

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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MICHAEL KIM

MICHAEL BALIKER: All right. We will go ahead and get started here with Michael Kim here at the Farmers Insurance Open.

Michael, making your eighth start at this tournament here this week and obviously high school down the road at Torrey Pines High School. I guess just starting out, how special is it to be back and be a part of this tournament again?

MICHAEL KIM: Yeah, this tournament is obviously really special for me. This is where -- Torrey Pines is where I grew up playing, went to Torrey Pines High School. So I'm always excited to come back to this event and it's almost a dream come true. Dream is to actually win the thing, so we'll see.

MICHAEL BALIKER: You're coming in on some great form finishing tied for sixth at the American Express, finishing with four birdies in the last four holes. It also putts you in a really good position for the Aon Swing 5, you're sixth in the standings right now and a good finish this week and an opportunity to get into Pebble Beach.

What added motivation does that give you here this week with that goal out there?

MICHAEL KIM: I certainly don't need any more motivation than I have to win this tournament. Pebble Beach is also another obviously really cool place having gone to school at Cal near there. I enjoy playing with amateurs in that format. I played, I think I finished 11th there last year, so good vibes for that week. Hopefully I can do a good week this week and move on to next week, too.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Just real quick before questions, again talking about your recent form, you mentioned that you maybe didn't feel like you had your best stuff last week but you were able to make adjustments throughout the course of the four days and turn in a good result. Does that give you any additional confidence knowing that, hey, I can still finish in the top-10 even though I'm not necessarily, you know, firing on all cylinders?

MICHAEL KIM: Yeah, definitely. Heading into Sony, a few things that Sean and I were working on -- it was pretty inconsistent at Sony with the ball-striking but the putting and chipping was really good and was able to figure some stuff out while playing AmEx last week and was able to put up a good final round. It was definitely a confidence booster knowing that I don't always have to feel great to have a good finish out here.

Q. Michael, do you understand the Aon enough to know what you need to do this week? Do you have any idea?



MICHAEL KIM: I understand that Carl is in front of me. I understand I need to be inside the top-5.

I wasn't thinking about it at all until a few days ago. I think I'm 20 or some odd points behind and I need to be inside the top-5. Like always, the answer is play better. If I have a good week this week, it will work out accordingly, I'm sure.

Q. As far as you know, you would need a top-5? You would need a top-5 or --

MICHAEL KIM: I need to be inside the top-5 of that list, of that Aon 5 list. If I have a top-5 this week, I'm sure I'll be in next week, but yes.

Q. But you don't know exactly what position you need to get into necessarily?

MICHAEL KIM: I mean, I guess in a perfect world I think I'm like 20-something points behind, which is like a top-15, 20th. I'm sure that's probably the minimum I need to do.

But regardless, like I said, I have plenty of motivation to do my best this week. I'm not too worried about that at the moment.

Q. The creation of the Aon is obviously to give guys a chance to get into some of the signature events. I mean, how great a thing is it that you have this opportunity so early in the season to make some kind of mark as far as your next step?

MICHAEL KIM: Yeah, definitely. For me, typically I've always loved the West Coast Swing. I grew up in California, went to school in California, but typically I've had -- I've been a slow starter. But this last week at the AmEx was great to get off to good start and hopefully continue that to Pebble.

When I was looking at the schedule for this year, it's kind of one of those things where like the majors for me where if I get into them, great, but it's not like I'm planning on playing Pebble or Genesis or stuff like that.

It was a nice surprise to see I have a good chance for next week. Hopefully a good week will take care of that.

Q. The contrast between playing out in the desert and then coming here, weather aside, we got like three inches of rain yesterday, whatever, is that -- do you think that that, the conditions at Torrey and the difficulty scare some guys away? Maybe "scare" is the wrong word, but just makes guys have to really weigh their schedule as far as do they want to come out here this early in the season and play a course this difficult?

MICHAEL KIM: You know, I think in the past the poa annua greens have been maybe not



an issue but a tricky point. But I have played on these greens when they're the absolute worst on a Friday afternoon at 6:00 p.m., so the greens don't phase me as much.

You know, I feel like this tournament, the guys that play it every year play it, certain guys skip it every year.

Q. How about the difficulty of it this early in the season when you're still working on your game?

MICHAEL KIM: You know, it is long and difficult obviously, but it's quite generous off the tee in that there's not too many hazards off the tee. You'll be able to find it on most holes other than maybe like 4 if you go left, 7. No, you can't really lose it on 7., you'll be able to find your golf ball. So it's -- the fairways themselves are tight, but you'll be able to find it as long as you hit it within reason. It's a bit of a balance, I think.

Q. What have you thought of the rough the last couple years, the last few years as far as how difficult it is and even looking at the North and the South?

MICHAEL KIM: Yeah, I think one of the biggest differences is how difficult the North has kind of become. I feel like when I first came to this tournament as a kid, everyone tore up the North. I remember distinctly Snedeker shot like 61 or some ridiculously low and kind of used that as a springboard. Now I don't think the gap is as wide.

The rough, we'll see. It's obviously rained a lot so I don't know -- I don't think they'll be able to even cut it. Usually they don't cut it when it's this wet. We'll see. I haven't really checked out the golf course too much from the rain, but I feel really comfortable out here and I'm sure I can adjust.

Q. Michael, this is a bit of a broad question but I think this week marks the 10th anniversary of your first PGA TOUR event. Could you have imagined the journey that you've been on back then in those 10 years? I mean, you had the win, you had all the struggles, you've had your recent play. I think your world ranking was well into four figures and now you're at 100, which I think might be your best one ever.

MICHAEL KIM: Um-hmm.

Q. Can you just kind of put in perspective a little bit what these 10 years have been like and if you could have imagined anything like that if you were sitting up there 10 years ago this week?

MICHAEL KIM: Definitely not. I mean, it is a pretty -- it has been a pretty big rollercoaster ride. When you show up to -- when you grow up hoping to someday play in the event, you don't really -- you only think about the good things that might happen, you don't necessarily think about all the bad things that might happen.



During those ups and downs I feel like I've grown a lot as a person and as a golfer. Surely much more knowledgeable about my mental game, my full swing and all that. Hopefully I can use those ups and downs to further my career starting now.

And like you said, I'm finally in the -- I think I'm 100th now. Nick Dunlap, it just took him four events to be inside, but it is what it is. Like I said, hopefully I can use those lessons for a better career going forward.

Q. What did you learn about yourself during those years when you were struggling and how did you keep it together?

MICHAEL KIM: You know, luckily I've always had a great support system outside of golf. I was able to kind of differentiate some of the bad golf and the real life stuff. I was able to kind of leave the bad on the golf course and once I got off, I was OK. I was sad, for sure, during a lot of those moments, but for the most part I was able to differentiate that.

Now coming back I just have a ton of gratitude being here feeling like my game is in good shape. Never would have imagined the degrees of ups and downs, but in the end I can consider it as just a big process of it all.

Q. You mentioned off the course. Much has been made about your social media presence. Was there a conscious decision you made at some point that you wanted to be more -- I guess just put yourself out there with people? I mean, that website can be a cesspool for a lot of people.

MICHAEL KIM: It can. I don't know the exact moment I decided, but there definitely was obviously a moment where I decided I want to be a little more active. Like I mentioned to Todd last week, Max obviously being a really close friend, a college teammate of mine, I guess if there was one moment, I played with him at the Safeway not this last one but the one before that and for whatever reason Max and my career, we never really matched up. When I was playing well, he was playing bad and when he was playing well, I was playing bad. So I hadn't really seen his following grow as much. I think that week was a big eye opener in seeing the following that he had, seeing the crowd that he drew.

Certainly that was a bit of a catalyst for make thinking maybe I can use Twitter or X as something to grow, quote unquote, my brand. That was probably the biggest start point of it all, yeah.

Q. Last thing, what's been the highlight of doing that? I imagine you interact with a lot of people, you've watched a lot of bad swings and analyzed them. What have you taken from it?

MICHAEL KIM: The highlight, I don't know if there's a real highlight. I think it's just even last week I ended up playing with a couple of my followers on Twitter as amateur participants. You know, once in a while I'll get someone from the crowd recognizing me, which as a kind



of a regular PGA TOUR player is pretty rare.

So just those moments kind of shows me that I'm doing something good, I guess. I think it's those moments that kind of surprise me, like, oh, my gosh, you actually recognize me compared to the next guy? Those kind of moments are probably the positives, for sure.

Q. Michael, recently on Twitter you kind of showed your swings throughout the years and how they changed and matured. I'm wondering as you've gone through coaching if you've realized there's a certain type of coaching you respond to best or certain ways that's evolved on how you like to go about things with a coach.

MICHAEL KIM: I think there's certain swing characteristics that I do much better with. I don't know if there are certain like coaching styles, but definitely some methodology stuff that definitely I do better with or that's kind of a neutral to open clubface compared to I shut the clubface, I do much better with a neutral clubface.

And the work that I have done with Sean over the last I want to say two and a half years has been great. I guess I work really well with Sean. Not that I didn't work well with coaches before, but I've seen definitely the most success with Sean.

Q. Is it just the way you guys interact or the way he talks about the game?

MICHAEL KIM: I do think Sean is a well thought-out person, he's definitely thinking about all kinds of things at all times. He's definitely a type of coach and to be honest a person that I really haven't interacted a ton with, but everything has been awesome for me at this point. Maybe it is the way he gives me certain swing ideas or thoughts about it, but whatever it has been, it has been great.

Q. A little off topic, just as someone who played last week and was kind of intimately familiar with the golf course and the tournament, what did you think about what Nick was able to do as a young amateur and kind of how impressive that is?

MICHAEL KIM: It's unbelievable. I think this was his fourth or fifth professional event. He's 20 years old. I think I might have been about that age when I first turned pro here.

When you're that young, you're kind of -- you just don't have as much scar tissue and so you're able to kind of freewheel it. He's obviously an incredible golfer. It's pretty amazing.

Also at the same time I saw that Jordan Spieth when he won the John Deere was actually younger than Nick. I think the amateur tag has changed our idea on how young he was. To see the things that Jordan has done is equally as impressive. Obviously what Nick did last week, playing with Sam, playing with J.T. on that final round was super, super impressive stuff.

Q. When you think about all the time you spent on this property, is there any certain



memory that comes to mind that makes you appreciate your journey?

MICHAEL KIM: Whenever I come back I remember mostly Tiger's shots, some of his most famous shots out here and me trying those shots, mostly the putt on 18 when he won the U.S. Open, or to get into the playoff in the U.S. Open. Certainly I think two weeks after that event when I was able to play I think I tried a few putts from that exact spot.

The putt on 13 he made from the back of the green to the front on Saturday. Just mainly those memories of trying really some of the shots that he hit.

Also just remember him making eagle on the North Course. They switched up the nines so I'm always confused. Nine or 18, I just remember him making an eagle putt. It's a lot of those kind of cool memories that come back whenever I come back.

Q. Do you remember the first time of the year that you stepped on property watching a tournament?

MICHAEL KIM: I don't remember the exact time, but probably -- I would think the first time I watched Tiger in person was I was in middle school, I think, so maybe like 2006 or something like that was probably the first time.

Q. Did you make that putt on 18 when you tried it two weeks later?

MICHAEL KIM: Well, the cup wasn't exactly there, so I put a tee down, but I certainly -- I think I put a tee down. I took a couple tries at it and I probably imitated Tiger's fist pump and then looked around to see if anyone was watching. I probably wasn't the only person trying that putt after that.

Q. Definitely not. You talked about your social media presence. You had some fun on Twitter yesterday. Did you relish the opportunity to remind everybody, hey, I'm one of the hometown guys, too?

MICHAEL KIM: It's kind of funny, a friend sent me the screen shot of my name not being on the list of guys from San Diego. I'm kind of looking at the list and I see Charley Hoffman, yeah, I get that. I see Xander Schauffele, yeah, I get that. I see J.J. Spaun, I'm like hmm, like I don't know, probably, I don't know, if you remember J.J. you probably should remember me.

And I see Cameron Sisk and I'm like, who the hell is Cameron Sisk? Funny enough, I actually ran into him on the range just earlier and he had a picture. He caddied for me like 10 years ago when I was playing this event as like a First Tee like walk up 18 and he sent me the picture. It was kind of funny, it was kind of one of my first old veteran guy moments, I guess. I still feel I'm one of the younger guys out here, but seeing that was kind of funny.

Q. You mentioned kind of some of the negativity. I know it can be hard for



professional athletes. Did you have to overcome any of that when you decided to kind of lean into social media? I'm sure through the years you've seen negative comments that all athletes seem to.

MICHAEL KIM: For the most part I feel like a lot of it's been pretty positive, to be honest, considering it is usually somewhat negative. It's usually like the LIV troll bots that are kind of commenting once in a while on the negative stuff. Those guys are sending out tweets to every PGA TOUR player, so those are pretty easy to ignore.

For the most part I feel like everyone has been pretty positive about some of the stuff that I've been tweeting.

Q. And lastly from me, what have you learned through the years in your experience about what it takes to score out here when it is a little bit damp?

MICHAEL KIM: I feel like I've played this tournament in every condition. Not just like going back to junior golf, when I played when I was a junior, but like the few times that I have played well and I have been kind of near the lead, I feel like the first time was the year Snedeker won with that Monday finish. I mean, it was torrential downpour, it was blowing 40 miles per hour. I shot maybe like 82 or something. I mean, it was so hard.

Then the next time I did well, the Santa Ana winds came and it was blowing 30. I think Jason Day won that year.

Every time I've done well through Saturday it's been like a crazy weather type day. Hopefully this time around looks like the weather's going to be good, so hopefully I can play well enough to contend. If the things go right, hopefully I have a chance.

Q. Michael, while we're going down memory lane, most guys would remember their first PGA TOUR start. Do you have any distinct memory of your first start here in 2014?

MICHAEL KIM: To be honest, I just remember being super nervous on the first tee. I remember my game wasn't in at all good shape heading into the week. I kind of scrapped it around Thursday on the North Course to shoot 2 under. I remember I went to the back of the range and I saw Tiger was hitting some golf balls and Sean Foley was the coach at that time and I had -- I had known Sean a little bit at that point so I kind of used him as an intro to get a picture with him afterwards. Stuff like that.

I know I played pretty terrible that Friday to miss the cut. You know, I just remember those first tee jitters, for sure. It was as nervous as I've ever been.

Q. When you tried the Tiger putt after the Open, did you make it?

MICHAEL KIM: So I put a tee down and I pretended to make it and give it the old --



Q. You hit the tee?

MICHAEL KIM: I think I was -- I don't think I hit the tee itself, but it was close enough to where I pretended to make it.

Q. People have talked about how hard that putt was, it was not straight by any stretch of the imagination. Do you remember that part of it, that you were thinking --

MICHAEL KIM: I feel like everyone remembers how bumpy the greens were and that slow motion of it kind of rolling and bumping along and taking a while for it to break and all that.

Q. Did you come for the U.S. Open that year? Were you on the property?

MICHAEL KIM: I wasn't on the property. I don't think -- I think my parents just told me to watch it on TV. I want to say I was playing a golf tournament, like a junior golf, maybe like an AJGA tournament. I wasn't on site, but obviously watched every moment of it that I could.

Q. Monday, too?

MICHAEL KIM: Monday too, yeah, for sure.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Michael, we thank you so much for the time and best of luck this week.

