99.9 percent of them and I just kind of threw in a couple ideas here and there. He's a hell of an architect, designer, so it was fun to work with him.

Q. Can you talk about your relationship with Jim Crane and what it means for you to be here to help support him in his first tournament at Memorial Park?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I thought when there was talks of this a couple years ago, Jim was saying that he wanted to take over the Houston Open, I thought it was a great idea. With everything they've got going, they're so big in Houston, just the city that they do obviously with the Astros, with his business, it's been -- it's a tournament I always wanted to play to help support him. I feel like we've had a great relationship over the last five years, even coming here the last time we were here going out and just having dinner with him and his family and just sitting, talking about different things, business to what's going on with the Astros. It's just life advice and I think it's -- it's been very, very good for me and hopefully it's been enjoyable for him. I know I've enjoyed it getting to know him and his family.

This was always going to be on the schedule for me just to support him, everything he's done and I'm looking forward to this week.

Q. What was it like for you to watch his baseball team make a run there in the playoffs?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, it was interesting. I didn't have much hope there for a minute, but when they got ought to San Diego they made it interesting, that's for sure. Yeah, I enjoy baseball, so I was watching every game. I know we were texting back and forth with Giles when they were on the plane on the way out there, so rooting for him.

Q. You're a workout maniac, workaholic when you're not on the golf course itself. What are you doing to satisfy your work out needs here in Houston?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Just working out at Minute Maid. It's easy, there's no one there, just me and my trainer, maybe one other trainer might be in the building or security or whatever,

but there's nobody there, are which is nice. We can get in and get out, don't have to see anybody, don't have to put ourselves at risk. It's been quite nice. They've got a good facility in there, it's perfect for what we need. It's hard to find places to work out when you're on the road because it's not -- I know we have our trailer that goes around, but I need a little bit more space, more weight, more room to do a lot of things. It's nice to have a place where I've gone before. I've worked out there multiple times, so it's nice to have a place I'm comfortable with.

Q. Have you taken any swings at Minute Maid, any BP?

BROOKS KOEPKA: No, I haven't. I should, though. We're in there, I might as well. I don't know how well Derek throws a wall, but it would be interesting to see. I don't know. It would be fun. I would love to, I would love to go take BP. I'll take BP anywhere. We used to do it with all my buddies up in Boston because Boston would start on a Friday and you would get in on Sunday and we would sneak out to their place at UMass and go play, about 12 of us, that was always a fun week. Your arm would be like hanging from pitching or throwing. By Friday you're like just starting to feel better.

Q. I did want to ask about architecture. Was that something you were interested in before this opportunity arose and what was just your favorite part of kind of building a golf course?

BROOKS KOEPKA: To be honest with you, I had no aspirations of ever being like I want to design golf courses, nothing, but then being asked to do this, it's a really cool idea. Obviously wanted to help Jim out. I think any time you can play a hand in having some opinion on a course that we're going to play out here, I think it's unique, it doesn't happen very often. And it's been cool just to see it evolve. I know this golf course is quite difficult. It's quite long. You'll see some high numbers especially if the wind gets up, it kind of resembles a little bit of a U.S. Open I think some people would say, which I feel like I've done pretty good at.

Q. Talk about the finish. Were there any other things that you wanted to bring to this golf course that maybe you don't see on Tour as often as you would like from a course standpoint?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I think just visually, you look at there's -- I can't remember off the top of my head -- 5 I believe there's a tree that overhangs on the left. It's just interesting when you look at this place of how you visually have to look at it from the tee box and then looking back at it from the fairway, the landing spot, trying to -- my big thing was I didn't like when everything is flat. You look at a lot of these par 5s, especially in the lay up area there might be a little section where it's flat but you've got a little bit of awkward lies sometimes. If you're going to lay it up, it makes that lay up important. Especially if you're going to be in the rough, you've got to control the jumper. Different things like that. The par 3s, I was never a big fan of every par 3 being over 200 yards. I wanted a real short one that's very penalizing, like 175, 195, I think that's fair and the other one you can just throw, which we got almost at

240. But there's different ways to play that hole. You can run it in if you want, you can fly it on the green, there's a hole lot of options but I think having a variety of par 3s is a big thing.

Q. I remember we talked when you were here after I guess getting into the redesign and the thing that struck you, the particular fairway view where you kind of caught the downtown skyline. Can you reflect a little on that? That's very unusual on Tour for all the obvious reasons. Do you remember making that observation, wow, what a cool view? And which fairway is it?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I think it's really neat. Going off No. 1, your first hole of the tournament, I guess now the back nine, but Saturday, Sunday it's a cool view. Looking out there you get to see the skyline of Houston. It's unique because we obviously don't play too many events this close to the downtown area, the actual city, metropolitan area. To have the skyline I think is -- it's cool, it's unique. It's different for us, we don't get to see that. It helps definitely picking out a building.

Q. And I've been long curious about what does it feel like playing without fans? You're going to have some again this week, a couple thousand, certainly not what you're used to. How does that change the way it feels playing golf on the course? Does it feel like a practice round? I know you're playing for money and all of that, but could you weigh in on that a little?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Usually at our practice rounds there's still quite a few people following us, so it's way different. I definitely think the atmosphere isn't there. I noticed it especially at the PGA. Me and my caddie were talking about on the second hole how we were quite amazed just how the atmosphere isn't there. It will be interesting at Augusta next week. I know we've got some fans here this week, which will help make it feel more I guess normal. As players, we become accustomed to having so many people out there watching, cheering. It makes you feel good when you make birdie, eagle, whatever, great par save, great shot, anything. But it definitely is a different feel, it's weird. I'm anxious to have fans back.

Q. It motivates you? You would think a sport like football of course it makes a different because it's action, yours is very cerebral. You're just not quite as pumped maybe as you would be with thousands of people ringing the fairways?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, and it also, too, I think it helps line the fairways a little bit, too. When you see fans down both sides, it really helps define your target where now I don't want to say it's like stepping on a driving range, but it's definitely a wider view. You can see almost everything where sometimes the fans can block out half the bunker depending on where they're at. It makes it a little bit more focus, more challenging, but I'm up for it.

Q. Brooks, two quick ones. What do you want to see from your game this week to let you know you're ready for the Masters?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I mean, I've seen everything I already need to see. I'm physically fine.

You can't judge a player when they're hurt and I've been pretty bad this year. It's one of those things where at the PGA, even though I was struggling through it, my body just wouldn't allow me. I was right there come Sunday, just my body wasn't going to hold up. It's unfortunate, but now it's in a position where everything feels good, everything feels solid and I can actually do what I want to do. I can finally hit the shots that I want to hit, I can hit draws, high draws, low fades, whatever. I feel like I can actually shape the ball and definitely have a lot more confidence now that I can get on my left side.

Q. To think back to the last Masters and what your thoughts were leaving that place after coming so very close to winning, how much do you -- do you go back over the round and say well, if a putt had fallen on 17 or 18 or if something different happened on 12, I guess what do you take from that experience and then bring it forward to this Masters?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I mean, just putting yourself in contention again, that was really the big thing I got out of it. I don't think about the rounds other than when you guys ask me. It's just one of those things where I feel like if I hadn't backed off it on 12, I hit a good shot, just I think we all know that wind swirls quite a bit there. The other big thing is, too, I think Tiger made it look a lot closer than it was. It was one shot but he had a two shot lead coming up the last and all he had to do was make bogey to win and it's a lot easier. He played it where he took double out of play and gave himself a look at par, almost made it. He did everything right. On 16, leaving it on that shelf was kind of a screw up for me, but it is what it is. I played good. There's some weeks we just get beat.

Q. Brooks, I'm sorry, we talk so much about the golf course, but I think it's so fascinating, I was talking to one of the teaching pros who said they pulled mattresses and bicycles, all these other things out of the creek by 2. What's it like to know a municipal golf course, I think you can play for \$21 during the week or something like that you were part of a project that brings a municipal golf course back on the PGA TOUR, which is kind of special for kids, you know, that are never going to get to play Augusta and Pebble and other places.

BROOKS KOEPKA: It's perfect for any fan or anybody that watches us play on the PGA TOUR, they can relate, wow, I've been there in that exact same spot with the same pin, they know the shot that we have in front of us or they're trying to hit. So they feel our pain I guess sometimes where they can be like, wow, that was a hell of a shot. It's much more relatable for the fans and I think that's what makes it so much fun. And obviously this place has been really affordable to play which is nice, because golf sometimes is quite a bit expensive for most people. This driving range, I remember how busy this driving range was. That was the only thing that was open when we came for the redesign. They were just telling me how busy the driving range is all year and to make that like a double decker I think is pretty cool. Just a way to keep people involved in golf in Houston and to have an impact on that I think is special.