

August 6, 2008



Oakland Hills Country Club ~ Bloomfield Township, Mich.

Hole #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Out	Total
Yardage	435	529	198	446	490	387	449	491	257	3,682	462	423	593	191	501	401	406	238	498	3,713	7,395
Par	4	5	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	35	4	4	5	3	4	4	4	3	4	35	70
Score																					

**AN INTERVIEW WITH:
ERNIE ELS**

KELLY ELBIN: Ernie Els, ladies and gentlemen, joining us at the 90th PGA Championship. This will be Ernie's 16th PGA Championship with his best finish last year, third at Southern Hills Country Club. Ernie also was tied for fifth at the 1996 U.S. Open played here at Oakland Hills.

Ernie, welcome back to Oakland Hills. You've had some success here, your thoughts on the golf course you've seen the last couple of days versus what you saw 12 years ago.

ERNIE ELS: It's very similar. I've played the course last week, Tuesday. I played 18 holes. And I played nine yesterday, and I'm probably going to play 10 or 12 this afternoon.

Playing very similar clubs into the par fours than we did in '96. Obviously technology has moved on since then, so I think the changes they have made has been good, because we are hitting, as I say, the same kind of clubs in there.

The greens are exactly the same. These are probably some of the toughest greens you'll ever see, and a lot of slope, a lot of undulation. You get above the hole, very fast; and then obviously the rough is up.

So the whole golf course really feels and plays like a major should be, so I think we're in for a tough week, but a very fair week.

Q. How much of a difference is it going to make after the warm weather last year at Southern Hills, how much of a difference will it make to have a little bit of a break as far as the weather goes?

ERNIE ELS: Who knows, as a golfer, you're not really too bothered about the heat or the weather. Maybe when you play the British Open, you're worried about the weather (chuckling).

But other than that, it's nice to play in warm weather. Myself personally, I like it. It feels like whatever aches you have is better in warm weather. So I've always enjoyed playing in that kind of conditions.

Did pretty well in it last year. Although I remember on the 11th green last year, almost went down, it was so warm, it was like 110 or whatever it was.

At this time of the year, you're always going to find you're going to play in pretty warm weather over here in the States. Today is very warm, and I hear that it's going to be nicer through the week, so it will be nice. But to be honest with you, the warmer, the better for me; I like it.

Q. Have you spent much time analyzing what went wrong during those nine holes at Birkdale, because obviously you ended up so close to the winning score, and it

just seemed totally out of character for it to have gone away from you quite so much. As I say, have you looked into the reasons?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, it's basically I lost my patience, because I felt like I played better than my score indicated up to that point, to where I made the triple-bogey on 14. I felt I played pretty good. I had a couple of 3-putts and I missed a lot of putts, so I felt like I should have been even or even 1-under par at that point.

Then when I hit that shot right on the par 3, you know, I really lost my cool a little bit and I lost my patience, which through the years have really helped me in majors, keeping my patience. That's why I think I've had a lot of Top-10s in majors is I haven't lost it.

So I guess I was a bit out of character there, and you know, kind of hit the ball a bit on the walk there for a hole or two, and that obviously cost me, you're right. I shot 43 on the back nine. And just to come back and make the cut, I had to play really well, and then obviously I had a pretty decent week at the end of the week, but those couple of holes really cost me.

KELLY ELBIN: For the record, Ernie tied for seventh in The Open Championship at Royal Birkdale.

Q. Given how you played those last three days at Birkdale and the nature of this course, do you feel like your game is in decent shape heading into this week and where is it at as we start this tournament?

ERNIE ELS: I think my game is doing fine. I've done some really good work with Butch. I saw him in Las Vegas before Akron last week. I came here last week, Tuesday, as I said.

So I've got a very good feel about the golf course. I feel my swing is in pretty good shape. Last week, unfortunately, the first two days really struggled on the greens. I had 65 putts the first two days at Akron, which isn't very good.

Kind of got it going a little bit better over the weekend. Especially Sunday, I felt like my stroke was really coming back, and my ball-striking was really nice Sunday afternoon in Akron.

So I feel quite excited about this event this week. I feel like I have a reasonably good chance at making a good showing, and hopefully I have a chance on Sunday.

As I say, I'm striking the ball quite nicely and swinging nicely. Just a matter of, you know, staying patient and doing my thing.

Q. When you start the year at the Masters, the first major, as we know, the

anxiety, the excitement, whatever that feeling is you have when you get to the Masters, how is it different when you get to the PGA having gone through three majors already, and kind of as a part 1 A to that question, is it any different when you haven't won a major yet this year?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, it's a different feeling. The Masters is very early in the season. It's the start of April; you know, you're still trying to see where your game is. If you haven't had a win on TOUR, you're trying to find your feet and see where your game is going.

The Masters, you know, it's a little different. Obviously because it's the first week, the first major of the year, and the golf course itself; especially on the greens there, the greens have really become very tricky there through the years, and the weather conditions can also be a factor.

But mainly, you know, it's very early in the season, and in many ways, you're just coming through the Florida Swing and all of a sudden you're into the Masters. You're almost rushing to get your game in shape; where right now, we've played through the summer, we've played quite a few golf tournaments. Guys know where their games are and where their strengths and weaknesses are now. Guys are a lot more prepared for this tournament than probably for other ones.

Q. You mentioned Butch; how much has he helped you and how much did you turn to him with an eye to majors?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I've seen him work with other players and look at their golf swings and how they have improved.

Again, I have to thank David Leadbetter for his hard work all through the years. We have a great relationship and we are still very good friends. It's just, you know, I wanted to get a new feel, new ideas about my swing and where I want to go. And obviously he's been with quite a few world No. 1s himself, Butch has, and you know, I'm saying I'm going from one great teacher to another great teacher.

But Butch has different philosophies about the swing and I wanted to try to tap into that a little bit more, and basically, what we're doing is just tightening up my swing a little bit, a little bit more; getting my lower body and upper body in sync with each other, and my ball-striking is really coming around now. I'm starting to really hit iron shots very close. I had quite a few tap-ins last week in Akron. I've still got a lot of work to do, especially on my short game and so forth, but I feel good

about my future now.

Q. Just in a general sense, your thoughts on why major championships matter so much and how they define the careers of the great players in the game.

ERNIE ELS: Well, I mean, they are so much bigger. I don't want to take too much away from any other golf tournaments around the world, but you know, the majors really set you apart in a big way.

We're playing in the era of the next greatest player, and winning a major in this era means a lot. As I say, not that it didn't mean a lot in previous times, but this is a big kind of decade that we are in. We're in a decade where the dominant player is pretty dominant. To win a major now, you make a huge step in your career, a huge step. They are so much bigger, and they only come around a couple of times a year, so it's all about trying to pace yourself, getting your game in shape for the big ones, and then see if you can perform better under huge pressure.

It's the ultimate test in golf, is trying to win a major.

Q. Although it's more than a decade ago, how much can you draw on memories of playing well here at the '96 U.S. Open for this week?

ERNIE ELS: Well, as golfers, we have pretty good memories, especially when you've done good at some events. Even when I came here last week, Tuesday, I had a good feel still of what I did back in '96 and what I have to do this year.

I remember I was hitting nice power fades off the tees, and I just felt quite comfortable with that again this week, and I feel like I can hit that fade; and leaving yourself makeable putts or where you can 2-putt from.

And even the greens are soft like it was in '96. I remember we had a huge storm here before the tournament started and that kept the greens soft. So that also helped scoring obviously around here, and the greens are pretty receptive this week again. So I've got a pretty good feel again still of what I want to do.

Q. Could you just talk about what it's like to be back with Ricci Roberts on your bag?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, Ricci, I keep saying it's like a bad marriage, I guess. (Laughter) I keep giving it a go.

But Ricci has been with me, geez, let me think, since 1992. Took a break from Ricci I think

at the end of '98. Took on Neil Wallace who caddies for Trevor Immelman now and they have had great success. He caddied for me for two years and then Ricci came back and then J.P. took over for 18 months and now Ricci came back about a month ago.

We are both getting on, so I guess this could be the last stint. (Laughter).

Q. If we were going to sort of pay attention to one statistic as each round goes by that might point us toward the eventual champion, what statistic would you say would be most critical here?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I think this week is very similar to a U.S. Open. Although the greens won't be as firm, hopefully. But the rough is up, so if you're going to be hitting it into the rough at a pretty constant pace, you're not going to be shooting a good number. So you want to hit at least 60 to 65 percent of your fairways. You're going to be needing to scramble because you're not going to hit all of these greens and you're going to miss them in some awkward places, so you need to scramble really well. You're going to have to hole out from eight to ten feet very well, because as I say, even if you hit greens in regulation, you get them on the wrong side, your first putt is going to be eight to ten feet away, so you're going to be having to hole out.

Basically, bring your whole game. (Laughter).

Q. You alluded to earlier the significance of majors and how they set you apart. When you sort of step back and look at your career, you had won two majors by age 27; when you assess your career, are you obviously proud of winning 40 events on The European Tour and here combined, or are you frustrated that you have only added one major since then?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, I think so. In all honesty, I would have loved to have won more since '97. I've had my fair bit of chances. You can look at my record yourself; I had quite a few second places, quite a few thirds, top 5s. So I had quite a few chances.

But I think Tiger a lot of times has just been way better. I remember 2000 finishing second I think three times, twice to him in majors, and some other times, as well. Last year, I threw a good round at him in the final round; I bogeyed 16 which probably cost me a little bit.

You know, you can only do what you can.

I feel I've still got quite a few years left, so I've got to keep pushing away. There's a lot of really good players out here on TOUR who probably feels the same way as I do. You know, they feel like they could have won a couple more, and yet that's always going to be the case. You've just got to keep pushing away and see maybe some of them come your way.

Q. So many times we have been talking this year about the next great superstars in the game; the "It" players right now, the young guns. In your mind, of the players or guys you've seen or heard us talk about, who is on that short list of the guys you think is not only a great player, but can handle all that comes with it to really succeed?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, that's a good question. I've been looking around, obviously the usual suspects are there. Adam, I saw Adam yesterday, and I'm playing with him this week. He's 28 this year. Now whether that's young or old, that's relative, isn't it? I would say it's very young. Obviously Sergio.

But the real young guys coming through, say, from 22 and up, must be Anthony Kim right now. I played with him I think last year at Westchester, and he really impressed me then. Really long and kind of fearless. I guess we were all kind of fearless at that age.

I've been watching him a little bit the last couple of weeks or the last couple of months, and he really seems to get it together now. It looks like when he hits a bad shot, he's not as hard on himself as maybe as he used to. He's more comfortable and seems like he can handle you guys. I think he's quite sure of himself, and I think that's what you need to be.

And obviously there's Martin Kaymer, wait until he gets out here. He's still playing The European Tour mostly, but he's got a great game. He's got a great ball flight, very good putting stroke, great attitude towards the game.

I'm going to leave out some other players, I'm sorry, but those are the two guys that jump out, and then obviously you've got the Sergios and Adam Scotts and Luke Donalds and those type of players.

Q. Why is it so difficult to handle the pressure? Justin Rose comes up, Immelman obviously has a major now, some guys have the success early; longevity is very difficult. What is the most difficult thing that you had to deal with when it all came so quickly to you early on, young, and why Kim would be better?

ERNIE ELS: I don't know, you know, I was just trying to be myself. I guess my father, he gave me a good upbringing; my mom, good family around me. My wife now; my girlfriend then. I don't know, I was just being myself. I wasn't trying to be somebody that I'm not, and I played a lot of practice rounds with Greg Norman, with Nick Price, hung around guys like Fred Couples and Davis Love and so forth, so I learned a lot from them. Especially from Nick Price, he was kind of my mentor out here. He kind of told me what to say and what not to say and what to expect, and he helped me a lot.

So I think you can learn a lot from guys with more experience and that's not a bad way to go. I think Trevor Immelman has done that, too. These guys have come through amateurs and juniors and into pro maybe more ready than we were. You know, they are very mature a lot of these guys. They really are handling it very well.

Q. A follow-up to your earlier answer about majors and all of those seconds to Tiger. I think at Birkdale, you said, "For once we can all be excited without Tiger there." Given how often you've played well in majors and finished behind him, how much of a chance is this, Birkdale and now here, without him in his prime obviously?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I think, you know, I had exactly that same injury, same procedure, and I know exactly what he's going through at the moment. You know, it's a bit of a frustrating time.

But in the same breath, too, it's great because you can spend time with your family and chill out for a while instead of traveling all around the world. He's not in a great position, but he's not in a bad position, either.

And it's going to take him a while to get over that injury. I guess his first tournament might be, I would guess, would be Bay Hill or something like that in March and then try to get himself ready for the Masters. First couple of weeks when he comes back, it will swell up and he'll feel it and he'll feel it for another six months. That's what I went through.

So he's not going to be over this injury for another year after he's come back. So he's in for a bit of a treat, so to speak, but as I said before, he's a tough guy. I mean, winning the U.S. Open with a busted-up knee, I've got to say, he's got some issues; (chuckling) he's a very tough guy.

It's an opportunity for a lot of guys. You look at guys who have not won majors, who at my age or even past my age who are playing well this

year, they can break through. If you look at the World Rankings from fifth to 20th, I mean, there's a lot of guys very bunched and playing very good golf.

So there's so many guys that can win, and I feel it's exciting times. You guys can talk about players that you would never talk about if Tiger was around. So I think for the whole game, you can kind of educate the public about more players, too. So it's kind of nice.

Q. Just curious, I think most would agree that you've been probably the premiere global player of your generation, and as we go forward to the next group, do you see more people doing it like you did or less?

ERNIE ELS: Good question. I think some of them will, some of them don't. I think a guy like Trevor, seems like he's settled down in Orlando now at Lake Nona, seems like he's going to play the U.S. Tour on a more full-time basis, maybe play in South Africa, the odd tournament here or there, and then maybe around the British Open.

But truly global players, I think players who have played a lot more in Europe, I think Adam Scott will be a global player. Give me some names, please -- I think Martin Kaymer, he's playing in Europe at the moment, but I spoke to him and he loves spending time over here in the U.S. and he spends time in Arizona.

Q. I was thinking guys in their 20s, do you see that trend going toward your way or more ancillary towards whatever TOUR --

ERNIE ELS: I'm not sure. It's so comfortable to come to the U.S. and play, the golf courses and play and they look after us unbelievably here. Traveling nowadays must be quite tough flying all around the place, all of the security and stuff.

It's a good question, we'll have to wait and see. Again I did it the way I felt comfortable and the way I felt I could play my best, and I've had a lot of criticism from you guys through the years, but that's just the way I felt I could enjoy myself and play my best golf.

Q. Westwood pointed out last week, and he took certain pride, and if you look at the World Golf Championships logo and all of the tours around, he's won on all of those tours; what source of pride do you take in that?

ERNIE ELS: I think you look back at that when you retire one day and I think he's still pushing ahead. Yeah, I've played all over the place, I haven't played too much in South America,

I haven't won there, but all the rest, I've just about won everywhere. So that's kind of nice.

I remember buying Samantha a map of the world, told her to putt dots wherever she went around the world; before she was five, she's covered the whole globe I think three times.

We've done a lot of traveling and played a lot of golf and made a lot of friends and won a lot of golf tournaments. It's been a lot of fun.

Q. You talked earlier about some of the guys that have opportunities now, a little bit better opportunity here without Tiger. I would like to know though, what is your response to the people who say, it's not quite the same or even have heard people say, there should be an asterisk at the winner. I'd like to hear your response to that kind of mind-set.

ERNIE ELS: You know, I mean, we don't have the best player in the world here right now, and I think that will be remembered for a very short amount of time, and all due respect to Tiger. I think Tiger will agree with me; the game of golf is bigger and will be bigger than any player.

We've gone through all the generations, from the Walter Hagens, the Ben Hogans, the Byron Nelsons, the Nicklaus's, the Players, and we end up now with the Tiger Woods. So the game will move on and keep evolving.

Although we will miss him here and I'm sure there will be some talk about it, but it will definitely not be on the headline. If you look at Harrington's win at the Open Championship, the great golf shot he hit into 17, 18; the way he played the final five, six holes, is just phenomenal golf.

So I'm actually quite proud that people haven't really talked down on the champions so far, because they have played some excellent golf and the golf has been at a very high standard. Again, the game of golf is bigger than most of the guys, or anybody.

Q. Obviously not your first time here at Oakland Hills for a major, or your first time in Metro Detroit and some of your thoughts on returning to Detroit and what you think of it?

ERNIE ELS: Actually I was here in '96 for the first time. I'm staying in a house just down the road, so that's perfect. It's got a swimming pool so we can cool off there.

But anyway, it's a fine place. I remember being here in '97, and they asked me to throw out the opening pitch at a baseball game here for the Tigers in the old stadium. So I've had a bit of fun here.

I've played in Flint, so I've been around the place a little bit. It's good.

Q. In almost any other profession that I could think of, a man in his late 30s who has made tens of millions of dollars, who is going to be regarded as one of the three to five best at what he does in the whole world, would be called an unqualified success. Yet, in this game, they could hang a label on you as they have done with Greg Norman that says: "Could have done more." How does that strike you?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I think people with a lot of talent, you know, I remember saying this in the 90s, you've got to be patient, because they are going to expect so much. And when people don't get what they feel they deserve from certain athletes, you know, they are going to criticize them.

I mean, I get criticized in South Africa a lot more than I get over here. It's something that I've had to live with for a while. As I said, you know, if Tiger Woods wasn't around, I probably would have won a couple more. But I don't feel like I'm done yet. As you say, I'm 38 years old, and I've just gone to a new teacher and I'm working as hard as I ever have on my game and trying to win more.

You know, we'll talk about this again when I retire, and that's probably in another hopefully 12 years, touch wood. So I've got a lot of time left. I'm in pretty good shape, so I feel I've got a lot more to give and to prove to myself.

I think I'm done trying to prove other people right or wrong, so I'm basically doing this for myself and for my family. At least I've got one more major than Greg, so that's better than him. (Laughing).

KELLY ELBIN: Ernie Els, thank you very much.

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