

Charles Schwab Challenge

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

Brooks Koepka

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, Brooks. Thanks for being back here at the Charles Schwab Challenge. Just some thoughts on being back for the return to golf. You've played here since, finished runner up in 2018 to Justin Rose, obviously have an affinity for the golf course, shooting a pair of 63s during that period. Just some thoughts on returning.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, it's nice to be back. I think everybody is excited to be back, have some competition, some sports, and I think everybody is looking forward to it. I know I am. I'm excited. It feels like forever. It feels like I've done this too many times over the last two years with injuries and stuff like that, having a couple months off, but to finally be back playing, it's exciting, and I can't wait to tee it up tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Just some thoughts on the featured pairing that you're in with Rory and Jon; how will that make you feel playing with those two guys, having been a former No. 1 in the world?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I mean, yeah, it's nice. You always want to play with the best players in the world. So yeah, it'll be an exciting group to watch. But at the same time, it doesn't matter who I play with. I'm focused on myself and what I need to do. But you know those guys are going to play good, simple as. So it'll kind of elevate the competition, as you do. You get into a Saturday-Sunday late pairing you know the guys are going to play well, so it always gives you a little added push.

THE MODERATOR: Just finally during the break, the forced break, do you feel that that's maybe been a benefit or a bonus for you, having a break, given you only played five events early in the season, had some issues with injury? Do you think this is going to be beneficial for you?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I got lucky. It was definitely beneficial for me. It's something -- I was able to kind of reassess where I was at, get the knee stronger. The knee is back. It's a lot better. And then finally be able just to swing the club the right way and kind of get back to the process or the way of thinking that I had before. It's been a blessing in disguise for me without a doubt,



and I'm excited to see what happens here.

Q. You mentioned that you kind of got a break with having the hiatus come when it did with the state of your health and the game. How does the game feel now compared to the stoppage? I know it's hard just judging by practice, but how does it feel compared to before?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I mean, I felt at THE PLAYERS, it was starting to come around. I felt something positive. But right now it's a million times better. The swing feels like it's in a great spot. I'm controlling ball flights, controlling spin, yardages, putting it good, chipping it good. I feel like a new person, honestly. The way I'm able to move right now is a lot better than I was three months ago, four months ago, and I'm excited. It really is going to be fun to tee it up again.

Q. What did you miss most about competing and playing tournaments during the three months?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Just the competition. That was the thing I missed the most, competing. It's hard when you're sitting at home. There's no competition. Yeah, you can go play some games at home, but it's not the real thing. It doesn't -- when you've got 144 of the best players in the world, it's a lot different than playing at home.

I really just missed just coming out here, competing for four days, having to string together 72 holes. I think that's what I miss the most, just the competition.

Q. It was mentioned that you've only had five starts this year. Is it a sense from your perspective that you've got to make up a lot of ground in these last 10 weeks, especially in regards to like Player of the Year competition, FedExCup points, those type of things?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Not really, no. If I do what I'm supposed to do, I'll be just fine. I didn't do what I was supposed to do first five events. It is what it is; I can't change it. It's in the past. But you never know. I mean, you can rattle off 10 wins, and I think that's kind of irrelevant.

Q. Just wondering how difficult the strictures of social distancing are going to be over the next four days in terms of maintaining your own competitive

rhythm? And also how important you think it is that all the players do observe the social distancing.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I mean, the PGA TOUR has done a great job. Everybody has been tested, so I think that's important just for everybody's peace of mind. I think that's something players, caddies, everybody I guess what they're calling in the bubble, it's nice to just have that peace of mind that everybody has been tested and everybody is clear. I think it's important.

Yeah, social distancing is obviously important. But for me, the way I look at it, me and my caddie, I'm going to do the same things to my caddie that I've been doing my entire career. You look at any other sport, I'm pretty sure LeBron James isn't going to worry about setting a pick when there's contact about social distancing. Football you're not going to worry about tackling a guy because of social distancing. It's just one of those things. Like my caddie has been at my house quite a bit. He's staying with me this week, and I have no problem standing right next to my caddie. He's been tested, I've been tested a couple times. It's part of, I guess, the sport.

Q. Now that you have gotten healthier, where on the importance level is tracking Rory down, getting back to No. 1, and how much do you enjoy that back and forth and that competition of trying to get back to the top spot?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I mean, I'm just trying to play the best golf I can play. I'm not -- yeah, I've got eyes on Rory. That's the goal is to get back to No. 1 in the world. That's the whole point of playing is to be the best.

If I do what I'm supposed to do, if I take care of my business, then I don't see any reason why I couldn't get back to that. I dug myself a hole, obviously, getting injured and then when I started back up the first three months of back playing or two months back playing. I dug myself a little bit of a hole. But you play good, you win, everything will take care of itself.

Q. As someone who's a guy who loves all sports or a lot of sports, what in your sport do you enjoy about the element of a rivalry, whether it is you and Rory or whomever it may be at the top or whoever is chasing you and that kind of thing? How much do you relish that kind of vibe?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I mean, I don't really view it as a rivalry. It's not something where I go out and go play and I'm like, man, I've got to beat Rory this week. Well, what happens if Rory misses the cut? What am I going to do, place 50th or miss the cut also or just beat him by one? You're just trying to play the best you can play. It's not a team sport, it's not anything, you're just trying to play the best you can play, and if I play my best and

he plays his best and I lose by one, so be it. It is what it is. I'm okay with that.

I just want to -- two years ago with Rosey, I played as good as I thought I could play and Rosey beat me by one or two, and I can live with that. As long as I give it my all and play my best, I'm okay with whatever happens.

Q. Sounds like when you talk about you and Rickie that it's almost family in terms of what you would do at home, but for everyone else and the amount of eyeballs that are going to be on golf this week, how important is it do you think for everyone to go through some of the protocols or plans in terms of wiping down a flagstick or the bunker rake or anything like that? Is that something that needs to be done?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I think so, because if you think about it, we're here at the golf course, you show up, everybody has been tested, but at the same time you never know -- I know guys are staying in a hotel. You never know what's going on in that hotel, if somebody has it that might check in. There are all these different things, a little bit of social distancing, and cleaning things. Obviously it's hot, which is beneficial for us. We play an outdoor sport. It's hot. I think coronavirus can't live past a certain amount of degrees for too long outside in this heat.

But yeah, I think it's important to go through it all. The thing is if we come back and all of a sudden if you guys get it, we're looking at not playing again. So I think it's important to make sure that we go through all these things because I want to play, I know everybody out here wants to play, I know the fans want to see us play, so we've got to take all those protocols seriously if we really want to be out here for the rest of the year.

Q. There seems to be some reporting out of Colonial where some players are maybe not taking it as seriously as you just outlined. Does that concern you, and would you ever see a place where you might step in and say to someone, hey, man, you've got to do some of the things they told you to do because if not we could all have a problem?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I mean, I haven't seen it. I mean, I've been here since Saturday, so I've kind of gone out early, played practice rounds basically by myself. I haven't really seen many guys. If you're out playing it's kind of hard to see what's going on.

Sometimes if the guys are playing four-balls, yeah, I could see how that could happen, practice rounds when you've got four players, four caddies and then probably four coaches out there, and they're all

standing on the green and guys are putting, and I could see how you could see it, maybe things like that. But it all depends I think on the situation. You've got to be there for it and actually know what's going on, so it's quite different to see as an outsider.

Q. Have you purposely decided to play early morning by yourself to stay away from other people?

BROOKS KOEPKA: No, honestly it's really hot here, so I just kind of wanted to beat the heat. I wanted to beat the heat a little bit. I've been up early every morning working out, so it's like, I'm not going to sit around all day and get cold, just come out and practice and get the work done that I need to be done.

Q. The Brooks Koepka that I'm listening now seems a lot different than Brooks Koepka maybe three or four months ago because you had all the things going on. Mentally do you feel -- outside of the physical things you talked about, mentally how much better do you feel about the game and going into competition now?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Todd Lewis just said that to me. I don't understand. If you ask me a question, I'll give you an honest answer. I'll give you my opinion on it, and if I'm playing bad, I'll let you know. I'm not afraid to hide it. There was no lack of confidence. I mean, my confidence was still there, I just wasn't getting the job done, simple as.

It's been important to go back to the basics, I guess, is when you get off track. That's usually what I do, go back to basics and try to regroup, and I feel like I was starting to do it. I did a good job of it there at PLAYERS and kind of a few weeks after when I was practicing, but I haven't played a tournament in, what, three months, so it's kind of hard -- you're going to come in negative?

Q. I just wanted to ask about the idea of you have had to take time off before, but these are different circumstances. What have you done over the last three months to simulate as best you can what it's like to be in a tournament round? Are there any games that you've had in south Florida or anything that you've done to try to get back into those competitive juices?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, just been playing with a bunch of guys. I played quite a few rounds with Shane Lowry, a Buddy of ours Stephen Grant, Chris Ventura, another player out here, he plays at Floridian, Mel Reid. There's been about 12 different people. You just try to play games as much as you can, try to get out there, some competition, get the blood flowing. You get a putt on 18 that means something, and it's a lot different than it is out here, but at the same time it

might pique your interest and try to take something off the guys, which is always nice. But I guess it's like a mini-prep for what you're going to experience out here, so I think it's important, and I enjoyed it.

I think it's a lot different. Usually I'll never go out and play 18 holes. I'll practice. So it was a lot different, a lot more playing this time.

Q. Brooks, after such a long layoff here for everybody and getting back to it, what will be the feelings that you'll have on the first tee tomorrow? Will it be back-to-normal life is good again, or will there be some added nerves or whatever you want to call it as you kind of get back into this rhythm of tournament golf?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Did you get nervous when you arrived today or the other day to go write something?

Q. Yeah, I wasn't any good, so it took me a while to get back into it.

BROOKS KOEPKA: There's no nerves. It's just -- that's my job. I'm supposed to go out there and go play, so just get back to it and proceed as usual.

Q. I don't know if you've been asked about what you think about the Ryder Cup, no fans, fans, play, not play; has anyone from the PGA of America asked your opinion, and if not, why not?

BROOKS KOEPKA: No, I haven't talked to anybody. I didn't talk to anybody when I was quarantined or over the coronavirus when we were back at the house. I didn't talk to anybody.

I don't want to play if there's no fans. I've said that. I said that in some interview, I don't know where. But I just don't think it's -- the fans make that event. The fans make that special. If we're not playing in front of fans, it's just like us playing a game in Florida. You've got myself, Rory, DJ, you've got all these guys that are living in Jupiter. It would be just like a normal game that goes on in Jupiter. And there's no fist pumping there, there's no excitement. The fans create the excitement for the Ryder Cup.

Yeah, we're excited to play, but you see the emotion. If there's no fans out there you're not going to see guys fist pumping and that passion behind it. Yes, I love to play for my country, I love to do all these things, but it's important to have the fans there. We feed off it. The fans get louder or they'll boo you depending on what you're doing, but that's the beauty of it. It makes it -- the Ryder Cup is a true sporting event. It's different than any other golf tournament we play. It's a true sporting event, and I think if we can have fans, that's perfect, and if we can't, it just seems kind of like an exhibition, which it kind of already is. I just don't want to

play it without fans.

Q. Can you see any scenario where if they decided to proceed with no fans that a player would protest by not playing?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah.

Q. Would you?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Possibly. I think there's a lot more that goes into that, why they would be playing, personally. As players I think we all know why they're playing or why we would play.

Q. Do you think it's money?

BROOKS KOEPKA: (Rubbing index fingers and thumbs together.) That's the only reason. Give it to Johnny Football.

Q. You have a late tee time tomorrow, but on Friday morning you'll be on the course at 8:46 for the moment of silence. I'm just wondering what kind of things might be going through your mind at that point while you're on the course.

BROOKS KOEPKA: First off, I think it's awesome that the PGA TOUR has stepped up. Being especially one of the first sports back, it's important to set the tone going forward for other sports, for just people in general. And I think it's important to set the tone. 8:46, I think it's going to be special. It'll be something -- I don't know that the PGA TOUR has ever really done something like this, a moment of silence even during the rounds. Not while I've been playing. I think it's special with what's going on right now. There needs to be change, and I want to be part of the solution, and I think this is one way that the PGA TOUR is stepping up and doing that.

THE MODERATOR: Brooks, we thank you for coming in and joining us and sharing your opinions, and good luck this week.