

October 31, 2007

VOLVO MASTERS

20 YEARS

• 1988 - 2007 •

Pre-Tournament Interview With:

PADRAIG HARRINGTON

GORDON SIMPSON: Okay, Padraig, welcome back to Valderrama for the 20th Volvo Masters. Last year, you came here with a job to do and you did it. How do you feel about your task ahead this week?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, it's obviously the same situation. I've had two goes at this before, obviously against Retief and last year against Paul Casey. Once, failed miserably and once came out on top. Another chance this year. I obviously have some -- probably gained some good experience from the head-to-head with Retief.

It's difficult to go into any tournament and finish in the top three on demand. It's difficult going to, you know, a golf course here that I have traditionally found difficult. So, but I've done it once; did it last year. So I feel positive about the challenge. I know I have to be patient and very accepting during the week and I kind of look at this as trying to get myself into position to win the tournament with nine holes to go, and if I can do that, who knows what will happen.

GORDON SIMPSON: How does the feeling differ, winning an Order of Merit, which is a season-long event and the exhilaration of one week at Carnoustie?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: (Smiling) Yeah, you know, winning the Order of Merit is very satisfying, there's no question of that. But to win a major, even though it's only one week, nothing in golf compares to that. Maybe winning The Ryder Cup at times, you know, because it's a team; it's exciting. But yeah, I think winning The Open is definitely on a different level.

But a different sort of level. This, it's a more satisfying thing when you win an Order of Merit, especially the way I did it last year, you know, having to come and play golf and performing was definitely a big confidence boost to my game. There's nothing better in this game than being able

to play up to a certain ability when you have to. A lot of times, you know, players more so than myself could be hit and miss and we turn up when we play great golf or we don't.

But it's hard when you have to turn up and perform to nearly your best standard. That's really a different level of ability, and it gave me a great confidence boost to do it last year. It would be the same this year if I did it, as well.

Q. I know it is a difficult golf course, but what is it you find particularly difficult about it?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I think you've really got to hit a lot of fairways and a lot of greens. You know, there's not a huge amount of drivers off the tee. And last year, I succeeded in doing that and I succeeded in hitting the eighth fairway four days in a row, which often I've missed that two out of the four days and were bogeys where if you hit it, you can make some birdies.

So there's a number of holes like that. It really is a golf course for the guys who hit a lot of fairways, a lot of greens and, you know, short game -- while it's nice to have a good short game around this course. It's difficult to hole any putt outside eight, ten feet, starting to swing a lot and they have a big break. And if you have short-side yourself on the greens, it's difficult to chip it close.

It's a more constrained course in the sense that, as I said, it's a course that you play by the numbers nearly and you've got to stay very patient on it. It doesn't have as much -- it's probably not as free-flowing a golf course as, say Montecastillo, you stand there and if you opened up your shoulders and if you found the fairway, great, and there was plenty of water and you could make plenty of birdies; but here you're happy if you are making two, three birdies or four birdies, it's still okay, and limiting the bogeys.

Holes like 13 today, I hit 4- and 5-irons in. I hit 4-iron off the tee and then hit a 5-iron second shot because it just gets so narrow further down. And to guarantee hitting the fairway, you've got to

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lay back and there's a number of holes on the golf course where you have to. And that would be very much my strategy is try, first point, to hit the fairway, even if it means, you know, even on the longer par 4s on front nine and 7 I hit 3-wood off the tee and leave myself longer shots in, because it bottles up. Of course, somebody that hits lot of fairways and lots of greens -- that wouldn't be my game. A bit more trying to birdie-every-hole sort of thing, and this is definitely curtailing that.

Q. Ernie Els has three majors and two Order of Merits; what's your take on the fact that he's not here this week, what do you think?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, he doesn't normally play here and didn't plan to play here, and he's honouring a commitment. You know, I normally do play and I saw this as something that at the end I would like to be here. But I think Ernie is honouring a commitment that he made, and, you know, that's what he's got to do. He would never have expected to be playing. I don't know, when was the last time he played here?

Q. '99.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: There you go. So he hasn't been here in nine years. I would say he's probably a bit like me, what was his performance like on the course?

Q. Used to clash with the THE TOUR Championship.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I'm sure, but the fact that he's never won here, has he? So he's never looked at this golf course as this is one that gives me an advantage. There isn't -- you know, Ernie is a big hitter. There's nowhere out there really that he could take advantage of that power.

I think, you know, because of that reason, he hasn't been here. And I can't see why in his plans to start the year, I could see that he would never have planned in coming and made a commitment to go to Singapore, and, you know, he's honouring that commitment.

Q. Do you think it would take something away, if you were to win the Order of Merit, it would take something away?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: From me winning? No, not at all (laughing.) It doesn't bother me that he's not here, it's to my advantage so I'm happy with that. (Shaking head, laughing).

Q. Do you think it would be embarrassing Ernie for Ernie to get a phone call on Sunday night saying that he has won the Order of Merit?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, which way is the TV -- yeah, he can watch it. He won't need to get a phone call. He'll be finished playing when we're playing.

No, he's made it check his commitments. He's done his thing and that's the way it goes. I'm sure he has a signed contract that he probably couldn't have got out of, anyway, if he wanted to change his mind. So as I said, you just -- it's not like he's played here every year and it's not like he would have expected to be here in this situation.

You know, these things have occurred, really through no fault of his own. Really looking at the start of the year, that's how he would have planned his schedule and this would not have been somewhere on it in the past. You know, he would have planned like he has in the past.

So this is just one of those things that's circumstantial things that have occurred and it's turned out like this paragraph par but you know, I don't see, if he has the leading amount of money at the end of the year, fair play to him, he wins the Order of Merit. He's played 19 events. No matter what happens this week, he's played more events than myself and Justin have this year.

So, you know, he's honoured his commitment to the tour, there's no question of that. He just got caught up in unfortunate circumstances that he has decided, you know, he signed a contract because this wouldn't have been on his schedule. He was looking to play this week somewhere that suited him.

Q. Ernie joined Lee Westwood in criticising the Tour for the coincidence of these two tournaments, two major events; where do you stand on that?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I don't think you can criticise anybody. How many weeks of the year do we have a number of good events? I think this happened and couldn't be changed, and, you know, it wasn't foreseen. It couldn't be changed when it occurred and it is being changed for the future. What more can you ask? You can't ask for anything. The Tour is dealing with the issue of having, you know, two good events on in the one week.

But, you know, the Tour, in years gone by, made sure it didn't clash with THE TOUR Championship in the States. The Tour is dealing with the issue, but the issue had to arise first before they could go and deal with it. I don't think it was so easy to foresee this happening.

So, no, I wouldn't blame -- I would blame the Tour if they decided to let it happen next year. You know, they have an opportunity to do something about it next year and make sure the schedule is right. But even next year's schedule will come out and, you know, Singapore and this event will not clash. But I guarantee you there will be two good events in another week we'll all want to play in and we won't be able to.

As golfers, we're very lucky, we have a lot of choice. There's a lot of good events every week of the year, and some weeks, you know, we look to tournaments around the world that we can play, quality fields, quality events and it's great for us and the nature of the game that we're spoiled for choice.

I think the Tour has done everything in their powers to accommodate what's the clash that was unforeseen, and, you know, they are making sure it doesn't happen again next year.

Q. Would you just tell us what you think or what the observations would you make about Justin and his game? I'm sorry to ask you about another player, but --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: This is a lot nicer question than the ones that have come before. (Laughing).

Justin's had a great year and he's really developed into a big player. You know, his name and representation was there for years but his performances this year are carrying this through and he's really set himself up to carry on with this. We are basically looking, I'm sure you guys and I'm sure players, myself, whatever, you kind of sit there and if we were asked this question at last year, which of the young, let's even narrow it down a little bit, which of the young English pros or British pros are going to go and win a major. We would have come up with a few names before Justin, even though we knew his potential, we would have been putting him at the top of the list; whereas most people will look at his good performance this year in the majors whether you do or don't put him at the top, he's going to be very close and considered in that position.

So this year has been a big year for him. I kind of look at it, I'm probably even -- I don't know if I should compare it with myself but the four or five

years ago, I had a period where I Top-10'ed in three of the majors or something in a year and had a few decent majors and I kind of look at it like that; that, you know, he's kind of progressed to that level and it will be interesting to see next year and the years after if he can continue on with the form.

Q. And his game, particularly; strengths?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I would consider his, you know, similar enough to my own game. Wouldn't be relying on hitting every fairway, every green, but would have a good, strong mind and a very good short game. So, yeah, I think he works the ball well in terms of he can get best score out of any round of golf and that's very important.

He works very hard at his long game, but definitely, it's his mental strength and his short game that is just like myself that is, you know, putting him right where he is.

Q. Were you offered the opportunity to play in Singapore, and if not, had the package been right, would you have been tempted?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I don't know if -- I actually think -- I think I had -- I don't know if I actually had a signed contract but certainly a contract was in place to play, to go out there and play. But, we were very aware throughout the year that as the defending Order of Merit Champion, that if I was in contention, I would want to win it again.

So we put in a clause that I would not play, and which they were delighted with, as well, that if I was in contention for the Order of Merit, I wouldn't be going. But there was -- Pat O'Riordan who runs the event for Barclays is a friend of mine, so, yeah, we talked, and I've love to be supporting him out there and helping him out with the tournament.

But right from the word go, as European No. 1, my place was really going to be here unless -- even though we talked, we were more or less 99% sure at the very start that, you know, it wasn't going to happen; that I was going to be here more or less.

Certainly I discussed it like most of the players, whether we go out there. It's obviously going to be a great event they have this week. But, can't be two places at once. (Shrugging shoulders).

Q. First round last year, did you go head-to-head with Paul?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yes.

Q. Were you first or second?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Charlie is telling me yes behind you. I don't remember. The only thing I remember, I remember going head-to-head with Retief and fixing a pitchmark in the fringe on the first green.

Q. Did you learn anything last year apart from that?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, I know I would certainly be hoping that Justin plays well tomorrow, because I'm more likely to play well if my partner plays well. And the way I see this battle is myself and Justin have to get into the top three as our first and primary goal.

We can sort out -- I tell you what, myself and Justin will agree right now to take a playoff for first and second place, if we go down that 10th fairway, if that's the first playoff hole and take our chances. That's the way I would look at it. There's no point in me beating Justin or Justin beating me if we both finish in the 30s. It's no use to us.

I'm hoping he goes out and plays well and in good form and if it will necessarily bring me along, but it often works that way, the two players will play well. If we go out there tomorrow and shoot 7-under par and start running away from the field, that's good-bye me.

Q. The first time you played with Retief, you did finish around 30th, didn't you?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: We did.

Q. Did you learn anything from the way you went about it?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Oh, yeah, that's what I was saying earlier. I definitely learned a lot. I definitely learned a lot more from that week than I did from winning last year. You learn very little when you win but you learn a lot -- there was a lot of analysis and looking back at the performance to the week with Retief. Because I only needed to catch him by €30,000 or something like that, but both of us have never really played well on this golf course back then. And Retief, again, somebody with a very similar sort of style of game to my own and it was an opportunity missed that I definitely look back at it and I really learned a lot from it.

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