

ANIRBAN LAHIRI

CHUAH CHOO CHIANG: Welcome, Anirban, to the virtual interview room. We appreciate you joining us at the Bermuda Championship. How excited are you to return to competition after a three-week break, especially at such a mystique and alluring destination as Bermuda?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: I'm really excited, Chuah. It's been three good weeks. I got a lot of work done, took some time off, kind of reflected on the start and also looked at areas that I need to work on and get better at.

So yeah, it's been good, I'm excited to be back. I played well the few holes that I did play last year. Yeah, hoping to extend that to 72 and keep playing well.

CHUAH CHOO CHIANG: I was going to say that you played at the inaugural event at Port Royal last year and had rounds of 66 and 73 before that withdrawal in Round 3. How did you like the golf course and does it favor your kind of style of play?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: It's a pretty nice golf course. It's unique. Obviously the biggest challenge here is the wind and I consider myself to be a pretty good wind player. I've had a lot of good results at windy venues and the grasses are tropical, so it's a lot like what I'm used to playing, primarily bermuda.

So to that extent I feel quite comfortable. Last year I was playing really well, played really good. I come up on another big break and put a lot of prep in, so it was unfortunate that I got hurt, but up until that point of time I felt really comfortable on the golf course. Hopefully I'll feel the same way this year when I get started and I'm looking forward to it, yeah.

Q. Anirban, tell us about staying in the bio bubble for the last two months in the U.S. traveling from one tournament to another. How have you been coping with this arrangement?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: It's been obviously a different kind of way to travel and play events. I think the Tour has done a great job of keeping us all healthy and safe ahead of everything else and still manage to conduct these events. Obviously once we get to the tournament, we follow all the protocols. We have to test almost twice a week every week just to make sure that everyone is healthy and safe. There's lots of measures that have been implemented within the clubhouse. We still don't have family and coaches and the support staff necessarily inside the bubble, just the caddies and the players at the moment.

So all the precautions are in place and I think we're getting used to it. It's a new normal, but

it's what you need to do and what you have to adhere to right now for everyone's safety. So we're just happy that we're playing and we have the opportunity that we have. Hopefully we get to a point where we can start opening up a little bit more.

Q. What's your assessment of yourself after you rejoined the Tour post the long break in India?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: Well, it's difficult. That's a five-page answer, to be honest, to go through everything, but I would assess myself before the break and then start with after.

But basically, in a nutshell, I put a lot of work in during the lockdown when I was in India, put a lot of new processes, refreshed a lot of my old practicing and things that used to work for me. So obviously the effort is to get back to being able to perform at my best.

So far this season has been good, I've been able to implement a lot of those changes. There's still some things that are developing. I think as I get more tournaments in, as I get a little more experience in terms of handling some of the new attitudes, new approaches that I have on the golf course, it should gradually get better.

Obviously spending extended time with my coach back in India made a huge difference and that's beginning to show. I trust my game a lot more, hitting my game a lot better, I'm hitting my irons a lot better, which has basically always been my strength and not so much so in the last couple years. So getting back to basics.

Q. Just your thoughts about this week, seeing some fans back for the first time on the PGA TOUR. What are your thoughts about seeing limited fans back in Bermuda this week?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: I think it's a great sign. I think it's a step forward. Bermuda as a country has done really well in managing and handling the virus. I think from the last I heard they only had 14 or 16 cases total since the start of the pandemic. I guess it's probably the safest place for spectators to come out. It will also be great for us to have the galleries again and have that atmosphere that obviously they bring, the fans bring.

So it's really great to see that opening up. I think we will be opening up a little bit going forward in the U.S. as well. So yeah, I think these are all signs that we're probably moving to the next stage or the next phase and hopefully we don't take a step backwards. Obviously there's been concerns with multiple waves of the virus. So far, so good. Hopefully we keep moving in this direction, so it's really good to see.

Q. You've had a few starts already for the new season with varying results. What would you say has been working or not working in your game?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: I think it's been a bit of a mixed bag. I've obviously had one good result and a couple of average results. I think the game has been a few loose holes every event,

the game has been one bad round or mediocre round every event, and there's been a lot of good golf and a lot of birdies and a lot of other positives as well.

For me it was just identifying where some of those mistakes are coming from and what are the areas I need to tighten up. There's definitely been some inconsistency with my iron play. My long game and driving by and large has been good. Barring one day out of the three events that I played, my putting's been pretty solid. More or less most departments are in a good shape barring the odd inconsistency, which is exactly what I was trying to work on over the last few weeks.

Things are generally looking in good shape. So I can't really point a finger and say, "Oh, this department's troubling me." I don't think any department's troubling me at the moment, it's just a matter of getting off to a good start. That's something that I haven't done as consistently, so that's going to be one of the focuses is to get off to a good start and then keep my foot on the pedal or keep that momentum and keep myself in it all four days.

So yeah, so far, like I said, lots of positives. Trying to build on that and also get more consistent with a couple of the departments that have been a little bit on and off.

Q. Coronavirus infection is still prevalent. Given the fear, how hard is it emotionally as well to be constantly on the go and to keep competing?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: Can you repeat that question, please?

Q. The coronavirus infections are still prevalent. Given the fear, how hard is it emotionally as well to be constantly on the go and to keep your focus in competition?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: Not really. I think once you get to the first tee and you tee off, it really doesn't matter. For those few hours we're kind of transported. There could be a nuclear holocaust somewhere -- hopefully that never happens -- but we would be completely unaware and completely zoned into what we're doing. Unless there's something going on in front of us where we are, I don't see anything really affecting us mentally.

So once we get on the golf course, once we start the tournament, I think those four days or five days, nothing's on our mind. Yes, obviously you have to deal with the travel restrictions and the other restrictions, and also there's so many protocols. So many countries have their own protocols. You have to test, there's a lot of documentation, you need to check a lot of things.

So yeah, those things definitely do add up. But again, it's part and parcel of how we need to go on with how we do our business right now. So it's not really something that any one of us is going to complain or whine or feel bad about. I think all of us feel very fortunate that we're doing what we're doing and we're continuing to play and also further our careers and et cetera, et cetera. So really it pales in comparison to the opportunity we have.

So is it emotionally draining? I don't think so. Are there a few extra things to do? Absolutely, and they're necessary things to do. We need to protect ourselves, our families, everyone that we come in contact with and the Tour because it's important that we keep this a place where we can continue to do what we're doing. We don't want to jeopardize the efforts of everyone here, the players, the staff, the Tour, the sponsors. Yeah, I think we're all committed to doing what we need to do and making it a success, whether it's a personal success or the common success.

Q. How frustrating was the last year and a half for you not being able to play some of your best golf and be in the top-10?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: It's definitely frustrating, but when I look back, I mean, I've learned some really, really tough lessons. I've realized a lot of things. I think golf, everybody says, is a good reflection of life and I think the last one and a half years is a clear example of that. I can't say that I worked any less hard than I have in the past, I can't say I wanted it any less than I do now or I have before.

So a lot of things on my end didn't change, but obviously the results didn't go my way. I wasn't playing very well, I was obviously not doing some of the things that I needed to do. But it's a learning experience. I would like to think that it's behind me now and I don't want to really dwell on it except to learn from it.

So I'm just focused now on what I need to do going forward. I think it's more about what I need to do going forward and how I use that experience, not just the frustrating years, but the years that gave me a lot of joy and a lot of confidence. It's about taking all of that and putting it all together into something that you can use positively going forward. That's basically what I'm doing right now and just trying to stay in the present.

Q. How are the conditions at the golf course this week and your thoughts on the field, and is it also important for you to gain world ranking points in a bid for you to get onto the Indian team for next year's Olympic games?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: Yeah, there's so much to play for. Let me start by answering the first part of your question.

I still haven't got out and played yet. We had a lot of rain yesterday, so it was not possible. In fact, it's still 9:00 a.m. here, so as soon as I get off the phone right now, I'm going to go and play the golf course. Whatever I've seen so far, it looks good. But like I mentioned, it rained quite a bit so I think the golf course is likely to be softer.

It's always windy here, but I just hit a few putts on the practice green and that felt pretty good, so I'm pretty sure the golf course will be in great condition.

Talking about things to play for, there's a lot to play for. Myself, I'm in a position where I'm not getting into a lot of events. This is going to be my fourth event of the year and may even

be the last just looking at how many entries have come in for the remainder of the events. So I have to make the most of it. I have to try and get as many points up so when the season restarts, whenever I get my next opportunity, I'm not trying to running with a gun to my head. It's very important for me to get off to that start, so it's important for me to be focused at every event.

Without getting too far ahead into the future for other teams or Olympics or so many things that we have to play for and so many things that we aspire to do for ourselves, for our country, I think it all starts with right now and what I need to do right now and play well in the moment.

So that's all I'm focused on. Of course I have my attention and my goals set for a lot of those things, but like I said, right now I just have to make the most of every opportunity and try and chip away and keep moving forward.

CHUAH CHOO CHIANG: Speaking of opportunities, Anirban, just curious, did you watch any of the last two Asian-based events on the West Coast and did it do anything considering that you've been a part of those events previously in your career?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: I'm sorry?

CHUAH CHOO CHIANG: Just curious if you watched any of the last two Asian-based events on the West Coast, ZOZO Cup and CJ Cup, and if you did, did it do anything for you?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: Not really. To be honest with you, I've put my head and I've just stuck to doing my work. I probably checked the scores and refreshed the app a few times, but no, I'm really going to talk about those events more when I'm playing those events and competing myself, hopefully by next year. No, I've just been focused on what I need to do.

It was great to see the fields that the last two events had. I think it was a huge success considering all the limitations and difficulties that the world faces, especially in Asia. Even traveling is not the easiest thing right now. To that extent I think it was a great success. I'm sure the tournaments are pleased, I think people got to see really good fields and really good golf, so that's great. Hopefully I can be a part of that going forward.

Q. How was it spending time in India with some of the younger golfers like Udayan Mane and Chikkarangappa? Did they pick your brain for advice?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: It was fantastic. You know, they're family. At least that's how I like to think about it. Chikka's like a younger brother to me and so are a lot of other kids that I worked with that work with Vijay at his academy.

So for me to be able to spend so much time at home with my friends and my family and my extended family was great. More than them picking my brains, I picked their brains. I try and learn from them. I try and pass on whatever knowledge I have or whatever experience I

have and I enjoy doing it, too. I see so much talent, I see so much potential that sometimes I can't help it, I'll reach out to them and I'll probably give them advice even when they don't want it. So to that extent I feel old, I guess, like a veteran in some aspects.

But I enjoyed it. It was great. I love being home, I love hanging out with Vijay. Obviously he's my coach, he's my guru, he's my mentor, but obviously also the students, like I said, are my friends and some of them are really, really talented golfers who can all play out here at the highest level one day.

Yeah, I think it was great. It's fantastic for me. It's like chicken soup, it just makes me feel good. It also gives me perspective as to why I do what I do, where I came from and why I love the game so much. Yeah, it motivates me, it energizes me, and when I have conversations with some of them and I see their aspirations and motivations, it reminds me of the pure energy and intent that we've all had to do something with the game and achieve something and get somewhere.

So yeah, all those things are fantastic and I love being home.

Q. This is possibly the best start of the season that you've had in three years. How do you attribute the turnaround?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: Well, I guess we've covered most of that in the last few questions regarding what I did on in the lockdown and how it was quite refreshing. But yeah, I think it has been a decent start, but now it's -- there's no time for me to look back at whatever few events happened, for me now it's about looking forward. I got off to a good start, but it's all about building that momentum going forward. The idea's going to be to build on that, build on that confidence and belief and snowball it into getting into contention more often, maybe this week, and try to work for a W. I have to think that way and stop looking at the past. Yeah, that's my attitude at the moment and that's what I'm looking forward to.

Q. Despite the constraints of the past seven months, what has been your biggest takeaway for you? Anything in particular that you gain from being away from golf and did you try something new or try to do something different in your game?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: That's a good question. I mean, there's been a lot of things that have happened. Obviously I came to India for the Indian Open and we all know what happened after that. So yeah, I think being away from the game for 70-something days, I didn't hit a golf ball, I didn't have my golf clubs with me. They were at the academy and that was a challenge. It's probably the longest I've been away from my clubs for 20 years, maybe more.

I think that also gives you some perspective. It builds the hunger to come back and motivates you, something that can suffer when you have an extended period of bad golf like I did, so that was one.

Spending a lot of time like we just talked about with my friends, family, extended

family -- when I say extended family, I mean the golfing fraternity -- also helps a lot, gives you perspective. It grounds you. All the people who have seen you kind of come from nothing and start from nothing, you see the belief they have in you because they've seen you come all the way up from there and sometimes you need that. Sometimes you need that secondhand belief because you kind of lose it in yourself and that's where I was at the beginning of the year.

So you start from there and you start building the blocks right back up. Forty-five days I think I was continuously and we started from the ground up, from the foundation, from the basics from learning how to grip a club all over again and standing over a golf ball. We did everything from the beginning like I've done so many times and you just build it up from there brick by brick.

So it's been a long process. It's been a very step-by-step organized process. I added some mental routines, I've added some aspects that were probably missing or some structure that was probably missing. So a lot of things have gone into it.

Since I've come back I've spent some time with Jim Sieckmann, who's my short game coach out here. We've spent a lot of time on chipping, putting and short game and some of those aspects as well.

Yeah, in a nutshell, to cut a long story short, a lot has changed, a lot has gone into the game and into me, I would say, as a person over the last seven months in every aspect. It's all about developing as a person, developing as a golfer. Sometimes it's not so much about doing new things, it's probably about forgetting the bad habits or eradicating the bad habits that have crept in.

And then it's also going back to your strengths. If I've been playing at a certain level for an extended period of time, I obviously did something right and I had a certain skill set which allowed me to do it. A lot of it goes back to removing all the dirt and the garbage, all the layers that kind of form on top. When you do that, you start scratching the surface of what was good and wholesome and what helped you get there. Then you kind of just nurture that and try and develop that into something positive.

That's what I've done. There's a lot that's gone into it and there's a lot that will keep going into it. It's been good. Like I said, it's been a journey. It's an ongoing journey and hopefully I continue to do the good things and keep removing some of the bad habits.

Q. Game-wise, how close are you back to playing your best golf?

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: I'm close, I'm definitely close. How close, I don't know. Might be this week, might be two weeks from now.

But again, my best golf is questionable. I don't know what my best golf is, so we'll find out. I think if I keep playing to my ability, to my potential, that I can push it further and further and

higher and that's how I want to look at it. I don't want to limit myself by labeling my golf as my best golf or the best round or, you know, any of that.

Yes, I'm playing much better. I can continue to get better, I can continue to better what is considered my best golf in the past, we don't know. For me it's all about staying in the process and keep moving in that direction. As long as I do that, I think you'll see it soon.

CHUAH CHOO CHIANG: Anirban, thanks very much for your time this morning. Play well at Bermuda and good luck this week.

ANIRBAN LAHIRI: Thank you. Thank you to all the Indian journalists. Thank you for supporting me in golf, thank you for being behind us. It's been tough. Please keep supporting us and we look forward to it. Thank you for your time, guys.