

Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

Sunday, January 21, 2024

Orlando, Florida, USA

Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

Jeff McNeil

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Here with Jeff McNeil, 2024 Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions celebrity division champion.

Congratulations. You played great today. I think you came around fourth into the round. Had a great round. Tell us a bit about it.

JEFF MCNEIL: Yeah, you know, pretty excited to be standing here as champion.

But saw the weather today and it was going to be a little bit dicey out there. I think that kind of worked to my advantage. I knew if I could go out there and make a lot of pars, maybe some birdies, there would be a good chance in the end.

Didn't quite finish how I wanted to. Thought I had to make some birdies there coming in to have a chance. Missed a short putt on 17 and a short putt I think to win on 18. In the end it was enough.

Super excited to be here and can't wait to come back.

Q. I think it's your first time participating in this tournament. What are you looking forward to, coming back next year?

JEFF MCNEIL: Yeah, plan on it. This is a pretty tremendous tournament. Hilton Grand Vacations, they did a tremendous job. Lake Nona Golf Course was incredible. The conditions were awesome. Just playing with these LPGA Tour girls, they were super incredible. Great talent. A lot of fun to watch them play.

Q. How do you prepare for a tournament like this?

JEFF MCNEIL: Not very well. Not like some of these girls. You know, for me, I didn't get to play a lot of golf this off-season, so tried to do the best I could and ended up working out.



Q. Well, you did great. I know we had a couple other baseball players here. We had Derek Lowe, John Smoltz. What's to like to play with some of these great MLB guys?

JEFF MCNEIL: Yeah, they're awesome. Got to play with John Smoltz today. Played with him before. Pretty comfortable pairing for me. I got to play with John and Charley Hull, who I played with the first day. Very familiar with the people I was playing with, and I think that helped a little bit.

Q. Did you come down here thinking you had a shot at winning?

JEFF MCNEIL: Yeah, I mean, that's why you show up at a tournament, is you think you can win. Knew I had a pretty good chance. I know there is a bunch of incredible golfers. I mean, a lot of good play this week, but I'm just happy to finish on top.

Q. And with your nickname, I guess it's squirrel appreciation day today.

JEFF MCNEIL: Is it? It's a flying squirrel, so...

Q. How do you get that?

JEFF MCNEIL: One of my teammates in college gave me the flying nickname for diving, making plays in the outfield. It stuck.

Q. There was talk about this going to a playoff. When did you find out and how worried were you about it?

JEFF MCNEIL: Yeah, so pretty crazy ending for me kind of. My caddie on 17 says, I think you're one back. You got to make birdie.

I hit a pitching wedge in there to about five feet in my head thinking, I need to make this putt. Missed it. Not even close.

So went to 18, I knew probably had to make birdie. Got up there, ripped driver super confidently, and then went right at the pin, and actually found out before my second shot Mulder made a bogey.



Okay, if I make birdie here I win; if I make par we go to the playoff. Hit it four feet again. Thought I had a putt to win. Missed it. In my head I'm going, let's go to a playoff and we can do it there.

Get in the scoring tent and I realize there was a calculation error with Mulder's scorecard on 7. Found out that way. It was a little bit unfortunate. Thought I could have celebrated a little bit more on 18.

In the end, just happy to win.

Q. Would you have been concerned about going to a playoff?

JEFF MCNEIL: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think I've been in one playoff in my life. I think in junior golf when I was like 17. Ended up losing, so that's the only memory I have from that.

Definitely didn't want to go to a playoff. I don't like the tee shot on 18, either. It's pretty tricky and tight. Super happy I didn't have to hit that one again.

Q. Hitting the shots close on the last two holes, did you learn something about yourself as an athlete?

JEFF MCNEIL: Yeah, you got to perform under pressure. I'm lucky not to do that every single night. In New York we play under a lot of pressure so something I've done my whole career. A little bit different on the golf course. Haven't really hit too many shots under pressure.

Just kept telling myself, you're with your buddies out there. It's just another round. It helped calm me down a little bit.

Q. Talk about how you balanced practice for baseball with golf throughout your life?

JEFF MCNEIL: I don't really practice golf anymore. You know, when I was younger golf was Plan A for me. I wanted to play golf in college and do all that.

Now golf is my getaway, my leisure activity. It's my way to escape baseball. I'm not really out there practicing at all. I like to go out with my buddies, have a good time, have some fun.

In the off-season my main focus is baseball, so making sure I'm ready for the season while I am out here, getting in the gym and make sure I am ready to go come spring training.

Q. When did golf become Plan B?

JEFF MCNEIL: Golf became Plan B -- I played in the U.S. Junior Amateur in 2009. Played well the first day; played horrible the second day. Hoping maybe some college coaches would take a chance on me. Kind of ruined that one.

Started playing baseball a few weeks later. Had a few people in my corner on the baseball field who kind of pointed me in the right direction and got me seen by some college coaches.

You know, I was committed to play baseball a few weeks later.

Q. How old were you?

JEFF MCNEIL: I've been playing baseball my whole life, but didn't play high school baseball. Played high school golf until my senior year. It was kind of different situation for me.

Q. Switched to competitive baseball again?

JEFF MCNEIL: Yes, yes.

Q. Where did you play your baseball in college?

JEFF MCNEIL: Long Beach State.

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