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An Interview With:

GRAEME McDOWELL

GORDON SIMPSON: Well, thanks for your patience, Graeme, as you realise there was a few other things going on roundabout lunchtime. But here you are again. Well, you're getting used to this in the first round, aren't you.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, obviously led after the first round last year as well, but yeah, I think I'm aware that there's a lot of golf to be played this weekend, a lot of tough work to do out there. Yeah, I'm just content with the way I controlled the ball today. Obviously very difficult conditions. Like I say, just hit it in the fairway and hit it in the greens. I took my punishment when I got in trouble. Gave myself a ton of chances. So, you know, it was very pleasing.

GORDON SIMPSON: And obviously 3-under in a flat calm is a good score, but 3-under in that wind, how would you rate that one?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, certainly, I figured before when I went out this morning that even par was a great score. You know, certainly 3-under par is beyond sort of what I was hoping for today. I mean, I really, you know, could have been a lot better. I really don't feel like there was too many times where I was in trouble out there.

Really, I putted pretty well. I think I had maybe 22 putts, so that's obviously pretty strong. But generally hit some great irons and I think if that continues, I realise that this golf course is going to catch up with everyone at some point during the weekend. I think I'm ready for that. If I can just, like I say, take my medicine when I get in trouble; I feel like I'm playing well enough to make enough birdies to offset any trouble I might get into over the weekend.

GORDON SIMPSON: Is it a course that needs experience probably to win?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, no doubt about it. I think this is the closest thing we play to a major setup during the season. There's no doubt, like a major, you need to play Valderrama

quite a few times to realise that, yeah, you're going to make bogeys and you're going to get in trouble. You've just got to accept it and move on, and obviously, I think the good thing about this golf course, if you play it well and you hit it in the right spots, you can't make birdies. It's not like a U.S. Open where you feel like you're on the back foot all day long. I feel like if you do play smart, you can score. So, you know, it's a good mix out there.

Q. You started well last year, didn't you, so did you learn any lessons from handling that situation?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I think a lot to do with what I'm saying about knowing the course is going to catch up and obviously it's going to be a mentally tough weekend. I think, you know, even when I was 2-, 3-under par coming in, I said to myself, today was about not playing myself out of the tournament. Yeah, I might be over that later but it's about trying to position yourself for the weekend, stay out of trouble, as I say, keep the ball in play, and 54 holes to go.

If this wind keeps up, it's going to be a real grueling weekend. I'm looking forward to it. Like I say, most aspects of any game are in pretty decent shape, so I'm excited about the prospect.

Q. What finishing score would you see?

GRAEME McDOWELL: If the weather stays the way it is, I think even par will win. You know, okay, there's guys shooting 1-, 2-, 3-under par today. That's always going to happen. Pins were quite tough today I thought. I really think the way the golf course is set up is in the hands of The European Tour, I really believe that they have kept the course soft and the greens were not cut to top speed today because, you know, they are going to have a nightmare on their hands if they would have had the place running fast and firm; it's so windy and it's so difficult. They can set -- the weather and the way they set the course up, they can control the scoring and they can make it as firm as

G. McDowell 1.11.07

they want to.

Let's hope that they stay smart and give us a chance over the weekend. Like I say, if it keeps blowing like this, it could be anything wins this tournament.

Q. In this wind, particularly, which were the unusually difficult shots?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Holes like 12, the par 3. I was hitting 3-iron to the front pin there. 15 to the back right pin was 233 yards into the wind over the right. It was fully a big 2-iron there and you're obviously hitting from an elevated tee box to a low target; it's impossible to keep the ball out of the wind because you're elevated to start with.

No. 9, I hit 4-iron to the front pin and 7 is a tough golf hole, wind into off the left; 6. There's a lot of tough holes out there.

Q. On a day when this wind is not blowing, what would you typically use on the 12th and 15th?

GRAEME McDOWELL: You're probably hitting 3-, 4-iron to 15, and you're probably hitting sort of 4-, 5-, 6-iron to 12.

Just the way this golf course is, the amount of elevation, like No. 11, the par 5, you're up there, probably the highest point on the golf course and the wind is just whipping across that green. I hit driver, 3-iron to that hole in practise on Tuesday to the middle of the green, driver, 3-iron and today I hit driver, 3-wood, 8-iron and got it up-and-down for five and was very content with a five there, I have to say. I mean that, hole will average over five today without a shadow of a doubt. Normally it's a birdie hole but it's tough.

Q. You were talking in Dubai about your process and your golf game, how is it going?

GRAEME McDOWELL: It's an ongoing process but I feel very happy. I'm disappointed in a positive way this year because I feel like I've played some good golf and got a lot of things in place really. I feel my game is improving. I'm building a really good team around me again, some good people. I'm just kind of settling my life back down again and I have a new house in Portrush.

Things are starting to settle down for me and I think I'm kind of able to look forward and see myself climbing backup the World Rankings and starting to play the kind of golf that I know I can play again and enjoy my golf. Really reset my goals and like I say, trying to get myself back to the

Top-50 in the world and back in the big tournaments. Playing with the big boys.

Q. What's your schedule for the rest of the year?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Playing Hong Kong, and then I'm probably going to call it a year I think. I don't tend to play much in November, December. I thought about maybe going to Australia or something, but South Africa doesn't really appeal to me right now.

I think with the schedule starting so early again in January, I'm probably going to have seven or eight weeks off, Christmas in Ireland. The game, you really don't have time to sort of have an off-season as such and you have to keep the game from taking over a little bit. Come the new year, you're getting the spikes on and you're back after it again. I think Hong Kong will do me and I'll have a little bit of rest and relaxation, a few weeks in the gym and pre-Christmas and just get ready to go again in January.

Q. If you were a guy we would have imagined had been at an event this week challenging for the Order of Merit, what held you up? Did you take a step across the Atlantic too soon or what was it?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, probably. I think I've probably been a victim of things happening too quick in my career, you know. I think when things happen fast, you've got to be disciplined and reset your targets and reset your goals. Maybe looking back in hindsight, taking my PGA Tour card on a Ryder Cup year, I don't know what I was thinking really. Maybe that was a bad move.

It was maybe bad timing, as well. I was coming off the back of a car accident that kind of affected me physically and affected my golf swing. Kind of had a very lean 18 months as far as how my swing went, and maybe just went over to the States, like you said, a little too early and not playing too well and lost my confidence a little bit. We all know what a factor confidence is in this game. And it's taken me that long to get back on top of things again and as I say, feel like I'm looking forward and everything is back in place and feeling probably as fit as I have since the accident probably in I think it was middle of '05. I'm feeling healthy and fit again. Can't do much unless you feel fit really.

So I'm feeling very, very positive good things.

Q. A long road back, but at any stage in the journey, did you think that you had lost it?

GRAEME McDOWELL: I don't think I ever really felt like I lost it. Frustrations, you know, disappointments, not enjoying the game. I think every player suffers, feels these feelings. But no, I don't think I ever really didn't believe in myself and didn't believe I could get back on the straight and narrow and get myself back into elite golf and top level golf again.

You know, I've been there and I feel like I've gained a lot of experience. I feel like as I set out on the road again back towards the top of the World Rankings, you know, I've experienced majors and WGCs and the PGA Tour and I've been there, and I'll know what to expect now and certainly I'll be a smarter, more experienced player because of it.

It's been a tough learning curve but I certainly feel ready to go again and I'm excited about the prospect.

Q. Do you feel that you now know what works for you, and that's a process you just have to go through?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I mean, you certainly -- I think when you step outside your comfort zone, there's no doubt it is a bit of an eye-opening experience, especially when you don't take maybe your A Game in there with you.

But I don't think any experience that you have in this game is never a bad experience because obviously it's just going to stand you in good stead in the future. So I think that I now know what I want to achieve in the game and I know what kind of schedule I want to be playing and obviously eyes on things like The Ryder Cup and competing in majors and all those good things.

So, you know, certainly I feel hungry to get back into, like I say, the elite part of the game really.

GORDON SIMPSON: Graeme, well played again today.

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