

BRIAN COOPER (-6)

BRIAN COOPER: I battled some equipment issues to start out, clubs just didn't feel right. I don't place blame on those, but I mean, it was just a little bit tough to start out and play with them.

Then last week I got a pinched nerve in my neck, I couldn't turn. So the off-week came at a perfect time. I was able to go home, kind of get the equipment situated and kind of regroup and get some physio and get some good practice in and this is -- it's tough to shoot 66 every time, but the way I played today is what I'm kind of used to with myself with my ball-striking and putting. So this week, so far this week it's come together, it's very special.

Q. Well, you're a veteran of the Big Break on the Golf Channel and you know how hard it is to get status out here on the PGA Tour Champions at 55 years old. What would a good weekend mean to you?

BRIAN COOPER: I mean, obviously if you can get a good weekend and get yourself bumped up a little bit higher on the Money List so you can kind of keep yourself within grasp as the season goes on, I think that's the key.

Obviously living in Arizona, I mean, this week -- playing well this week would really mean a lot. I'm going to have family here, friends here. This week would really mean a lot.

I like this golf course. I qualified for my first Senior Open here when we played at the Broadmoor, so I feel a little bit comfortable here. This week a good week would go a long way, I think.

Q. This is my first opportunity to take a look at your game. You're a very good athlete, you played hockey, you played baseball growing up. Tell us a little bit about the strengths of your game that we might look for tomorrow.

BRIAN COOPER: That's a good question. I like to think that my -- you know, being able to be strong still at this age, I think that's going to be -- I think that will help not only this weekend but I think it will help throughout the year.

Pretty tough on myself off the golf course. If you don't believe me, you'll get a chance maybe on Sunday to ask my son how tough I am on him at 9. I think that's it. I pride myself on trying to work hard off the golf course to stay physically fit because this is a long season. For a rookie, obviously I've got to play as much as I can, so the physical aspect of the game is going to be tested for sure.

Q. Brian, so currently top of the leaderboard, a little bit better than you've been doing now. We had snow yesterday, beautiful weather today. Just what was working for you?

BRIAN COOPER: Honestly, the start of the year was tough. I mean, I can't reiterate enough that I dealt with some equipment issues and it's nobody's fault but my own. I'm extremely OCD about my equipment and I was lazy. I mean, quite frankly I was, I was lazy with it and it suffered.

Then last week or Naples I felt like we were getting closer, but then I got a pinched nerve in my scap and my neck, couldn't turn my head. It was just tough, it really was. No blame, it's part of the game, it's part of being an athlete.

The off-week came at a perfect time. Went back, made sure the equipment was right, made a couple adjustments, made a putter change, got in to see my physio and he worked it out really good. It's still bothering me a little, but it's 10 times better than it was in Naples.

I think the way I hit it today, it's kind of indicative of the way I've been hitting it and that's what I expect out of myself. Whether it's 66 or not, I expect to hit the ball good and give myself opportunities. In the first two weeks, honestly, I had zero opportunities. So this is what I expect of myself not only this week but the entire year.

Q. What would a win mean for you this week? I know it's early, early on, still a lot of golf to play.

BRIAN COOPER: I mean, it would mean I have a job next year, first off. It might get me in a couple majors, I think. I mean, God, after everything I've been through, God, you're going to do this to me? Really? Everything I've gone through in the last year, if I were able to finish it off in that manner, I think it would be, I mean, it's like a fairytale. To be perfectly honest, it's like a fairytale.

I'm not thinking like that. I've just got to continue to go out and do what I did today, hit fairways, hit greens, give myself opportunities and hopefully that turns into something really special this week. And if it doesn't, then we go on to the next event and we try to do the same thing.

At some point I feel like that week's going to happen, I do or I wouldn't be out here. I believe in myself, I know I belong out here, I've always felt like I could compete and win and if it's this week, great. If it's not, somewhere down the line, but this week would be obviously ultra-special since it's kind of my adopted home state of Arizona. But we'll see, not going to get too far ahead of myself.

Q. Taking golf out of it, this is more than just a golf tournament this week. What does it mean for you to be playing in the Cologuard Classic by Exact Sciences and just what -- their mission to raise awareness for colon cancer?

BRIAN COOPER: Well, I've been tested and it's not a friendly process, but I've had cancer go through my family, it took my dad. It was a different kind of cancer. So to be able to be in an event that stresses checking yourself for cancer no matter what it is, it's important, it's something that everybody needs to do. The awareness for it is awesome the way they do it here and it's just such a great cause. I couldn't be more proud to be able to play in an event that represents that.

Q. I'm just curious, seventh round so far on this tour now, is some of the learning curve just understanding what it really takes to win out here and compete against these guys?

BRIAN COOPER: I don't know. I've had some pretty decent success in Mondays, getting in when I had conditional status. But it's tough, you get into a Monday and you have these blinders on, you're ultra-focused. Generally you're by yourself most of the time in a Monday. Then you get in the tournament and I've always said you need blinders to go like there for a Monday, then they go like this. You know, it's a tough, it's a tough process, it's a tough learning curve to go there.

So I think my -- like these guys, they're golfers, they're golfers. If you ask my brother, my brother would say you're not a golfer, you're an athlete. I think that's an advantage for me. I can maybe somewhat adapt a little bit different, but I don't know if -- I don't look at this as really -- even though I am a rookie, I don't ever really look at it as my rookie campaign because I've played out here a lot. I've played three majors.

But it is a little different now and it is important to continue to play good and smart and aggressive and more like what I did today. Whether you shoot 66 or not, it's important to put yourself in that position to be able to do that. Today I did and hopefully I can do very much the same throughout the weekend.