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Second-round interviews

### **AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE STRICKER**

**THE MODERATOR:** Steve Stricker, thanks for joining us. Good first two rounds for you. 68, 65 off to a great start. If we can start with opening comments about your day today and the course conditions.

**STEVE STRICKER:** It was a good day for me when you can go around here and shoot a 5-under with no bogeys it makes it a good day. It was kind of a solid round. I didn't do anything spectacular, but I kept the ball in play really well. I hit a lot of greens. I only missed a couple of greens and putted well. When I can do that it was good. And the conditions were hot. They were sticky. There is no wind out there at all.

But the course is in great condition. The greens are receptive. They are holding. The fairways are firm and running fast. So you have to pay attention off the T-box, you have to get into the fairway here. They stick these pins in some of the corners and it becomes pretty difficult to get it close.

**THE MODERATOR:** Questions?

Q Maybe some things you have been working on to have a good round coming like this?

STEVE STRICKER: I have been working hard. This is my 9th event. And I really have no status out here besides being a past champion. I lost my card last year, basically, and I'm fortunate enough to have got in here on a sponsor's exemption and so I have been working hard. I have a lot of motivation to get back out here this year. And so I have been putting in my time and playing when I can. But I have been seeing signs. Slowly my confidence has been the biggest thing that has hurt me over the years the last couple of years anyway. I'm slowly getting some of that back.

Q Just to follow up on that. What has been helping to get that confidence back? A lot of times it takes a lot of results. And you haven't had a chance to put up a lot of results.

STEVE STRICKER: You know for me it's seeing it. Like any other player you have to see it somewhere. And I started to see it on the range, you know, where I start hitting it a lot better. And then I wasn't taking it out to the course. And then I started taking it out to the Pro Am. I started shooting 4 or 500 every Pro Am. I am thinking something has to be going good if I'm doing that. I didn't see it in tournament play, but now I'm seeing rounds here and there pop up where I'm getting some of that confidence back and scoring ability back. So it's been a slow process, and I'm starting to see a little bit here and there.

Q If you could start in a tournament and you were allowed to pick one stat to lead in besides scoring, what would it be on this course?

STEVE STRICKER: On this course here? I think greens and regulation here. The greens are not that huge so if you can get it on the greens in the right little quadrant where they put the pins, you have a good opportunity to make birdie. And they really are not that fast yet. They are soft and they really haven't picked up much speed yet, probably because of the hot weather. I would say like today I hit 16 greens, and it was not a lot of stress on my game. So if I could do that every day I would be happy.

Q Steve, when you have been as good a player as you have been on this tour, especially earlier in your career, and then you go through the struggles, can you describe what the journey has been and what has kept you going, and kept you believing you could get back to, you know, where you have been?

STEVE STRICKER: Right. It's been an up and down journey. And I guess what I look at is that it's very difficult in this game to maintain a high level for a long time. And except for a very few guys Vijay, Tiger, for most of us it's tough. The players that are coming out are better and stronger and more athletic and it's become a tougher place to play.

My game has not progressed. It went the other way. And when that happens you lose confidence. And all of a sudden that hill is a lot tougher to climb, it's a lot easier to go down than it is to get back. So, I just have been trying to persevere. I have been trying to keep a good head and not put too much pressure on myself. And try to somewhat gain some confidence back, and I know I can do it. I have done it. So I just keep believing in it.

Q Steve, you were talking about the Pro Am, you know a lot of guys treat the Pro Am as a practice round or a necessary evil. Were you at the point where you were searching for confidence wherever you could find it and the confidence came on Wednesday?

STEVE STRICKER: No question. No question. There was a time where, you know, I couldn't go out there and do it in a Pro Am. And you know I felt uncomfortable. Any time I put a tee in the ground or hit it from the fairway, and now I'm starting, I'm not comfortable all the time nor is anybody, but it's getting better for me where I can stand up there and feel a little more comfortable. I have more positive thoughts running through my head than negative, and as we all know it's important. It's probably the important part of the game is thinking positively about it. I feel like I'm going in the right direction and I keep telling myself I'm going in the right direction. I'm trying to reinforce it with myself all the time too.

Q Steve, you talked about this is your 9th event of the year. What do you do to fill in the gaps when you don't get sponsor's exemption, are you trying a 4th spot in open events? What are you doing to keep a playing schedule on the court?

STEVE STRICKER: I have been going home and spending time with my family. I'm from Wisconsin, so it's just starting to get nice at home where I can practice now. It was tougher the first, you know, 5 or 6 events where I would go home between those weeks off and have really nothing to do with my game because it was still cold. But, I just have been going home and now I can start practicing when I go home. But just spending time with the family.

Q You know, you were talking about the journey up and down and everything, did you ever reach a point where you thought, you know, if I don't get it done this year maybe it's time to go check something else out? Did you feel like you were close or do those kind of thoughts creep into your head?

STEVE STRICKER: It depends on when you ask me. If you ask me after I made a bogey, it probably did. But it creeps in there. You know, I mean the game is not any fun when you are playing like I have been playing. And that is the part that I have come to realize is that it's not all, it's not all perfect. You have to battle through it. And I have been trying to get tougher with myself about getting it back. I have been trying to just dig a little deeper and concentrate a little harder. But those thoughts cross your mind. But when it comes down to it you work a little harder at it.

Q Steve, you played with Kevin the first round can you talk about his game and maybe his composure out there?

STEVE STRICKER: Good player. I played with him two times out there one time in Tucson where he lost the play off. He is solid. He done drive it real long. He gets it in the fairway and he hits a good iron shot, and makes putts, and, like I said, his composure is really good for being 21 years old. He is going to have a long and bright future out here. Especially the way he has been playing so far the first couple of years out here. So he is a good kid, you know.

Q You have talked about the difficulty maintaining that consistency. I wonder if you think back was there one or two things that maybe kind of started the decline or that you can grasp on to?

STEVE STRICKER: I think there was a few things that I kind of traced it back to. But you know whether it be equipment changes, I started driving it bad, and I think really that is where it went. I started driving it bad. And I lost the confidence in the driver and it kind of trickled down to everything and I lost my confidence. I'm still fighting it on the tee now. But at least I'm swinging at it more aggressively. I can feel that. I have more positive thoughts running through my head than I did before. I'm starting to see the ball. See the shot before I hit it. Where before all I could look at is the hazard and the trees on the other side. So it was, that part has gotten better.

Q You are working with a mental guy? You and yourself?

STEVE STRICKER: I have read a few books here and there. I try to apply some of the stuff I read. It's just us players we have done it long enough. I mean sometimes you need some little tidbits from a book or from a sports psychologist guy that can open up your thinking a little bit, and realize that it's something that you haven't been doing. But, you know, we have all played it. We know what we're supposed to do. It's sometimes getting yourself to believe in yourself and doing it.

Q I'm curious, all of the success that you had early in your career and all of the expectations that you generated within your self, is that something that you can even draw on at this point or is that one of those things that you end up beating yourself up about that I haven't been that player? Does it cause you to be harder on yourself?

STEVE STRICKER: No. No. I can draw upon that. You know I know deep down I have won out here. I have beat some great players over the years in the match play event, and in the tournaments that I have won. And I can reflect back on that and know that I have done that. So, no, I still think there are bigger and better things for me to come sometimes. I don't think I am washed up. I don't think I am going to leave this game in a year or two. I'm working at trying to become a better player.

Q You know you are talking about taking small steps. We have a weekend to go, two solid rounds on a classic course like this can that be another step in the right direction for you then?

STEVE STRICKER: No question. Any time you can put up two good rounds. I have a problem putting four together lately, but I'm off to a start putting up two. I like the challenge of the weekend again. I haven't had good weekends so far this year. I like the challenge of me being able to come out here and being able to play well on this weekend.

Q Is there some sort of thought or thought pattern or something that you have been clinging to lately whether you read it?

STEVE STRICKER: Not really, no. I have been trying to focus why I'm out there. I have been trying to be a little easier on myself this week too. I tried to just kind of look around and see all the great sights here. And I have been joking with my caddie, I tell him what beautiful day it is. Something corny like that. I am trying to be light and not feel pressured and trust myself and go with it.

Q How hard do you get on yourself? What do you do to yourself mentally when you are not doing that?

STEVE STRICKER: Well I don't beat myself up, but, you know, I sometimes feel the extra pressure I don't need to feel. I'm out here trying to make the cut sometimes, and, you know, I said forget it. Let's just see what happens. Hit it and go find it. Just try to be a little bit less stressed about it, you know. "Who cares" attitude. That is what I have been working on for the last few weeks. Just trying to hit the shot and be in the moment at the time of hitting the shot. And then after that just blow it off and go find it and go do your best on the next one.

Q Steve, if we could touch on your five birdies today?

STEVE STRICKER: Sure.

(Scorecard)

STEVE STRICKER: I hit a lot of first cuts.

Q (Inaudible)?

STEVE STRICKER: Right. I bet I had, well I just rattled off those three in the first cut, and I know I had another one on 14. And No. 1, I piped it down the middle on No. 1, and it rolled through the first cut. I know 4 or 5 I hit on my line that just ended up rolling through. That is what is going to happen here with anybody. You can hit a good one and the fairways are moving away from you and they take a funny little bounce, and all of a sudden you are in the rough. That is what is happening here. The firm conditions.

Q (Inaudible)?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I didn't have any problems with that. It was sweaty. I mean it was wet. So I would imagine some guys had that problem.

Q (Inaudible)?

STEVE STRICKER: Every once in a while. She is going to do it when the tournaments come back up in the Midwest. She really misses it. Every time I leave home she is like, she shakes her head and wishes she was coming to carry the bag. but she will do it, you know, quite for a few events -- I won't say quite a few, probably 3 events when we come back up to the Midwest.

Q (Inaudible)?

STEVE STRICKER: I have a guy name Jimmy Walker, but I have been taking a couple of different guys here and there.

Q Steve, thank you very much. Good luck.

STEVE STRICKER: Thank you.

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