

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
February 13, 2024

CHASE JOHNSON



MODERATOR: We would like to introduce Chase Johnson to the interview room here at the '24 Genesis Invitational.

Chase, congratulations, you're in the field on the Charlie Sifford Memorial sponsor exemption.

In case people missed it, Chase is in the field on the Charley Sifford Memorial sponsor exemption. Congratulations.

Just can you tell us just how that came about, where were you when you found out about that, what sort of excitement you had when you discovered that?

CHASE JOHNSON: Yeah. I followed the Charlie Sifford Award closely the last couple years. I've written letters a couple times. I've gotten some feedback back, so this year I was in my living room with my fiancée, Katie, and our dog, Deeferdog. And Mr. Antolini called me. He said, hey, what do have you coming up? Just chilling at home, got some stuff coming. I'm looking over No. 10 right now, I'm curious how you're going to play it, if you still want to play. I think I can make that happen, I think I'll take the position.

Yeah, it was really exciting. We were freaking out. Deefer could sense the excitement and he started barking like crazy and Katie is trying to calm him down, so it was really exciting.

MODERATOR: This will be your fifth PGA TOUR event. What have you learned in the PGA TOUR events that you've played so far?

CHASE JOHNSON: Just to stay patient and play within myself. Last year I had a good season and validated some things I was working on and kind of finally got the cut breakthrough at Rocket Mortgage.

Then went to Cabo for World Wide and found myself in contention through the first couple rounds.

Biggest thing I learned is just got to continue to go after it and make putts on the weekend. Played well but kind of cooled down with the putter and slowed down a little bit. One under on the weekend's not good enough for these guys. Just stay patient and trust my process and just try and get some putts to fall.

MODERATOR: You're a Kent State guy, I believe you just missed Corey Connors. When you played there, he might have left just before you started, but you had a practice round



with him today I understand. What was it like reconnecting with him and how did you find the golf course? What did you see out there?

CHASE JOHNSON: It's really fun, yeah, Corey's great. For a while we played at the same course in Jupiter and I haven't seen him for a while, so it was really cool to get a round in with him today.

I was kind of picking his brain a little bit asking him on certain holes what he tends to do and he was explaining certain things and where they put pins and tee shots. Yeah, it was really fun being able to play with him again and just kind of learn, I think he's played out here six years now, so just getting some feedback and stuff from experience obviously goes a long way. With how firm the course is, you've got to know where you're hitting this ball.

Q. I know it's kind of a big question, what has Tiger Woods meant to you in your life and your career trying to pursue professional golf and have you had any interactions with him since getting the exemption?

CHASE JOHNSON: Yep. He's been huge to my -- he's my idol. I grew up playing the Tiger Woods video games and everything. They had this one feature called trophy balls and whenever you got an award, first eagle, back-to-back eagles, whatever. My dad had taught me based off of that system. When I was 4 or 5 we would be practicing and he created daddy trophy balls and so if I succeeded at something in practice I usually got a pack of Yu-Gi-Oh! cards or Pokemon cards during the round. It taught me how to win at an early age.

First time I met him was at the World Wide Technology event last fall. First thing I thought is I need to get in the gym, man, this dude's so much bigger than me, he's huge. Like TV and stuff does not do justice how biggest.

Had a good conversation with him a little bit on the range, just kind of joking around. He was there for a split second. Haven't gotten to catch up with him this week but hopefully we can get something in before the tournament starts.

Q. Chase, how does this tournament feel differently from the other PGA TOUR events you've been in? Obviously there's not fans here yet, but with the huge purse, chance to make a lot of money in this event and kind of prove a little bit more to yourself, how does it feel differently than anything else you've been in so far?

CHASE JOHNSON: Obviously it's a Signature Event, so just from a prestigious level, it's a major tournament. Small field, the top players in the world.

So it's exciting to be able to play for the purse against this competition, but ultimately I'm just excited to test my game against a fantastic legendary golf course against the best players in the world.



You know, just see where I stand and hopefully at the end of the day, at the end of the week I've played within myself and everything else will fall into place and take care of itself.

Q. Was today the first round ever here?

CHASE JOHNSON: No. So I was able to get out here and get some rounds in last month. Completely different course when it's soaked and soft. So I played yesterday in the pro-am, played this morning nine with Corey and then went out seven, eight holes by myself after that.

It's playing very different. The fairways tighten up a little bit when they're firm and rolling through some of the doglegs, greens are firmer. If you're above the pin on certain parts, when I was here last month it wasn't an issue, now you've got to really just be conscious of where the pins are. If you get into trouble, where you need to leave it to save a par.

So learned a lot these last couple days and ready to get after it.

Q. Chase, following up on Dan's question, the admiration you had for Tiger and playing his video game and now you're in a field against him, what's the thought behind that?

CHASE JOHNSON: It's really exciting. In the fall at World Wide I was really excited to play in the very first PGA TOUR-sanctioned event on a Tiger designed golf course at El Cardonal, and it was exciting because you could see his creativity with irons and approach shots because you had to aggressively play to a position that was 40 feet away from the pin in order to use the slope and get it down to a kick-in.

Now, I've always wanted to play against him. Everyone from my generation does. Everyone from every generation wants to. Now being able to compete in the same tournament as him, it's next level. Hopefully, all goes well for both of us for the week and we can have some late pairings going into the weekend.

Q. Second question, talk a little bit more about the stuff that your dad did to prepare you for golf. I love the story about Yu-Gi-Oh cards. What else is there?

CHASE JOHNSON: We don't have enough time for all of that.

So one that everyone likes is to play in conditions -- when I was here for media day, it was 30 degrees and pouring rain and in Barberton, Ohio, in early 2000s you would see Chase Johnson and his dad out there with a hose and he's spraying me with the hose and I'm hitting golf shots into the field behind our house. And someone asked me how do you feel about that and I was like please, I have a Super Soaker combined with golf, I was living the dream as a kid outside. The better shot I hit, I more excited I got.

Yeah, there's so many others. He would create a little podium and ask me interview



questions just like this after I won a tournament on Tiger Woods video games. He did a lot of stuff that you don't really see as a kid, and then when you're in the situation here, I feel comfortable and it was all worth it.

Q. Chase, just curious, out of all the stories and recipients that have come before you, why do you think your story was the perfect one to be the recipient for this opportunity?

CHASE JOHNSON: You know, obviously Tiger, with the relationship he had with his dad growing up and everything, how he was trained and everything, my relationship with my dad was very similar and the training was based off of a lot of the stuff that they had done.

I watched the Tiger Woods story religiously as a kid. It was like a TV show kind of movie, very low budget but I loved it. A lot of the stuff that we saw in that we had took -- you know, my dad never played golf really until a couple years before I was born, but read his book and built a lot of my game off of everything that he learned from Tiger, his dad, his book and all that stuff. So it was a huge influence and being out here is very exciting.

Q. From your dad's perspective and everything that he's taught you, what's the one thing that you're going to carry with you as you tee it up on Thursday?

CHASE JOHNSON: A very simple one: If you hit a bad shot, come back with a good one. He drilled that in when I was 3 years old. I mean, that's how you teach a kid to forget about bad shots. You're going to hit some good shots that don't get rewarded out here, so they're going to come off as bad shots and you've just got to come back with a good one and just try and put yourself back in position. That's going to be important this week.

MODERATOR: One other connection that you have with this tournament is Will Zalatoris. Will was a Collegiate Showcase winner here in 2015, made his first start here and he's a sponsor exemption this week also. You finished runner-up to him at a Korn Ferry Tour event in Colorado four years ago, I think.

CHASE JOHNSON: Yeah, 2020, yeah.

MODERATOR: What was that experience like being in the hunt for probably the first time in a Tour event and what did you learn from that?

CHASE JOHNSON: It was exciting. You know, Will, our story kind of goes back to Callaway Junior World days. I think we were all paired -- me, him and Davis Riley were all paired together in the same group. Fast forward all those years later through amateur stuff we're battling. We played the third round together. I shot like 75, fell down the board a little bit. Then on Sunday I shot the course record at TPC Colorado and came from behind and posted the clubhouse lead.

The biggest thing I took away from that is, one, you're never really out of it. You can always



get hot and make a comeback kind of like Nick did this past week at Waste Management on the back nine.

And then to see the putts going in and then when you're that early, there's no cameras. When you start getting into contention, the cameras come out and they're following you. I responded and continued -- I birdied four, five holes coming in since they had appeared.

So just validating that and responding to the pressure obviously I knew that I was in, and then birdieing 18 to give myself a chance was really exciting. Just to know that I could do it and put myself in contention at that level that early. It was only my second Korn Ferry event, so that was definitely a confidence booster.

MODERATOR: Doesn't look like we have any more questions, so appreciate your time and good luck this week.

CHASE JOHNSON: Thank you, guys. Appreciate it.

