

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
October 27, 2021



BRIAN GAY

HALEY PETERSON: We would like to welcome our defending champion, Brian Gay, to the virtual media room here at the Butterfield Bermuda Championship.

Welcome back.

BRIAN GAY: Hi. Thank you. Great to be back.

HALEY PETERSON: Yeah. So now that you're here on the course, what are some specific memories that you have of being here at the tournament? This is your third time. Any specific memories flood to your mind?

BRIAN GAY: I guess obviously the one that stands out the most is the shot on 18, the last hole of the tournament last year would probably be the biggest memory for me. And then winning the playoff with the shot on 18 to tap in and get me in that playoff is probably my biggest memory.

HALEY PETERSON: And I understand you had -- kind of took a little while with some travel issues to get here. Glad you're finally here safely, but if you want to expand on that?

BRIAN GAY: Yeah. We were flying through Charlotte Monday and got to the gate and they wouldn't let some, I don't know, 10 or 15 of us on. They said the plane was too heavy, wasn't big enough and they needed enough fuel to fly all the way back to Bermuda and back to Philly or somewhere in case that can't land here. So they left some people behind and had to wait another day to catch the next flight over here, so finally made it yesterday.

HALEY PETERSON: Glad that worked out. What is it about this course that fits your style of game? With your first appearance here getting a top-3 and then last year, of course, winning it, what is it about this course that just feels comfortable?

BRIAN GAY: Yeah, I think it's a combination of, you know, the weather, just similar to Florida. I don't mind the wind. I grew up on in bermudagrass, which the whole course is bermuda here. It's not necessarily -- it's not a bomber's course, you don't necessarily have to hit it far, and there's plenty of opportunities. Just stay out of trouble on a few holes where you've got to be careful and plenty of birdie chances out there without -- you don't need a lot of length to play well here.

Q. You've already had a couple starts this season. How does your game feel entering this week?

BRIAN GAY: Well, oddly enough, it's the longest I've gone without hitting a ball before a tournament. Hopefully I'm going to get a few here this afternoon since they opened up for us. Been quite a few days, so I'm going to try to shake a little rust and see, go out tomorrow morning to start. It's windy. I'll just try to shake a little rust and loosen up today and go from there.

Q. Since you mentioned longest time off, with the WD from Shriners, how long has it been since you've been able to really get out on the course and practice?

BRIAN GAY: I was practicing some at home. We had some bad weather in Orlando the day before I left and then two days to get here. I tried to go look for somewhere to hit balls Monday afternoon and didn't -- I didn't have any luck there in Charlotte, so it's been four or five days since I've hit a ball, which is not obviously normal before starting a tournament round.

Q. With the weather and different conditions we've been experiencing today, how do you think that will come into play this week with the wind and how this course -- it's one of the shorter courses on Tour?

BRIAN GAY: Yeah, I'm not sure. I don't remember it getting a bunch of rain, so I don't know if the course usually plays pretty dry and the ball runs out here. I don't know how wet it will be, I didn't get to see the course at all.

The wind, we had a couple real windy days last year. I think it's maybe -- I remember last year it blowing quite a few different directions during the tournament and it looks to me like it's not going to blow the direction that it did I know on Sunday last year. So it will be a little bit different strategy I think, some different clubs off some tees with kind of the opposite wind.

Q. Circling back to capture the win, how much did it mean to get this win after having your fifth win, after having kind of such a gap in years between getting your win? Did it give you a boost in confidence for your game?

BRIAN GAY: Yeah, it was -- you know, it had been a little over seven years I guess and in that time I had been out with two surgeries for a year and a half, kind of '14, '15. I guess it was sort of a third chapter. I was out here for a while, got my first win, got a couple more after that, then the injuries and out and kind of a comeback after that. The win was kind of a bonus, kind of a late career bonus win, if you will. But it was exciting, a little unexpected. I felt like my game was getting better coming here and I had good feelings from the year before finishing third, so I think that helped the confidence coming back to a place that I liked.

Q. And how important is it to get these starts and do well in the fall that sets you up, with last season finishing 95 in the FedExCup? Does it put kind of a little sense of pressure to perform well here in the fall?

BRIAN GAY: I'd like to think not. It is good to get off to a good start in the fall, got to get a little bit not ahead of the game but it's better to come out, you know, in January already being up there on the board with some good points and everything and have a good feeling starting in Hawaii and not feel like you're starting from zero. There's some good tournaments for me in the fall, Mayakoba that I won and I like Sea Island, so there's some good events coming up.

Q. I understand that there have been some delays, whether it's due to travel or weather difficulties. How do you stay focused and keep your head in the game?

BRIAN GAY: Good question. Well, I haven't even been out here to get my head in the game, so I guess I'll try to get in that mode a little bit this afternoon with a little bit of practice, try to get my head on straight about what I want to do when I come out tomorrow morning and start the tournament. It's a little different in that sense since I haven't really had any preparations for this event, which is kind of different for everybody.

Q. Good afternoon, Mr. Brian Gay. How are you? Welcome to Bermuda.

BRIAN GAY: Thank you.

Q. I couldn't help but looking at your bio to really smile and see that you have two connections that caught my eye. That you spent time down at Ft. Rucker. I'm a Troy boy and I was just wondering if you could tell me anything significant about your golf experience down there on that military golf course that we used to play from time to time.

BRIAN GAY: Yeah. So my dad was in the Army and we lived at Ft. Rucker from, I was there fifth grade through high school pretty much every day. That's where I grew up playing, practicing with my dad and a bunch of the people there at Ft. Rucker. Oddly enough, they had a great practice area where you could shag your own balls. It was good experience for me to learn to play and grow there as a player. Yeah, I was an Army brat. I was there for, like I said, about eight years.

Q. Wonderful. And then I couldn't help but notice that you had an outstanding career with Buddy Alexander down there in Florida playing the pasture I guess many days. I spent a little time going through University of Florida with my roommate Kenny Green back in the day from JUCO days. Tell me what it's like to have the legacy of being one of those great Gators that have produced so many outstanding players over the years.

BRIAN GAY: Yeah, I had a great time at University of Florida. Like you mentioned, Buddy was the reason I went there. I grew up a huge Georgia Bulldog and was looking to go there. Florida was my last visit and decided to go there and play for Buddy. With the experience he had as a player and winning the U.S. Amateur, I thought that would help me the most to play

for Buddy there. We had a great one, won the conference all four years and won the NCAA my junior year, so it was a great time.

Q. Thank you for that. What advice would you give any young golfer aspiring to play professional golf that's looking at college? How important it is for them to make that connection with a person like Buddy Alexander, who is indeed, you're correct, an outstanding player in his own right, but then has nurtured many players at Georgia Southern I believe he was first before he went to Florida.

BRIAN GAY: You know, it's quite a bit different now than when I was coming up through college. Guys are turning pro earlier, players are maturing much more early. Some of them may not even go to college or just play a year or two and they all kind of have their teams put together before that. You know, in high school they've got all their trainers and teachers and their whole team put together. It wasn't like that. Virtually everyone played all four years of college back when I was there, even Justin Leonard and Phil Mickelson. Guys weren't turning pro as early as they do now, so I think it's changed quite a bit.

Q. Knowing that you played a lot of golf down there in southeastern Alabama like I did, I found the transition there very similar being that the topography and the hilliness were in play. How are you finding our course, Port Royal, which we're celebrating our 50th anniversary? How are you finding our course and transitioning to it?

BRIAN GAY: It's not too difficult. I've said before it's all bermudagrass, which is what I grew up on and which I like. I feel comfortable. I love bermuda greens. I played in a lot of wind, it gets windy in Florida sometime. I just feel comfortable on it, mostly the grass. Like I said, it's not a long golf course, you don't have to be too -- it's more about position and being able to handle the wind, getting in the right spots and make some birdies.

HALEY PETERSON: One final question before we wrap things up. Again with your win here that you captured last year, you were able to go back to the Masters in the spring. Can you just give me some general thoughts about that experience?

BRIAN GAY: Yeah, it was great to go back after. Yeah, it had been a while. I've got a lot of family in that area. My dad actually lives up there now, my mom's family is from there. Got to see a lot of people and it was really cool to go back again. Hopefully it won't be the last time.

HALEY PETERSON: Perfect. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us. We wish you the best of luck this week.

BRIAN GAY: Thank you.