

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
June 9, 2021



ERNIE ELS

Q. Ernie Els, your first start here at the American Family Insurance Championship. Your thoughts on being here in Madison this week?

ERNIE ELS: I'm excited to be here. I've played the course twice now. Played it last night and played the pro-am now this morning and I really like it. I love the condition, the condition is probably the best we've seen on tour this year. The greens are running beautiful and the fairways are great.

The golf course is scorable. They've got some long par 5s, shorter par 5s, it's a well-balanced golf course. Hopefully the weather's going to be great. It's been awesome so far. It's almost a little warm, but it's great to be here. I played with Jack, he's the chairman of the company, American Family Insurance, and had a wonderful morning with him. Couldn't be more excited to be here, to be honest.

Q. What had you heard about this event from your fellow players?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I heard it was a good event. I played with Steve Stricker a couple of weeks ago in Tulsa the first two rounds and kind of asked him where to stay and where the nice restaurants are and stuff, so he gave me some info there. So I'm staying downtown.

I just heard from all the guys that this is one of the events you need to be at, people are excited to have us here and they like to come out and watch. So it will be nice to see some people out here and have some excitement.

Q. You're paired with Retief and Mike Weir in the first round. Can you talk a little bit about that pairing?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, seems like I've been playing with Retief almost every week now. I've been drawn with him in the first couple of rounds quite a few events now. Myself and Retief, we go all the way back to when we were junior golfers in South Africa, so we've got a long history together. It's great to spend a lot of time with him again. We were great friends back in the day and we're back to being very good friends again, so it's nice to play with him.

Mike Weir, same thing, known Mike a very long time. He's played really great as of late on the Champions Tour. I've known Mike for over 20 years, Presidents Cups and so forth. He was kind of my partner in a lot of Presidents Cups and we won some points. He's one of my favorite guys out here.

Q. Some of the other players talked about how it's a big course with big greens. Did

you notice that at all?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, yeah, it's a lot different from last week. It's really the opposite course from last week. Last week in Des Moines was very different, very narrow and kind of a little tricky. This one is a little bit more broad, you know where you can go. The greens are quite big, as you say. It's got a lot of slope on them.

But it's a nice broad golf course and it's well defined. You know where you can go and where the trouble is so you can kind of make up your mind, make a decision where you need to be.

But as I say, the really great fun part is that the golf course is in such great condition. The greens staff should get a lot of credit.

Q. On the regular tour everyone is talking, of course, about Brooks Koepka and Bryson DeChambeau. I wanted to know as a former Presidents Cup captain, how would you handle something like that with two guys in the team room who might not get along and what kind of problem could it be for Steve Stricker at the Ryder Cup?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, it's kind of a little awkward here and there, especially what happened last weekend when, you know, people were enticed to kind of really get onto Bryson a little bit. I'm not quite sure what the history is of the two.

You know, we're living in a day and age now where social media is a big thing and I don't know if that's part of the tussle is, who's going to get the most out of the social media thing. That could be a very clever marketing employ by the two of them. But if it's for real it needs to be sorted out, and especially with a Ryder Cup coming up, you know. They could be really good together playing partners, but they've got to like each other a little bit more.

I'm not sure what the history is there, but obviously it's been blowing up a little bit, and obviously what's happened last week. I'm just kind of watching it from the outside like all of you guys. I'm not on that tour that much anymore so I don't really spend much time with those players. There's always been a beef, you know, always been -- not everybody gets along. It's tough to have everybody get along, but it's kind of -- it's kind of new to me to see that unfold the way it is. It's kind of, you know, I don't want to say it's kind of fun to watch, but it's interesting to watch.

Q. Ernie, the world's kind of returning to normal. Does it feel like sports are returning to normal? Do you feel that as a player that it's kind of the new normal maybe?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, it's getting there. I'm not sure if we're ever going to get back to the old normal, but it seems like there's a lot more people watching us play. We've got to still be careful obviously. I mean, I got vaccinated, a lot of people have been vaccinated, so we've got to be really careful still. It is getting back to normalcy as we might have remembered it, but not quite where it used to be, but it's getting there.

In this country just with all the vaccinations and all the medical help that we can have is there. If you look at the rest of the world, they're not quite where the United States of America is, so people have done a really, really good job of getting us to where we are today.

Q. Kind of a different perspective on the camaraderie on the Champions Tour. Seems like with all the relationships you guys have had going back so many years, just what's it like being on this tour kind of playing with each other each week and being around each other going across the country like this?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, obviously our competitive spirit is totally there. The guys do not like playing poorly and the guys out there are working on their games, but we've kind of grew up together. As I just mentioned, Retief, myself, Mike, we've known each other 20, 30, even 40 years in some cases. We know each other, we've been around each other, we've traveled together, in a lot of instances we've helped each other on our games or even personal stuff. Yeah, we had a good bond of guys out here, but make no mistake, when the bell goes, everybody wants to win for themselves. That competitive spirit and drive is totally there each and every player, but we're playing it in I believe in the right spirit.

Q. With two rounds under your belt now, what do you think is either the most challenging hole or part of this golf course?

ERNIE ELS: There's quite a few challenging holes. Driving is -- some of them are at a premium. The 4th hole up the hill is a very good hole. The par 5s, if you can get off to good drives you can attack the second shots. I can reach most of them, maybe not the 6th hole on the front nine, but the back nine seems to give you a little bit more chances for birdies, maybe a little shorter nine, wedges into par 4s and you can reach the par 5s. More action on the back nine, but it's a well-balanced golf course.