

RBC Heritage

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

Jim Furyk

Press Conference



JOHN BUSH: We'd like to welcome two time RBC Heritage champion, Jim Furyk, into the interview room. Jim, I know last year was disappointing for you not being able to defend your title from 2015. But can we get some comments being back and going for your third one?

JIM FURYK: I always enjoy the golf course. I haven't had a lot of success this year, I played poorly. Haven't had any good strong finishes, either.

I enjoy playing here, it brings back good memories. It was a disappointment last year, but I held out as long as I could trying not to have surgery, and realized I eventually had to. And it's disappointing.

And I missed some events, the Masters, but I'm here. Some places I never want to miss. It's good to be back. It's good to be healthy.

And what can I say? It's a great golf course. Lost a few trees out there. It looks -- I can't say it -- it looks like less tight in spots, I'd say it looks less open. They've replaced some areas with some newer trees. But I think overall probably good and healthy for the golf course as far as sunlight, as far as get some air movement through there, and probably healthy for the golf course, as well.

JOHN BUSH: Obviously our FedExCup champion in 2010. You mentioned now that you're healthy. You have advanced to the playoff every year for the last ten years. You're currently 121st. Tell me about the rest of the year and your goals for the year.

JIM FURYK: Well, I guess goals are always to try to keep improving. I've been working on some equipment. Working on my game. Practicing. And I'm a little disappointed with the results at this point. But I've seen some good flashes. I've seen some good things happen. I just haven't been able to put that together for say 18 holes or four straight days, whatever it may be. Again, I haven't played poorly, I haven't played a lot. And when I have, I haven't played well.

Q. Having been forced to miss last year, do you still come in here with kind of the mentality, do you feel like you're a defending champion here?

JIM FURYK: It feels like more than two years ago, to be

honest with you (laughter).

I don't think that's really the mentality. I think I have the same mentality I always do coming in here. It will be more a matter of patience. I feel that this is the place in my career when I have been patient, when I have been playing well. I know I can win this golf tournament. I've won it twice, I've had a couple of opportunities to do so. I've had a number of very high finishes.

Sometimes the difficulty is a lot of trying to force the issue, trying to make things happen. When I have been patient I've also missed cuts, as well. The idea will be to try just play my style, not force the game. And let things come as they may.

There's definitely -- you're going to get some wedges in your hands, there's a couple of par-5s in front that might be reachable. There are going to be places where you have short irons and if you put the ball in the fairway you can attack.

My goal will be to try to pick and choose my spots wisely and be patient and not try to force things. And kind of crack the seal and get a good tournament under my belt and kind of jump start things. But you have to let that happen.

Q. Is there a different dynamic for you in tournaments, a year and a half away from Ryder Cup, but does that change the way you approach tournaments, in the sense that you're looking for other things, as well?

JIM FURYK: It's so early in the process right now to be looking at how other players are playing. I don't really care how the guys are playing right now. I care how they're playing a few months leading up to the event. Obviously there's a point where things start to get significant and important, not much I can do on that. Guys have to quality on their own merit.

As we get closer and next year, it will be really trying to identify those players. I have enough to work on right now trying to get ready and in my mind I'm always thinking, laying in bed thinking about that week, how I may handle certain situations and trying to play a lot of that through my mind, what the team may look like. Part of that is trying to provide the atmosphere for

those guys to succeed.

Q. I was going to ask you the next major being a U.S. Open, and you've been a former U.S. Open champion, what do you know about Erin Hills?

JIM FURYK: I don't know much. I've been told a little bit about it, it was a good, long golf course. I've heard really nothing great, nothing terrible. I've heard a lot right down -- the everyone is riding the fence. I think it will deal with a lot how it's set up and how the USGA wants to work the golf course.

But I haven't been there. I don't really plan on getting up there. I hear it's a really congested, crowded area.

Q. How do you prepare for this course, specifically because of the smallish greens here? Do your tactics change from tee to green?

JIM FURYK: I've always found that you can let your -- sometimes I let my mind wander on a course that's big and wide open. It makes you kind of want to reach back, hit it hard, maybe not be specific on your targets or trying to hit the ball too accurately. Big greens you can get lazy and sloppy and hit a lot of shots 30, 40 feet from the pin but still be on the green.

Here there's really no -- you look out and there's a tunnel off the tee. Fairways -- the fairways now after the redesign, because I didn't play last year, there's a significant number of fairways that are much tighter than they were before. I mean by the mowing cut. The tree lines stayed pretty much the same. They narrowed up the fairways. It makes me get very specific on my targets. I think because the greens are so small and they're difficult to hit it makes me very specific, again, on where I want the ball to be placed. And that being the case, I think I've hit the ball more accurately and straighter here because of that. I think when holes are well framed and small you tend to hit to smaller areas. And as things get big it gets easier to kind of let things drift away.

I'm not sure there's really any way to prepare other than, as I said, I've set up a game plan of how I wanted to get around this golf course, where I want to attack it, where I'm playing shots off the tee, and attack greens from. And so just kind of trying to fall back into that same rhythm, learn what may be new about the golf course, the back left of 2 has been changed. The 5th green has been relocated. A couple of trees have fallen down. It may change the course of a couple of holes, like No. 9 isn't quite as narrow and open as it was before. So just trying to learn those little things that have maybe changed in the last couple of years and refresh my memory on how to attack this course the best.

Q. I know you and Brian had a rules issue here several years ago. What do you think about the situation with Lexi Thompson?

JIM FURYK: I wasn't paying attention a lot. I know that there was a call-in, a little different than what happened with Brian and I. Brian made a swing and immediately said I think I might have an issue. And so that was -- he called that penalty on himself, which is admirable. I think that's what this game is all about and what you see a lot on the Tour.

As far as Lexi, it's a Catch-22. I think it's tough to have something happen that late in the game, probably almost 24 hours after the infraction. And I know there's been some folks negative about the armchair rules official, but you want to get things right, as well.

I think most competitors at the end of the day, when the tournament ends -- when the tournament ends, you sign your card and the trophy is handed out, everything is fine, nothing is going to go back.

But in the middle of a golf tournament if you figure out that I did something wrong and deserve to be penalized, yet didn't receive the penalty and I went on to win the tournament, I wouldn't feel right about that, either.

I think trying to get the rules right is important. And in that situation it's just the timing of it all. The fact that she's sitting on a two-shot lead and now she's got whatever it was -- two-shot lead, instead a two-shot deficit, it happened so much later. It's got a lot of negatives to it, as well.

Q. I was going to say Brian got up and down, won the tournament, somebody called in Monday, emailed Monday, would that have changed your mind?

JIM FURYK: No, once that trophy is handed out it's final. Guys have had maybe grips that weren't right or -- unknowingly, and found out later after they won the tournament, it's a final event at that point. It would have been a different situation.

Q. I don't know how long you've played a week after a major, but you're usually always at the Masters, except for the injury. And you always play here. Is it hard to go from one to the other? How do you balance that dynamic of I'm a little worn out from what just happened, but yet this is a great opportunity because it's a course that I love and it's a different situation?

JIM FURYK: I tend to play golf courses and tournaments that I love playing, that I go into in a very good mood. If I left the Masters with all the preparation I put in there and now we were seeing a place where I

just didn't enjoy playing, I'd be even that much more miserable being here, if that makes sense.

So I play the week before a major if I love the golf course. I play a week after the major if I love the golf course. Nothing against Houston. I hear it's a wonderful place. A lot of guys love the tournament. I asked folks what does it take to play Houston? And they all tell will me high, bombing, draws. And I go, well, no, no and no (laughter.) I'm 0 for 3, so maybe I shouldn't go. And so I've had 20 guys tell me -- 19 say I don't think I'd like it, one person's told me I'd love playing there. I go with the 19 out of 20 that say maybe that's not a good place to prepare for Augusta.

So the one thing I think gets overrated is this is a really cool island. I think it is a really relaxed, laid back place, maybe not so much on Easter weekend. But it's a great place. I think folks love bringing their families here, especially young families when the kids aren't in school. So a lot has been made of this nice, relaxing tournament after the Masters.

But I think that's maybe doing a little -- I understand the story and I like the story. But it also does a little disservice in that this is a great golf course. I think there's a lot of folks on Tour that put this in their top-5, top-10 of the golf courses we play, and they mark this tournament early in the year, whether it's after the Masters or not. I think it's a great tournament.

Q. First of all, is it in your top-5 or top-10?

JIM FURYK: It's honestly my favorite event. I used to say that about Colonial. But I really enjoy -- for about the last five to ten years this has been -- before I even won in 2010, this has been my favorite event. And a lot of it has to do with the golf course. It calls for a lot of different shots. It's different than a lot of golf courses we play. I won't lie to you, my strengths are very valuable here, getting the high, bombing draw and driver isn't really in my wheelhouse. And there's not a huge need for that here. So it's always going to be a top three. But right now it's my favorite one.

Q. To follow that up, checking off boxes, conditions on the course appear to be really good, no wind in the forecast, terrific temperatures, is 61 for a single round and is 20-under, either of those numbers in jeopardy?

JIM FURYK: Again, depends on the speed of greens, how firm they get, how crispy they get. There's still some factors you can't weigh in yet. I expect because the wind is down, and because it's in great shape -- I saw pictures of the 18th fairway where there was debris. I think there was actually a boat in the middle of the fairway.

Q. A dock.

JIM FURYK: A dock? Okay. I heard about all the trees down. You wouldn't know it actually showing up here in mid-April. So hats off to the crew here, the golf course, Sea Pines, did a wonderful job.

And because it is in such good shape, and because the conditions about be benign, I think you'll see low scoring. Whether 61 or 20-under par is an issue or not -- it's not right there yet. Give us a couple of days before they kill us.

Q. Sergio has been an adversary for yourself and all the other top Americans for many years in the Ryder Cup. What's been the general thought on Tour of his victory? And even among the Americans that have been his adversary, are there people that think he's earned it?

JIM FURYK: He's been a difficult opponent in the Ryder Cup. A wonderful Ryder Cup record. Most Europeans have won more Ryder Cups than not in the last 20 years. But he's been one of the toughest players.

I really can't speak for -- it's funny, I've been asked that question yesterday in the Pro Am, today in a Pro Am and now in the media room. And one, I haven't been in the locker room, because I've played a Pro Am and Pro Am and in the media room. We don't sit around in the locker room and talk about stuff like that very often.

I can answer it personally, he has a phenomenal talent and an amazing game. It's hard to imagine that he's in his late 30s --

Q. 37.

JIM FURYK: That's late 30s. Over 35. It's hard to imagine that's his first victory in a major. I think most guys would have the opinion I do, that, yeah, I'm kind of happy to see him. It kind of gets the monkey off the back, he doesn't have to answer that question anymore, which I know is enjoyable.

But more importantly he probably just really enjoyed the moment. And looked like he had a smile on his face, a clenched fist, and something that he'll cherish and have for the rest of his life. And he's been so good for so long. I don't know if the game ever owes you anything, but he certainly was due.

JOHN BUSH: Jim, thanks for your time. Best of luck this week.