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FEBRUARY 11, 2010

INTERVIEW WITH FRED COUPLES

SPEAKER: Well, Fred, thanks for joining us. Maybe get us started, I know you've played in Naples previously with the Shark Shootout. Maybe, first off, your impressions of the golf course. You had a chance to play now a couple days.

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, it's a good golf course. It's hard. It certainly was cold this morning, but you know, it's -- I think the only tough thing about it is for the spectators, it's a tough one to walk.

But getting through all that, it's in very good shape. Any golf course is hard when the wind blows and this one is right in there with those. There's some water that you've got to maneuver the ball around, but I think it's a good course. I think the players will like it. There is the possibility of a big discrepancy of maybe a 66 shot and an 80 shot because you can get it going the wrong way out there with all those hazards.

SPEAKER: Just to go back a couple weeks, what did you take away from your first event on the Champions Tour when you played in Hualalai?

FRED COUPLES: Well, second place, I know I took second place. You know, it was a great week. It was a little nerve-wracking at first, but once the tournament started, it was pretty much golf and playing with the guys I've played with a long, long time. I played the first round with Nick Price, and Michael Allen the second day, and Watson the third day. So guys

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I have seen a lot, know their games and now I'm the youngest, one of the youngest ones in here.

But to be honest with you, I mean, I didn't take anything different than I would have from anywhere else. You know, if I would have won, I honestly don't think it would have been much different. I couldn't have played much better and Watson was -- birdieing the last two holes was fun to watch and I think that's what this Tour's all about. Everyone has a good time, I think, even when they lost and sometimes you lost in a different way. Obviously he birdied the last two holes and I couldn't make enough birdies.

But again, on a course like this, there's no time now. We're here to really not pay any attention to what you're doing and feel good about yourself because you had a good tournament. There's a lot of hard shots out there. This is a different week.

SPEAKER: Any guys you saw this week with the full field that you caught up with or anything that maybe you didn't get a chance to in Hawaii because maybe it was a smaller field?

FRED COUPLES: No, a lot of hi's. I mean, out here, while I shouldn't say this because I don't really know, there aren't a whole lot of practice rounds. So there's two pro-ams. Yesterday I saw a few people on the range, Tom Kite, and I haven't seen Blaine McCallister yet, an old college teammate, but I think I know almost all of them. There's a couple guys I didn't know, Gene Jones at Hawaii, but got to meet him. I just saw Vicente Fernandez, who I haven't seen in a long time.

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But I've still played with these guys, whether it was in Europe or obviously on our Tour for a lot of years. There will be a lot of dinners to go to. They're pretty compact weeks and I don't do a whole lot. I like the format, the three rounds. I understand the pro-ams and I think it's a great Tour, I really do. I think the play is exceptional. The only reason I know that is because I've watched for a long time and once you get out here, they all hit the ball the same, they just don't quite hit it as far. And every Tour has long hitters no matter if you're in Tiny Tad's 10-year old, people are going to hit it further, or on the regular Tour or this Tour, but they all hit the ball really, really well.

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SPEAKER: You're friends with Tommy Armour, right? How do you think he'll do?

FRED COUPLES: He'll do well, he'll do well. He hits the ball -- you know, anyone with a little bit of short game will do well. What I mean is on the regular Tour it gets to a point when you get to be like Azinger and Tommy and myself where we can still play well at times but, A, we don't play as much or work on our game as much and be sharp.

But out here, you know, I hear lots of guys say they're going to play every week, whatever it is. The Tour will allow you to do that. There's a lot of breaks and it's really run well.

I actually hope, back permitting, this year I won't but next year I'll probably play more than I have since I was 23 or 24 years old just because of the Tour setup and I think that's great.

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And we all talk about on the regular Tour, we don't understand why we play every single week from January 1st to really November. It makes no sense, but it is what it is. Whereas out here, they do it probably that way because a few years ago they lost some sponsors, but they found a little groove and I think it's great.

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Getting back to Tommy, I think Tommy will do well because of, you know, the roundabout question of getting back, because he's got a very good short game, a good putting stroke, and he hits the ball beautifully. Azinger will do the same, but so will older guys like Jay Haas and John Purtzer.

It's no show because we're just 50 years old and we're supposed to be better. There's a lot to learn out here. The next time I play after this will be at Toshiba, which is in Newport Beach, which I have a lot of friends and I look forward to playing that. But you have to be -- you have to play great golf wherever you go, and sometimes if you play well, you'll finish 25th or 40th. I just played the L.A. Open and I thought I did really, really well and I think I finished in the high 30s.

That's why, when you turn 50, you push yourself away from those events, although last year I took Mickelson to the last hole, but that's what I'm saying. There are older guys that can still play and get it around, but out here, you have to play well. I mean, I've seen it. They get in streaks; Loren Roberts and Jay Haas and Fred Funk, Tom Watson, all those guys. I mean, Sunday, Tom Watson hit the ball extremely well and

I would say he's going to do that almost all the time, and when he putts well, he's probably going to be right there.

SPEAKER: Did I read in the L.A. Times last weekend where you played with the Ping clubs?

FRED COUPLES: I used them on Thursday and Friday in a little support for Phil, yeah. I just thought, you know, we won't get too deep in that, but I thought that was a little bit much, so I thought, you know, I'll use them and see if anyone picks on me.

When I started burying them in bunkers and not hitting them very good, it didn't take me long to say, hey, I'm not worried about what people are saying, but I've got to get a better sand wedge in there.

SPEAKER: I read a little paragraph in the --

FRED COUPLES: No, I did. Again, I was sitting at home and I had two overnighted to me and I tried them. Personally, I don't even see any of problem if the whole Tour used them or if four guys used them. It's not that big of a deal.

But when you single-handedly pick out the best player on our Tour at the time, which Tiger's not out there right now, I think that's -- that's worse than what he said, personally. And I think he regrets it and he's a very nice guy, Scott's a very nice guy. But to pick on Phil Mickelson in his hometown, his first tournament of the year and he's our best player is not really the way we want to be going.

SPEAKER: How do you feel about coming out here with the expectations of your arrival and things like that?

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FRED COUPLES: Well, you know, I thought about that and I laugh at that because I know I can play. I played well on the PGA Tour last year, so I'm looking forward to playing out here. People will come out and watch a lot of us. There might be more watching me.

But as far as expectations on whether I'm going to win or finish second or be in the last group every single week, you know, I'm pretty smart to realize that to do that, you have to play a lot of golf. There are times when I just don't do that, even on the PGA Tour. So the expectations for me, I want to play well. I'm not out here this week or any week to just go through the motions. So that's my goal and it was at Hualalai and I played well and I had a shot at winning. I know when you come here, when you're trying to hit 3 irons or 4 irons or stop wedges down wind that you're not going to pull off every shot, so you have to be careful and you've got to figure out scoring. I think that's a big deal.

To answer, a question I don't know is scores. When I go play a PGA Tour event, even when I was 32 years old, I knew what a good score would be on the course. I can't tell you what is going to be a good score on this course. I can say a guy 66 is going to be a hell of a score. I just don't know if you can shoot that. It's pretty hard. So that's a tough thing because in my mind, I'm not a one-hole-at-a-time kind of guy. I like to know what's going on.

When some guy says, "Oh, I played and I didn't even look at the leaderboard," I look at the leaderboard on the third hole of the tournament because I think it's

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fun. I think it's entertaining to see that Keith Fergus is three under after three. That doesn't make me go, "Oh, my God," but I don't know if he's going to continue to birdie every hole and then I shoot one under and I'm 10 shots back, that's not where you want to be.

So to me, that's the hardest thing is I have no expectations on what everyone's going to shoot, but you're supposed to pay attention to yourself. Sometimes you get on a course and you may try something you might not do and it may work for you or against you. But basically this is a new course for all of us, so nobody really has any idea, but I really like it. It's a nice layout.

SPEAKER: When did you make the decision to play here and what went into it?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I actually made the decision because -- it's hard because if I withdraw from a tournament on the PGA Tour, it's okay. But if you enter one here, and a lot of times when I don't feel good, I still go play a PGA Tour event but I probably won't play the next week.

So when I knew is when I was practicing at home and on my way to L.A. and I think I entered -- I think I played a round last week, I'm not really sure. You know, I want to play out here, but I just don't want to enter the tournament and have everyone get excited and then pull out. So there will be a lot where I'll wait until Thursday or Friday the week before and that's the best I can do. I think it's better to give them a surprise than give them a, "Wow, this guy pulled out." I don't have any other way of going about it. I don't

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know how I'm going to feel. I wish I knew more.

SPEAKER: Do you feel good now?

FRED COUPLES: I do. This morning was rough, it was rough on everybody, and I'm sure there's a lot of aches and pains out here so there's no reason to gripe and complain, I've heard that from everybody. Whereas when I'm on the PGA Tour, I tell everyone, "Yeah, wait until you get to be 50," and all that, and they look at you and they go, "Yeah." They're 24 years old. Out here, hell, I'm the youngest guy so no one wants to hear a word.

SPEAKER: What was going on before the Shootout with your back? Was it more just the same kind of thing or was it something different?

FRED COUPLES: You know what, my back has been pretty much the same setup for maybe 16 or 18 years. It's identical. It's never horrible. I mean, it can be, but then I lay down for four or five days. But at the same time it's good for short periods of time. I can still play, so right now I feel pretty good and I'm hitting the ball hard. I don't have to like massage it around the course, which is good.

But it's the same deal. I mean, I could get up out of this chair and have it go out, or I could play tomorrow and shoot 68 and wake up Saturday and feel not very good. So it's a pacing, you know. I will go back and I'll probably lay around the room for a couple hours and do a little -- I am starting to so-called not work out but exercise, and it's not much but I'm trying to get really hot before I tee off. So I'll come here and probably walk for a half hour and get sweaty and go

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play, but I haven't been -- I don't want to test it this week because it was freezing today to me.

♀ I really am -- I like this Tour. First I think it's unbelievable golf and I've only been to a few events and watched. I did a little TV one year three or four times. But when you're on the range and you can tell by the sound of a ball and you can tell by the scores. I'm hoping next year to play 18 or 20 times and this year probably 12, and that could change quickly. If I enjoy it as much as I think, I might play 15 times.

They've been very nice and everyone is just what you expect, even the guys you don't know. They love it out here and they're kind of a group. When the younger guys come out, like Calcavecchia's coming up, there's four or five others, somewhere someone's got to go. I don't really understand this Tour just yet, but I do know that when Tommy Armour, myself, Pavin, Azinger, Calcavecchia, that's five more guys. The fields don't go up to 83 or 84 guys, so somewhere they go backwards. I know there's a lot of guys my age on the Tour that are close.

SPEAKER: Kenny Perry turns --

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, I think, you know --

SPEAKER: Steve Lowery.

FRED COUPLES: Kenny Perry will probably stay on the regular Tour as good as he's playing, I wouldn't blame him for that.

♀ SPEAKER: How will you approach the three rounds? Have you thought about it that much, not want to get off to a bad start?

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FRED COUPLES: Well, you don't want to get off to a bad start even if you're playing a 36-hole event. It's a mindset and it could be different this week. I know at Hualalai, I wasn't really worried about it at all, but I did hear a lot of guys say, "Don't shoot even par your front nine, you'll be "glapped." I don't think you go for the first hole Par 5 in 2 if it's all over water either.

Those are great questions, everyone at home asks me, so I think you just play. To me, Friday -- excuse me, Saturday is more of a day -- again, I'm just saying you might try a couple things differently because if I come out tomorrow and still hit the ball well and shoot 71, it might be a good score, it might be in 25th place. Then on Saturday I might start trying to do a handful of things that I might not do normally and see if I can make some birdies. You know, you've got to force yourself, but again, yeah, Friday is an important day and Sunday usually is the most important day, so they all work in there.

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