

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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ZACH JOHNSON

MODERATOR: Thank you, everyone, for joining us here today at the Principal Charity Classic. We are now joined by Iowa's very own Zach Johnson. Can we just get some opening remarks on being back here in Des Moines competing at the Principal Charity Classic?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I just did a radio interview and I think the best way to put it is I've been looking forward to this week for quite some time.

You never know, you know, how and when, I guess, but -- you know when you turn 50, but one of the hardest if not the hardest tours to get on. So once I graduated from the PGA TOUR and made it, I've had it highlighted. I cannot wait to compete here.

It's just good to be here. Like all the things, all the sentiments, nostalgia, good feelings, reminiscing, all of that. I mean, I played a practice round yesterday, had one of my college roommates, teammates who was actually a member here as a kid with me. Just fond, fond memories.

You know, it's good to see friendly faces. I'm a people person, so good to see a lot of people I hadn't seen in a minute. And I love Des Moines. This was home for four years and cherished every second of it.

Q. What have you missed?

ZACH JOHNSON: Sorry?

Q. What have you missed the most from here?

ZACH JOHNSON: What have I missed the most? Well, hard to like list it all, but certainly the people. You know, I may not -- I cherished my time at Drake University. Somehow I got in and somehow I got out. I mean, say that kind of jokingly, but at the same time that was certainly divine in the sense that that was perfect for me.

I'm a competitor and I love to compete, play this game. I was able to do that.

I'm social, I had that. And then obviously the academia there was special, too. That was big.

Furthermore, like I said earlier, the people. I mean, there's still some here that I met that live here. Roommates, teammates, friends, et cetera. That's what I miss.



But I also welcome immediately this golf course. I mean, that's big. I mean, I think I can say it now, I just signed a document, they bestowed upon me an honorary membership, which was way out -- out of the blue, but I don't know what to say other than I'm honored for that generosity.

They better be careful what they wish for on that one. I'm just kidding. Utilize that pool. It was very kind.

I think we probably played here the most in my four years. We were gifted that ability to come and play these 18 holes as a team. Now and even back then it was trying, so that's how we got better, we were able to play Wakonda Club.

Yeah, that's what I missed. It's kind of full circle, but part of it feels like yesterday and then a lot of aspects feel like it was almost 30 years ago.

Never did I see myself ever sitting here and answering that question.

Q. So Drake played at Wakonda Club?

ZACH JOHNSON: We played here quite a bit. We were spoiled. Part of the reason that we were pretty darn good is that this town in itself is spoiled with really good golf courses and we had the ability -- whoever advocated for us, I'm not really sure. Granted our coach was probably a big part of that, but we were gifted the ability to play a lot of really -- Glen Oaks, Des Moines Golf, Hyperion, here, Echo. We played Waveland, too. We played Blank. We played it all.

Looking back on it, you know, all different varieties of golf and so when we competed in golf tournaments, more times than not the courses were easier. We were tested, we were ready. That was a luxury.

Q. Someone told me that you were the third best golfer on your team at Drake. I don't know if that's true or not in terms of like where you were in the rankings.

ZACH JOHNSON: Depends on what year you're talking about.

Q. Depends which person I ask, right?

ZACH JOHNSON: There's some accuracy in that statement.

Q. Being that you went on to have so much success that you're still enjoying as a professional golfer, at the risk of asking you a way open-ended question, how do you go from being at a school where you're not winning a national championship as an individual golfer or sort of just an above average golfer in terms of where you are in the pecking order on your team to accelerating your own achievements as a golfer to the heights you have?



ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I think the easiest and shortest way to answer that is my story in the game of golf is one of -- I was a late bloomer, but improvement every year. I played all the sports and golf kind of picked me in the end.

However, my improvement was just. It was never on a pretty significant upward trajectory, it was just kind of a subtle, you know, lower plane. So every year I improved. You know, by my junior year I was probably playing the second, third guy on the team. By my senior year, probably consistently second on the team.

Then decided to turn pro because the improvement never stopped. Again, it wasn't like there was these massive, massive gains, it was just subtle improvements on and off the golf course. Physically, technically, all of it.

So I was in a position there like what do I do? Do I go back to school? Certainly an option. Do I get a real job? That sounds awful. What do I do?

So I was able to put the things together and pursue it professionally. Once my entire focus was strictly on the game from a work standpoint, the improvement may have been on a steeper trajectory maybe. But again, I didn't stop improving. For every little valley I had, one step back, I'd take two or three steps forward.

All that to say that trajectory, that process, that journey is a product of people. I mean, obviously I'm the one hitting shots, I fully understand that, and I put the work in. However, I'm a product of people. I have been since day one and that hasn't stopped.

I'm still trying to prove myself. I was trying to prove myself back then, I was always the guy that shouldn't. I love the posture of having my back against the wall, that's the way I'm wired and I still try to attack every day like that.

Q. Zach, one of the unique things about golf is the ability to play at a competitive level beyond the age of 50. How much fun is joining this tour?

ZACH JOHNSON: Hard to really put into words. Fun is probably the easiest of adjectives. It's been very welcome, very amazing. It kind of feels like I graduated. I kind of said that earlier. I played the PGA TOUR, I made it through and now I get to sit back and have fun.

Not that it's not fun out there because it is and I'm going to continue to play a few tournaments out there, but bottom line is PGA TOUR Champions, the way I summarize it is it's opportunity. You're 50 years old, you can still go and compete on phenomenal venues, you can still technically earn a living, you can still do what you love to do. You can still, you know, compete and rub shoulders with some of my buddies. Like that's amazing.

All along, you want to ride in a cart? Sure. You want three-day tournaments? That's amazing.



It's just, it's different, but I think it's better. It's the hardest tour to get on. Technically, your resume from the PGA TOUR is a big indicator of how long and how often you can play out here. Then when you have the opportunity, as I mentioned, it's an opportunity. And then you play well, you're going to reap those rewards, too.

That's tremendous. That's meritocracy, that's golf, that's the way it should be.

It's been an absolute blast, fun in all senses of it.

Q. Zach, you said you played here yesterday. Is that the first time you played since the redesign?

ZACH JOHNSON: 1998. I think it's been redesigned at least once since then, maybe twice is my understanding.

Q. Your thoughts on it?

ZACH JOHNSON: Amazing. I was telling the president of the club and the GM, two buddies of mine now who gifted me the honorary membership, which was again so kind, the way I see it, things change, courses evolve, they all have to. Whether it's the turf, the type of turf, the pushing here, the moving there, the agronomy of it all, right? You have to evolve and change, so they've done that. There was a lot more trees back then, that goes without saying.

All that to say the integrity of what was here when I played it still exists and that's tremendous. I'm so glad they didn't change the routing. Maybe they could have, maybe they couldn't have, I don't know. I wasn't privy to those discussions, nor should I be. I love the fact that when I get on some of these tee boxes, it sets in like, OK, I can't go that far right or that far left, whatever it may be. You have to still shape your ball.

And we're here for one week, right? And so the main thing when it comes to a restoration, renovation, whatever you want to call it, is the membership, right? It's the other -- well, up here it's not 51 weeks, but it's the other 30 weeks a year where the membership are going to go play.

I think they've maintained, like I said, the integrity and the difficulty that Wakonda Club should be all the meanwhile allowing the members, you know what, there's a few more pin placements now, the greens are a little bit expanded, the fairways may be a little bit more generous. The rough's still up, you still have to hit it straight. All of that is still there and I think it's better for all parties.

Q. Are there any guys on this tour that you looked up to that are still playing this weekend?



ZACH JOHNSON: I'm not sure where to start in on that. Yeah, I mean, I'm a rookie, so all these guys -- some of them I would even consider confidants of mine, but numerous individuals and I've been fortunate to have a lot of great dudes that I admire for different reasons and some for the same reasons. Some are here this week, some may not be competing this week.

Yeah, it's not fair to list them all because there's so many. I've been fortunate. I mean, I've had many guys since I got on the PGA TOUR -- frankly even before that when I was living in Florida that kind of took me under their wing and showed me what to do and what not to do. That's paying it forward, right? I hope I at least gave a little bit of that back to some of the younger generation because the last five years they were all the younger generation for me. And that's great, that's what the game's about, that's what mentorship's about.

Yeah, so many -- I mean, yesterday I played with Lee Janzen. I've known Lee before I even got on Tour. We played I don't know how many holes, 14, 15 holes yesterday together. I consider him a dear friend. It's not like we texted every week, but we did a lot together, especially my wife as well. He's still the same Lee, we're just a little bit older, maybe a little bit slower, orthopedically hurt a little bit more, but nothing else has really changed.

It's awesome. It's awesome coming back. Having dinners with these guys, going out, reminiscing stories. Last week -- Davis Love's one of my dear friends, we live on the same island together and certainly a really good friend, and Tom Lehman came out and Scott Verplank, we went out to eat. I wouldn't even know where to start, there have been so many.

The beauty of those guys is they get it. We're all blessed to play this game.

Q. And this event where you're kind of (inaudible) does that come with any extra pressure or is this just a fun weekend to play for you?

ZACH JOHNSON: If you would have asked me that 25 years ago or so, almost 26 years ago when I played in the first John Deere Classic, I would have said -- I don't know what I would have said, I was a deer in the headlights, but it was trying.

At this point, it's all gravy. I'm playing at a place I love in a town I love with people I love. I mean, it the beauty of what I've experienced in the Midwest, but I guess I technically haven't competed in Iowa on any of the big tours, but what I've experienced around these parts is it really doesn't matter if I shoot 85 or 65. It does to me, but I appreciate that.

I've even seen it just in the last day and a half signing some autographs, taking some pictures whether they're kids or adults, like I can tell that -- you can kind of just feel it. They sense that it's pretty cool to have me back here and I'm grateful for that.

I'm in a state right now, it's almost euphoric in a sense that I'm competing in what I do day in, day out. When I get to that first tee, it's competition, but everything outside of the ropes is



just a little bit different this week and it's a great different. It's hard to really articulate.

Q. Coming back to Des Moines, have you had the chance to go to the Manhattan Deli to get the Zach Johnson (inaudible). Also, are there other spots when you come to Des Moines, Iowa, that you have to go to?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, it's going to happen. I guess the beauty of it is that this won't be my last time back. I can't fit everything in. Yeah, I intend on trying to get to some of those spots hopefully in time.

I mean, last night I had dinner with two roommates and teammates of mine from college at one of my buddy's houses. His wife did all the cooking and she killed it. I compliment a really good cook because I like to eat. And another buddy of ours who played at Iowa State, so we all lived together.

Those are the kind of things that I'm relishing the most. I don't need to go out and sit at a nice restaurant, I want to sit and hang out with my buddies and their kids, you know what I mean? That's what it's about. I'm back in Iowa and we had prepared frozen Iowa sweet corn from last year, and if you're from Iowa, you know exactly what that means, burgers on the Blackstone and it was outstanding.

