

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: WOODY AUSTIN
May 5, 2016



DAVE SENKO: Woody, thanks for joining us. Coming off a pretty nice stretch here. Without getting in too much detail, what's been the key for you? You've won three of the last four events. What's been working?

WOODY AUSTIN: Switching putters on Sunday. That's what seems to be the key for me so far. I'm playing basically the same as I played last year in those eight events that I played the year before. I've given myself a lot of chances, I just was never able to make enough putts to win. I've had I think over 60 percent of my finishes are right around 60 percent are top10 so it's not like I just found the formula. The formula is I made a couple putts, which I said that's the key. This game is a putting contest and that's the weakest part of my game, and now it seems if I switch putters on Sunday that gives me a little added boost.

DAVE SENKO: How many times have you done that now?

WOODY AUSTIN: All **three times**.

DAVE SENKO: What are the putters?

WOODY AUSTIN: Well, they're both the first week was the only one that they were different. The first week in Tucson I completely went with a total experiment. I went with a longer putter with the long grip and a mallet head, and I tried to go with the longer putter with the longer grip and grip down on it and have that little counterbalance idea and try to get the putter to swing. That didn't work so well, so I switched back to my original putter on Sunday and putted well. I have two of those, I have a silver one and a black one. Now, they're supposed to be identical but to me the black one's a little softer. So I putted with the silver one, which was Sunday's putter at Tucson and Atlanta, and didn't putt well at all on Friday and Saturday and switched to the black one and then shot 64 on Sunday. And then started with the black one at the par 3, didn't do did okay. But the thing about the par 3 course is I could have both of them in the bag so I just kept switching back and forth. I didn't need any woods, so I still even though I had two putters in the bag, I still didn't have 14 clubs. If I hit a couple bad putts I gave one a try, but if I hit some bad putts I just switched.

DAVE SENKO: What's your history here at this course on the PGA TOUR?

WOODY AUSTIN: I would say okay. It's another one of those courses I did pretty well back in the day before technology made it kind of obsolete or whatever. It's a good driver's golf course. You've got to hit some good drives, you've got to keep it in play. You can get yourself in trouble with hitting it offline here, which used to be important, which isn't that important anymore.

I like the course. It's a good track. I think I finished tied for 9th or 10th last year in my only one out here with this. I've got a good feel for it.

DAVE SENKO: You've committed to playing this tour now, you went back and forth. What's the biggest difference when you do that?

WOODY AUSTIN: As far as going back and forth?

DAVE SENKO: Yeah.

WOODY AUSTIN: The part about going back and forth is when you play out here you're on an even playing field, you're pretty much level with everybody. The fact that I'm almost considered the young guy at 52, not too many people hit it by me out here. I mean, they do but it's not like leaps and bounds. Like if I'm short of guys in my group, it's five, 10 yards or half a club or a club. That's no big deal. So everybody's pretty much on an even playing field.

You go out there on the regular tour and you're outdriven by 40 yards and guys are hitting two and three clubs shorter than you into the greens. So it doesn't matter how well you're playing per se because they've got such less clubs into the green, it's easier for them to make more birdies or hit the ball a little bit closer.

And then again, they get away with hitting the ball offline now. We don't grow the rough on the regular tour like they used to, they just keep everything wide open so these guys can just bomb away and that's why the scores are as low as they are. That's why the players that you don't hear about on a regular basis win now with regularity because there's no penalties. It's just hit it, find it, putt it, and that's hard to beat.

DAVE SENKO: We've asked a couple other guys your thoughts on John Daly joining the PGA TOUR Champions.

WOODY AUSTIN: Well, you know, he's what we in our inner talks, he's a needle mover. We need that out here. We need somebody that people want to come out and watch. They don't want to come out and watch me, I understand that. I'm not a marquee name and I'm not a big name. And unfortunately for this tour the big names coming off the regular tour have decided not to play. Nick Faldo never played, Norman only played a couple. So what we call needle movers, people that will bring interest to the tour, we haven't had enough. Our biggest needle mover is Freddie Couples. Freddie plays 10 tournaments a year, 12 tournaments a year. So you need somebody like JD to come out. From that standpoint, it's going to be a good thing.

How he plays, I don't even know if he's played much this year. I know the previous years he's been playing in Europe and getting sponsors exemptions, but this year I haven't seen his name anywhere so I don't know what he's doing golf wise.

DAVE SENKO: PGA, that was it I think he said.

WOODY AUSTIN: So we need interest to keep people coming out to watch us. Unfortunately, like I said, it's not going to be me.

Q. Having said that, you're not going to apologize for winning every week, are you?

WOODY AUSTIN: Oh, no, no. Like I said, as long as there's a place for me to play, I want to play. I mean, I love the game. This game's given me everything I've got, so from that standpoint but I also am not I'm also a realist and I understand that this tour was not built for me to have the greatest life in the world or the greatest retirement in the world. This tour was built so that Jack, Arnold, Gary, Lee, those guys were still in the public's eye, so they could still see them playing golf, and I understand that. That's why again, we may struggle to get people to come out because we don't have those guys anymore. We need those needle movers. They don't want to see what you would call a journeyman in my career. Even though I won four times I'm still a journeyman. I'm not a household name or recognizable player.

So we need more of the JDs, we need Freddie to play a little bit more. It would have been nice for Norman to play. It's nice that Colin decided to play. You need people like that to keep interest because that's just the way it is. People want to come and see the players that they want to see when they were in their prime. They don't want to come see a guy that was nobody's No. 1 player in their prime and I understand that.

Q. Other than the mechanical changes that you've mentioned, what would you attribute in terms of confidence for this current run?

WOODY AUSTIN: Well, again, the biggest thing is the golf ball basically does everything for the player now. The golf ball launches all by itself, it selfcorrects when it's in the air, and it goes farther. So again, there's confidence right there to begin with. And the fact that they don't grow the rough, they don't put penalties, you know, out there for them to be as long as you keep the ball on the golf course now, that's all you've got to do because you can spin the golf ball out of what little rough that they put on it, because again the golf ball doesn't need you to catch it perfectly to spin it because it will launch higher so it will land softer. The guys like Bubba and JD, anybody who hits it far but doesn't hit it straight, it doesn't matter. Unless there's a tree directly in front of them, there's no deterrent.

So it just makes the game easier for them to play in a broader spectrum and I think that's where the confidence comes from. There's no again, they can play bad and yet still play pretty good. And then when they're on, so you'll never see you'll never see Bubba like Tiger. Bubba's going to be down there, oop, blip, there he is. He's going to be down there, oop, blip, there he is. Because he's going to be on and then he's going

to be all over the map, and then he's going to be on and then all over the map.

If you listen to his interview at Doral when he finished second, I think since they made the changes he's finished in the top five all three times or whatever. They asked him why and he said because of the changes they've made the course harder because of the water and stuff, but if you listen to his interview he says I'm not afraid of the rough, I can hit it out of the rough here so I don't have to worry about where I hit it off the tee. Watch that interview. That tells you the state of the game right there. I don't have to worry about my driver, I can play out of the rough. When I learned the game, you didn't want to hit it in the rough.

Q. Even though you personally would profit from this as well, what I'm hearing is it kind of irritates you a little bit?

WOODY AUSTIN: Well, the irritation comes from the fact that the game has been changed by the technology. The game hasn't been changed by the players, the game has been changed by technology. So what I'm saying, I guess if you want to say irritated or what have you, is as a lover of the game and a lover of Jack Nicklaus, who's my alltime favorite, I love to see the game played the correct way. The game today is played today's way. It's not played the correct way, it's just played today's way.

Q. There should be punishment for doing stupid things?

WOODY AUSTIN: Exactly. You should be penalized for bad swings and you're not penalized anymore. You know, and they say, well, the players have adapted. That's true, but the adapting is not based on the player, the adapting is placed on we all know that we're bigger, stronger, faster when we're 20 years old than we are when we're 35. That's just genetics, that's just honest.

The reason why the players are better at 22 to 30 now is not because they're better athletes, it's not because they work out. It's because that's the way the game has transpired. My sweet spot when I was 20 years old was that big, and if I didn't hit it, the ball didn't fly. Their sweet spot's that big. They're not better players and it's not that they work out, it's just that they have a bigger area to hit at so if you can swing at it harder. We never swung 100 percent at a golf ball when we were young because you couldn't, because you couldn't hit that spot swinging 100 miles an hour.

Q. The corollary to this may also be a lot of the back issues and health issues we're seeing?

WOODY AUSTIN: Exactly, 100 percent. I've been saying this for at least five years. The game will be dominated from 22 or even you can almost go to 20 at this point, but 22 to 30, and then after 30 you might find a handful of guys whose backs hold up. Because when they start learning now at eight and 10 years of age, they're not learning technique, they're learning clubhead speed, they're learning to swing at it, they're

learning to hit it hard.

The perfect definition of golf now is the way it used to be. The way it used to be was hit it straight, we'll learn how to hit it farther. Now it's hit it hard, we'll learn how to hit it straight. That's what the game has turned to. The game has flipfopped from being under control and trying to learn to hit it like Norman being the longest straightest driver of the ball, to now let's hit it as hard as we can and we'll try to hit it straight like Fred Funk. That's the way the game has changed and I'm not saying it's because my whole thing is not that they're better athletes. I'm not saying that some of them aren't because they do work out a hell of a lot more than we did, but that's not the reason these guys are doing what they're doing. That's just ludicrous to think that.

Q. Going back to your original thing on the putters though, what brand do you play?

WOODY AUSTIN: I've been with Scotty Cameron since 1994.

Q. And have you won tournaments with both the silver and the black one? You kind of lost me there, it will be on the transcript.

WOODY AUSTIN: Right. The silver one was Sunday at Tucson, the black one was Sunday at Atlanta, and both of them were used during the par 3.

Q. So obviously this is kind of the way the brain works, it's all psychological?

WOODY AUSTIN: Absolutely. Well, people have always told me, you know, throughout my career because to me I said putting's always been my Achilles heel. You've got to be confident, you've got to be confident to make putts. Well, I'm under the understanding you can't fake confidence. I've got to see something happen for me to be confident. We can start out the day and go, I'm going to make putts today, but if I haven't made a putt in the first seven holes, how am I supposed to still be confident?

So the whole adage of that is I know the putters are exactly the same, they swing pretty much the same. Well, if one's not working, what's the big deal about switching to the other one and maybe all of a sudden just that little bit of change like I said, to me the black one feels a little softer than the silver one. And then all of a sudden a putt goes in, you know, it is a psychological thing, sure, absolutely.

All I'm trying to do is putt halfway decent. That's all I'm trying to do. If I putted like Brad Faxon I would probably commit suicide and I would probably go to heaven because I would be in such a euphoric state. But that's not going to happen but I'm trying to get there. I'm trying to get to what it's like to make 20footers with ease. I'm trying to make one a day if I'm lucky.

Q. You're talking about the technology off the tee, but what's changed on the

green over the years? Anything?

WOODY AUSTIN: No, nothing, it's still the same game. But again we're all again you can go back to we're all a lot more brash, a lot more confident when we're 20, when we're early in our career. If now let's say let's just take Jordan Spieth for example. What happens if Jordan Spieth at, what is he now, just turned 24 or just turned 23?

Q. He's turning 23 soon.

WOODY AUSTIN: So he's 22. What's going to happen to Jordan Spieth when he doesn't putt as well as he does for let's say a few years? His game is predicated on being the best putter in the game. What happens if that putter somehow leaves him for a little while and he gets later on in his career, he gets in his 30s where you guys, everybody's trying to make him out to be the next Tiger and Nicklaus with the majors and whatever. Let's say he gets to 30 and he's only won a couple more and the reason why is he's not making 33 percent from outside 20 feet like last year? His confidence isn't going to be so good either. It's just how that's just how it works.

Q. Great stuff, thanks.

WOODY AUSTIN: Yeah, I'm sure I'll look like a goofball as always.

Q. Six or seven weeks since your win in Tucson with your son on the bag. As you reflect on that family moment, has it become even more special to you?

WOODY AUSTIN: It is. Like I said, it's been great. The one funny thing about it is when I shot the 64 on Sunday at Atlanta, he texted my caddie and said, Well, it's about time, I only needed one. But then Dave was able to text him back and say, Well, I've done it two in a row now. It's been a good little tit for tat. And then he's able to hold it over the older brother's head. Oh, you haven't done anything yet.

Q. He was supposed to caddie for you?

WOODY AUSTIN: Yeah, the young one didn't want anything to do with it, it was all the older brother. It was his idea to even go because I wasn't even going to play because that was their spring break week and he's like, No, I want to caddie for you my spring break week. So instead of doing our California trip during spring break, we went that little bit early. So we played Pebble and did all that stuff with their friend and he was going to caddie and he got sick.

Q. What are their names and ages?

WOODY AUSTIN: Parker and he's 18, and Peyton is the one who caddied, he's 16.