

RBC Heritage
Tuesday, April 11, 2017

Luke Donald Press Conference



NICK PARKER: I'd like to welcome Luke Donald into the media center here at the RBC Heritage. Obviously this is a special place for you. Six top-three finishes in your last eight starts here. Runner-up last year, four runner-ups in the last eight. What makes this place so special to you and why do you play so special here?

LUKE DONALD: Certainly a course that suits by game. I've had a lot of success in the last eight years, as you said. I've done everything but win. But it's a course -- it's like a puzzle, this course to me. I think you really have to think your way around it very well. You certainly don't need to overpower this golf course. It's a strategy -- a lot of strategy involved. And certainly it's in the best condition I've ever seen it. I think, despite the hurricane. In certain regards the thinning out of the trees has really helped the condition of the golf course. It's always been in great condition, but this year, especially. I played the back nine this morning, and it's in superb condition, and looks like we're going to have a great week for this tournament.

NICK PARKER: A lot of places the fairways are so wide you feel you don't have to focus in so hard, but here you have to focus in because they are so narrow.

LUKE DONALD: It's a very claustrophobic place. A lot of overhanging trees. And I think -- for some reason that real tight feeling narrows my focus and gets me more engaged in the shot, and that's why I seem to hit it very well around here. And also the greens are very small, so if you do miss greens you need to be really good around the greens. I've always putted pretty well around here, too. A lot of factors going into why I've been successful.

Q. Talk about the missing trees.

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, I played the back nine this morning. A couple noticeable trees are down, left of 15 green, right of 16, off the tee shot. There's a tree on 11, I think, that used to be quite big on the right-hand side. I don't feel it's going to impact the way the golf course plays. A little bit feels like you're a little bit less claustrophobic out there, gives you a little bit more room.

But the overall feel and the way the golf course plays and with the weather conditions I think they're going to be able to get the greens firm and quite fast. I don't think it's going to really impact scoring too much. As I

said, the condition of it is as good as I've ever seen. Whether that's more sunlight, more air, being able to circulate around the course, the fact that they actually closed it for a period of time. But it's in tremendous shape.

Q. A lot of players love the golf course, it's one of their favorite courses. But also they like the vibe of the event. Would you mind discussing some of that here at Sea Pines?

LUKE DONALD: Yes, a very family-oriented vibe. I've come here the last three or four years with my family. My kids are on Easter break this week, so it's nice for them to be with me. You drive around and you see so many people riding around on their bicycles. And it's just a very good family spot.

And I think following on from the rigors of Augusta and how tough that course plays. This place never plays that easy. The scoring is always quite challenging here, too. But certainly I think people let off a sigh of relief coming from Augusta and you just come here to enjoy the tournament, enjoy the golf course, and enjoy that kind of atmosphere of a family atmosphere.

Q. You don't sound too excited, considering all the success you've had here. Are you down on your game or are you feeling good with where you're at?

LUKE DONALD: Probably just my English tone, you know. I'm always excited to come here, I love this event (laughter).

I was disappointed not to be playing last week in Augusta. I feel like there was a stretch of some tournaments that -- on the West Coast and Honda where I really felt good about my game. This last month has been kind of a strange run of events for me. I didn't play well at Tampa, which is usually a good event for me, which was disappointing. And then I wasn't in the Match Play, I wasn't in Augusta. So I added Houston, which I've never really played very well at.

So the last month has been inconsistency in the schedule I would have liked to have played. And not playing well at Tampa, you know, it's not the greatest run up to this event that I've ever had.

But there were certainly some weeks on the West

Coast and in Florida where I was very, very encouraged about my game. I've certainly been working hard on my game. And hopefully coming back to a place like this where I've had some success I can get it going.

Q. You talked about how great condition the course is in, the wind is supposed to lay down. The weather is supposed to be good. Brian Gay at 20-under par, is that doable?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, the last few years it has blown here, it's been quite windy, and that makes it very tricky, in and amongst the trees. And when you come to the last three holes, you really feel the wind, you're very exposed. So the condition of the course, being good, the greens are holding right now. And they feel a little slower than previous years, maybe just because there's that much more growth. That could all couple to having to go a little lower. And I wouldn't be surprised if the winds keep down that scoring will be a lot better than it was last year, for sure, when conditions were quite tough.

Q. Greens here are the smallest on Tour. Do you do anything different to prepare for the smallest putting surfaces on the PGA TOUR?

LUKE DONALD: No, not really. You want to obviously come here with good ball-striking. I feel like it's important to keep it in play as much as possible. As I said, this is a claustrophobic place. You want to keep it in the fairways as much as possible, even though there's not much rough here, you can control it from the fairways much better coming into these small greens than you can from that first cut. So really that's the key to hitting a lot of greens is trying to hit a lot of fairways and being in the right spots.

But it's a little bit of a chess game, this course. You really have to know where the good misses are. There are certain places you can just not go, where you cannot access the green, because you're blocked out by trees.

In that way, I like the extra kind of course management and course thinking that this course demands.

Q. Just curious what your thoughts were from Sunday, watching Sergio finally break through after 70-whatever majors it is?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, I've obviously known Sergio a long time, we started playing junior matches together when he was 12, 13 years old. I've grown up knowing him. He came to my wedding. I'm invited to his wedding. We've been very good friends. We've played many Ryder Cup matches together. And obviously to carry around that best player to have never won a major, which I think Sergio was in the discussion,

obviously, was tough for him. I think someone that had that much talent to not quite have got it done for so many years, and have so many good opportunities to get it done and not finish the job off, was tough for him at times.

But he obviously is in a great place. He proved to himself that he could do it and showed great resilience on Sunday, even when he struggled a little bit early on the back nine, he came through with some amazing shots down the stretch and drove the ball amazingly well. Augusta is a tough place to drive it well, nowadays. It's become a lot more narrow. He was hitting it far and straight. And to finish as strong as he did, I think he deserved to win.

Q. Where were your kind of rooting interests on Sunday? Obviously Justin is a friend, too.

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, they're both friends. I've known Sergio a little longer. But, you know, I think because Sergio hadn't won, my allegiance was slightly in favor of Sergio winning, because he's never won a major. I played with Justin the last round of Merion when he won his major. But I feel for Justin. I feel like he's going to get a green jacket. His record there is pretty strong. His game seems very suited to Augusta. This was just meant to be Sergio's time.

Q. And yet Sergio talked a few years ago about how he may -- it may not happen for him. Are you past that? Is it still going to happen for you?

LUKE DONALD: Well, I still believe that I have the ability to win a major and win more tournaments. And I certainly -- I'm not hanging up the clubs yet. I'm very committed to working hard on the game, and get past a little bit of a lull in my results the last couple of years.

It's certainly not been the golf that I wanted. But I'm working hard on it. And I still believe that I'm good enough. Anyone who can get to No. 1 in the world for over a year I think has the ability to bounce back and hopefully I will.

NICK PARKER: Thanks for coming in, Luke. Best of luck this week.