

RBC Heritage

Tuesday, June 16, 2020

Jim Furyk

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome Jim Furyk to the interview room here at the RBC Heritage. Jim, thanks for joining us. Obviously, a lot of good history here, making your 21st start in the event, two-time champion, eight top tens overall. With all that said, just some opening comments on being back here and the opportunity to be here for the event this week.

JIM FURYK: Yeah, my favorite golf course we play on TOUR, my favorite tournament. I'm happy for RBC as well. They title two events on TOUR, and the Canadian Open is not going to be played this year. So to have them have this event, it's nice.

It's different times. Usually we're coming off the Masters. You got guys that like to come down here, kind of decompress, enjoy Hilton Head. Golf course is going to be in a little bit different shape this year, a little bit more Bermuda grass, not the overseed we see. I'm excited.

Great golf course. I know the players love this area, love Hilton Head. It's a shame we don't have the fans, but right now you take what you can get. For me to come to my favorite event, my favorite golf course kind of early in the schedule is a lot of fun.

THE MODERATOR: One more question, and then I'll open it up for questions for everybody here. I've seen a little bit of you in the past few months, but just kind of bring us up to speed on how you have spent the last few months in these certainly interesting times.

JIM FURYK: I think the first part, from THE PLAYERS Championship, I kind of shut things down, didn't play a lot of golf, kind of tucked the clubs away. Spent my time at home. My family and I decided we were just going to stay put. Thankfully, I really like where we live because I did not leave campus at all for about six weeks.

Then as it looked more and more likely that we would get back to starting at the Colonial, I started kind of ramping up and practicing, getting out a little bit more.

It was nice to get some time away. I'm sorry for all those businesses, all those folks that are struggling. The silver lining, I guess, was all the time I got to spend with my kids and Tabitha and the dinners that we had together at home. No one was obviously busy, so we spent a lot of time together.

I've got my daughter going to college in the fall. My son's a junior. So to get that much time where the four of us spent together, I think, it was quite nice. Played a lot of golf with my son actually, getting ready to come back out on TOUR.

So I worked real hard, I think, to try to stay fit during the break and then worked real hard on my game for about a month, getting ready to go to Ft. Worth last week. Excited to be here and excited to start off three events where I like the golf courses, where I'm comfortable, where it's not about just overpowering the golf course and bombing it. You've got to place the ball very well, in Fort Worth, here at RBC, and next week at Travelers. So it's a good start for me.

THE MODERATOR: With that, we'll open up and take a few questions.

Q. Just a couple things. Since you turned 50 at home, what thoughts have you given to the Tours for the rest of the year, assuming that Champions gets going as well?

JIM FURYK: My goal, when this thing started, was to play the PGA TOUR through our playoff schedule and hopefully be able to play some Champions Tour events. I'm still holding pat with that. I would like to get at least a couple, say two to four Champions Tour events in probably this calendar year and kind of reevaluate.

Maybe next year -- eventually, the timing is going to be right, and I'll kind of flip the switch and go play the Champions Tour full-time. With Tabitha and I, with our foundation hosting an event, I want to get out there and see the guys. I played a practice round last week with Olin Browne and Scott McCarron. I played with Davis today. I want to get out there and see the look, the feel, what a Champions Tour event is all about, what the Champions Tour is all about, because we have an event we need to build, and I want it to be successful, and I want the guys to like it.

Q. Secondly, you're coming off a tournament last week with no fans. We're about to have our first Major in a few months with no fans. Your feeling on the Ryder Cup? I ask you that in your position as a past player, past captain, I believe task force member, unless I'm mistaken. And any feeling on

whether it's worth playing if you can't have the atmosphere that has come to make up the Ryder Cup?

JIM FURYK: I think it's a dynamic question, and there's a lot of parts to that question. I'll start with and say what you've heard a lot of folks say, you know, it raises an eyebrow. It's strange to play a PGA TOUR event without fans. It would be really strange -- I mean, just exponentially at a Ryder Cup. That atmosphere, the one side getting cheered for, the other side not at all, that's kind of what makes that event. That's what we love as players about that event.

You get to represent your country, and you feel like you're in -- you know, it's like going to an American football game, right? 99 percent of the fans there are rooting for one team, and you have that home field advantage. So to miss that would be awkward.

I think in order to make a really educated answer on your question, I'd kind of need to know a little bit more about what our options are. Are the options no fans at all? Are the options a limited number of fans, like we're going to see, I think, on the PGA TOUR to start? 100 percent, or what's the option if we don't play? What happens? What's the financial ramifications to the PGA of America if we're able to play under any of those conditions or if we're not able to play at all?

I think one of the things you have to realize -- we all have to realize, the PGA of America represents 28,000 golf professionals around the country, and that event is -- that's their pride and joy. That is the event that basically financially allows the golf professionals in our country to do a lot of great work and to grow the game.

I'm not privy to -- even as a past captain, even as a vice captain this year, I'm not privy to understand or know all the answers to those questions, but before I could, I would say it would be very awkward to play without fans, but we need to see a little bit about -- I would need to know more about what it means to the organizations -- to the PGA TOUR, to the PGA of America, to the European Tour for that matter and European PGA. What's the financial ramifications if we do and we don't play?

Q. Having gone through it last week, played at Colonial, you guys are creatures of habit. What was sort of the most difficult thing to get over as far as where you go, hitting balls, getting golf clubs, eating, that type of thing?

JIM FURYK: I don't know if there's one thing that stuck out. I think early on trying to get used to how Fluff and I were going to move around the golf bag and around the golf course and try to social distance and try to create some space, and I think just kind of being

worried about the appearance of what it would look like on television.

I know we both tested negative early in the week. We both stayed at home. I stayed in my hotel. He stayed in a residence last week. We didn't go out to dinners. I felt safe being around Fluff, but I wanted to be -- I guess we all have a responsibility to do the right thing and to have that event have the correct appearance on television as well.

So I think for us early in the week on Tuesday and Wednesday, I played nine holes each of those days, and to try to get a feel for how he was going to set the bag down, move away, have me get in, hit my shot, clean the club, grab a putter, just the movement around how we normally function versus how we are now is totally different. It started to feel a lot more natural over the weekend, but it was a little awkward kind of early on in the week.

Q. And I don't know what your comfort level was before coming out, but having played last week, has that increased?

JIM FURYK: Yes, I would say that's fair to say. I have a lot of confidence in our leadership of the PGA TOUR, and I have a lot of confidence that they were going to take every measure possible to keep us safe, but I think knowing or seeing is believing, to be out there at the event last week, to see how everything was kind of painstakingly taken care of.

I did, as a player -- you can call it in the bubble or whatever you want to say -- I felt very comfortable at the golf course and moving around and the way things were handled. And I had belief in the TOUR before, but getting there and seeing it in person probably made me more confident.

Q. Jim, would you consider putting on 40 pounds of muscle to gain 20 miles per hour ball speed? And could I just get your take on what Bryson is doing right now and where it might take the game.

JIM FURYK: I got a chance -- I guess no, I would not. That doesn't mean he's wrong. I guess what I would be nervous -- I kind of built my game on accuracy and hitting the ball straight. For me to try to get longer, I always worry I'm going to lose what I'm good at, which is that accuracy side of things. It's always great to improve your weaknesses but not at the risk of hurting your strengths.

The present day player plays a different game. The best players in the world attack the golf course differently than I do right now at 50 years old because that's the way I grew up. It's fun to watch. Fairways hit really isn't an important stat anymore. It has nothing to

do with shots gained off the tee. I shouldn't say nothing. It has very little to do with shots gained off the tee, whether you're fairway or rough.

I think what he's doing is really interesting, to be honest with you. He looks like a different person. He's much bigger. I think he said he gained two shirt sizes. And then to see -- I think I saw him -- I only saw him hit one shot on TV last week. It was, I think, on the second day off the 1st tee. I think his ball speed was 185. The player that hit right in front of him was Dustin Johnson, and his ball speed was 177. So for me, that was kind of an eye raiser. Dustin is pretty big, pretty strong, athletic, hits it pretty far. If you're gaining 8 miles an hour on Dustin Johnson, that's moving it.

You know, it's interesting. I think we're in an era right now with golf, the way it's played, the way our golf courses are set up, it's quite an advantage to be able to hit the ball far like that. I can see why so many guys are kind of chasing distance, using technology, using launch monitors for launch and spin for equipment to gain distance. It's definitely affecting the game.

Q. Is it affecting it in the wrong sense? Colin Montgomerie talked last week on the BBC that he feared we'd have to go to 10,000-yard golf courses, that it's just getting too close. That he had ten approach shots of less than 100 yards into par 4s on the weekend. Do you share any of that type of fear?

JIM FURYK: Yeah, I think there's going to come a point where enough is enough, but the difference is you can't regulate how big and strong a person gets or how well they train. The way I look at it is let's go to swimming, for instance. Not much has changed in water over the course of the last hundred years. I think it's still pretty much the same chemical makeup. I realize there's fast pools and slow pools in the way they're designed. But the times in swimming, where tenths of a second are astronomical, have lowered by seconds, and three and four and five seconds at a time, and sometimes not that very long races. You know what, some of it is technique. Some of it is probably the way the stroke is taught. But the athlete is getting bigger, stronger, faster, and you can't regulate that.

In Bryson's case, I think it's not like the equipment. Putting on 20 pounds and gaining all that speed is pretty interesting. It's an interesting way to look at things. I think from an equipment standpoint, yes, I fear that golf courses could someday get a little too short. 7,000 yards -- I remember when 7,000 yards was long, and I'm 50 right now. 7,000 yards isn't scaring me. I'm thinking that's pretty short.

So, yeah, I think there will be a time where -- and I

think the bodies that be are trying to find the right way to regulate, but there will be a time where we'll have to kind of make sure we cap things off. We can't build 8,000, 9,000, and 10,000-yard golf courses. I think 10 might be a little bit of an exaggeration. It will take a while there. Land's at a premium. It's difficult to find the land to build the courses to do that.

Q. There's a lot of guys here who are maybe here for the first time or here for the first time in a while because of the way the schedule played out, how much does experience come into play here? What can these guys expect who are seeing Harbour Town for the first time in a long time?

JIM FURYK: Well, one, today the wind definitely came from an odd direction for me, but I think course knowledge is important anywhere. I think there's a lot of pin placements, a lot of -- on this golf course, you don't step up on the tee and let a drive fly. You try to figure out most of the time where's the pin, what angle do I need to be attacking from. That sets up where you want your drive to go. There's some course knowledge.

But it is a relatively straightforward golf course. The holes are really well framed. You know where to hit it because you've got an area about that big off the tee to hit it through, and you've got an area about that big to get it through to get it to the green. So the golf course is right in front of you, but course knowledge is always -- seeing this golf course in a million different conditions and seeing it in the wind and seeing how difficult it can play at times, I think is always an advantage.

It's nice that these fields right out of the gate that we had last week, we have this week at RBC, next week at Travelers, it's amazing the strength of fields. I think it's a great product that we have, and the telecasts look a little different, every tournament looks a little different, but the strength of field is amazing. Nice to be out here competing with the best in the world.

Q. You think we might expect some of these guys back at Harbour Town next year if it comes back to its normal spot? Will this week be able to convince them that this is a place they maybe should play more often?

JIM FURYK: Yeah, and I think it's always like a horses for courses as well. For guys that -- this is not a place where you're going to tee it up as high as you can and see how high your ball speed can get off the tee. It's about placement. For those guys that like to work the ball a lot -- right to left, left to right, high shot, low shot -- for your creative players, good ball strikers, they have an advantage at this golf course. Long or short, it doesn't really matter. It's about do you like to shape the ball, and can you imagine some different shots, and do

you find that style of golf fun? Which I do.

I would say Davis Love has had more success here than anyone, and he was a guy earlier in his career where he was the longest guy on tour, a guy that just bombed it. He can hit a variety of different shots and always enjoyed playing this golf course. It just comes down to a style and what each player likes.

But I do think we'll see -- I think you'll see guys that like the golf course and come back that we don't usually see at this event, yes.

Q. Jim, if this was asked and I missed it, I apologize, but having never been here before, I'd be curious what the vibe is like as the second week back in the return compared with the week after the Masters. I always heard this was a -- just because of the nature of the place, it's just a huge exhale when you got to Hilton Head.

JIM FURYK: Maybe we should be asking you, Doug. Since you're here this year, do you think you'll come back in the future? Are we going to see you next year is what I'm curious about.

Q. That wasn't the question. I'm the one that's supposed to be asking the question.

JIM FURYK: I got it. I'd be really good at it, though. I'd be really good at pressing you down.

Yeah, I think, to say this event is -- when they play it out, it's just like a relaxing week, and everyone loves coming down here and decompress. I think it's a great compliment on one side. I also think it's a bit of a slight on the other side. The compliment is, yeah, everyone's stressed out. You just played Augusta. It feels like it's 9,000 yards long. The greens are rolling 15 on a Stimpmeter, and it's the first Major of the year, so everyone's totally stressed out.

You come down here, and Hilton Head is just a fun spot. It's a small community. It's always supported this event very well, and it's a place where, yeah, it's a relaxing spot. You've got the harbor. You've got the beach. A lot of the families come down with the little kids. They go to the beach. Folks rent condos and homes together a lot of the times. So two families could stay together and kind of enjoy themselves.

But I also think it's a great event in its own right. So to just say it's a great relaxation after the Masters is a bit of a slight in my opinion because I think it's a great event and I think it's a great golf course.

You know, what's the difference? This golf course is on an extremely small piece of property. There's not a lot of space. So I'm not going to say that they get these

massive crowds where there's 50,000 people, but you can put 15,000, 20,000 people in here, and it feels packed. Kind of as you get out to that area between 10 and 16 and to the right of 17 and to the right of 18, there's folks, the harbor -- it's kind of got like a little bit of a party feel. Not the Dallas hanging from the chandeliers type of party feel, but more of the khakis and the collar up and the gals in sundresses. It's got that nice southern feel to it, and it's a nice modest party.

It's a fun spot, in my opinion. I think everyone's relaxed. I'll miss that atmosphere. I'll miss kind of the fun that goes on around this golf tournament because I've always thought it was kind of done in the right way, and it was fun to be kind of playing a golf tournament in the middle of it.

Q. Thanks. I'll see you next year.

JIM FURYK: All right. I'll hold you to it.

THE MODERATOR: Jim, thank you for your time as always. We appreciate it. Wish you best of luck next week.

JIM FURYK: Thanks.