

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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TONY FINAU

MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Tony Finau into the interview room, our defending champion of the now Texas Children's Houston Open.

You were just talking about this new trophy here. You held a trophy from this tournament two years ago, I know you're ready to get your hands on this one as well. Talk about being back for your title defense.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, that'd be awesome to hold this one as well. I was just saying the other trophy was massive. It's the heaviest trophy I've ever lifted that I have by far. I bet it's 35 pounds, it's wild.

It's nice to be back at a place -- always nice to be back at a place that you won, especially a golf course where I really performed well all week in 2022. Quite a different title defense as it's not playing at the same time of the year and 16 months later, but I am happy to be back and looking forward to playing some good golf this week.

MODERATOR: Let's talk a little bit about your season up to this point. What's the state of your game coming in?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I didn't have the result I wanted last week coming into my title defense. I missed the cut at the Valspar last week, 45th at THE PLAYERS, so not the best finishes that I would have liked.

I've been working hard at my game, I'm as strong as I've ever been as far as getting in the gym and doing the work. I know at some point the results will come. The work is there and the body of work is there and I just know sometimes you go through spurts where you just don't score nearly as well as when you do at other times throughout the season. But hopefully this week I can spark a nice run.

MODERATOR: Is it a different mindset when you are defending or is it business as usual for the tournament?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I wouldn't say different mindset, but I have more obligations this week than I would on a normal week, and also I have great memories on the golf course, so that will just help as I play throughout the week.

Q. Defending championships and events, it's more the exception than the rule, it's hard to do it. You come in with great memories and great confidence because of last year, but sometimes that also maybe adds to the pressure a little bit?



TONY FINAU: Yeah, I think it definitely can add to the pressure. I guess being a champion at a place people can expect you to always play well there, so there's that added pressure.

I've been fortunate to have to try to defend a few titles over the last couple years. At least I'm starting to become a little bit more familiar with how it feels to defend a tournament and hopefully have a nice title defense this week.

Q. Nobody has repeated here since Vijay back in '04 and '05 so it's kind of proof that it's not an easy thing to do.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, no, defending any title isn't easy. I saw my name actually next to Vijay's on the winner's plaque, so hopefully I can add my name to that back to back.

Q. Very different time of the year to be playing here. Your observations on how the course is different from what you remember in the fall?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I haven't been out on the golf course yet, I plan on doing that after this.

Just from what I expect, my expectations are that the golf course will play a little softer with the overseeded grass. Back in the fall it was playing quite fast, the ball was running, the greens were firm. I don't think that's going to be the case as much this week. I hope it firms out a little bit. It looks like the weather's going to hold up, not going to be too much rain. If that's the case, I do see it firming up a little bit, but I don't think it's going to play nearly as firm as it did back in November.

Q. You led almost from the get-go, that's of course a great feeling. How hard is that to do?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I think it's a tough task. I guess they call it wire to wire where you're pretty much leading every day. I think here and Detroit are my two titles where I led pretty much from start to finish. Yeah, it's an incredibly tough thing to do, you usually don't have your best stuff for four days, but sometimes certain weeks you do. Last time I played here I definitely did and it would be pretty amazing thing to do that twice.

Q. Is there a particular memory or perhaps even more precise a particular hole that comes to mind when you think about what you accomplished last year?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, last time I was here I walked off the ninth green on Sunday I believe with an eight-shot lead going into the back nine and I just remember for me that was uncharted territory in that I had never held a lead that high on the Korn Ferry Tour, on the PGA TOUR. Maybe the last time was in junior golf, you know. It was a situation where it was -- you know, I knew I was playing good enough golf to win the tournament, but it was a situation in my head where I was kind of fighting like, man, this could be the choke job of the



century or I could win by 11, I could try to run away with this thing. It was kind of a weird feeling, that's what I remember. I played so well all week to build that lead and then it was just like, all right, let's get this thing in the clubhouse and get this trophy in my hands.

Q. Tony, you mentioned being in the gym a little bit more. Is there anything kind of you've added to your routine or more so doing more of certain things? How has that kind of played out?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I'm in the gym more often than I've ever been. The numbers have shown this year my speed is up, I think I'm fourth on ball speed or swing speed this year, which is for me, I haven't been that high since really my first couple years on Tour. For me, it's paying off. It hasn't paid off in results yet, but again, the work is there and I know at some point -- it's how the game is, at some point you start getting results and that turns into more confidence and hopefully better results more often. The work never ends, but I've put in a lot of work outside the golf course to make sure that my body's strong and fit. Again, at some point I know it's going to pay some dividends.

Q. The numbers in strokes gained approach, you've always been pretty solid but it's gone on the uptick the last two or three years. Is there anything you attribute that to?

TONY FINAU: I think just really learning about how I do it, how I swing the club, what are the good things that I do, what are some things I need to work on and just try to be more diligent in working on the little things really. That's really it.

You try to get better every day and ultimately every year you're out here. Fortunately for me in that area I've gotten better each year, hitting it a little bit closer to the hole each year. Yeah, just the little things have paid off I think in a big way just in that I'm hitting it closer to the hole, which allows me to make more birdies.

Q. This is your tenth year on Tour. Does it seem that long or does it feel like it's flown by? How would you kind of assess that when you think of it being your tenth year on tour?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it's crazy. It's a little bit of both, it feels like it's flown by and it also feels like yeah, I could see how it's been 10 years as I think back on maybe my first win or my first, you know, major championship. That was like, wow, that did feel like quite a long time ago.

It's a little bit of both, but it's quite the journey to be out here for 10 years. I didn't really know what to expect when I got to the Tour, but it's definitely exceeded any of my expectations just being able to do what I love every single day I think is quite the blessing for me.

Q. And you're part of the esteemed Korn Ferry Tour class of 2014. This year has already become the winningest Korn Ferry Tour class, which is pretty quick in 10 years to do that. When you think back to being part of that class, kind of what are the



memories that come to mind from that season and just what it was about that class that has allowed it to have so many great players?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it's quite cool to be part of that. I played a lot of golf with Max Homa on the Korn Ferry Tour, Justin Thomas, so I got to know those guys pretty well on the Korn Ferry Tour as we were paired together really often. I think Nick Taylor, Adam Hadwin, these are all guys we all competed hard against each other on the Korn Ferry Tour and it's cool to see our class has had so much success on the PGA TOUR. It's really cool for me just to be a part of that class.

Q. Tony, everybody sets goals at the start of the season, but can you -- like so far this season what do you feel like you've been doing really well in your game and what do you feel like you're struggling with and need to continue working on?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, so I've been hitting the golf ball close. I think historically ball-striking has been my strength on the PGA TOUR, and especially over the last few years driving the golf ball has been my strength. I would say this year I haven't driven the golf ball nearly as well as I have in the past, so I'm not hitting as many fairways, so then my ball-striking just hasn't been as good as I need it to be.

My putting's across the board a lot better and I feel a lot better with the putter in my hand. Again, it's one of those things where so far up to this point I've played eight or nine events, so still a big enough sample size to know what I need to work on, but still a small sample size compared to what a full season looks like.

So I'm optimistic that good things are going to happen soon and hopefully I spark that this week.

Q. Going back to that back nine on Sunday in the fall, protecting a lead is, as you mentioned, can be really hard. What did you do differently just to make certain that you didn't have the choke of the century?

TONY FINAU: Well, I try to just stay in the same mindset. I tried to increase the lead, that's really what I wanted to do. I thought it would be really cool to win a golf tournament by double digits.

Q. Because to play conservatively, that would send you in the wrong direction?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, because I had been playing just so solid all week, I didn't really think I needed to change anything. It was more of a -- yeah, it was more of a mentality thing than it was a physical thing. I knew I was playing well enough, I was hitting the golf ball well and putting it well. To me it was just keep playing the game you've been playing for the last 63 holes and the tournament will be yours.

So I didn't end up increasing the lead, the lead decreased, but at no point on that back nine



did it cross my mind that I wasn't going to win the golf tournament, which is a rare feeling. Again, I had such a big lead and was playing well that as holes and shots went on, to me in my mind it was evident that I was going to win the golf tournament. I just needed to continue to keep my head down and not focus on the end result, just one shot at a time. It's a very cliché thing to say, but that's really where you're at in those situations is hit the bet shot at that time and move forward. I was still able to pull off a victory by four shots.

Q. Did anything happen on Thursday that made you think, wow, I'm in a zone this week? I'm just kind of throwing that out there.

TONY FINAU: Not really. I was coming off a missed cut last time I won as well, so I guess that's the one parallel that I have going into this week as last time I won here by having one of my best weeks, I missed the cut the last time I played here as well. I really didn't feel like I was playing great going into the week, but sometimes you get out on the golf course and you make some putts, you make some nice swings and you just start to stack those things up throughout the week.

It was just one of those weeks where that just happened. I was able to get into my groove and again play some of the best golf of my career the last time I was here.

Q. Tony, so this course is unique on Tour in that it's a muni, locals can play for 30 bucks during the week, kids can play for 10 bucks. What's that like knowing that you guys are playing on a course that's truly open to the Houston community where anyone can go play?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I absolutely love it. I grew up playing a muni golf course, a par-3 next to an executive course back in Salt Lake City. I love that we're playing on a public golf course. I think it's important to do that on the PGA TOUR and then the locals have the opportunity to play the same golf course that we're playing, see the shots maybe that we hit and have access to the same golf course that we play. I think it's quite special that we're playing here this week and hopefully this golf tournament's hosted here for many years to come.

Q. Lastly, I did want to ask, Scottie Scheffler having such a great (indiscernible) back-to-back wins. Have you played much with him and what impresses you about his game?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, just a quick Scottie Scheffler story. The first time I played with Scottie, I didn't really know who he was because he was a rookie on the PGA Tour and I played with him at TPC Boston. This was in I think '17 or '18, his rookie year.

We're playing together and after nine holes I think he shoots like 7 under or whatever. I'm not really paying attention, kind of focused on my own game. We got to No. 17 and he makes another birdie. I look over to my caddie and I'm like, man, this guy's got to be 8 or 9 under, and my caddie's like, how about 11?



So anyways, he birdies the last hole to shoot 59. I was playing with him and that was the first time I heard of him, it was the first time that I played with him. So that gave you an idea -- maybe not the first time I heard of him, but I vaguely knew who he was coming from the Korn Ferry Tour. I knew he was a good player.

But anyways, that was the first time I played with Scottie, he shot a 59 at TPC Boston and I knew he was special from that moment on.

Being teammates with him on some of these Ryder Cup and Presidents Cup teams over the last few years, gotten to know him, have played together a handful of times with him. When he won the Masters, I played with him the first two rounds and it was evident to me that he was going to be hoisting the green jacket after that on Friday.

I played enough rounds with him to know how great of a player he is, but I think it doesn't beat the person that he is, I think he's pretty fantastic for our game and cool to see all the success that he's having.

MODERATOR: All right. Tony, as always, thank you for your time. Best of luck this week.

TONY FINAU: Thank you.

