

FEBRUARY 14, 2010
INTERVIEW WITH FRED COUPLES

Q. Fred, another shoot-out. I mean, the slug-fest with Watson two weeks ago?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, I got to watch that. That was easier, I think even easier to take. You know, I just set it out there that I birdied the first three holes and I think I had maybe like a six-shot lead maybe over everybody but one guy and then a seven-shot lead.

I was telling Joe on one of the holes that I felt like, you know, I didn't need to do anything stupid or crazy, just keep plugging along. The next thing I knew, Tommy made two or three more birdies to get within about four shots and I birdied number 8. I was cruising along and I birdied the 12th hole, a par 5, and hit a really nice shot on 13 and then I birdied 14. Then I hit an iron on the 15th green and I looked at the leaderboard and I was tied and seriously was shocked. Even Scott Hoch thought, "Wow, you must have thought you had a three- or four-shot lead," and I said, "Yeah, I surely did."

What a round. I mean, I shot 8 under, thought whatever how many stroke lead I had, I thought that would certainly be easy enough. I wasn't 8 under on the first hole, but I felt like I could shoot another good round and even if I did, I wouldn't have won. So I felt lucky to have won this tournament even though for three days I played and I was in the lead or near the lead except for maybe two holes.

Q. Tommy just said that Freddie's a pretty awesome player. Maybe just talk about, I guess your relationship with him and his game.

FRED COUPLES: Well, you know, I've known Tommy since we both were in college. I used to hang around him a little bit and stay with his parents in Dallas. That's how we got to meet each other. But the other day I texted him after our first rounds, and I said, "Hey, you know, let's have fun this year and keep up the good playing." He texted back something like, "Yeah, I hear ya." And then three days later I wasn't all that thrilled about the text when he was 11 under par after 53 holes.

But he is a great player. He's been working very hard on his game, and I can't speak for him, but I know we

had a conversation last year where we're both going to be 50. He has played very well the last three, four, five years and I kind of told him I'm going to play a few on the PGA Tour but I'm going on the Champions Tour, and why are you going to do that, blah blah blah blah. But then he's had a little bit of some injuries and I believe -- I don't know if he came in here, but I think he's going to play the Champions Tour full time, which I think is smart because of things like today.

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When I finished second to Watson in Hualalai, I went back feeling pretty good about myself and the way I played, and today he's second and feeling the same way. I just can't get over 61, that's amazing to me.

Q. You mentioned when you looked up at the 16th tee there you saw you guys were tied. What was going through your mind at that moment?

FRED COUPLES: Well, actually, my caddy said, "You're going to have three birdie putts<" and I ripped a drive on 16 and it went down there much further and I had what I would consider to be a 50-yard shot with not much green. I was trying to knife it in there and I hit it a little fat, but it got on the fringe and it wasn't much of a birdie putt.

On the 17th hole it was a perfect club and I just hit a good 9 iron, went right for the flag and it stopped 3, 4, 5 feet short of the hole, but my mindset was I was going to have some birdie putts, even on 18. But they're good driving holes. They're not the toughest driving holes, but they're just good driving holes, especially when you're tied and you have to maybe work the ball a little bit. But I think I drove the ball about as well as I could today and that's why I had so many birdie choices.

Q. What was your overall impression of this course being a new event and the Champions Tour in general?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I loved the course from the first time I played it, the pro-am, because it's hard and I knew it was going to be windy. I didn't think it was going to be this cold.

I think the harder the course, you know, for myself even on the PGA Tour, the better off I'm going to be. If I'm going to play out here, I know there are some courses such as Hualalai when the wind doesn't blow, you have to

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shoot a lot under par. But here, there's a lot of demanding shots. You know, if you look at it, there's a lot of guys that shot five, six, seven under, which in that weather, two-and-a-half under a round, there's nothing wrong with that. I had a great start today, Tommy went crazy and I managed to keep making a few birdies.

Q. When you realized you were tied, did it enter your mind at all that, "I hope I have enough left in the tank here after another long day"?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I knew -- no, there was a lot going on in that little mind. I knew that with the small little blip of a bad shot or a mediocre putt, I would be behind. And I putted well this week, and again I would say the last time, I had birdie putts most of the day and I knew I was going to keep getting them. I did not get one on 16, but 17 I hit stiff and I stepped up on 18, hit a very good drive. The tees were up, they're up

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for everybody, but they were up which made the hole a little bit easier because it felt like the wind was going to be blowing hard in your face there. When I hit my drive, I thought I would have a 7 or 8 iron, but for not playing the course much, I hit a 9 iron and I felt pretty good about hitting a 9 iron to the pin and getting the heck out of here.

Q. Any thoughts back to Hualalai that Watson came from behind on you a little bit and maybe you had a chance to post a birdie on the last couple holes that you needed?

FRED COUPLES: The only thing that went through my mind was if I didn't win, and that thought didn't last very long. When all of a sudden you think you're four or three ahead and you look and you're tied, he's in the clubhouse, sometimes you would say I would rather be in that position, but this time it worked out better that I had a few holes to play and birdied one of them.

Q. After being so close two weeks ago in Hawaii, how does it feel to finally get the monkey off your back and get your first win on the Champions Tour?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I mean, that's a great question. I think the biggest thing is I hadn't won a tournament since 2003, so last year I had two or three really good chances to win on the PGA Tour. I think when you win a tournament wherever you are, whether you're on the Nationwide, you still have to play well and it's a nice

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feeling.

So I don't use those words "I got a monkey off my back," but it's not that easy to win. There are some incredible players out here that have gotten beaten and I know Mark O'Meara comes to mind. He's told me a few times where he had the lead, shot 67 and lost. I shot 64 in the last round in Hualalai and I could have shot 65 today and lost, or 64 and lost in a playoff.

It's a fun tour. It's a great spot for me, I'll be honest with you. To be perfectly honest, I don't know how much I'll last, but I'm not going to be a 57 or 58 year old on the Champions Tour playing, but if I can play two or three years and my back hangs in there and play well, then it will be a lot of fun.

Q. Does your back worry you that much at this point in your career that you think you can only go two or three years?

FRED COUPLES: I play enough, and when my back goes out, I don't get to play a whole lot of golf. That's why I play such a small amount of events every year and I try and pace myself. To come out here and play 22 or 24 tournaments is never going to happen. I don't think I've played more than 16 or 17 tournaments in the last 20 years on the PGA Tour.

So it's a pipe dream to think I can come out here because it's only three rounds. It's still a week of

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golf and it's still tough. I can tell you, I worked as hard today to win as I did in any other tournament. It just doesn't have the same ring as winning at L.A. or The TPC, but for me, this is where I play now and it's my first and I hope I get a few more.

Q. Would you like to see this tournament come back to this venue next year?

FRED COUPLES: Come back to The Quarry? Oh, for sure. I've only played a couple courses here, but this was a rough week, it was cold here. I'm sure the wind can blow, but they did a great job. The course was set up very playable. A couple days the wind was blowing so hard, you know, any golf course would have been unplayable and we just couldn't finish the one round.

Q. Would you talk a little bit about the crowd support this week, Saturday and Sunday being the better days,

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how it compares to the regular Tour?

FRED COUPLES: Well, you know, I was impressed with how many people were out there. It's a tough walking course. I don't know if any of you guys walked some of those holes, but if you don't get a cart in between some of those greens and the next tee, you're going to go home a lot more tired than I am.

But the best thing about the crowds is they're very supportive, they love golf in Naples and I don't know how many people were out there but it seemed like there were a lot.

On the PGA Tour, not a knock, we don't get the biggest crowds as we did 10 or 12 years ago. I think there's a lot more going on, but we still get good crowds. So on the Champions Tour it's a little easier, you can get closer to the players. It's still a struggle, I can't sign autographs in between shots and talking to people, but it's just got a little bit simpler feel to it. When you're battling for a tournament to win, you know, you can't take away having a lot of people out there rooting for you. That's a good feeling.

Q. Talk about your start. I mean, you bogied 17, I guess your next-to-last hole in the morning. Did you really think, "I'm going to get a good start here"? Did you have a good feeling that you were going to?

FRED COUPLES: I thought about the first few holes. I butchered the first hole yesterday and then hit a great shot on number 2, but today it just kind of happened. I hit a really good shot on 1, it's a 2 iron and a sand wedge. Then the next hole, great pin and I birdied there. Next hole, par 5, I hit two really good shots and a good bunker shot and I was off and rolling. Then I played five under from there on the next 15 holes, so I hit the ball really well.

There were a couple tee shots I didn't like partly because I wasn't really sure of with all the wind

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coming, those pro-am days, and I might have been better just hitting a hard 3 wood, which I did a few times today instead of trying to hit these easy drivers. But the last four drives I hit, I hit really, really well on the par 5 and then 16, 17, 18.

Q. Your friendship with Tommy, I don't know how you guys would characterize yourselves as maybe close

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friends, your personalities possibly being similar, maybe kind of laid back. Does that play into it at all, how close you guys may be?

FRED COUPLES: No, because he was up two groups ahead of me. I never worried about anybody today, not in a good or bad way, until I walked on that 15th green at 11 under par. But I'm just saying did I think about Tommy out there today and what he was going to shoot and all that? No.

Q. I mean more the relationship the two of you have together, is that one of the things why you guys maybe have been friends or are friends for a long time?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, we're friends because he's a very nice guy, fun to be around. I would say and he would be the first to tell you there's a few times he would call and want to go do something and I would say no, but we play a lot of practice rounds and the reason I say no is because he used to be known for staying out a lot later than I would ever stay out so I would not do that.

But at the same time I think he would sit here today and tell you, yeah, it kind of hurt my game and I learned a lot from it, and he's a much better player now than he was when he was in his 30s and early 40s. He can really play and he works hard at it. His brother helps him a lot when he caddies for him. Basically, if there were practice rounds out here, I would be playing most of them with him because we've known each other so long, and guys like Jay Haas. But there's usually two pro-ams and I don't think there are any practice rounds, which is kind of hard but it's okay. It would be fun to bang it around with a couple of guys, Bob and Curtis and Jay, but I had a great pairing with Peter Jacobsen and Jay the first day, which was fun.

Q. Freddie, does it even hit you the impact that you have on this Champions Tour? You're a fan favorite, you were a fan favorite back in your 20s and you're always in contention at the Masters. It was a big deal for you to join this Tour and attend this event. Does that impact you at all, your presence on this Tour?

FRED COUPLES: I don't really look at anything that way, but I do know that at Hualalai there were a lot more people than normal and here there were a lot of people. I don't enter tournaments specifically to help the

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tournaments. I've played a few times, but I would think

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even if I was back at 3 or 4 under I would have a nice gallery walking around. But the idea for me is I entered this tournament late because I didn't know if I was going to play obviously, that's why I entered it late, but I'm glad I played it.

I'm learning more and more that the Champions Tour is better for me. My idea of playing good golf on the regular Tour is to have a shot at winning tournaments. That doesn't mean all of them that I play in, but last year was pretty good, but I'm now learning that those are few and far between. I can still play, but if I can come out here and play and be better off and help this Tour, that's my goal. This year I won't play as much, but next year it will be 90 percent on the Champions Tour.

Q. Your back being the way it is, do you ever wonder, always wonder which is going to be the last one, the last win? Is that part of --

FRED COUPLES: No, no, but I wonder sometimes when it doesn't feel good, one swing might cripple me. But it's been since '92 and that's 18 years. I have no problem with it. Like I played with a guy today, Scott Hoch, who's got a wrist problem. He's missed a lot of golf. A back problem, you know, I don't want one, but I've been able to play with it and when it's really bad, I get away from it. Like I say, I think the last time I won was 2003 in Houston, so that's seven years ago. That's a long time. I am very excited that I won and I'll keep trying to win out here and I have a couple chances on the PGA Tour to make the cut. That's really not the idea of fun. When you can come out here and play well, I expect to play well. I don't expect to be in the last group every single time I play, I'm very realistic on that. But I know at any given time I can come out here and get on a roll and play well and that's my goal. My goal is to play, and if I don't play well on this Tour, then I've got some -- I've got to figure out how I can and you've got to practice hard. These guys really work hard. I was, I don't want to use the word shocked or surprised because that's not the right thing, but they work hard and they shoot incredibly low scores and it's impressive.

Q. Thank you.

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