



ERNIE ELS

Q. Ernie, welcome to Phoenix Country Club and the Charles Schwab Cup Championship. What are your first impressions of the golf course?

ERNIE ELS: The golf course is in great shape, a wonderful place. I played it on Tuesday, I spent some time here in the evening, it's just fabulous. Kind of an old-school design. You can just see by the history they've got in the club, this course has been here for many years and some really great tournaments have been played here. Looking forward to a good week.

Q. This is the last tournament of 2020. Just evaluate your first year out here on PGA TOUR Champions.

ERNIE ELS: Well, I've got to be satisfied, two wins. I haven't had a win for quite a while before this year anywhere in the world, so it was nice to win again. You know, played pretty good golf, some good scoring. I let a couple slip, a couple of putts here and there could have been a little bit better, but as a rookie to have had the year I've had so far, I'm very satisfied.

Q. Is Tuesday the first day you saw the course?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, my first time here, yeah. I've only played one other time in Phoenix, actually a couple, Grayhawk and TPC, so I've never been downtown actually, so it's nice to see it.

Q. You talked about the course being kind of old style. What are your other impressions of it?

ERNIE ELS: It's just in great shape. The greens staff have done a fabulous job. The greens, every player you ask, these are some of the best greens we've seen all year. Conditions, if conditions are good, you're going to see some good scoring just because of the golf course. It's not overly long, but they've got some doglegs either way. Par 5s are kind of gettable. So it's there, but you've got to be careful. If you go offline, there's a lot of punishment.

Q. Ernie, you're part of a pretty amazing rookie class for seniors. What do you have to say about your fellow rookies?

ERNIE ELS: It's a hell of a class, as you say. There's some really excellent talent, a lot of wins in that group that's coming through this year and even next. So it's going to be -- it's going to get quite competitive here very soon when everybody decides where they're going to play. I see Jim decided to play on the Champions Tour now, he's going to be a huge

factor. KJ, Mike Weir, Rich Beem when he finds his feet, Phil if he decides to play, it will be a big change for us. And there's more to come, so it's going to be exciting in the years to come for the Champions Tour.

Q. Ernie, did you expect to I guess enjoy your time out here as much as maybe you have this year?

ERNIE ELS: Let me tell you, I think I surprised myself. Like a lot of rookies, we weren't quite sure if we're going to play full time or not and I'm really glad that I made that decision early. After my first event of the year in Hawaii, I was sold. I know Hawaii's Hawaii, it doesn't get much better than that, but each and every week it's just been a nice new experience for us, my wife and myself, even me caddie Ricky. Just the way they play out here, the way the players treat each other with respect. We still needle each other like we used to back in the day, but there's a mutual respect out here. When you've made it to the Champions Tour, you've done something right in your career and you should enjoy it.

Q. What's the offseason plans for you?

ERNIE ELS: Well, you know, just try and stay fit, stay at it. At my age if I sit too much, all kinds of things happen in the body, so I've got to keep active and keep it going. I'll work on the game a little bit, but have some fun, try and enjoy Thanksgiving and Christmas. We're not going to go back to South Africa this year for the first time in many years just because of the world situation, so we'll be in Florida. My daughter will come from California and join us, so we'll have some nice family time and get ready for Hawaii.

Q. Ernie, do you have a good first Masters story that you can share with us, your first time there?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I think my rookie year was my first and best. You know, I had a bit of a love-hate relationship with Augusta National. The members and the club, unbelievable people and facility, but the golf course itself, you know, didn't quite go my way.

A good story? There's many of mine. Obviously practicing my putting on the first green or the first hole of the tournament a couple years ago was quite something, but other than that, I played with some great champions there in the past. I remember my first time playing the tournament was paired with Ben Crenshaw and he was kind of a master of Augusta. He showed me my way around the tournament and the golf course in the third round of 1994 and I shot a 67, which is still one of the best rounds I've played around there. Ben was a good mentor for me around there.

Q. What are your expectations for the Masters being in November? What's going to make it different?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I haven't seen the weather report. It's all about the weather report for next week for those guys. If it's a good weather report, you know, a lot, a lot of guys could

win it. If it's not a really good one and it's wet and cold and rainy, the long hitters are really going to benefit. So tell me the weather report, I'll give you my nominations.

Q. Have you ever played it this time of year?

ERNIE ELS: No, I've not. I've played it when it was cold and wet obviously a couple times in April, but never in November. I wouldn't be able to tell you.