



TOURNAMENT NOTES - THURSDAY, FEB. 7

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Couples Hoping To Shine In All-Star First-Round Grouping At Oasis Championship

Fred Couples was as excited as South Florida golf fans when he saw he was playing with fellow major champions Retief Goosen and David Toms in Friday's first round of the Oasis Championship.

"That's an unbelievable pairing," Couples said. "That's the most fun for me is the pairings."

But the World Golf Hall of Famer made it clear he's not walking onto The Old Course at Broken Sound to take pictures, shake hands and listen to old stories from his playing partners.

"I'm not here just to show up," Couples said. "I do want to win again, and if I play enough this year, I feel like I'll have plenty of chances."

It has also been almost 20 months since the 59-year-old won the last of his 13 titles on the PGA TOUR Champions. But he can still play, evidenced by his fifth-place finish last month in Hawaii.

He just can't stay healthy. He has played in just 22 events in the last three years because of chronic back issues.

"I could play great today and get in the car and drive to the hotel and get out wrong and something could go wrong with my back," Couples said. "Or I can hit a driver as hard as I can and something could happen there. There's no rhyme or reason, but I do really feel pretty good and I'm planning on playing a little more this year."

In his only start in the Oasis Championship, Couples finished sixth two years ago after starting the final round a shot out of the lead. He blamed his struggle on lack of course knowledge, especially the drivable par-4 seventh.

"There's a few key holes that I remember butchering," he said. "I'm not going to try and drive (No. 7) anymore. I think I'm going to hit a 5-iron and a wedge, see if I play it better. But I really like the course."

But mostly, he likes winning. The highlight of his 15 PGA TOUR titles was the 1992 Masters that spring-boarded him to world No. 1.

He remains one of the game's most popular, cool players. But he wants more than adulation.

"I still am very competitive," Couples said. "I walk around here with the idea of paying attention to every shot I hit and not just feeling like how lucky I am to be playing because I still want to win. I don't even know if I won a tournament last year. The next time I win, I'll for sure remember it."

Other featured groupings include John Daly, Miguel Angel Jimenez and Jeff Maggert (10:50 a.m., first hole). Eight-time Player of the Year Bernhard Langer of Boca Raton goes with defending champion Mark Calcavecchia and Kirk Triplett at 11:10.

Nicklaus Making PGA TOUR Champions Debut

Gary Nicklaus, also making his PGA TOUR Champions debut, is grouped with Rocco Mediate and Brad Faxon at 10:20 a.m. on the first tee. That was a good grouping for Nicklaus, who was used to getting less-than-stellar tee times when he played on the PGA TOUR.

"That was a welcome surprise to be paired with two guys that I know well," Nicklaus said.

Now comes the important part: Playing well so Nicklaus can justify the sponsor exemption and hopefully prove he's deserving to receive some more.

"I'm not nervous. I'm very anxious to get out there," Nicklaus said. "I've been doing a lot of events leading up to this."

Nicklaus should receive a sizable gallery that is expected to include his father, Jack.

"I know he'll be out here," Gary said. "I think he's probably more excited about this than I am.

Gary smiled.

"Not really," he said, "I'm pretty excited."

The players are re-grouped for each round, based on their score. They will play in threesomes off both tees the first two rounds. but will go off the first tee in twosomes in Sunday's final round, weather permitting.

Tickets for the 54-hole event Friday through Sunday are \$30 at the gate. Kids 18 and under are admitted free and fans 70 and older, with proper ID, also get in for free.

For more information about the Oasis Championship visit www.oasischampionship.com.

Eddie Jones, Ed Jovanovski in pro-am: Former Miami Heat star Eddie Jones and ex-Florida Panthers Ed Jovanovski and Jose Theodore played in Thursday's Pro-Am with World Golf Hall of Famer Sandy Lyle. Jay Berger, father of PGA TOUR winner Daniel Berger, also played with Calcavecchia.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Thursday, February 7:
Click on the name to see the transcript.

Fred Couples
Gary Nicklaus

Wednesday, February 6:
Click on the name to see the transcript.

Retief Goosen
Bernhard Langer
John Daly

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