

**PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW**  
**June 9, 2022**



**FRED COUPLES**

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**ALLIE LeCLAIR:** We're here with Fred Couples at the American Family Insurance Championship.

Fred, can you talk about being back here? You won in '17.

**FRED COUPLES:** A long time ago, I honestly don't know. I know -- did I lose last year to Kelly? That was last year, yeah. Bogeyed the last hole, I do remember that. But if you asked me what year I won, I don't really remember.

But I'm so excited to be back. Love Steve Stricker and Nicki and it's a great event and it's a course that I think I've played well every single year that I've come. As long as I'm able to move, I'd like to keep coming and representing myself on behalf of Steve and the rest of the guys. It's a fun spot.

**Q. Is there anything in particular about the course that fits your eye or your game?**

**FRED COUPLES:** Well, I grew up in Seattle. We're certainly not in Seattle. And last year I think it was 90 and humid, so that's not Seattle, but this is great weather. It's kind of got that feel, you know, where it's a well-built course. Some holes look a little wide open, but then if you put it in the wrong spot, you're struggling to knock it on the green. Then you get other holes that are really tree lined and you've got to hit perfect drives to keep it down some of the channels.

You know, I'm a good iron player, the greens are pretty good and big and I also putt well from long distances, so if I do hit a 4-, 5-iron, it's 50 feet, I have the knack of hopefully getting it up there and two-putting and going to the next hole, but you've got to make a lot of birdies here, that's for sure.

**Q. How would you characterize your form both in terms of performance and in terms of physically?**

**FRED COUPLES:** Well, physically, I feel really, really good. I had not played in four months. I tried to play Newport in the pro-am and that didn't go well, and then I didn't touch a club. Somehow miraculously I played at Augusta and I actually felt pretty good. So then I think I took a couple weeks off really without playing and I went to Houston, which is where I went to school, and I played pretty good. Then I went to Atlanta. I mean, I had a couple shots at catching Flesch, who was ahead of me, and staying ahead of Toms, but I tied for second, which was huge. Then last week I felt like a really, really good week.

So I've played little, but I'm kind of excited to play. And I usually don't play a whole lot anyway, but I like playing two weeks in a row where if I don't play well, like last week, I know I have five or six rounds or days of practice where hopefully I got better this week from playing last week.

**Q. We're always asking about your back. How about we talk about is that something you address on your own with just feel or how much are doctors involved in terms of telling you what you should be doing and how you should get to the form you want?**

**FRED COUPLES:** Well, normally, I could stop talking to you and walk over there and hit a ball and something might happen, and then a lot of times I'll get through that day and then the next day -- this is what I tell some friends who have back problems -- and the next day I've got to come out and work the ball around.

I fell in Sioux Falls. I fell off the first tee or slipped down the hill and jarred my back and I hadn't been the same. And I had it worked on maybe five times from two people who had really helped me in the previous years and they just couldn't figure it out. Finally, I just said I've got to rest. Then it just kind of calmed down, but I wasn't even able to swing, which was kind of fun to get away from it, but now that I actually feel like I'm pretty healthy and I can smash it, which is a good feeling.

You know, I don't tell a lot of people, but family knows and Cheney knows that there's only really one way that any of us really want to play and when you get to a point, if you can't continue to do that, for me, then I don't really want to compete with myself trying to be better than I can possibly be. I like to compete with the other 78 guys and make sure that if I'm in second, the guy who beats me does well to beat me, and if I'm in 30th, the guy who finishes 29th, you better birdie or par the last hole to beat me.

So that's my feeling on this. I want to stay healthy. If it goes away again, then I'll just rest it out, but I don't have that many more years of this and I want to win one more time badly.

**Q. But is the longevity effort much harder than you ever imagined? You probably never even thought to this point in your life, but as you were coming up, it does seem that that is the -- what everybody's chasing here is trying to see how long they can do it.**

**FRED COUPLES:** I only won one time in my 40s, I think. Maybe twice, but I know for one in Houston. Then I think I was the typical guy who said, When I turn 50, I don't want to keep traveling. I got on the tour when I was 20, almost 21. Then when I turned 50, I actually like it better than the regular tour. I think it's -- as you look down the line, you know everyone for 20 years or pretty much. When you get paired with them, you're always playing with top players. Not that you don't on the regular tour, I'm making it sound like we're better than the regular tour. What I'm saying is I just know them all so well and it's more fun for me. I only can speak for myself. I think turning 50 was a blessing to come out here and play.

**Q. Is there a guy on this tour that you look at and say, If I had his body, I could play till I was 80?**

**FRED COUPLES:** Well, I'm planning on playing till I'm 80 or I'm going to kill my manager. He knows that, he knows that. So if he does die, people are going to come looking for me because I've said I'm not going to play this until I can't and then can't play with all my friends every other day.

So is there anyone? Look, here's Tom Pernice who is as fit as anyone still playing. I think we're close to the same age. The longevity means that you're healthy and you can continue to play well, for me. Langer is a freak show. Jay Haas is amazing, who just shot a couple shots under his age. And I played with him at Atlanta and he was on the same pace to beat me and he had a couple bad holes in 17 and 18 but the first 52 were unreal.

It just depends on who you're looking for or who you're looking at. There's so many good players out here, and it's a tour most of the time you get a winner that's won before. I don't even know why I'm saying that, but first-year winners are difficult. Once they get the taste of it, then they really continue to win. Scott Parel is a guy that I just love to watch hit balls. Up until he turned 50 I had never seen his name or heard of him. Out here, he's as good as anybody.

**Q. And when you win again, whether that --**

**FRED COUPLES:** I'll be gone.

**Q. Really? Out the door?**

**FRED COUPLES:** Yes. So hopefully Sunday night I will be gone.

**Q. That's it?**

**FRED COUPLES:** That's it.

**Q. Cold Turkey?**

**FRED COUPLES:** A pretty simple thing. That's why I keep choking on all these five-shot leads. I had a five-shot lead in Seattle a few years ago and I wouldn't have won anyway, but Brandt Jobe shot I think 63. But yeah, I'm done.

**Q. When you do win, wouldn't you want to say one more?**

**FRED COUPLES:** No.

**Q. No?**

**FRED COUPLES:** No.

**Q. The best of two?**

**FRED COUPLES:** I might play -- I'm already bouncing out. Well, there I would like to go for a couple more years, but the Strickers and Furyks -- I'm leaving out -- we have Jerry Kelly represents Tucson, so there's other guys. I'm leaving a few names out, but I think if we had all tournaments named after players, I would probably play them all, I really would. I think we should do that. I honestly think a player such as Ernie Els should have a tournament in Florida. I don't know why we don't, but if he did, he's six-foot-four, 240, he's going to come up and I'm going to look at him and say, No, Ernie, I'm not playing? That might cause a problem.

**Q. Everyone's got some ache or pain on this tour. Is it the guys to beat are the healthiest guys by and large week to week?**

**FRED COUPLES:** Well, I've been playing the last few weeks and Steven Alker's been out. I did play with him last week and we shot -- we -- I shot 69, I think he shot 64, so we were 12 under as a team and it was easy. He's 50 or 51 maybe now, he's in perfect shape, but he hits it -- he's not here. We had a chitchat about that. I really did, if you ask him. I said, You're skipping Stricker's tournament? And he looked at me like, Yeah, I've got a family obligation. I went, Okay, that's okay. But now there's one less guy to beat, so I'm fine with it. I think Mike Weir's in Canada, so that's two less guys.

**Q. There are advantages to playing at home, but there's also the pressure that goes along with it. Jerry's kind of mastered that the last two times out here. What do you think's gone into that?**

**FRED COUPLES:** Well, yeah, he's a great player, first of all. I play in Seattle, which is where I grew up. Again, however many years ago I was five ahead after two rounds and the whole time I've ever been there, I've had a few good finishes there, but I've said, you know, it's never really affected me.

I was pretty nervous and I was even par after like five and Brandt Jobe was 4 under after six or seven and I was like, oh, my God, one ahead now. So it just is one of those things you've got to keep pounding it. Last year I fought pretty hard, I birdied 16 and 17 and I think he made -- I think if I remember he made a nice par putt on 18 and I bogeyed it, which was really a depressing thing. But he's a very good player and I'm surprised Stricker -- has Stricker won here yet?

**Q. Uh-uh.**

**FRED COUPLES:** Yeah. So it would be great if Steve won. Steve's playing so well, I'd be shocked if he's not there.

**Q. Is Jerry underrated a little bit do you think?**

**FRED COUPLES:** You know, he could be. He's not underrated to us, but for the average person when they -- I don't even know how many times he's won out here or on the regular tour, but he's been a good player since he was -- got on tour. So there's not really much to underrate players. I think I've been doing it 42 years. I don't even know how old he is or when he got on the tour, but I don't think he's ever really lost his card. He's just solid, he's a very solid player.