



MICHAEL THOMPSON

HALEY PETERSON: We would like to welcome the defending champion, Michael Thompson, to the media room here at the 3M Open.

Michael, welcome back.

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Thank you.

HALEY PETERSON: Can you reflect back on your second PGA TOUR win last year.

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Yeah, it was a magical week. I was putting really nicely, my ball-striking was as good as it had been all year, and just had a really good feel around this golf course. It's my second time being around and just kind of everything went right. Played great, played real smart golf, didn't make too many mistakes, but I think what was key for me that week was my putting. I made a ton of putts, gave myself a ton of chances and just felt very comfortable on the greens. So far, I practiced yesterday and kind of feeling the same way this week, so I'm excited to tee it up.

HALEY PETERSON: Being back on the course, does it bring back certain memories of specific holes, ones that maybe you birdied, or can you walk us through -- I remember No. 16 was a big one, and the finishing hole on 18 in that final round.

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Yeah, absolutely. Actually, one of the first memories I had was all the tee shots on No. 2 actually. That was -- the first time around this golf course, that was a tough tee shot for me, just visually kind of intimidating. One of my goals that week was just I want to hit that fairway every day. I think I hit it three out of the four times, so that was a real kind of positive for me.

Then obviously the bunker shot on 16 on Sunday was incredible. I played the back nine yesterday and tried to recreate the shot and left it like 30 feet short, so put it into perspective how great that shot was for me, just propelled me on to win.

Another big one was going for the green on 18 on Saturday after I hit it in the water off the tee shot and then saving par out of the green-side bunker. That was a huge momentum swing at the end of a day, kind of a struggle in terms of dealing with nerves being back in contention for the first time in a long time. That really kind of helped keep the motivation and keep the confidence level at a high going into Sunday.

So those are probably some of the, I guess, the three biggest takeaways from last year was just accomplishing my goal on No. 2 on the tee shot and then the bunker shot on 16 and

saving par essentially on 18.

HALEY PETERSON: What is it about this course that fits your game so well?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: I kind of -- I guess it has a lot of similarities for me to Arizona golf in terms of you've got to position your ball off the tee. If You can do that, keep it in the fairway, it gives you chances to get it close coming into the greens.

And then I think on the greens, these greens roll so smoothly, the surfaces are so perfect. The grounds crew do such a great job of getting these greens rolling so nicely that for me it's just easy to see lines and read putts.

But the biggest thing from tee to green, it's kind of position golf. You've got to hit it within a certain area off the tee, avoid some bunkers, avoid some water in certain situations, and if you do that, you're going to have great opportunities to get it close.

HALEY PETERSON: Seven years between your first win and the one last year. I hear a lot of players say the second win's almost harder than the first. The first is kind of relieving the pressure, getting to that point proving you can do it. Did you find that second win was harder than the first?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Yeah. I mean, honestly, I didn't know if it would ever come. You believe in yourself and you work hard and we grind every day to try to have that success. It's obviously easy for some guys, but for myself, kind of a journeyman guy, been out here for a long time, just kind of steady, when you get in that situation, the tendency is to put a lot of pressure on yourself to try to close out the tournament, to win. It was just -- it was just a special moment.

Going through that struggle over seven years makes the win even more special and more important to me. Obviously now I know I can do it multiple times, so there's that little bit of extra confidence that I can do it again. The process doesn't change, it's just continue to give myself opportunities and try to make as many putts as I can and give myself a chance come Sunday. I know I can do it and I have the belief that I can do it, so hopefully I can have my -- give myself another chance to do it again this week.

HALEY PETERSON: And 2020 was a unique year where there weren't any fans there to celebrate your win. How excited are you to have fans back, especially at this course?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Yeah, it's going to be great. I think Minnesotans are excited about this week. I've gotten a lot of feedback on Instagram from people that are excited to come back to the event. The build-out here is awesome, you've got grandstands all surrounding 18 and 17. Coming down the stretch it's going to be pretty wild and ruckus, so it's exciting, I'm looking forward to the atmosphere.

HALEY PETERSON: Is your family out here with you as well?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: They are. We got here Sunday. Kids are excited to be here. My son has been asking me when am I going to win another tournament because he wants to be there when it happens, so it's going to be a good week.

Q. Following up on what Haley asked you there, seven years, how do you keep a positive outlook when you don't win for that long a period of time?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: You know, I think that's just the mindset that any athlete needs to have. You need to have the belief that you can do it and you can overcome adversity and you can become a champion even when you don't feel like you're at your best.

I really loved Rory McIlroy's answer, I think it was back in January when he was kind of pursuing more speed and was starting to hit it kind of all over the place. He said you have to be the eternal optimist, you can't stop believing in yourself because once you do, you no longer become competitive and you start to fade away from the game.

We all go through those struggles as athletes, and golf especially because golf is so cyclical, it's so up and down. It's really all about the self talk, what we tell ourselves when we're waking up in the morning or when we're working out, when we're practicing is continue to have that positive self talk, like I can do this, I can make putts, I can hit the shot when I need to, those kinds of things. And the more you hear it, the more likely you're going to find success when you're actually in that moment.

It's really just as simple as that, albeit it's a difficult discipline to master.

Q. What do you love about the grind?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Just the pursuit of perfection, the pursuit of executing the shot when I need to, the joy of hearing a crowd cheer when you hit a great shot or make a long putt. That's part of the joy of playing competitive golf is the gratification and satisfaction of really kind of impressing somebody; not only yourself, but the fans. That's what drives the motivation.

Q. If I told you when you left Alabama that you would have two wins at this point in your career, what would you be? What would you feel?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: I would say I would expect that. I might even say I would expect a little bit more. I think I've underperformed since I graduated college, but at the same time I'm still young, I'm only 36, and there have been plenty of guys who have had the second half of their careers be the best part of their career. So hopefully I can follow suit, like a Steve Stricker or kind of Matt Kuchar towards the later half of his 30s. Both had stellar careers and I hope that I can be a player like that. And obviously I'm working hard for that and I've got a couple-year exemption on Tour, so I've got time to work on my game and get better, more consistent.

Again, the self talk is probably the most important part because if that doesn't exist, then I'm only limiting myself to what I can achieve.

Q. And just one last little follow-up, which of your children has been nagging you about needing to win again?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Definitely my 4-year-old, my son. My daughter, Laurel, she's 16 months, so she doesn't quite understand what's going on, she's just happy to see me every day. But Jace is excited for me to get a second win because he wants to experience it and celebrate that with me at the tournament. He's the one that's been reminding me every week, "When are you going to win again, Dad? When are you going to win again?"

So there's a lot of motivation there to have him experience being a champion and being a winner of a golf tournament.

Q. Michael, you talked at media day about how you've been practicing well. Is this like returning to this course where you've had success, can that kind of be the launching pad for breaking-through in tournament play?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Yeah, absolutely. Obviously this course, I like it, it's comfortable, I've got great memories. I kind of have the same feeling here as I do at the Honda. You know, at the Honda, when I first played that as a rookie, I didn't like the golf course at all and then two years later I win, and since then I've actually had a lot of really good finishes there and feel like I've been knocking on the door of another win at the Honda.

So I feel like this course kind of has that similar feel to it. It's kind of position golf, keep it in play, be aggressive when you have a wedge in your hand and see the ball going in the hole when you're on the green.

I've been having better practices. I've been focusing a lot on my short game lately, I feel like my iron play is getting better. Just made a change on my driver yesterday that is allowing the ball to fly a little bit straighter, so I'm kind of excited where things are. You just never know until you get in the moment and you see it up on Thursday, but I think the confidence is higher than it was even at media day, so I'm looking forward to this week.

Q. You mentioned like structures around 18 and there's like that on 17, I'm sure it's like this at every tournament you go to right now, but it's so much more -- there's so many more structures and less open than it was a year ago. How does that change thing for golfers when you play a course one year and it's wide open without any fans?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: There's obviously more noise with all of that, with the people, which is great. There's kind of an exciting buzz when you get on that hole, especially when there's a big build-out like the grandstands around 18.

But in terms of like from a golf perspective, all it does is change your targets, right? You have something different to aim at. Actually, as a pro it makes things a little bit easier because there's defined targets right behind the tees or off the tee shots, so just makes it a little bit easier in terms of picking out targets, which can be good for visualizations and visualizing what shot you're going to hit, working it off something, starting it here and trying to end up there. So it's kind of nice to have those back because I've been out here long enough, you get used to aiming at certain structures and we didn't have that last year, so my caddie and I had to make a lot of adjustments, but it will be nice to get back to normal this year.

Q. Michael, welcome back. Have you been around the course the last couple days yet?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: I played the back nine yesterday.

Q. Anything that you can see, any change in design or condition with the drought we've had here?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: No. I was here a few weeks ago and it had been raining a good bit up until that point, so the course was soft. The course is a little soft right now, but I fully expect that to firm up as the week goes on. I think they're just kind of keeping it healthy early on in the week. I expect conditions to dry up a bit.

But the course is in phenomenal shape. The greens are so smooth, the fairways are like carpet and the rough is very healthy. It's going to be a premium on hitting the fairways this week, and then as the course firms up it's going to be kind of ball position with regards to approaches into the greens is going to be important because, as you know, there's a lot of hazards out here and a lot of deep bunkers. Making sure that you're playing out of the fairways and hitting into the greens, how aggressive you get is going to depend on how soft the greens are. As of right now, I think it's great scoring conditions, and as it firms up the course is going to play a little bit firmer, a little bit more difficult, so it's going to be a great week.

Q. Like everything out here, it all depends on the wind?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Yeah, yeah. You could say that every day on a golf course. I expect it's going to be hot this week, so that's going to be something everybody's going to have to deal with in terms of fatigue, but the wind is the wind, everybody's got to deal with it. Hopefully, I get a good draw Thursday-Friday and get favorable conditions. We'll just see what happens.

Q. Does it suit any particular type of player?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: I don't think so, and I think that's what makes this tournament

great is that anybody in the field has a chance to win whether you're a long hitter or a short hitter, a great putter or a great iron player, everybody can play well, and hopefully that will lead to a bunched leaderboard come Sunday afternoon. That's what the viewers want, that's what the fans want. What happened in 2019 with Matthew Wolff and Collin Morikawa, that's why people go to golf tournaments is to see the excitement on the last hole, the last three holes. I'm excited and hopefully I can give myself a chance to be in that situation.

Q. What do you think of the strength of the field a week after the British and with the Olympics?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: I think it's pretty good. I think the Olympics has hurt it a little bit, a few guys maybe not here that otherwise would be, but any week on the PGA TOUR's a great field where there's 120 guys with a legitimate chances to win, I think, every week. And you never know, there might be a break-out player that comes out and goes lights out for the week. It's always exciting.

Q. Kind of piggybacking off of Jerry's last question, you got I believe it's like 23 of the top 70 players in the world here this week. What's kind of the national perception on Tour of the 3M Open now that it's in its third year? The field seems to get a little bit better every year. What's kind of the national perception of this tournament?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Yeah, I think everybody on Tour talks about the quality of the course set-up as well as the conditions; I arguably think some of the best conditions we have all year. The rough is thick, the fairways are perfect, like I said, they're like carpets, and the greens are some of the smoothest greens we play all year.

I think barring a ton of rain, which could happen this time of year, although this week I think we're going to be pretty dry, I think it's a great course. It's obviously a course that has stood the test of time, had a Champions Tour event out here for a long time, so it's had a lot of great play, a lot of great champions. And I think this is a tournament that's not only in a great location in Minnesota, but in a good time slot of the year in terms of coming up north in July is always preferable for us.

I think we're excited to be here. This is a great opportunity for a lot of guys to secure their card going into the FedExCup as well as earn some needed points to position themselves to make it as far as they possibly can for the FedExCup. There's a lot to play for this week.

Q. You talked a little bit a couple weeks ago at media day about your caddie kind of almost challenging on the Saturday to execute a couple shots on your way to the win. Anybody who watched The Open Championship coverage saw Collin and his caddie talking over shot. They saw Jordan Spieth and his caddie talking over virtually every shot. How important is that relationship with you and your caddie, because I think a lot of people who are casually watching assume they're just carrying a golf bag and it's more complicated than that. As you navigate around the golf course, how does that relationship kind of evolve?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: It takes some time to create that trust between a caddie and a player. I think once you reach that point, a good caddie understands how a player sees a golf shot and how he sees attacking a pin or where he wants to hit it off the tee, position himself in order to be able to attack a pin. Once you get to that point, the caddie provides a great sounding board for the player to basically confirm his instincts. At the end of the day, the player's instincts matters more than anything, but also every day a player is going to have doubt. Not all the time, but there would be a few shots around that are just -- just require a little bit more focus or a little bit more attention. When there's any sort of doubt, if a player's willing to communicate with his caddie, the caddie's job becomes very important in solidifying the confidence in the shot choice.

As we saw with Collin Morikawa's caddie and obviously Jordan Spieth and Michael Greller talk a lot, I think a good caddie you'll see -- and even Bones did this with Phil, was giving the player confidence in that they're making the right decision and they have the right club, the right number and to go execute the shot. That's exactly what Damian Lopez -- D-Lo -- my caddie did last year on Saturday on 18 after I hit it in the water and took a drop. He gave me the confidence that I could hit a 3-wood over the water and give myself the best chance to save par, and it worked out. That's a moment that will obviously live with me more a long time, but a perfect example of a caddie stepping in and saying, "You can do this," which we all need every now and then.

Q. Michael, just wondering, do you have any ties to Minnesota or Minneapolis area, or have you either in past trips or do you have plans to see some of the sights this week or in the past?

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Yeah. So one of my three U.S. amateurs that I played in was 2006 at Hazeltine, so I had a great experience that week getting -- first time really being in Minnesota.

Then another connection I have is my brother, younger brother, his wife grew up here in Minnesota. They met in college and he's now flying F-16s, doing crazy stuff in a fast airplane. His in-laws live up here in Minnesota and they actually came out two years ago to watch and they might come out this week, I'm not sure yet. Have those two connections.

Having my family here this week, I'm definitely planning on bringing my son out here to experience a lot of the science that 3M is showcasing this week, so I'm excited to do that.

In terms of sightseeing around town, don't have anything planned yet, but if anybody has suggestions, shoot me up on Instagram and let me know what I can be doing.

But for the most part I'm focused on being here, playing the tournament and hopefully give myself a chance to win. That's first priority.

HALEY PETERSON: That's all the questions we have. Thank you, Michael, for taking the

time to join us and best of luck this week.

MICHAEL THOMPSON: Thank you, Haley.