

PGA TOUR COURAGE AWARD PRESENTATION
November 14, 2023

JAY MONAHAM
CHRIS KIRK



DOUG MILNE: We will go ahead and get started. As you can tell, Chris is slightly perplexed as to what's going on here. Nonetheless, we would like to welcome Chris Kirk on the 10-year anniversary of your 2013 RSM Classic victory here, the second of five victories.

Before we do get started, we would certainly like to welcome a lot of people you probably recognize in the back, family, friends, former teammates, coaches, players, RSM Classic representatives and RSM, everyone from the organization.

Last but not least, Commissioner Jay Monahan is here for a special presentation, so with that, I will turn it over to Jay.

JAY MONAHAN: Thank you, Doug, and thank you, Chris.

Good afternoon and welcome everyone to the RSM Classic. This is a very special week for the PGA TOUR. We have a passionate sponsor in RSM who's been our partner since 2010 supporting the Davis Love Foundation and so many other worthwhile charitable causes.

We have a tournament host in Davis Love III, World Golf Hall of Famer who is so gracious with his time and his talent, and we have a host in Sea Island Resort who does southern hospitality like no other.

Today is special in another way. It is my distinct honor to present Chris Kirk with the PGA TOUR Courage Award.

This award is not presented annually. It's reserved for very special circumstances and equally special people. I'll read the description of the award:

"A person, through courage and perseverance, who has overcome extraordinary adversity such as personal tragedy or debilitating injury or illness to make a significant and meaningful contribution to the game of golf."

In May of 2019, Chris made a very personal and courageous decision. He took a six-month leave of absence to address alcohol use disorder and depression. These issues had taken a toll on his golf game, but much more importantly, on his well being and his life with his family.

After facing these issues head on, Chris returned to competition six months later in the fall of 2019. I'm sure he would be the first to tell you the road back has been incredibly challenging,



but this year he returned to the ranks of the Tour best in part due to the incredible tempo of his golf swing that we are all so jealous of. This past year he earned his fifth PGA TOUR title at the Honda Classic and finished No. 32 in the FedExCup standings.

But Chris' impact on the game of golf is not the singular focus of numbers on a scorecard. Look around, you'll see a great number of his peers in the room, many of whom call Chris a friend and a mentor. Professional athletes have an incredible platform to help others and Chris' honesty, candor and courage in speaking publicly about dealing with a very personal situation has inspired so many people with everyday struggles.

I'd also like to recognize Chris' wife, Tahnee, and their three boys, and other friends and family in attendance today. I know this is a very proud day for all of you.

The PGA TOUR Courage Award comes with a \$25,000 donation to a charity of Chris' choice, and RSM, who has stood by him through all of his adversity, has agreed to match this contribution. Thank you, RSM, for your generosity.

Ladies and gentlemen, the sixth recipient of the PGA TOUR Courage Award, Chris Kirk.

(Applause.)

DOUG MILNE: Thank you, Jay. We'll excuse you, but don't go far because we've got a handful of pictures to include you in shortly.

Chris, I was not originally scheduled to work this event, but I got a phone call last month asking if I would be interested in coming here and sitting and moderating this special press conference with you. I was both honored and proud to do so.

The request for me, specifically me, to be here on this occasion wasn't motivated by any of your many achievements on the golf course, it was more so inspired instead by all you've achieved off the golf course as a person, as a husband, father, friend, teammate. Even though I was with you for all five of your victories, it's who you are as that strong, remarkable person, Chris, that resonates with me and makes me really happy to be sitting here right now as a person and as a friend to you.

Knowing this award is presented to individuals deserving of its criteria that Jay just touched on with players like Jarrod Lyle, Morgan Hoffman, past winners of the event, just a couple opening comments on the award and what it means to you.

CHRIS KIRK: Thank, y'all. I think everybody can probably tell this is very much a shock to me. I had no idea this was coming or that any of y'all were going to be here, but thank y'all for being here today.

It takes me back very much to April and May of 2019 and where I was at that time in my life, and I could have never imagined at that time, I didn't really feel like I was going to play golf



again much less be here with all of you and to have won again on the Tour. I'm really just blown away. I'm beyond thankful for my family, especially for Tahnee for staying with me and supporting me through these difficult years. I just am so blessed and thankful to currently live a life better than I could have ever imagined. Just the mental clarity that I wake up with every day is an absolute blessing and a gift.

A lot of my peers and my close friends back there, these last four years have been the best years of my life and I appreciate the camaraderie and the friendship that I've had on and off the golf course with you guys.

I also remember very well back to that May of 2019, my conversations with Bill and Andy and others of the RSM team as well as with Jay and other members of the PGA TOUR staff, just the -- it was very genuine, like nobody was concerned about my golf career at that time. I could feel that with absolute sincerity that we're here for you, we're here for you, to help you with anything that week.

I got the same feeling from Jay, my golf career, and it felt that way to me, too. It was very irrelevant at the time, so that was incredible.

It's one of those things that happens in your life that everybody gets every now and then. You find out who your friend are. I'm very lucky and very blessed to have a lot of people that care about me. Sometimes I wonder why, but it's been amazing just to have the group of people around me that I know don't care about if I shoot 67 or 75, but believe in me and care for me as a person.

DOUG MILNE: That was very well said. One question from me and then we'll open it up to the bigger group here. Chris, when I was making the journey similar to what you have done successfully, I learned a lot about myself, some things that I was really glad to peel back the layers of the onion, other pieces I wasn't.

What is something that you have learned about yourself that you are particularly proud of?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, the process of getting sober and working steps to get to your -- to get to a place where you can kind of be OK with yourself is certainly very much a fact-finding process and a process where you learn a lot about yourself. I mostly learned a lot of things that I didn't like about myself, to be honest.

Just I think one thing that really has defined me as a person for a long time is perseverance, determination. I have probably an excess of that, so I'm just very thankful that I was able to set that to a good use and set that to how can I from here forward go about being the best father and husband that I can be. That's kind of been my main focus and then eventually after that, working on becoming a professional golfer again.

DOUG MILNE: OK. With that, we'll open it up and take a few questions.



Q. Your win at Honda on that golf course was great at any time, but I want to take you back a little bit more. June of 2020, the Tour was getting back from COVID, they put together those two Korn Ferry Tour events at the Slammer & Squire. It was about a million degrees and you had to shoot a million under to win it. You talked a little bit about your journey at that point. Just that week with no fans, no TV, just golf, did winning there help in the process to where you are now, and how much did that -- I know you talked a little bit about it after you won, but looking back on it, did that play a pretty big role in where you've come?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, I would say so. That was a very special week, for sure. I remember Mike and I going down there in the RV and just kind of hanging out. I remember Mike driving a bunch and getting stuck at the gas station where he couldn't get turned around.

That week it was -- at that point and I still do my best to feel this way now, but there I was just, it was just the joy of competing. I think that during the initial stages of my time away from the game, I had a lot of -- I had a lot of really bad memories of sitting in hotel rooms by myself playing in PGA TOUR events and missing my family and just not really wanting to be there. So I got to the point where I kind of felt like -- I felt like golf did this to me. Golf, the pressures of professional golf and having to travel by myself all the time, that's how I felt. I know now that that's not true. So I really had kind of a hate a little bit for competitive golf and everything that came with it.

But after getting dug into my recovery and starting to play a little bit of golf again, mentally it was like starting over for me. I just kind of realized that I love playing golf and I love competing, I love trying to go beat people. So at that time, I remember that Korn Ferry event in St. Augustine, that was pure just like let's go have fun and let's go make some birdies.

Q. You talked at the Honda Classic how meaningful that victory was after everything you've been through. How does this rank given the recognition and everyone behind me right now?

CHRIS KIRK: I'm still pretty shocked, to be honest. I was not expecting to see anybody that's here really, so I don't know.

Yeah, I think that like a lot of things, I currently feel a little bit undeserving, but I'm very thankful for, like I said, I'm just thankful for the people that are in this room and how much they mean to me. I hope that they see that and feel that as often as possible. But to have this group of people behind me is, I don't know, I just feel incredibly, incredibly blessed to have these people here that mean so much to me.

Q. You talked about feeling alone in a hotel room, which, you know, kind of coming back from COVID that's exactly what every Tour player kind of had to face was a lot of solitude there. So in a way did it help to be alone with your thoughts because you knew what path you were on at that point and did it get a little bit easier and a little bit easier to go on those trips and maybe not have everybody around you?



CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, I wasn't by myself for years. I'll stay in a hotel room by myself maybe once or twice a year now, but the first couple years back I didn't stay by myself ever. So a lot of these guys back here in the back of the room, I'm the house dad that rents a four- or five-bedroom house every week and those guys stay with me and we hang around and play Yahtzee and play cards or whatever.

That was definitely something that I made a point to do when I decided to come back and play purely because I had all those bad memories of sitting by myself in a hotel room. I just said I'm not willing to do that anymore. If that's what I have to do to come back to the Tour, then I'm not going to do it.

Yeah, with the help of a lot of those guys in the back of the room, and we've continued that to now where I was sending out a big group text last week planning out houses for the west coast, and talked to Harman some yesterday about houses. I've kind of ended up being the one to coordinate it most of the time, but it's been a huge, huge change as far as quality of life on the road. I hope those guys feel the same. It's definitely been that way for me where, you know, you go shoot 65, you get a bunch of atta boys when you get back and you go shoot 74 and nobody really cares. You just come hang out and see if you can do a little bit better at Texas Hold 'em than you did on the golf course that day. It's a really great environment I feel like we've created.

Q. Chris, is there an example of someone you've heard from who's written to you or contacted you and said thanks for doing that, going public, it really helped change my life? I'm sure you have many, but is there one you can talk us through?

CHRIS KIRK: Yeah, that's been a part of all of this that I certainly did not expect and certainly not really what I was going for.

My initial reasoning for being very public with all of this was partially a little bit of accountability, but more than that, I spent a lot of years really lying to a lot of people. Lying to my family, lying to my friends, lying to myself as much as anybody.

So once I got to the point where I could wake up in the morning and I could look at myself in the mirror and kind of be OK with who I was and what I was going to do that day, that was such a freeing feeling of just the open honesty, I've got nothing to hide, because I hadn't felt that in so long.

So that was why I was kind of public and open and honest about it, just because it felt great just to say here's who I am and take it or leave it.

But then as the years have gone on I've gotten, yes, a lot of people have reached out on social media and through kind of friends of friends. Yeah, so there's been -- I've had probably 30 or 40, maybe 50 stories that I've heard directly of people that have said things along the lines of, you know, I saw you do this and I figured if you could do it and you could,



you know, with your life and your career, if you could shut everything down and do what you had to do to get yourself better, then why couldn't I?

People -- I've been sober for four and a half years so there's a pretty sizeable group of people that I still communicate with on an intermittent basis that have been sober for four years or four years and three months or whatever it may be.

That's a really special thing. There's a group of people that I kind of go visit every year coincidentally in Palm Beach Gardens where I go and have spoken a few times and have gotten to know some of the people down there. That was another little special connection for me being able to win there this year.

Q. What's that feel like (inaudible)?

CHRIS KIRK: It's amazing really. Like I said, it's not something that I ever expected, but I also think that anybody that -- any of those people would have done the same for me. I don't necessarily feel like some kind of hero or anything, I just feel I was able to share my experience and I'm very thankful that's been able to help a few people.

DOUG MILNE: All right. Well, Chris, as a surprise as it may have been, congratulations on the PGA TOUR Courage Award. Couldn't be happier for you.

CHRIS KIRK: Thank you, Doug.

