

**Toshiba Classic
Newport Beach Country Club
Newport Beach, CA**

March 7, 2010

Final-round leader quotes:

INTERVIEW OF FRED COUPLES

DAVE SENKO: Before we get started, just a couple of things, Fred is has now won two of his first three starts, and he joins a somewhat exclusive club that includes Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player. He is now 56, in your 3 starts, 56-under par, and 9 straight rounds.

Fred, congratulations, just talk about your victory today.

FRED COUPLES: Well, once again it was a lot of fun. I thought it was not easy out there, but once on a course particularly like this, once you get going, you feel like you can birdie a few holes. The only reason I say that is yesterday I birdied 3 of the last 4. There was another round I birdied three or four holes in a short stretch. You just get a little momentum.

Then when you hit a shot off line, you start to think about, you know, working it in the fairway and trying to judge that wind.

And today, you know, I hit a few mediocre shots. Some were pretty poor. It had nothing to do with the one on 18, but on No. 8 I hit a bad iron in the bunker. But hit an unbelievable bunker shot, it almost went in. I hit a couple of drives that were pretty loose.

When you are leading a tournament, nothing is easy. Tom Lehman probably played well, and then was not his best in the middle of the round, and that's where I made my stretch where I went from a 2, 3, 4-shot lead.

And then, of course, Ronnie Black, who I played with yesterday, who played extremely well, I guess he eagled 15 to get within a couple of shots. Then I eagled it also.

You know, it looks easier than it really is. These are rounds that I look back and say I putted well on.

You know there were not many holes where I was really aggressive with the putter because I wasn't hitting the ball that close. But

I did make a couple. I made a nice five or six-footer for par on the fourth hole and a couple of other side-hill curlers that I've missed before in my life.

But this year I've been making them. That's pretty much where most of the confidence comes.

I know I can hit the ball. It just is scoring. Like you said, you get that many under par you have to putt well. You don't hit every par-5 in two. To have five or six other putts, they are all two footers. I've been putting extremely well this whole year.

DAVE SENKO: Birdies, maybe just go through 11 and 12.

FRED COUPLES: Okay. 11, I hit a good drive and I hit a sand wedge to a foot.

12, I hit an iron off the tee, and I hit a wedge to maybe three feet. And then the next hole I hit a decent iron pin-high, but I knew I was in trouble as soon as I saw where the ball ended up. It had a big ridge. It was just a few feet off the green. I could have puttied it if it wasn't that slopey, but I ended up hitting a flop shot short and 2-putted for bogey.

And then the par-5 I hit a good drive and a 6-iron to probably 15, 18 feet.

16, I hit a good drive and a 9-iron, 8 feet.

18, I really did, as little pressure as I've ever been under, that's the worst shot I've ever hit maybe. I don't know. I don't even know what I did. I swung so fast, and it looked so easy, and I just said I'm going to hit it up there on the green and 2-putt, make birdie and go home and it ended up, it went that way.

Joey got all of the green paint off the ball so when I puttied it, it was clean. But it was a great way to finish to make that putt and get over some of the embarrassment on that second shot.

DAVE SENKO: How far was the putt?

FRED COUPLES: Probably 20 feet.

DAVE SENKO: Did you get a chance to see the scoreboard what Tom Watson was doing?

FRED COUPLES: Oh yeah. Once again, I saw that, and I knew I had a lot of holes to go. And I think at one time, I think I had birdied maybe 11 or 12, or maybe both of them, to still be 3 ahead. He finished 11, correct? But, yes, that was a great round, 9-under par. I won't get into much of it. I love looking at the scoreboard. I knew exactly what he was shooting.

Like my caddy said thank God he took a little time off after Hualalai, he got the rust off Friday and Saturday, and Sunday shot 9-under.

I will say, and I can't put words in his mouth, but I don't think the next time he is playing is until Augusta. So I won't be seeing much of him. Well, I'm playing Cap Cana and Houston.

He is a great player. I will say Ronnie Black, I played with him in Naples. He played really really well. Yesterday he played well and today he shot 6-under maybe. So that's nice. He is a very good player.

DAVE SENKO: Questions? What was the iron you hit on 18 there?

FRED COUPLES: 3. That's what I swung.

Q. Did it hit the side of the green?

FRED COUPLES: I think it did. It wasn't that bad of a shot. It hit and ricocheted but it was a 3-iron.

Q. So when you make a birdie and it hits the grandstands, is that a grandy?

FRED COUPLES: A grand finish.

(Laughter.)

Q. Fred, you get two wins, almost three, on this circuit, but you played great last week in Phoenix with the younger guys, so I know it's a month away. But Joey was saying earlier Fred certainly got the length, but you putted good this week. You see what Watson did at the British last year, and how he played today, is there Freddie to magic maybe?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I am going to Cap Cana. I will be off for a couple of weeks. I don't know how I will do at Cap Cana. I want to play well. But after 2 weeks off, my goal is to get there and swing and play and go to Houston and get ready for Augusta.

For a couple of years in a row, I almost won Houston last year and the year before I finished third, and I was really on my game and missed the cut both times the last two years at Augusta. It was highly disappointing.

Now, you know, I will tell you when I played last week, on Sunday my back was killing me, and it was really hard to bend over and putt. That's when the most pain was. I didn't putt very well. But I did putt the first three rounds there like I've been on the Champions Tour. That's a huge key. I feel better on this Tour. I think that, you know, it's like when you miss greens, and you are in the lead, and the guys you are playing with are hitting the ball and having birdie putts all the time, you cannot keep getting it up and down and beat that guy. That's kind of what I feel like on the regular TOUR when I play. Even when I play well, I go up against Mickelson, and I went up against a couple of other guys when I played well. They don't make the mistakes that I make. That's why they are the best players.

Out here I feel like I make less mistakes so far. It's been three tournaments, but that's really what I see. I just am not all of a sudden a better putter because I'm 50. That I can guarantee. But I'm getting back to your question, I am definitely looking forward to competing at Augusta. I really think that I can.

Q. Do you think the three rounds format helps you a little bit? Does it help you mentally knowing that it's not going to be as draining as the 72-hole format?

FRED COUPLES: To be honest with you on the Champions Tour I think three rounds is perfect. For me I wouldn't mind if it was four

rounds or not. We have a few Majors. I'll see how I do in those. But so far with the three rounds events I'm doing pretty well. But again, they are long weeks when you are 55 or 56 years old, which I will be some day. I will be into my 35 year of doing this. You know, three rounds is a good thing. I think they don't need to kill us out here. I think the 2 pro-ams are huge for the Champions Tour. So all of that leads into that. There all scores to me. If I keep playing well, you know, I'll do okay. But I'm smart enough to figure out if I shot 71 the first day, you're in trouble. And that's part of life. I'm going to do that a lot and see what happens. So far I've been making a lot of birdies and getting it under par and hanging in there.

Q. Freddie, some fans said welcome to the other side of 50 after the tournament, what do you have to say about that?

FRED COUPLES: I just smiled and laughed. I'm 50 so I get to play in the Champions Tour. I'm not one to say the golf ball doesn't know how old I am. I think everyone knows how old we are. At Phoenix, I bogeyed the last hole which I think I would have tied eighth or ninth. That was more depressing than any shot I hit for 72 holes. It's not the money part. I felt like that would have been a great, great, great finish and that's one stroke. It kind of took the luster off of tying for 14th. If I would have putted a little better there, on the last day now, I could have finished third, fourth, fifth place. Those are my goals when I play. I'm going to be slowing down on the regular TOUR. Certainly I have a few more left. But next year it will be even smaller. I enjoy this Tour. I think it's a fantastic Tour. Not just because I do well. There were a lot of people out there today. I still get decent crowds, but if I play well, I get more. But to come out and play in front of a lot of people is more fun for all of us. And I know that not everyone has all of the galleries out there. But so far in the pairings that I've had I've had good galleries and it's a lot of fun.

Q. You go to 17 with a three or four shot lead, it wasn't the ball stopping on the bank of Augusta, but were you worried about that tee shot rolling down?

FRED COUPLES: No, to be honest with you, I was not trying to be cute. I thought I could hit a really good shot. I thought if I missed it, not like I did on 18, it was a decent shot. I was aiming for the pin thinking that if I aim for the middle of the green and pulled it, then you got that big dicey hill, and I just did watch John Cook get it up and down out of sand. It didn't look that hard. So in the back of my mind with a 6-iron I thought I would go right at it and I pushed it a little bit, and I had a fairly easy chip. It wouldn't have been if I had a one-shot lead. With a three or four shot lead it became much easier.

Q. Fred, again, the confidence, this winning, you mentioned it yesterday --

FRED COUPLES: No doubt.

Q. -- even on this Tour?

FRED COUPLES: You know, at Naples it was hitting a good drive on the last hole and having an easy second shot and hitting a good 9-iron right where I was looking to the left of the pin. Coming here, starting out today with a couple of shot lead, I didn't really play that great. But closing the back 9 out and winning, they are scores.

So there is a lot of confidence to be played, and when I go back on the regular TOUR, I have confidence that I think I'm going to do better than I would if I wasn't out here.

If I was 49 years old, and playing on the regular TOUR another year, it would be a pipe dream to maybe win.

But I can still play well. But when you're out, it's a struggle. You get in these ruts and you want to make the cut because you are not playing your best. That's the worst feeling, that's the dumbest thing, but it happens.

I travel all the way somewhere, I don't want to play Thursday and Friday and go home. That's a lot of pressure. I never really felt that.

Out here there aren't any cuts. That's irrelevant. Because I know at this time of my life I should be competing to win tournaments out here. That's as much pressure that you want to put on yourself. It's not easy. I shot 18-under, and I played very well to do that.

Q. They introduced you each day as a former Newport resident?

FRED COUPLES: I lived right by Hoag Hospital where they almost gave a million bucks. I lived in Newport Crest for about six years.

Q. I live there.

FRED COUPLES: You live there? I used to live right on Imalita (phn) court. I would get on my hands and knees if I owned it if I still lived there. That was an unbelievable place.

Q. What year was that?

FRED COUPLES: I think in the mid '80's for six or seven years. The reason I got out of there, I never played any golf. And like I said, I never played here. I didn't even know where Big Canyon was. I had a little bit of a membership, honorary membership at Santa Ana, and I would go there once in a while. But most of the time I went to Newport night range and hit balls. I loved it here.

Q. Another SoCal question, a lot of us played Talega, a course that you designed, can you talk about that a little bit?

FRED COUPLES: Yes, that's got to be 12, 14 years old. I did with Brian Curly. It's doing very well. I know they sold every home

and people are enjoying the course. I've heard it a few times this week. I haven't built any courses in a few years, it's been a struggle to get golf courses, to be a designer, but I did design that. I think it's pretty good.

Q. It's a great course, we all love it. Thank you.

FRED COUPLES: Thank you.

Q. Fred, you won in '94 at Riviera and I was looking in the book earlier today and 7 out of 10 guys here --

FRED COUPLES: You're right. I said it the first day. I used Riviera a few times because at Riviera it's much longer now. It's longer than here. You can miss a few drives if you miss them in the right spot. Here, you can miss a few drives if you miss them in the right spot. The greens are tiny, the same kind of greens, tough to read and make putts. It's got the same feel.

Tom Purtzer, who always played well. Hale Irwin won Riviera.

Lanny Wadkins has won it. You are exactly right.

Again on Thursday after the Pro-Am, I really told my caddy I like the course because I get a driver on most of the holes and try to use some length and it gave me some openings if I happen to pull them, or push them

Q. Freddie, are you anxious to see how you can do on the PGA TOUR now?

FRED COUPLES: No, never anxious about the PGA TOUR. I'm a Champions Tour player. I really am. I'm going to go play Houston. I went to school there. I've played well there. And then I'll get ready for Augusta.

I don't think they are too worried about me because I'm winning on the Champions Tour when I go over there. The anxious part, I'm anxious, to be honest, to get to Cap Cana.

I know that's odd. I don't really have many goals. I'm playing well, and I many going to keep playing until I'm not playing well, then I will take a few weeks and figure it out.

But I was off a lot in November because my back was killing me, and I worked pretty hard in December, and I haven't taken much time off.

I played five weeks, two on the regular TOUR and 3 here. I will play Cap Cana, play Houston to Augusta. For me that's a good amount.

Q. Any hint of the back issue this week at all?

FRED COUPLES: No, once I stop it wears on me. I felt good today. I felt better yesterday and better today than did I on Friday. I got out of the Pro-Am on Wednesday here because I wasn't feeling good, then I came up and played on Thursday. Mark O'Meara took my spot on Wednesday. I feel good.

Q. With the strength of the Champions Tour fields now do you see a need or any chance of World Ranking points coming to the Champions Tour, are you concerned about it?

FRED COUPLES: No, no. Trust me, when I go to Houston, I've played well the last two years there, I'm not just going there to show up at Augusta.

I think, you know, I think this is a great Tour. I think it's got great players, big names, and I feel good about being on the Tour, and I certainly think that I'm helping The Tour, and I am helping myself by winning 2 out of the 3.

But no circumstances do I think that I'm going to go out -- Tom Lehman is a great player, he is just 50 and Corey Pavin. These are guys I played with the last 30 years and now we are 50. To be honest, we should be up there, because we all still been playing the PGA TOUR.

Now, there are guys 50 that played a long time on the TOUR, but they didn't play for three or four or five years, it's hard to come out here and say, wow, I want to win, when you haven't even played much competitive golf.

I've been ready to go. So I'm hoping to still be ready to go.

Q. Not much was happening on the front 9 when you scrambled for pars on 5, 7, 8, was there a key shot or sequence that helped you relax?

FRED COUPLES: Actually, yes I got off to pretty a pretty good start. I didn't hit a wedge on No. 1 very good or No. 2. Then I hit 2 beautiful shots on 3 on the par-5, and that was some quality stuff. Then I got around to some mediocre golf. I was trying to get this lead bigger, and I failed at that.

The drive on 10, and the second shot, I had a beautiful iron. It looked like Tom had hit it two feet, and it looked like I hit it two feet. I was about 8 feet short and he was 8 feet passed and neither of us made it. Then I went and had tap-ins on the next two holes.

I knew I had two par-5s coming up. I figured I could birdie one of those and somebody would have to go 4 or 5-under on the last six holes. I ended up making an eagle after Ronnie Black to keep a big lead. But the front 9 was okay golf. It really was nothing special.

Q. Fred, Phil says that the Houston course is a good preparation for Augusta?

FRED COUPLES: Yes, Phil will be there. A lot of guys. They cut the rough short. It's not Augusta National, but they try to duplicate the same kind of feel. That's good for me, too, I think that's why I played well the last couple of years. On the other course I won was a long time ago, 2003. I like to play before a Major, too. I know Phil will be there. They get good fields, it's a great event and from there right to Augusta.

DAVE SENKO: Thanks, Fred.

