

Travelers Championship

Tuesday, June 23, 2020

Collin Morikawa

Press Conference



TRAVELERS
CHAMPIONSHIP



THE MODERATOR: I'd like to introduce Collin Morikawa. We're in a little different location than last year when you were sitting along Viktor and Justin and Matthew in the media center with many, many people in there, interested in the four of you, the awesome foursome making a start at the Travelers. It's been a year for you on TOUR now as a professional. What's this year been like for you?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It's been amazing. You know, who would have ever thought about what has happened since then, with everything we've gone through, not just on the course but off the course. But you know, specifically talking just golf, I think it's been everything I've wanted, and I just keep setting new goals. My mindset changed a lot this week a year ago after listening to Brooks and what he said in his press conference, and knowing that the four of us that were coming out, me, Wolff, Viktor and Suh, we had a chance to do something. I think we had a lot of guys watching us knowing, yeah, we could be these next guys, and who knew if we were or we weren't. So we had this entire summer to go make something.

I've learned a lot about myself and my golf game and everything and just how to be a professional golfer out there, and it's been a lot of fun and I love every part of it, so I'm excited to keep this going. I can't believe it's been a year, but it's good to be back at a familiar place again.

Q. You obviously got your start, one of the early starts here a year ago you just mentioned. It's been a history of doing so at the Travelers. Can you talk about that experience and how important it is that tournaments do that for young golfers like yourself coming up and through?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, I mean, it's huge. That's what we rely on, especially being a top college player coming out, turning professional. I got to see Sahith today, and I've literally grown up with him probably longer than a lot of other guys that I've known for a while. I've known Sahith forever and I've seen his game grow, so it's cool to finally see him out here.

But having starts like that I think is really important just because it gives us the opportunity. I'm always going to remember the starts I had as an amateur, whether it was that one on the Korn Ferry TOUR, a couple on the PGA TOUR, because those are where you really get to

expose yourself and really get to learn about what golf is going to be like, whether it's one, two, three years down the road when you do turn pro.

So having those starts out in the summer, obviously it's not as much of a schedule I'm sure as some of the guys would have wanted that are turning pro, but it's something, and it gives them something really to just realize, okay, we can go play golf, we can go have fun, and this is where we belong.

Q. You've had a couple weeks to digest the final holes at the Charles Schwab. I'm wondering as a young player if there's a learning curve in those situations or do you just have to adapt when a TOUR win can come down to one stroke or potentially come down to one stroke on a final hole?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It's a huge learning curve, and I think for me, if I'm able to learn something every single week, that's really important. I think I can go back all the way to my first start in Canada. I've been learning every single week. If I stop learning, that's when things are going to go bad. I'm going to get complacent with yeah, I'm okay where I'm at, and I don't want to ever do that.

So yeah, obviously I wanted to win. It's not like I didn't want to win. I wanted to make those putts. And you know, I hit a good putt on 18. I didn't hit a good putt on the playoff hole, but I hit a good putt on 18. For me if I just keep putting myself in these spots, giving myself these opportunities coming down the stretch, that's all you can really ask for.

I talked to Webb Simpson, it was when he won Waste Management this year. I played with him the first two rounds, and he was not even close to that leaderboard that first round. I think he might have shot 1-over maybe. If you give yourself a chance with nine holes to play, you have done everything you can that entire week, and that is when all of our practice, everything comes into play when you're down the stretch coming through, trying to close out a tournament.

So yeah, it's going to be a learning curve. Yeah, it stings, but I've gotten over it. For me I know I'm going to put myself in that spot again just like 3M last year, I gave myself a chance, I gave myself a chance to win,

didn't work out, oh, well, you're going to come back, I'm going to keep getting better, and every week is a new week.

Q. It is a unique kind of pressure, though, isn't it?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: You know, it's different, especially with no fans. That's crazy different than what we normally experience, and you get that adrenaline from the fans being there, rooting you on, hearing cheers, whether you birdie 16, 17, 18, whatever it is. But you want to be in those positions. I'm not afraid of those positions. I want to be in those as much as I can because the more you are, the more comfortable you're going to be.

So you know, if we have this talk again five years later, hopefully I have a lot more experiences like that. I have a lot more chances to close out tournaments, and hopefully I do.

Q. With regard to Colonial, you handled it with such grace right in the immediacy of it, myself having been right there. I'm curious how long it took you to get over that and process that and move on to the next thing, and how if at all did it affect you the following week?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, I mean, obviously that Sunday night it stung a little bit, flight over on Monday still was there, still was lingering, but by the time I started practicing Monday, Tuesday, Tuesday morning, it was all gone. I can't affect what happened. I can't change what I did on that putt. I wish I could, but no one has magical powers like that. So for me, I talked with my caddie J.J., and we looked at it, like what did we do wrong. I talked with my coach that I've been with for 15 years, what did I do differently, what did I do wrong on that one putt. I got ahead of myself. It's as simple as that. You hit a poor tee shot, you get it out, hit a great chip, within three, four feet. You think you're in the hole but you're really not. I still had to make that putt, and I think that's something I'm going to learn.

I've done a really good job of not getting ahead of myself on the course, but this was a position that I hadn't really put myself in too much where I've got to make this putt to keep going on, and yeah, that's what happened. I'm going to learn from it. But did it affect me last week? No. It's a brand new week. Every single week for me, yes, I can take the positives, I'm going to learn from the negatives, what happened, what I did wrong, but I just have to go out into the next week with a clear mind thinking, okay, my game is in a great position, I'm playing with the best players in the world, and I'm able to play some really good golf. Just last week I just wasn't hitting it as well, my clubs just didn't have good distance control, nothing was really working. It was a grind all week, and just kind of stumbled in that

fourth round.

But this week, like I said, it's a familiar place for me. It's really good to be back somewhere that I've seen and I know just kind of how everything reacts.

Q. A question about Bryson: As somebody like yourself who has a very different physique like he does and makeup, what's your impression? I know you've only been out here for 10 minutes, so to speak, but what's your impression of what he's been doing and just kind of the whole bulked-up -- do you see that kind of changing -- to some degree a lot of people trying to chase that same thing?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It's flat-out amazing what he's doing. To even think about the ball speeds -- I got to play with him at Colonial on Saturday, and it was funny because I was only 25 yards behind him on one of the drives, and I gave him a little jab just because he wasn't 50 by me like he should.

But yeah, you know, I don't think it's for everyone. You see last week, you see a bunch of winners that you don't have to hit it 350 just to be able to win. What he's doing, he's trying to gain an advantage on courses where he can do that, and when I see it, it's relatively straight. Like it's not -- his misses aren't that far off. So for him hitting it that hard and swinging that hard, props to him because he's figured it out, and I'm sure he's still going to keep pushing those boundaries. Whether I see it down the road like that for everyone, I don't know. I mean, I think if you started to see him win every single week and everyone else was just being blown out of the field, maybe guys will start doing that. But I don't think -- like I still believe I can win every single week with the way I'm hitting it and the way I play.

So yeah, you know, it's a different perspective. It's a different game he's playing. I'm sure it's a very different way of thinking throughout the course, how he navigates courses, how he sees shots. But that's him. I'm sure there's going to be a couple other people down the road that are like that, and you just look at them and wish them the best.

Q. Compared to the last two golf courses that the TOUR has played, does this week maybe play into his hands a little bit more than the last two?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I'm sure he's going to be able to unleash his massive 200-mile-per-hour drives or whatever, 190, whatever they are. But at the end of the day, you've still got to hit it close. Just because you hit it far does not mean you're going to hit every shot close. He's an amazing player and I know he can hit great shots, I know he can putt well. So yeah, you know, I can't say -- this course probably is more beneficial to him hitting it far, but then again, that doesn't mean he's

going to hit all his 7-irons super close. So we'll just -- I guess we'll see.

Q. I was just curious if you've had a swing thought that you have been going back to over the years, one that always seems to work well for you and your swing that you find yourself continuing to return to.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, for me a lot has to do with where I finish, so whether it's like kind of where my ears are, above my ears for a cut, below my ears for a draw, and it's a simple swing thought. It's nothing on the backswing, it's all coming through, it's all hitting the ball. It's not really a swing thought for per se when I'm on the range, but I've just got to watch where my takeaway is.

After this quarantine ended and we started getting back to practice, I just had to make sure all of my tempo was syncing up. For me that's huge. I've got a somewhat slower tempo on the backswing, at least compared to a lot of these guys, and if something is just not firing properly, my right foot goes up, everything doesn't rotate as well. So for me, it's tempo, it's where I'm finishing through the ball, and those are pretty much the simple swing thoughts that just kind of allow me to hit the shots.

Q. And your follow-through you're saying in relation to your ears, if you're hitting a draw it goes above your ears? Am I understanding that correctly?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No, draw is below, so a little lower you want to finish with a draw, my normal just stock little high cut is kind of around that top-of-the-ear line, and then if I'm going for a lot bigger cut I'm going to go a lot higher. But it's just like a simple -- it's not even a swing thought, it's just -- I guess it is a swing thought, but it's for me to just feel my target, feel my body go towards one way and I'm able to sync everything up just to get there, and that produces that shot.

Q. Putting aside at Colonial, you've become one of the best ball strikers on the PGA TOUR.

Statistically you're amongst the elite iron players in the game. Do you pay attention to your putting stats, and are you working on that? You hinted that you're seeing courses now finally for the second time around; this is your second chance here. How much of a challenge has seeing PGA TOUR courses and these greens been for you? How much of a challenge has that been for you in terms of your putting?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It's huge. You know, last week was super grainy, and you come to this week and they're just amazing. They're pure, they're fast, they roll

smooth. But you know, I think I hit a milestone when I -- right before Bay Hill, I thought I putted solid. I think I was around that negative 1 to 0 for the entire week, which if I'm hitting it -- granted, we talk about my ball-striking, if I'm hitting it closer, if I'm gaining zero shots for the week, I think it's going to be a very solid week, because if I have more 15-, 20-footers than a lot of guys, I'm not going to be gaining shots every single time putting. So if I'm around zero, I think it's solid. That's where I want to get to, at least in the next few months, by the end of the year.

So yes, I do look at my putting stats. I think -- like I said, if I go back to Bay Hill, that's where something in my head, and I had talked with my coach, something mentally switched, and the way I putted was very different. I wish PLAYERS played through because I know my putting stats that first round, it was positive, like 2, 2½ something, around there, and I knew my putting was trending in the right direction.

So we go through this quarantine. I take three weeks off, four weeks off, and I still felt good over the ball. I still felt confident. And for me at the beginning of the year, like I said, it's a different mentality, the way I putt now.

Yeah, my putting stats have been skewed from this -- we've already played, what, two thirds of the year, but from Bay Hill, I feel like I'm a completely different putter. You know, yes, my putting wasn't great last week, but if I look at my three-putts compared over the past two weeks compared to the rest of the tournaments I've played, I've dropped them drastically, which is huge for me, because no one wants three-putts. The best players are not three-putting at all. So yeah, I think I'm trending in the right direction. I do look at those stats because I do think it's important to look everywhere. I'm not just going to look at what I'm good at. I need to know where I need to improve, and that's 100 percent one spot I need to improve on.

Q. Did you consciously make a decision playing your last bits of junior golf and collegiate golf to build a game like this, it that was going to be a little bit more oriented in terms of ball striking with not quite as much emphasis on putting? Obviously everybody wants to be good at putting, I get that, but did you try and build a game that would analytically match up well with the way the PGA TOUR is played now?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I don't even know how the PGA TOUR is played. I think everyone plays a different game. It's really cool to watch everyone play.

You know, I think that's just been my game throughout my entire life. Like I have always been a ball striker. I

feel super comfortable with my irons. My caddie asks me why I have my 8-iron in the bottom slot of my bag golf with my 9 and pitching wedge, because I feel comfortable attacking pins from 170. That's why I have my 8-iron down there. He always looks through people's bags to see who has an 8-iron down there, and we found the first one last week and it was Jim Furyk, surprise, surprise. But no, it's not like I've tailored my game to where I was always going to focus on ball-striking. It's just that's been my strength, and I've always tried to figure out how I can get better at that.

If I compare my short game and putting now compared to four years ago when I stepped foot in college, I would not be out here on the PGA TOUR. I have worked tremendous amounts on that just to be able to get it to where it is now, and where it is now is still not where I want it to be. It is still not good enough to be that top 5, top 10 player in the world every single week, and that's where I want to be. I want to be that consistent player that every single week you're able to put yourself in contention. Yeah, you're going to have some bad weeks here and there, but for the most part, every single week you want to tee it up, you want to feel like you can come down the stretch and have a chance to win.

Do I feel like my ball-striking is there? Yes. Do I feel like my chipping, wedges are there? Not quite. I feel look they're good. Everyone's good days are going to be good, but it's just averaging out those bad days, figuring out how to get those scores from even to 2-under to 4- to 6-under on those bad days.

Q. What did you find at Bay Hill? You said all of a sudden maybe a light went on. What happened?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, let's see, I'm going to make sure I word this properly just so I'm not sharing my secret. Maybe everyone knows.

For me, it was just to be more of an athlete, be an athlete that reacts to your target. You look at all other sports, basketball, you think basketball, they're always looking at their target. I thought of Jordan Spieth when I was putting, when he putted -- I don't think he does it anymore, but when he used to look at his target, he was reacting. That's all he does. He takes a couple quick looks, if you look at his pre-shot routine, a couple quick looks, doesn't stand over it too long, but he's committed and he just reacts to the target. And I think before I was so focused on speed or I was so focused on trying to hit this great putt that I just wasn't reacting to what I was doing. I try and do that -- I react when I hit an iron shot, why can't I do that when I'm over the putter. So I'm telling you, the stats -- it's a very small, small portion since Bay Hill. But I really believe that it's slowly getting better, which I'm excited.

THE MODERATOR: Can we just get a comment from you on the caddie bib program that's been instituted the last few weeks and this week honoring front line healthcare workers? How is that to recognize these workers.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It's very important. I've had a couple friends that are nurses go back to work, and what they're doing every single day, it's amazing. They're risking their lives for millions and millions and millions of people to contain this and to really just get it over with because I think at the end of the day, we've hit that point of we have to be safe but we all want things to go back to normal as much as we can. It's been really cool to have another person's name, a front-line worker on the back of our bibs. I think it's really special, and it's a cool thing because it just gives us an extra sense of pride for someone that we hopefully can highlight their name somehow on TV. I know they'll be excited to see their names, I'm sure.

For me, it's just very thankful and we're all very thankful for them and for what they're doing.

THE MODERATOR: We appreciate your time, Collin, and thanks again. Good luck this week.