

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: FRED COUPLES
August 24, 2017



DAVE SENKO: Fred, thanks for joining us. You didn't have a chance to play last year, so it's probably got to be good to come back and come home to play in this event.

FRED COUPLES: Yeah. I mean, I really like the course. It seems like I don't ever get off to a good first round on it. I say the same things every year, I kind of struggle on a few holes and I play some of the harder holes really well. It's like 70 or 71 and then I just get behind the eight-ball.

But I'm a sport nut. It's coming into football time and I got in late last night and I stayed up with John, who I'm staying with, for a couple hours and we talked a little bit about the Mariners but mostly about the Seahawks.

If you went and found your writings from last year, it's the same thing. Do I want to win this tournament? Yeah. Do I like to come up here and play? Yes. Do I wish we had another major in Oregon or Washington? Yes, I think we deserve it. I'm a Northwest guy and I think we have some of the finest courses for us to play.

We don't hit the ball 350 yards and we could play a lot of events up here. We do luckily have the Boeing and I think I missed it twice, now, right? I blew my back out after the first tee shot and last year I played three tournaments. It's a bit of a bummer because, to be honest, I thought I could play here last year and just come up. I couldn't even move. I ended up playing two months after in one tournament just to see how I did, and then this year's been very good.

I haven't played much. I have a trainer who I do train with, but I don't do as much as I should but I'm doing more. And he travels with me from time to time and he's really helped. He was at Augusta, he went all the way to Wales for the British Senior Open, and both of those, not only did I play well but I played well because he was there. I just felt good every day. Flying is not easy anymore.

But it's been a fun year. I know Stricker's not playing here, correct? He's got the -- we've been talking, but just like I'd say, well, there's a chance I might go to Wisconsin. Well, there's chance he might come to Seattle. But he's got a lot on his mind so we've been talking about Presidents Cup and that's pretty exciting, too, in another month probably, right around that. I'll be one of his assistants and get out there and hang around with the younger guys and have a good week there.

I've had a few weeks off. I played Saturday, Sunday maybe, I don't know, and then played Tuesday and then hit balls yesterday and flew up here. I feel okay. I'm a little rusty, but like I say, I really like the course. There's a few things -- I'm not going to play any differently. I could play horrible tomorrow and shoot 69 or I could play really well and shoot 72. My goal

is to win, and you can't shoot in the 70s here I don't think and win this thing. You've just got to be 68s and 69s at your worst.

I heard it's pretty firm and fast. Sometimes that obviously makes the course play shorter but it will make it play harder. So I'll find out here in another hour when I go play. I will have a fun week. I know sometimes I'm trying so hard and I'm not like Gary McCord anyway, but I really like to play and I see a lot of friends. They have to understand that I'm grinding, trying to win this thing. When I get to be just come up here, I'll laugh and giggle on every shot I hit, but right now I'm not quite there yet no matter where I play, whether it's Seattle or Wales or Chicago. I try and grind it out and have a good time playing.

DAVE SENKO: Any different playing at home, thought process that maybe there's a little bit more pressure playing in Seattle as opposed to Naples, Florida, for instance?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah. A couple people have mentioned the same thing, you're a little edgy. You want to really, really play well. Every round is important. But in three-round events, it just becomes more magnified. Maybe the first -- seems like I never birdie No. 1 and everyone I play with birdies it. Then you get a hard hole like 3 and 4 and I feel like I play those really, really well. Then you get to No. 8, which I'm naming all the par 5s that everyone thinks are easy and I can go for them and it might be a birdie one day and I go to the next and hit it in the water and make bogey and it kind of all washes out. So I really need to pay attention to what I'm doing.

Tomorrow, it will be exciting but I'm not going to be any more nervous than if I was leading going into Sunday. Yeah, I think if you look, if I played six times here, it seems like my first rounds are not really that good. I don't think that's because I'm chopping it around, I just think that it's one of those deals. If I could figure it out, I would, but I'll have to play really well tomorrow. I have a great pairing with Scott and Miguel, then hopefully play well.

Q. Is Miguel fun to play with?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, yeah. And Scott's obviously one of our better players and hits the ball really crisp. I can play off them. We all kind of hit it the same. I'm a little rusty but I have been hitting the ball okay but it's different. I played at Wales, I don't even know when that was, a month ago. Doing a golf course in Cabo and I've been down there a few times trying to make this thing as good as it can be and it's been fun. Then I come home and relax a little bit.

It's summertime, so my girlfriend brought her son up here who's nine and they're at the space needle and Niketown and doing all that so we're having a good time and seeing some friends. Honestly, the next thing you know it's Saturday night. You guys do this tournament, it's Saturday night like that. I'm going to stay up here for a few days after before I go to Calgary and try and do a lot in those days versus -- because I'll be in bed at 7:00 every night.

Oh, yeah, if John Bracken was in here, I play, go back. That's what my sister struggles with because every tournament I play, I can't change in Seattle. I play, tee off at 12:30 tomorrow, do a little bit, go back and then I'm resting. My body just can't take the grind. We'll do some stuff Sunday night or Monday and have a good time after the tournament.

Q. Do you follow Seattle sports teams wherever you are in the world, do you follow Mariner games on the internet and stuff like that?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah. It's odd because in football I'll check out the Huskies before the Houston Cougars, and in the last five years both teams have played much, much better. Houston's a little different schedule but they haven't lost many games.

It was nice to see the Lady Huskies golf team win a couple years ago. Suzanne and I watched every shot. There were some wild -- I'm a Seattle guy. I do not live here. I say I hopefully will come back. I do have season tickets to the Sonics -- I wish to the Sonics, I would get those, too. I mean to the Seahawks, but I don't follow many other teams really.

I'm in L.A. I know how good the Dodgers are and what they're doing, but I just go along with my friends who text me every night about the Dodgers and I just don't want to argue. So when they start talking about the record, I bring up the Mariners record, what were they, 116 20 years ago or whatever. Then they'll shoot me down and go, well, this is a better team. Then you go over who the Mariners had with their lineup versus the Dodgers and it was a much better lineup back then.

Oddly enough, every game I check out what Ichiro's doing.

Q. Still?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah. I don't know why his -- I think it's his agent is Matsuyama's too, Bobby Turner. I'm sure you dealt with him when he played here, right? He was always with him? Anyway, I know him pretty well and I've never even shook hands with Ichiro, but a lot of pinch hits, a three-run homer the other night. I just like him. He's 43, yeah. 43 years old and he's still -- and he's going to keep going.

But anyway, I'm hoping we keep playing here for a long time. For me it would feel like a major if we moved this tournament around. If we went to Sahalee one year and Englewood and here, but all the players love it here. I think the field's very strong.

So a month ago I was asking Brian, who I don't know, I just met, how's the field look because it's important. I have nothing to do with the tournament except come play and represent myself in Seattle, but I always want to make sure -- like Stricker, he just physically can't be here. He's in a playoff, he's with all his guys and you ask, make sure he comes. And I just found out that DJ may withdraw, that's a bummer.

But it's a good field and always exciting things. Those last four, five holes, they're pretty

dangerous. Then guys make them look easy, too, but it's a fun finish.

Q. Do you feel like you're an ambassador at all for Seattle golf? The area is so under maybe appreciated nationally. You always hear Winged Foot, Merion, blah blah blah blah blah, but we have so much great golf here that you obviously know, we all know. But do you feel like you need to advocate, if you will, or evangelize for Seattle-area golf?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I would answer that I really, really love to play golf. I don't -- if I lived in Seattle, I wouldn't go with you to Pine Valley to play, or to Cypress Point. That's not what I like to do, but I do like to play around.

I'm not an ambassador for really anything. I do love Seattle, better than any city in the United States, there's no doubt I would tell that until I die.

But I don't live here for a few reasons and one was it was just hard to travel. Rick Fehr did it, Peter Jacobsen did it, but then Peter moved to Florida.

I live in California but I'm a northwest guy, just live there. I like it there, but when I come here I want to make sure they introduce me out of Seattle, Washington. Suzanne will hear that, "He's from California." Well, I live in California but it's not because I'm a surfer and I love the beach. I can just practice and I enjoy being there and it's a couple hours closer everywhere we travel. I don't live in Vegas to save taxes, or Texas or Florida. I just moved to California because when I first turned pro, that's where my sponsor was and he was up here, had a company up here in Seattle and he lived in Palm Springs and my uncle was down there and I just fell in love with Palm Springs.

Q. What is the trainer that you mentioned, what has he done for you, like massage or exercises?

FRED COUPLES: Actually, all of that. A lot of rubber band stuff. So when I hurt myself this last time it was in my hip. Never had that in my life. So I went to see him and not much was helping. Then all of a sudden it just started to feel better. Then it's really for the hip and the back and it just kind of clicked in there.

I've tried stuff close to that, but he's very -- I mean, he's hitting the spots and so I've continued to stay there and hopefully -- he lives about 20 minutes away at Huntington Beach and I see him a lot. I really haven't seen him in almost two weeks, but I want to -- I need to see him.

He works with Ross, the receiver here. That's one of his guys, so he goes to Cincinnati. He has -- but he was coming up here and then he said, you know, the Husky guys were still looking after him. But he's one of his guys and that was pretty exciting to see.

Q. You've had back problems for a long time. Is that just something you've come to

terms with, that's just part of your life?

FRED COUPLES: You know, I actually do (knocks on table) very well. I've seen other guys. For instance, maybe the best player to ever play has had a bad back and he's never really bounced, pardon the pun, back. I've been able to do it I think since like '90. A couple times it's full bore where it's four or five months. Last year was really a hip thing and my back, I just couldn't move. It was bizarre. I feel like -- I don't know where it came from. No one knows what I did. There's nothing on an MRI. I leaned over a guy going to the restroom on an airplane. He didn't move and I kind of hopped and the next thing I knew is I was out six months by doing that. Whereas in golf, it seems like maybe overuse or something like that. This year I haven't played many tournaments but I've actually practiced and played a lot at home and I'm making it, so I feel pretty good.

I get that question asked a lot and I feel very lucky because at the same time in, a runabout way, I know my body and I know when I need to like not go try and play. For people who just hurt their back, then they start feeling good and then they come back. It doesn't matter to me if I take three months off. It did when I was 30, 35, it really bothered me. Then I would come back and I wouldn't play that well and I wouldn't feel that well.

At my age now, there's no way I want to go play a round of golf and not feel well. What would that accomplish? I don't need to go play in Calgary just to go play.

But back then, and that's what I told Tiger, I said, you know Tiger, you don't have to play. I really needed to play. I didn't have 92 wins and 14 majors. I had a few wins and one major and I could go play. But that's where I feel lucky.

And when I came up here I was playing really well. I hit my tee shot off 1, I bent down to pick my tee, I stayed in John's house five straight days without getting out of bed. It's bizarre. But if it happened another time, then I'm used to it, you know, so it's weird.

Q. You mentioned Tiger. Do you think he's going to come back?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I hope. We'll see him in another month, he'll be there. I don't even -- I just tease him a little bit. We're all on the same -- the assistants are on the text on what we need to do to make these players play well, peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches and make sure they have towels and make sure they get to the course on time. It's kind of comical.

I don't think Stricker enjoys hearing all that. I think he's more nervous than we are. I'm sure it will be easier in person. Are you hitting balls, are you putting, how do you feel.

I mean, he must feel okay, otherwise I just feel really bad for him. But if he never plays again, you know, I'm 57. This PGA TOUR Champions has been a complete -- when I was 40 I said no way, I'm going to grind this out, keep playing and then I won't play the PGA TOUR Champions much.

I actually love it. Tom Watson, I just played with him at Wales. I mean this guy doesn't play much, he plays less than I do, but he still loves it. He's 67, something like that. I can -- as long as I'm capable of playing okay, I can see doing it for a handful more years.

Q. Is it still fun when you do tournaments?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, no, tomorrow's -- yeah. The tee times you have to turn in a score are fun days. And trust me, today I think I have a great pairing. Pro-ams I love, too. It's kind of so fun and easy. The tournaments are really -- I've got two of the best players, and if I play well then I'll get two of the best players Saturday. There are great pairings on this tour, it's really competitive.

When you get down to it, I'll say this, I don't want to -- like David Toms, I'm just shocked that he hasn't won one. But when he does win one, I'd go to Vegas and bet he wins the next week, it's kind of that thing. It's hard to win.

When I was 43 I think was my last win on the regular tour, and then when I was 50 it just kind of happened. Then I won one and I won four in a row. But I don't think if I would have screwed up on that first one and not won, the second one may not have happened as easily.

But I think for Toms -- Vijay also but he doesn't play much, he plays four or five a year. I enjoy it, I really do. I complained more when I was 46, 47 and 48 than I've ever done out here about my back and about how I feel. If you go play the regular tour and you play with Sergio and Jason Day, you don't want to -- you want to play like they do. Out here, I can play okay and maybe birdie three out of the four par 5s and still shoot an okay score, but at the end of the day you'll go over and go wow, I drove it bad and hit some bad irons and it kind of wears on you. But you can get a lot of confidence and play well out here. The other tour when you get old is very hard. Davis is still doing very well at it, Vijay still does. I couldn't do it. I just wasn't capable at 51 or 52 of playing 10 tournaments out there. I can go play at Augusta or L.A., which I loved and do well at those, but not anywhere else. Just was too hard.

DAVE SENKO: Thanks, Fred.