

**Sony Open in Hawaii
Waialae Country Club
Honolulu, HI**

January 13, 2010

Pre-round quotes

INTERVIEW OF ERNIE ELS

JOHN BUSH: We would like to welcome Ernie Els into the interview room, a two-time champion of the Sony Open in Hawaii. Ernie, welcome back, just get some comments on the state of your game and your preparations for the week.

ERNIE ELS: The state of my game, I don't know yet. We've had a couple of months off. I'm looking forward to the week. Normally I come here, you know, I've played the Mercedes, but I didn't qualify for it this year.

But ever since last week I told my family I was coming here, I told Samantha, and they were actually going to school last week or this week. When she knew that I was coming her, she had to come with, so that's how much we love this place.

It's a pity it's so far, bu it is what it is. But it's a great place and it's got a nice golf course. I've done well in the past. You know, the first week of the year, I've hit actually quite a few golf balls, quite a bit of rest and a little bit of meat around the midsection, but I'm looking forward to the year and obviously this week.

JOHN BUSH: T-39 last year, had to feel like a missed cut to you after 5 straight Top-5's. Comment about this course, what you like about this course.

ERNIE ELS: Actually I almost missed the cut last year. I remember I finished in the morning on Friday and waited all day to see if I made the cut. I'm happy just to be here.

But I've had a lot of Top-5's here. I've won twice. You know, it's so different from the previous week. The previous week at Mercedes is a bomber's heaven. And here you got to play a bit of golf. You got to place the ball and check where the wind is coming from.

I love both ends of the spectrum, I guess. I like control golf when you have to do that. I think the greens, these are some of the best Bermuda greens we putt on. The speed is unbelievable. The hole pretty well. The guys can really make up ground on the greens here.

JOHN BUSH: Questions?

Q. No wind, they brought your name up last week, only briefly. Can anybody catch Ernie?

ERNIE ELS: Where is that?

Q. There was no wind last week.

ERNIE ELS: Oh really. What was the winning score.

Q. 22. The place at the bottom of 15 is all yours.

ERNIE ELS: I don't know what happened that year. It must have been the red wine or something.

Q. Ernie, I'm curious, there is rookies, obviously, and some kids that never teed it up on TOUR. Someone like you, you've been around for 20 odd years, guys who have been around 10, when you get to the first full tournament of the year, do you think the level of optimism is the same for some of the kids as it is for some one like you?

ERNIE ELS: Yes. In a way, yes. When you have the love of the game and you want to achieve things, I think the first week of the year is quite exciting.

I look around the range and you're right. I actually played a practice round with Bob Estes yesterday. He has been out here longer than I. We were just talking. I said, man, the transition this time, the change came very quickly. Because every 10 years there is like a change, you know. I guess we've been through two of them now. There is a lot of guys I've never seen before. I've never heard of really. Obviously, they can play. Some new swings. You see this quite of bit of expectation of some young players.

Yes, it's an exciting year. You are going to look around this week and see who might be doing what for the future of the TOUR.

Yes, I think it's exciting. And, yes, I think players like myself, you know, Retief, even Phil now, he will be 40 this year. There is a lot of guys, you know, the hour glass is starting to run out a little bit and we like to prove everybody wrong, obviously. We still got a lot left in the tank. It's obviously a lot of excitement the first week of the year.

Q. Did you happen to see Daly at all this week?

ERNIE ELS: No, I haven't.

Q. Have you seen him lately at all?

ERNIE ELS: Yes, the last time I saw him was in July last year at the British. He was playing right behind me. He almost walked

passed me. I didn't really recognize him. I hear he's even smaller now.

Q. Mostly, yes. What are you looking for this year? How do you feel coming into the year?

ERNIE ELS: I feel good. Obviously the first week, you know, tomorrow is quite a big day trying to get yourself into the tournament. From there you can take it further. But as the year, as a whole, I'm looking for good things. I'm not going to travel around as much this year. I'm not going to the Middle East, so I can play a bigger schedule in the U.S. through The Masters.

Obviously, July we'll go to Europe to play in those tournaments. But for the 2hole, I'll play more in the U.S., and I think my future will be more here than overseas.

My kids got quite a schedule themselves, and I would like to be a part of that. Samantha is on the soccer team, basketball team, volleyball. And Ben is coming around nicely, too.

I would like to spend some more time at home as a family. I've been traveling for almost 20 years a crazy schedule. I think it's time to concentrate a little bit more here and see what I can do.

Q. What do you think is the key to being able to win in your 40's?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I think we can draw from experience, obviously. I think just to keep your body in shape, not having too many aches and pains helps. Especially I got a big swing, a long swing as you know, so I need to be in pretty good shape.

And then I've been struggling with the short stick a little bit for the last, I'd say, two years. You got to get the ball in the hole to keep your momentum going and stuff like that.

But the golf courses, and managing your game, I think, I don't think a 20-year old kid can beat me at that. They might get it passed me or have a longer or more powerful game, but I think managing your game, and knowing where to hit it, I think you can draw from that. But, obviously, the level of play just keeps on getting better year after year.

Q. Ernie, what will your schedule look like through The Masters, will you play a few more on the West Coast?

ERNIE ELS: My schedule, I'm going to San Diego, I will be in LA. AT&T, I don't know, but I'll play the Match Play and then Doral. Play most of the Florida tournaments. Maybe not Honda, but I'll play Bay Hill again this year. Probably not Houston and play The Masters and then I got one in Korea probably. That will be my one big trip.

Q. Par 72 at Bay Hill again?

ERNIE ELS: I hear that. I hear they made a lot of good changes. I call them good.

Q. Does that make a difference?

ERNIE ELS: Yes, I think so. I think playing a tournament in the early 90's, I thought it was one of the best courses I've ever played. It was quite narrow. And then they took a lot of the trees out, a lot of the bush out. They changed the greens into different grass. And, you know, changed those par-5s into 4's which never really even looked like 4's. Especially the one up the hill, No. 4. The bunkers are out of place, where you drive it, it's so narrow. It was never a par-4. It's all about scoring again. I'm glad it's back to its original course. I think a lot more guys will come back.

Q. Do you have Tampa in mind or no?

ERNIE ELS: Sorry. I said Honda. I meant Tampa, sorry. I play Honda and not Tampa. I should have said Tampa.

Q. It's tough to give one up there, isn't it?

ERNIE ELS: Yes.

Q. A good swing they've got?

ERNIE ELS: Yes. But we've got our (inaudible) and Bay in between this, and I need to have a bit more time.

Q. Ernie, you travel so much, have you been tempted over the years, I remember Nick Price, he could never understand how you keep it up, have you attempted to curtail it a bit?

ERNIE ELS: I must admit the last two years I've been talking to Liezl about it. We have relocated to Florida, and to be honest with you, if I wasn't in Mercedes, it was a very easy start for me in the Middle East because it's so close to South Africa. You just fly up to Dubai. But ever since we made this change to Florida, it seems like my international schedule, it's really difficult to do it from Florida. I can understand where Price is coming from now. That's why we lived in England for 10 or 11 years. It's easy to get anywhere in the world within 12 hours. It's difficult to do a Florida to Dubai trip which is 16 to 18 hours and then come back and try to be half normal when you come back. It takes you two weeks to get back. The last two years we've been talking about it.

Q. Among the various things people will say about you in terms of describing you as maybe the foremost global player of your generation, are you proud of that?

ERNIE ELS: I never thought about it that way. I just did it. That's where I was going. The Johnny Walker people, there were good to me. I had a contract with them for a long time. A long contract with the Dubai guys. Qatar, Wales, Singapore, wherever I have gone, we signed up long term deals.

Q. But you were going before you signed the deals?

ERNIE ELS: Yes, I did. That was probably the forerunner for my eventual stay in it, that kind of schedule.

Q. We all know about appearance money, it's been around for ages. But even now we are getting to a stage where more guys are starting to travel. There were even a few more Americans in Shanghai. Anthony Kim starting off at Abu Dhabi, et cetera, you must like that, they must still look at you as an example?

ERNIE ELS: Yes, it will be interesting to see if they sustain that. Myself and Vijay did it for 15 years and then he kind of stopped doing that because he came to live over here. It will be interesting to see who sustains that kind of schedule. If you do it for as long as I did, obviously it means something to you. Some of the guys now, you know, IMG runs Abu Dhabi, there is certain agencies doing certain tournaments. They need players and they brings in their agency players. So it makes sense for them running those tournaments. That's how things work nowadays. Let's see if they sustain that kind of momentum.

Q. Looking back, Ernie, would do you it the same way or would you maybe not travel as much?

ERNIE ELS: If I won more Majors. No, I come from South Africa. I've gotten this question my whole career, I don't think I would have done it any differently. That's just the way we were, we are. Gary Player was that way because he started in South Africa. And he started spreading his wings, I just kind of followed suit, just wherever it came from.

Q. Speaking of Majors, how do you like the rotation for this year? Augusta is always Augusta; Pebble Beach, St. Andrews, Whistling Straits, licking your chops a little bit?

ERNIE ELS: There is a certain guy that is probably licking his chops.

Q. What do you mean?

ERNIE ELS: Pebble Beach he won by 15 or 12. Won twice at St. Andrews. I'm looking forward to it. St. Andrews, I've been playing there for a long time. I've never won there, unless you count those Daniel Cups or whatever.

Q. Someone counts them?

ERNIE ELS: I love going to St. Andrews. It's almost like a second home to me. They give me my same hotel room now for the last 15 years. I stay in the same place. It's almost like an institution for us. In any case, where is the other one?

Q. Whistling Straits?

ERNIE ELS: U.S. Open, Pebble, looking forward to that. I kind of enjoyed it the last time we were there. It was interesting to see how they set up the course. They were very scared of the course getting from them. They kept it very soft. If it gets firm, it can be quite interesting. I kind of enjoyed it last time.

Q. Ernie do you feel like the USGA is starting to play too many of the same courses for U.S. Open over again, rather than, it seemed like the 60's, 70's, they had a wider variety going to a different courses all the time, now it seems like it's more geared around, can they handle the event?

ERNIE ELS: I think you're right. That's why they went back to Bethpage. I think it was a great success of the golf course. They got all of that space for the corporate stuff. I think you're right. I think there is so many great golf courses in this country. They should take it around. It's a U.S. Open. You don't have to go back to certain places. I am with you on that. I would love to play some different ones.

We are going back to Congressional, I don't mind that too much. But the year after, we are going to Marion, which my generation never played, so that's a new one. I would like to see more of those classic great courses. There is Brookline, the guys said, that's a great golf course. Go through the country, you got some good courses. I'm with you.

Q. I'm just curious, World Cup going to South Africa this summer, you won't get a chance to go back there?

ERNIE ELS: I was just in South Africa now. As you know, this is our summertime. Unfortunately the World Cup is going to be right in the middle of our wintertime.

Q. That disappointing for you?

ERNIE ELS: The people won't really see South Africa in all of its glory. I saw the stadium in Capetown, is unbelievable. For us, it's a 90,000 seat stadium. The stadiums in Johannesburg are done. There is a lot of beautiful stadiums. They've done a lot of work. I think people will really enjoy them. Come see our South African hospitality, it's quite nice.

Q. What country has the best golf fans in the world in your opinion right now?

ERNIE ELS: Golf fans? It depends what kind of fans you like. If you go to TPC you get a pretty good crowd, you know. You will know they are there. If you go to Scotland, they are pretty quiet, but they know their game. It depends on what you look. To me, personally, I like the fans that understand golf, you know. If you play away from the flag, they don't boo you.

Q. Adam said something interesting late last year. He said the days of Ernie winning or contending on the Money List on two tours is probably over.

His thinking on it was, I think it was about '01, thereabouts, where you won one and second on another. If you are playing a schedule in the U.S. and Europe, compared to a guy in Europe, like a Rory or Lee, who is playing 22, 23 odd events, you are giving up 10, 12 starts for a player of that caliber; ditto for here of a Furyk or of a Vijay, do you think there is some truth to that, that

it's okay to play both Tours, but are you diluting yourself into thinking you can win on both or compete on both?

ERNIE ELS: Yes, to be honest, I think Adam is right. Because the European Tour has got so many golf tournaments now. It's almost every week. I think they got 48 weeks covered, 49 weeks covered of the year.

I know if you win the big ones, you move up so quickly, if you win a World Championship event or a Major or so. But you are going to have to have off the chart year to be able to win. You can probably maybe do it Europe. But you are not going to do it here in the U.S.

In the U.S., you are probably going to win six or seven, eight million dollars to win the Money List. Over there you got to win four or five and still play and go loopy. Yes, I think he is right. Things have changed the last couple of years with the amount of tournaments. They've got two tournaments in the same week sometimes which is crazy.

Q. Hong Kong and Australia last year, right?

ERNIE ELS: Yes, crazy, they are putting their names wherever they can.

Q. What was your thought when you saw the U.S signed up a tournament in Malaysia next year? Do you get a sense that it's almost like a wild west for tours trying to compete?

ERNIE ELS: Well, it's the market, isn't it?

Q. Yes.

ERNIE ELS: They've got a very really brand in the PGA TOUR, and they can sell it quite well over there. Golf is booming over there, believe me. China is probably the next frontier for them. They can probably do three or four tournaments in China. So, yes, the European has been doing it for 25, 30 years. They might be forced into it, too, the U.S. Tour.

Q. Do you get a sense at all of relationships between Europe and the U.S. right now from an administrative level because of this territory trying to be staked out?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I think it will be a good fight for them. See whose got the best players, the best brand, and who can give them the most as a sponsor. Who sells the best.

I don't think U.S. needs to go the way Europe went because they don't need to. You've got such a great base here in the U.S., you can play 12 months of the year. Europe can't. That's why they did it. They can only play five or six months in Europe, so they needed to give their members more opportunity to play and that's why they went there. U.S. can pick and choose. I don't want to get in the middle of it. They can basically choose where they want to go.

Q. Ernie, I overheard you say that you saw winners on the U.S., PGA TOUR yesterday ought to get double points towards the world rankings compared to the European Tour. Do you want to talk about that?

ERNIE ELS: You know, we just talked about, myself and Bob, he has been checking up on that. I haven't. All I know is if you play well you are going to be okay. That's been my motto throughout my career. Wherever you play, if you play well, you should be doing okay.

But saying that, you brought it up, there is a tournament in Abu Dhabi, where they brought in players, I was part of that, I am part of that, and they bring in really strong players. So you bring in strong players, the point system goes up. Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar will have a lot of points. Where the strength of field right through is not quite as strong as the strength of field even here at the Sony. Open. So for a player to finish in the Top-20 over there, it's going to be a little bit easier than doing it here. So throughout the year, you look at the averages. The guy that does it over there can do it more often than the guy playing over here because of the strength of field.

So at the end of the day, I think through the whole field on the U.S. TOUR should be -- there should be more points awarded than, let's say, in Europe. Or even give 10 more guys points here than say 30 over there, you give 40 guys here points.

Q. Geoff Ogilvy spoke last week a little bit about with the absence of Tiger for an unknown amount of time, No. 1 in the world might be up for grabs, it might be a little more of an open feeling as far as opportunities this year, and so forth, I just wanted to get your thoughts on that.

ERNIE ELS: Well, the way Phil Mickelson played at the end of last year, you know, he played with Tiger in Shanghai, won the tournament there on the final. The TOUR Championship he won coming from behind, you know. I mean, the way he is hitting the ball, Phil is hitting it as long, or longer than anybody out there. He has really been working hard. Now his putting is coming around. I think Phil is probably the man to beat now.

And even when Tiger stopped playing, you know, even if you ask Tiger, I think Phil got right to his level, you know, throughout his game. I think, there is a new guy we got to chase.

Q. Still more opportunities for everybody else?

ERNIE ELS: Yes, I think so. Obviously with Tiger not in the scene it becomes a free fall again. You try to position yourself, and you try to be the man. So, yes, it's a different landscape with Tiger not here.

Q. Ernie, you talked about maybe not traveling as much overseas. Can you talk somewhat about your businesses that you have and how they've kind of dealt with the economy as it's been?

ERNIE ELS: They've been hit. Wine is down. The golf course design business is very quiet. Thank goodness for our design business. Our big market was in the U.S. It was really all over the world. We are really pretty strong in China now and India, which is a growing market, believe it or not. We got four golf courses going at the moment and obviously there is a lot in the pipeline and there is going to be a bit of time where those courses are not going to go anywhere. I think everybody felt the pinch. Even that industry is at basically a fatalist. You got to be a serious player now, or you are not going to get any jobs. I think guys, jobs we just sign up, and take your money, and somebody else does the job, that's done. If you're not in the industry, don't even try. And then the wine, the Ernie Els blend, which is the high end, the sales are down 25 percent. They can hit, you know. You got to wait it out and keep grinding.

Q. Did you stop at the golf course out here?

ERNIE ELS: No, I haven't been out. I've been busy on the range trying to get a game going. I will go there Friday afternoon.

JOHN BUSH: Let's wrap it up.

Q. Speaking of hits, if and when Tiger does come back, is it going to be the same for him out here?

ERNIE ELS: What do you mean the same?

Q. Fans, everything that Tiger got that nobody else got?

ERNIE ELS: Who knows? I mean, I don't know. I don't know. As a player, you know, he is our No. 1 player in the world. He is the brand that fuels the TOUR. I don't know, Bob, to be honest with you.

Q. Can he play as well if fans are critical of him where before they idolized? He can walk by a thousand people that wanted an autograph nobody would say anything?

ERNIE ELS: He did it, didn't he?

Q. He won't be able to do it now.

ERNIE ELS: Yes, he will. I think he will have the blinkers on and do his thing. I don't know. It's just a situation it's tough to talk about. I've known him all of my life, most of my life. I don't know. We'll see when that happens. That's all good stuff.

JOHN BUSH: Ernie, thanks for coming by. Play well this week.

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