

U.S. Open Championship 2017

Thursday, June 15, 2017

Ernie Els

Flash Interview



Q. Ernie, how do you take your round, the way the first 16 holes?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, it's a shame the last two holes, but, you know, I could definitely play those holes better. So that's a positive (laughing). So going into the next couple, I'd love to get that better.

But all in all, I've got to be happy. You take a 2-under par in the first round in the U.S. Open, you're right there. I know Rickie played a great round, 7-under, but through experience you know that the field's coming, the worst part. So we'll see where it goes, but I'm happy with that first round.

Q. How do you explain when you're not playing well and you come into what's supposed to be the toughest thing out there and it all starts looking --

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, the way I've been scoring has been awful this year. But physically I wasn't great. A lot of times I had a couple of niggles and the lower back hip and shoulder and knee. So it's really the first year that I've got experience with that, so it's kind of new.

So I feel good this week. I've got my trainer Vern here, and I'm feeling a bit better. So I'm feeling really loose. That's been nice. It's nice to play pain free.

You know, I felt that some of my game is coming back. My putting's back and short game's pretty good. So I've just got to play golf.

Q. Ernie, you made the birdies, but the par putt on 13 looked pretty hard. How big was that for you to keep a good mindset going?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, you find if you get on a roll, you've got to really try and capitalize on that. Then when it gets kind of tough, you've got to grind it out.

Seems like my back nine, I had to do a lot of grinding right through there. When you make those par putts, they almost feel as good as a birdie putt. You know, you've been around quite a few of these, and you've got to keep grinding along and just keep trying to put a score on the boards. So that's what the mindset is.

Q. So you're happy with your grinding?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, I've been doing it all year (laughing). So, it's nice to hit some good shots in there. Then you have to start grinding it and I've been doing that. So you've just got to kind of grit your teeth

and try to make those par putts.

Q. What is it like when people want to bestow upon you these humanitarian awards and lifetime achievement this, and here you are still out here trying to compete? You don't want to be a ceremonial --

ERNIE ELS: No, not yet. But it is nice. I found out a couple of days ago. Obviously you get nominated for something like that, and that capacity is quite something. But I've got to wait to make my speech because it's not only me. I've got a huge group around me, as you all know. They might as well come on stage with me if we do get an award. A lot of people have been helping me.

Q. You talk about all that career stuff and then you come to a new venue for you, does that recharge you at all?

ERNIE ELS: Absolutely. I felt good from the moment I walked through the gates here and on the course. I look over and it almost looks like a British Open Championship in a way. The crowd are happy to see us here. It's the first-time U.S. Open site, so there are a lot of positives out there, and I'm trying to feed off of that.

Q. Today it was 20 years ago that you won at Congressional. When you wake up in the morning and look at that date, do you kind of take some extra good feelings out?

ERNIE ELS: Don't write that. Really. My dad actually sent me a photo of us after Congressional. It was my dad, my mom, Liezl and myself with the trophy.

Yeah, we both said it's crazy that 20 years has gone so quickly. In many ways it feels like yesterday. In other ways it feels like a lifetime ago. So it's amazing. I'm just blessed to still be playing the game. So nice to still compete.

Q. Ernie, Congressional was considered a great U.S. Open site. You've seen them all?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah.

Q. What should a great U.S. Open site be? Is that changing, and is this one?

ERNIE ELS: I think we're in an experimental phase with the game of golf. I played a practice round with a

kid from Texas A&M, and he was hitting the ball 340 yards, okay. I used to be one of the kind of -- not the longest, but up there, hitting at 290. These type of golf courses might be the future: 8,000 yard golf courses. Technology helps when you swing the club very fast, and all of these youngsters are swinging the club at 120 miles per hour. So it could be the future.

I know from my friends who are members at Shinnecock, the whole golf course has been moved back. So we're probably going to be walking 200 yards back to tees from the greens at Shinnecock, so that's how quickly the game has changed. This could be the future. Who knows.

Q. If you aren't scoring well and you do have nagging injuries, is it hard to stay motivated?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, especially at my age. You try to still play the schedule that I've played for 20-something years, but it gets tough to go out there and play. You can't quite do what you have done or are trying to do because of some kind of little niggle. So, yeah, it gets frustrating.

Q. How do you get over that?

ERNIE ELS: Well, you've got to get better. Yeah, keep working on it. I like to compete. It hasn't been really good the last year or so, but I still want to be out there with the guys and play.

Q. Ernie, as the father of a first-born daughter who just graduated high school and is heading off to Stanford, what did you make of Phil's dilemma?

ERNIE ELS: Oh, Phil's thing, yeah. That's very understandable. Luckily Samantha graduated Memorial, Jack Nicklaus's tournament week, so I knew Jack would understand. I told him.

It's just one of those things. We're all parents, and you don't want to miss that day. It's almost more a parent day than a student day. You take the pictures and I won't say I'm crying, but, you know, you get emotional. High school is done and the next phase starts.

You know, Amanda's going to Brown, and that's wonderful. Phil and Amy are just enjoying it like all parents do. It's one of those things.

Q. I saw you talking to Maverick. Is he going to give Samantha some tips?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, I want to know. I guess -- is he a senior?

Q. I think he's done, yeah.

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, so, I know. It's a wonderful campus, and we're all very excited.

Q. It's very cool.

ERNIE ELS: It's a real bonus, as you know.

Q. Did you come here, Ernie, with the idea of trying to play well enough to get to next year's U.S.

Open?

ERNIE ELS: It's not really on my mind. I'd love to have a chance to, to be honest with you. I think if it's top 10, I think a top 10 gets you in, and that's great. But like I said at the Masters, 23 there, 25 here, you know, it would be nice to keep going, but if not, it's also fine. I've had a good time. Thank you.