

# John Deere Classic

Saturday, July 8, 2023

TPC Deere Run

Silvis, Illinois, USA

## Alex Smalley

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good mojo here, Alex, having qualified a few years ago. Not the place where it all started, but a place where it got a jump.

ALEX SMALLEY: Yeah, I feel like a veteran here. I've only had two years on tour, and this is my third year at this event, so it's one of the few events where I feel like I know the course decently well.

I feel comfortable here. I like the atmosphere of this tournament. Last couple of months we've had some tournaments in some big cities, and obviously Moline isn't the biggest city in the world. So I kind of like the vibe and the atmosphere of just kind of having a chill tournament.

Obviously the crowds were great today. It's nice to see a lot of people out here. So, yeah, I feel comfortable here.

THE MODERATOR: Your mom said the way you started, she was rooting for you to miss fairways.

ALEX SMALLEY: She does that during pro-am days too. If I make too many fairways or make too many birdies during the pro-am, she will tell me to stop on the fifth or sixth hole.

THE MODERATOR: But you missed the fairway 1, 2, and 3, and picked up strokes.

ALEX SMALLEY: Yeah, hit it a little left on 1. Luckily, I had a good angle. The pin was back right on 1 today. Missed the fairway to the left, so I had a decent angle into that hole location.

Was in the fairway bunker. Had a sand wedge out. Tough shot. You know, it's hard to hit wedges out of fairway bunkers. Caught it well and just went the right distance and had a decent look for birdie and paid it off.

Then number 2 is a difficult tee shot just because the fairway slopes right to left and then there's a tree on the left-hand side. If you go too far down the fairway, you get blocked out behind the tree.



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So today I pushed it a little bit right, but in our practice rounds we noticed that there wasn't a whole lot of rough on the right side, so we felt like we could be pretty aggressive on the right side of the fairway. If it rolled through into the fairway, then great. If it didn't, we would probably still have a chance to go for the green.

I hit it further right than I wanted to, but was able to catch a lie and got lucky on the bounce and rolled up there pretty close on 2. Yeah, it's a dream start, I guess.

THE MODERATOR: There's been a lot of focus here on the young guys that are here, the PGA TOUR U graduates. I think when you were here in '21 -- I'm trying to remember now.

ALEX SMALLEY: That's correct.

THE MODERATOR: Is there a chip on your shoulder a little bit? Do you feel like you had a solid college career and you're overlooked a little bit, or do you just like being under the radar?

ALEX SMALLEY: Yeah, I like being under the radar. Yes, I had a decent college career. I certainly would have liked to have PGA TOUR U when I was in school, but I think it's great what they're doing with that.

It gives a lot of guys opportunities to play right out of college, and I think what you are seeing with Ludvig, you know, guys are ready. Guys are ready to compete out here, and guys are ready to win.

Certainly on the Korn Ferry TOUR, I think Adrien won in his first start, and then Ricky won in his first or second start the next week.

It's not like guys playing in college aren't ready for pro golf. I mean, they're winning right as soon as they're coming out of college. So, yeah, it's great to see tournaments like this give spots to not only PGA TOUR U guys, but guys that are still in college. I think it's great.

Like I said, I would have loved that when I was in school, but it's nice to have a lot of young guys out here.

THE MODERATOR: 23 first-time winners here. Is your

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attitude, "Why not me?"

ALEX SMALLEY: Yeah, I don't see why it couldn't be. Just got to go out there tomorrow, and if I play like I did today, I feel like I have a pretty good chance. Just got to have the same mindset.

THE MODERATOR: You picked up Don here. It's obviously been a lasting relationship. How has that it worked out?

ALEX SMALLEY: It's been great. He has been out here. I don't want to get dates wrong or anything, but I think he started out here in '99 with DiMarco, Chris DiMarco.

He helped me a lot last year. Being my first year on tour, I wasn't super familiar with a lot of the golf courses we were going to, and he was able to give me some pointers on a lot of the courses like the week before so I knew what to practice.

So, yeah, he has been great. It's nice to have him around. We talk about a decent amount of stuff. He has been great.

THE MODERATOR: Mom said he coached him up on a few things. Have you noticed what those are? Basically the psychological stuff.

ALEX SMALLEY: Not necessarily, no.

**Q. Talk about the comfortability factor. This is your third time here. At what point did you start feeling at home on this course in the Quad Cities, and how long does it normally take to hit that at certain places?**

ALEX SMALLEY: I would say after my first experience here in 2021, I liked the golf course. I feel like it suited me relatively well, so I would say after that year I felt pretty comfortable.

I was looking forward to coming back last year and playing as a PGA TOUR member. Yeah, I played well. I'm trying to remember how I finished. I might have had a top 20.

Yeah, I feel very comfortable here. I think it depends on the player how comfortable they feel at different venues. Obviously some guys feel comfortable on different venues rather than some other courses.

You know, there's no right or wrong reason why that is. So, yeah, I would say this is an event I certainly have circled on my calendar at the beginning of the year looking forward to.

**Q. Given that history here, how special would it be to get it done at this event in particular?**

ALEX SMALLEY: Yeah, it's hard to think that far ahead to tomorrow. Obviously it would be very special just because I qualified here in 2021, and it helped me get my tour card. I was able to make the Korn Ferry Finals in 2021. I got my tour card that way.

So this event has a special place in my heart because it kind of served as a stepping stone to that. So, yeah, any place where you win it would be great, but it would be an extra cherry on top here.

THE MODERATOR: How do you keep everything that it would mean out of your mind tomorrow, whether or not you're in the lead at the end of the day today?

ALEX SMALLEY: Could you rephrase that?

THE MODERATOR: In terms of what you get if you win, the exemption, trip to the Masters, obviously you go across the pond.

ALEX SMALLEY: Sure.

THE MODERATOR: How do you keep that out of your head tomorrow?

ALEX SMALLEY: It's going to be hard. Like I mentioned previously, I haven't been in this situation before.

Well, I guess I had a chance at making the Open Championship last year at the Scottish Open and bogeyed the last hole to miss it by one. I guess I have a little experience there.

Yeah, it will be difficult, but I think that's where having a good caddie on the bag is going to help just kind of focusing on what we're doing, and being super present and in the moment is going to be really important tomorrow.

I'm not saying that I'm going to do it perfectly, but I'm just going to try to do my best at that. I think that's all I could really do.

**Q. You mentioned the Walker Cup over at Hoylake. How did you do in that?**

ALEX SMALLEY: Captain Crosby was nice enough to putt me out in all four matches. I was 3-1 in the matches there, and I think that was the first Walker Cup we won on foreign soil since 2007, I believe.

So I certainly have a lot of good memories there. That was



my first time playing links golf, so that was a little learning experience.

But, yeah, I feel like it would be great to go back and kind of draw on those memories from four years ago. I hope I have that opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: One last one from me. Circle back to Mom. You seem very calm, very measured, don't get too high, too low. She seems a little excitable sometimes. Would that be accurate?

ALEX SMALLEY: I'm sorry? I didn't hear you.

THE MODERATOR: Your mom seems a little excitable. Would that be...

ALEX SMALLEY: A little bit. She's a mom; right? Any mom is going to get excited. She's on the highs with me and in the lows with me.

Yeah, I mean, I'm pretty laid-back. Never really been one who searches for the spotlight or anything like that. I feel like it just kind of creeps up on people. I like being that way.

So, yeah, I feel pretty laid-back. Hopefully I feel the same tomorrow. Might feel a little different, but yeah.

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