

AT&T Byron Nelson

Tuesday, May 11, 2021

McKinney, Texas, USA

TPC Craig Ranch

Will Zalatoris

Press Conference

DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome Will Zalatoris to the virtual interview room here at the AT&T Byron Nelson. You're coming in making your third start here at the AT&T Byron Nelson and obviously with your location of where you live I'm sure this is a nice week for you. So if we can just start off with some comments on being back here for the 2021 AT&T Byron Nelson.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, anytime you're able to sleep in your on bed is obviously a big bonus. So I played TPC Craig Ranch a bunch going back, I think, to when I was actually 12 years old. I played in, it was actually the Ewing Junior Tour regular season championship, played in a foursome with Scottie Scheffler, and I've got a lot of great memories here. So I guess I've been competing here basically half my life, so really looking forward to, obviously, competing in front of some friends and family this week. I know it's going to be a lot of fun. And I'm really excited for obviously this addition of the Byron Nelson.

DOUG MILNE: One of the questions we have gotten with it not being a regular stop so far on TOUR, just some thoughts on the course, if you can just kind of give it a little description as best you can.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah. You know, I think the biggest defense of this place really is the wind. Typically, when I've played here, it's fairly wide open, it's very long, especially when you have Zoysia grass, the ball doesn't roll very far. Getting weather as well is going to slow down the ball off the tee, so it's going to benefit a lot of the longer hitters. But you're able to really hit some darts into some of these greens, especially with how the weather is going to, or at least how so far the conditions are going to look like for the rest of the week. So expecting some low numbers this week, but at the same time if the wind picks up, I mean, I've seen it in Q-School where all of a sudden, I think one year in Q-School, I think I shot 72 and moved up 15 spots. So normally in Q-School you might shoot 68 and move back 20 spots.

DOUG MILNE: One more question and then we'll take a



few from our audience on line. Just an amazing year. Six top 10s, obviously highlighted by the runner-up at the Masters. Just kind of assess your game as you're heading into the week.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, you know, obviously it's been a really fun year. I think last week was a really great reminder kind of just to stay patient. I think when you're riding that high for that long, I don't remember who said it, but someone said when you're playing good, you feel like you're never going to play bad again; when you're playing bad, you feel like you're never going to play good again. I really wasn't that far off, just kind of made a couple mistakes here or there, and like I said, it was kind of a great reminder just to realize I'm, just keep sticking to the plan, keep sticking to the process, and I think in, it's probably a blessing in disguise considering I'm playing the next four in a row and one of them being a major. So I'm in a really good spot, especially on a golf course that I know very well.

DOUG MILNE: We'll take some questions.

Q. Congrats on the engagement.

WILL ZALATORIS: Thank you.

Q. What are the details of that foursome when you played with Scottie Scheffler here. What was the best story from that?

WILL ZALATORIS: Oh, I think I, it was in the middle of August and it was so hot that I think we both took towels and dumped them in coolers and literally wrapped them around our necks and played with them on the entire day. I know neither one of us won, but it was -- I could probably name seven or eight times that we've played together, probably between, like, 9 and 15 where it was like duking it out. A lot of fun. So I think, probably the other one was, I remember we had the tees so far up on 14 that both of us drove 14, and I think when you're 12 years old and you're driving par-4s it usually doesn't happen.

Q. What's the best showdown between you and Scottie from those junior days?



WILL ZALATORIS: Oh, man, well, he probably has more memories than I do because I know he kicked my butt more often than I kicked his, so...

Q. When you had such a breakout week like you did at the Masters, does that make you eager or more eager to try to repeat that in front of family and friends this week or is it more of a case that you just need to stay patient and know it's going to come, whether it comes this week or not?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I think it's just stay patient. My goal is to obviously win one before the season's over and be a part of the FedExCup playoffs. But I've kind of given this same monotonous answer for the last six months of I've been sticking to the same practice routine and same process for two years and it's gotten me to here. So I think last week was a great reminder to keep sticking with that process and not force anything. Just because you've had some success doesn't mean that we need to be changing goals, changing our attitude. It's just more of the same. I've done that from Monday qualifiers on the Korn Ferry Tour all the way into playing, contending in a major championship. So I think if anything it's just keep doing what we're doing and run the tables and if this is my week, yeah, of course it would be wonderful to win in front of family and friends, but the way how I do that is just keep doing what I'm doing.

Q. Also, Bill Rogers once told me that the only thing about winning out on the TOUR is people expect to you do it again. Is that, with the second at the Masters, do you now feel like there's an expectation not only from yourself but from others that you know it's possible and they expect to see that again?

WILL ZALATORIS: No, I mean, the only pressure I feel is the pressure I put on myself. I mean, of course there's a lot of people that think I could play on a Ryder Cup team or win a major or whatever. I mean, I've heard it all. I've gotten asked all the questions, but the fact of the matter is it's just every week I'm just trying to become a better golfer. And I know more people have seen -- I've now kind of had a little bit more of a breakout where more people have seen me play, but it's still the same for me. People might think I could do more, think I could do better, but the goals I put on myself or the pressure that I put on myself is the only pressure that I really feel.

Q. Have you had a chance to see, to watch the final round of the Masters? Do you have any idea how Hideki played, how close it really was?

WILL ZALATORIS: So I haven't gone back and watched it.

I knew that, because I was walking up 17 when he hit it in the water on 15, and I kind of, I knew on 13 when I 3-putted for par that that was kind of the, I needed to do something extremely special to win the golf tournament. So I've kind of relived more of my side of it than his, if that makes any sense, thinking through little things like changing my line on 3 on my second shot being more aggressive. Stuff like that, I think, that I've kind of looked back on and tried to figure out where I could find the one or two shots, and I do that on every tournament. We all do, think about how we can improve. But I actually just saw Hideki for the first time since the Masters in the parking lot earlier. I tried to see him after the tournament was over, but he obviously had some more important things to do. So it was nice to kind of share a moment and just tell him congratulations, and obviously making history like that for an entire country is unbelievable.

Q. I don't know how much you've played with him, but what is it you like about his game? I'm sure you've watched him on the range or seen him on TV a bunch?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, the guy just absolutely grinds his tail off. He works so hard at it. The guy will be testing out every iron shaft or shaft you can think of, trying new heads, trying different putters. He's a constant tinkerer, at least it seems like from afar. But the thing is is that they're kind of all the same. It's, like, he's testing three or four putters, but they're all the same head. So it's just kind of cool to see a guy try to find the tiny intricacies in different clubs and his golf swing. It's really admirable to see someone who is that passionate about excelling at this game. So, like I said, a guy who made history for his country, but there's also nobody more worthy than him to go win that major. So it was a long time coming.

Q. How much have you had to change your goals during the course of this year?

WILL ZALATORIS: I really haven't. I think that's the thing that's so funny is even though that I've gone from -- I think -- actually, I'll kind of start over and say that I think last year was a really good reminder that it's just go play golf and not worry about what's happening, because I start off the year, what's my goal? In 2020, let's go get a PGA TOUR card. Well, all of a sudden, it's a two-year season. Now the goal's to win three times. Well, we didn't win three times. So now I'm in the U.S. Open. I wasn't even trying on playing and then all of a sudden I turn that into special temporary status. So it's just, last year was so crazy that it kind of took the expectations and realizing that, hey, I don't need to think of all these exterior goals. Just go out, get better, and sign up for a golf tournament and try to go win it. It's nice to obviously know that I can contend in majors and contend against the best players in the world, but I still



have things to improve on, and there's things that I need to get better about in my golf game if I want to go win these tournaments. So why, for me, it's the same goal of go out and win a tournament or win a major, whatever, these are all career goals that I have, but I do that by focusing on the micro and trying to get better in every aspect of my golf game.

Q. Given your experience with Craig Ranch, your experience, at least your knowledge of this tournament, first year at Craig Ranch and the field is, I would argue anyway, substantially better than we have seen in recent years for the Nelson. From your perspective, what do you think is the reason for that? What is it about Craig Ranch, what is it about this tournament? In general, when you look at the field being so much better this year, is there something you can point to that's the reason for that?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I mean, I think there's a couple things. I think, the first part is the Korn Ferry or Korn Ferry TOUR finals, I guess, their championship used to be up here so a lot of guys have actually played here before.

I think the second part of it is also where it sits on the schedule. A lot of guys like playing the week before a major. So I think the second part's probably the biggest reason for that and you'll see a lot more guys, no matter what the turf conditions are, they like playing and getting into a rhythm the week before a major. So I think that's really the biggest difference.

But, yeah, besides those two that's kind of all I could think of.

Q. Do you feel like this is a real positive change, though, for the tournament as a whole to be coming to Craig Ranch?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, absolutely. I think that coming up here to Frisco, there's a lot of, obviously, corporations that have moved their U.S. headquarters around Frisco, the Plano area. I think once we kind of get past COVID, we're really going to see this place blossom. 17 is going to be an arena and I know that that's just going to grow as the years come on. There's a, it's a great venue. I mean, it really checks all the boxes. Like I said, I'm really excited when things get back more to normal and we're able to have the full crowds, and so it will be fun to see this place really build out through the upcoming years.

Q. You mentioned your friends and family are going to be following you. The real question is, will Tony Romo be carrying the Will Zalatoris flag around Craig Ranch?

WILL ZALATORIS: You might have to get a golf cart to get him out here. He doesn't walk much anymore.

Q. You mentioned having some people come to see you, though. I am very curious if it's going to be a family-related thing where you're going to have a bunch of people following you or is this tournament going to be any more special just because it is in your backyard?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, you know, I think mom and dad, they try to come to as many events as possible. Obviously just a drive down the road they will be here. So I've come to the Byron Nelson since I was nine years old. I didn't miss it until I think I went off to college. And, actually -- when I had my appendectomy it was actually the first Nelson I had missed since we moved to Dallas, which was my freshman year of college, and I would have had a spot that year.

So this tournament, yeah, it means a lot to me. I still have the autographed hats that I had. I was one of the kids asking for autographs from guys walking off 18. So it's kind of fun seeing it all come full circle and I'm excited for this week and to have my fiance and mom and dad there this week, it's going to be a lot of fun.

Q. Every golfer's family system is different. Some parents are much more involved. Some are very hands-off. Curious what your folks were like during your development, how that helped you, and kind of along Mother's Day, the lessons that they have taught you along the way, which ones have resonated with you the most, just as a young man?

WILL ZALATORIS: My parents were very hands-off. My dad is really proud to say that he's never been to single golf lesson in my entire life, never sat in on one, never said, Hey, you're working on this, do that. He's just completely let me be. And it's very admirable, because I even think about some of my buddies or kids that I've mentored and if I go watch them play nine holes I'm like, dude, you got to get this thing going. I even act like a parent and they're not even my kids. So I don't know how he was able to do it that way, but it let me own my golf game. It kind of goes back to even the questions of, like, pressure, is, like, I always wanted to be really good. I always pushed myself to a point where my dad even told me, Hey, you know, pump the brakes a little bit, go play basketball or do something else. I've always loved it. I think really that competitive spirit probably comes from my mom. She ran track at Oregon. She's the toughest person I know. So it's kind of funny to see the, me as kind of a combination of my parents. So, but, yeah, I mean, my dad introduced me to the game, but his whole job that he joked

was to go get me an Orange Julius milkshake and make sure I had enough golf balls when we were out there.

Q. Were there times where it became overwhelming for you just because of the pressure you say you put on yourself? What were those conversations like to kind of reset you and kind of get you back mentally focused and maybe fully aware, rather than just so focused on maybe minor things that didn't matter as much?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, it's funny because I would say that the little moments of kind of chaos of my golf game where I made too much of it, I kind of have to appreciate them. Like, I needed them to happen because it let's me appreciate these moments now and it also, it kind of got me that, what if I mess up attitude, I guess, if you will. Like, it got me to here. It forced me to work harder. I think when I was trying to figure out where I was going to go to school and I really wasn't playing that great and Coach Haas took a chance on me, offered me the Arnold Palmer scholarship when I really wasn't playing very good golf at the junior level. Having someone believe in you like that was kind of a turning point. And I think the another one too was after my appendectomy and all of a sudden I was playing some really nice golf, I had a very good chance of making the Walker Cup team and all of a sudden I have to basically start over and come back in the middle of the summer and basically play perfect golf for two or three events just to have a chance. And I put so much pressure on myself to do well that I was just, I played terrible, and I think that's why I have that attitude that I have now is, sure, I missed the cut last week and I haven't missed one in eight months and so of course you might think there's a little bit of a freak out, but it's like, it's just golf, man. I mean, sun's going to rise tomorrow. Like, I'm still playing some really nice golf, just go hit a couple hours of golf balls, putt for a few hours, and keep working on things you're doing and it will pay off. So I think those are probably the two biggest moments that I really learned something about kind of staying patient and enjoying the journey.

Q. Your message to kind of young golfers right now who may be in the next north Texas area who want to be the next Will Zalatoris or Jordan Spieth or Scottie Scheffler, what kind of message would you give those young junior golfers that you used to be once upon a time?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, take advantage of your junior tours here. You've got North Texas Junior Tour. You've got Legends Junior Tour. Texas AJGA has a bunch of tournaments here. Play as much as you can, even if it's just a 18-hole medalist event in the summer. You know,

you want to go play 25, one-day events in the summer, play as much as possible because that's how you learn how to play the game. Everyone can play the golf swing and just stay on the range and hit balls all day, but going out and shooting a score is an art. And being able to go play in those tournaments, hit a shot that means something, you know exactly where your game's at and you know exactly what you need to work on. So take an advantage of it because we've got the best junior -- I mean, the best, really, junior setup in the entire country right here.

Q. I forgot about that appendectomy. How big of a letdown was it to have that happen the week of the Nelson?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I kind of wasn't really feeling that great for the week leading up to it and I finally, I remember calling Jon Drago and him saying, Hey, are you coming out today? And I said, I'm sorry, I'm in the ER. I'm about to have an appendectomy and I have to withdraw. And it killed me. I mean, it was just, I wanted to play in the Nelson my entire life and literally here's my chance and it was gone. So, yeah, I mean, I learned a lot from it. Just enjoy the journey as much as you can. I mean, it could be gone tomorrow. And so it's, like, obviously I had -- I've had success at every level, but at the same time, maybe that would have been my only PGA TOUR event I was ever going to play in. So that was kind of why I've had the, this attitude of just enjoying it as much as I can.

Q. With your success at the Masters, you had so much TV time. You had Adam Sandler tweeting you. What's kind of been, what's it been like with this newfound celebrity, anything kind of funny or memorable that's happened?

WILL ZALATORIS: I've had a couple of funny interactions with some people. Just thinking, you know, I get all the Adam or the Happy Gilmore lines all the time when I'm out playing, but the real funny one that actually hasn't happened to me, but it happened to Austin Smotherman which, congrats, he just won or won on the Korn Ferry. But he said that some people were confusing the two of us and so he said that some people were saying, Congratulations on your great play at the Masters, and he's like, Oh, thanks. Which, I haven't seen him, I texted him congrats last night, but we have got to talk about that. I think that -- he's got that dry sense of humor that he could really play on well with that.

Q. What was the best autograph you got at the Nelson in those years when you were a kid and did you get the autograph of anyone who is in the field this week?

WILL ZALATORIS: Oh, that's a good question. I would



have to think about that. The second half of that anyway. I remember getting Corey Pavin's signature when he was the Ryder Cup captain. And I remember that being a really big deal to me. I don't think I ever got Phil's. I'm trying to think of who else I got. But I think Corey Pavin, I just remember that being a big deal because he was a Ryder Cup captain. You're going to have me thinking about that, I might have to text you later about that one.

Q. The majority of the field this week has never seen this course. Without giving up your deepest, darkest secrets, what's one or two things that newcomers should be aware of when they come out here for the first time?

WILL ZALATORIS: We don't play a lot of Zoysia, so I think you can be a little more aggressive just because you can just spin the ears off the golf ball around the green. And by a little aggressive I don't mean aiming at maybe one more flag a tournament, just because all these guys are so smart. But there's times where, if we were playing, let's say Colonial, when you're on grainy Bermuda and all of a sudden an easy up-and-down's no longer that easy. Out here you might have a teed up Zoysia lie and you can just absolutely spin the ears off the golf ball. So I think that's something that you'll be seeing a lot more of this week.

DOUG MILNE: All right, Will, we will cut you loose. We appreciate your time and wish you the best of luck this week. Thank you.

WILL ZALATORIS: Thanks, Doug.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports