

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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RAFA CAMPOS

DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome San Juan's pride and joy, Rafa Campos, to the interview room here at the Puerto Rico Open.

Rafa, thanks for joining us. Always a pleasure for me to sit here with you year after year and talk about it. This is your 15th start, I believe, in the Puerto Rico Open. That said, just a few comments on how special it is this week every year for you.

RAFA CAMPOS: Yeah, Doug, thanks for having me like this every year. Yeah, I think this is the 15th start I think out of 16 years or something like that. The only year I missed out was I was injured one year, so I think 15 out of 16, something like that, so it's been some time.

No, it's an honor, it's a pleasure to play in front of our Puerto Rican crowd. I only get to do this once a year and it still is equally as special as the first time, which is pretty amazing. I still get those big first tee jitters and all of that.

Yeah, it's a great honor to be Puerto Rican and especially with three other Puerto Ricans that are playing alongside me this week. They're the future of our game here in Puerto Rico, so it's nice to have that type of group leading up for the week.

DOUG MILNE: Good season on Korn Ferry last year, back with your card. How special was that, how validating? Not that I'm saying that you weren't there before, but how special is that to have really done that the way you did it?

RAFA CAMPOS: Extremely special, honestly. The amount of hard work and the amount of work I put in the entire season not only to get physically fit, mentally stable. My entire team knows that we put in so much effort to give ourselves a chance to get back to the PGA TOUR, and to actually at the end of the year succeed in that sense.

You know, it was tough to witness that last week, last couple weeks. We made it a little bit more dramatic than it should have been, but honestly, it's just extremely special to be back on the PGA TOUR after all the work that we put in. So it was very validating for myself and for my team that the things that we were working on, trying to do actually had a very good positive result at the end of the year.

So yeah, feels great to be back on the PGA TOUR, it truly does. It feels phenomenal. Just excited to have these opportunities and hopefully do the best I can and earn enough points to make this permanent here.

DOUG MILNE: Well, you're off to a good start with your top-20 finish at Torrey Pines. How

have you felt kind of rolling into this season?

RAFA CAMPOS: I felt ready. I've actually felt prepared for the tournaments that I'm playing. Would have liked to play some more tournaments, that's all.

I felt really good at Farmers. Tough golf course and I just came out of -- I got injured the week before working out and I had to withdraw from the event. Just being able to start the year off with the right foot forward with a top-20, that was big for me mentally. It kind of let me know, OK, we still have the game there. There's a couple things we need to tweak a little bit, but overall I feel great.

In Mexico I believe I finished like 39th. Consistent week. I didn't hit it great, didn't hit it bad, didn't make that many putts, but overall to start the year the way I did, a couple cuts, kind of put myself in position that first week after a couple days. I'm just looking forward to all these events, I'm just looking forward to these opportunities and hopefully, hopefully we can play a little bit more just so we can get into a groove. Having to wait a couple weeks sometimes in between tournaments kind of stops the groove a little bit. But either way, I'm feeling phenomenal. In the time off I'm practicing the way I should practice and I'm actually very ready for the tournaments. Just waiting for those chances.

DOUG MILNE: You mentioned working out. First thing I noticed about you on the range earlier was how much slimmed down you've gotten. How dedicated, how important is physical fitness and so forth as far as your game and just your mindset?

RAFA CAMPOS: How important, I think it's extremely important. This is one part of my life that I never tackled. I was always big, I've always been big, but I would never wake up in the morning to go to a gym. After all the injuries these last few years, sitting down with my team, coaches, trainers, I realized like, man, we need to get in shape.

So it's extremely important, and it feels phenomenal, It feels great just being able to go out and not worry about what hurts, what doesn't hurt, if something's going to hurt.

I think physical fitness is extremely important nowadays especially for golfers. We make these swings, high rotations, high velocities, the body's not meant to do that. I think it was -- it has been actually priority No. 1 for me this year and last year to wake up, go to the gym every day, and even my trainer's upset with me because I want to go seven days a week and he's like you need some rest.

No, overall I think it's extremely important. I'm grateful I decided to make that change last year. I lost 50 pounds in total. I've gained like 10, but I've been working a lot with weights lately so I'm pretty sure, I hope it's more muscle buildup instead of fat. Yeah, it's extremely important.

DOUG MILNE: Really, just last two questions, You just came from a press conference here where I'm sure you were pleased to hear they've extended through at least 2026. How good

does that make you feel to hear that?

RAFA CAMPOS: This is great. It does make me feel really good because it's a very special place for me. This is one reason, first time I had a chance to play this event, this was what really motivated me to pursue golf and actually make professional golf my actual profession.

It's awesome that they extended it because of these kids that are competing this week. There's a 15-year-old kid, Evan Pena, there's an 18-year-old-kid, Kelvin Hernandez, they were unbelievable golfers. If I had half of the talent and skill at that age, I don't know where I would be. I'm just grateful to see them and I'm really looking forward for them -- for me to see them playing these next three, four years in the Puerto Rico Open. This is awesome that we got a chance to know that we're going to play for a couple more years here in Puerto Rico.

DOUG MILNE: And really, just the last question along those same lines, not to put you on the spot, but you obviously are a huge inspiration to a lot of these kids.

How much gratification or how much good does that do your heart to know that you have influenced so many of these Puerto Rican kids and even beyond Puerto Rico to come out and give golf a shot to make it a career?

RAFA CAMPOS: So one of my main goals in life obviously and especially the last five or six years has been to promote the game of golf here as much as possible, so inspire those younger generations.

You just asking me that question, yesterday was a very special day. There was a launch of something that was recorded, a documentary about us Puerto Ricans and all that. I went to the premier and a couple of these kids went to the premier. It reminded me why I do this, why I'm doing this. I was crying midway. I would see ironically these same kids, the younger kids and all that, the message during the documentary just saying, OK, Rafa, thank you for everything and all that. That kind of validates my main goal of what I've been trying to do.

It is truly inspiring for me -- not even for them, just for me to know that what I've been trying to achieve, I'm actually able to actually accomplish it.

Yeah, it's pretty fun to be a role model for these kids, but all I want to do is just help them as much as possible to achieve their goals faster than I ever did. They have the potential, ability, skills necessary to do that and just kind of, just trying to give them self confidence to keep working hard and you're going to get there if you don't stop.

DOUG MILNE: Last one since Nico's back here, did have a good champion last year who's going to come up and join us, how cool was it to watch him do what he did last year?

RAFA CAMPOS: It was awesome, especially Columbian Latin guys. You know, for me I love watching Nico, I love playing with him. We got paired last week in Vidanta Mexico the

final day and I'm pretty impressed honestly how he's hitting the ball right now and it's really fun to watch him.

Just to have a Latin person win this event after 15 years, yeah, 15 years it took for a Latin person to win, it just meant the world I'm pretty sure to him, for him, for winning the Puerto Rico Open or winning a PGA TOUR event but for us as well.

Like I said, the way, if I'm trying to inspire these kids, he served as an inspiration last year because I'm like, hey, if he could do it, other Latin people can do it.

It works like a -- it's just a compounding effect. I'm trying to inspire these younger kids to understand if you have a goal and you work hard at it you can achieve it. If I can do it, if I can get to the PGA TOUR, you guys can definitely get to the PGA TOUR. Nico's win last year served as another motivation like, hey, I saw everybody cheering for him at the end, I kind of want that feeling, I want to see how big it can get if I do that.

DOUG MILNE: I feel really confident it will be quite a big roar. Thank you for your time, we always do appreciate it.

RAFA CAMPOS: Thank you, Doug.