

BMW Championship

Tuesday, August 25, 2020

Olympia Fields, Illinois, USA

Olympia Fields Country Club

Maverick McNealy

Press Conference

JOHN BUSH: We'd like to welcome Maverick McNealy into the virtual interview room here at the BMW Championship. Maverick is one of four rookies to advance to this event here in the FedExCup Playoffs, comes into the week No. 67 in the standings. Maverick, a little bit of work ahead of you this week. If we can get some comments, please.

MAVERICK McNEALY: Really excited to be back here. When I heard that the BMW Championship was going to be at Olympia Fields, I immediately put it down on my calendar. This is somewhere I've really got to be this year. The FedExCup Playoffs are really cool. It's been fun to see the evolution as a golf fan over the last couple years and going up watching. But it's fun to be a part of it now, and really excited to be out here at this golf course.

JOHN BUSH: You mentioned Olympia Fields; we won't mention the loss to Bryson in the U.S. Amateur finals, but you have won at Olympia Fields twice before that. Just talk a little bit about what it is that you love so much about this golf course.

MAVERICK McNEALY: This golf course is just a good golf course. You have to do everything well. The rough has been thick every time I've played, and I'm guessing this year is no exception. I haven't been out there yet. But it's not tricky. It's not complicated. It's just a very straightforward challenging golf course. You have to hit good golf shots. It's Chicago, we get some wind, and there's something about the look of the place that I really like, tree-lined, have to drive it straight, and it's very clear where you need to hit your ball on every hole.

JOHN BUSH: I might mention, as well, your girlfriend Danielle Kang won the Women's PGA here in 2017, as well. A little bit of knowledge there you can get from her, also.

MAVERICK McNEALY: Definitely, definitely. I'd be lying if I said I didn't watch that highlight reel a couple times getting ready for this week.



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Q. I had a question about focus. When have you been able to focus the best in your career? How do you cultivate it when it goes missing and how do you find it? And then the second question is about Vegas and how you chose Vegas as opposed to Jupiter, Florida, like everybody else?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I think focus actually for me comes from nerves. When I'm nervous and there's something on the line and there's pressure, that's where I'm able to focus best. I've played some of the best golf of my career from behind, and really that desperation and needing to accomplish something is sometimes what helps me play my best. I'm 67th right now and need to get to top 30 to play next week, so there's definitely some desperation here this week.

As far as Vegas, I've loved Las Vegas. I moved in the fall of '17, and first of all, no state tax, which is fantastic. You notice golfers end up in Vegas, Texas, Florida, all states with no income tax. There's two TPCs, TPC Summerlin and TPC Las Vegas. TPC Summerlin hosts the Shriners event every fall. Just an incredible staff and fantastic host for all the professional golfers out in Vegas.

The weather is good but not too good, which is important, because we know what it's like to play in heat, cold, wind, and just about every day is playable but it doesn't mean it's always easy.

My coach Butch Harmon is out there in Henderson, and there's actually an incredible amount of young players that are out there now. They're kind of calling it the Jupiter of the West at times, lots of PGA TOUR, LPGA, Korn Ferry, Canada, Latin America, high school players, college players. It's pretty motivating to be out there. Everybody is working hard knowing there's a lot of people out there trying to get my job, too.

Q. And you play mostly with Collin or Doug Diem John Oda? Who do you play with?

MAVERICK McNEALY: All of the above. There's always a game out at TPC Summerlin. The people I see out there most are Alex and Danielle Kang, John Oda, Shintaro Ban, I mentioned John, Aaron Wise is out there a bunch, even Scott Piercy, Ryan Moore, Kevin Na. There's so many guys. Inbee Park is out there. Lots of great players, and a

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lot of people to try and win 10 or 20 bucks off.

Q. When was a time in your career, could be your amateur career, college career, when you were the most zeroed in, when you were the most focused that you've ever been?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I would say that the best stretch of golf I've played from a results standpoint is 2015. I won seven out of 12 college events in 2015 for a little stretch there, and Fighting Illini was one of them. To me that's the gold standard of execution and performance and consistency that I want to get to. Obviously it's a lot more challenging on the PGA TOUR than it is in college and the margins are a lot finer and I feel like I'm a better player now, but there's something special about that time that I take a lot of lessons from.

Q. I have a question about your strategy off the tee this week. Here at the North Course, the landing zones in the fairways are guarded by a number of bunkers providing a challenge off the tee. What's your strategy to avoid a difficult approach in so you can attack these greens?

MAVERICK McNEALY: So when I go about the bunkers I look at the lip, I look at where the ball is going to settle in the bunker, and I really only avoid it if I feel like I'm not going to be able to get the ball to the green. Otherwise I just take a line that gives me the best chance to hit the fairway. On the PGA TOUR when you miss the fairway it becomes a lot more challenging to make pars, let alone birdies, so taking a club that I think fits the hole and allows me to get the ball to the green every time is my strategy.

Q. I was wondering, do you ever look around at say the other TOUR players that are under 25 and not necessarily compare yourself to them, but when you look at those guys, who are some of the guys and parts of their games that you really admire?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Well, I think a better way I can answer this is when I got to college, I was playing on arguably the best team in the country with some of the best players, and I figured that everyone out there did at least one thing better than I did, and if I could learn what that is and imitate part of it, I'd become a lot better player myself. These guys are all the best players in the world, so there's a lot of things they do really, really well, and yeah, picking little bits and pieces from all those players, old or young, is very, very helpful. Viktor Hovland, Collin Morikawa, Matt Wolff, I'm probably forgetting a bunch, Jon Rahm even, I played a bunch against him in college, and even the rookies that made it here this week, Robby Shelton, Harry Higgs, and there's another one, I forget who, but they all do

a lot of things really well.

When we played the Walker Cup in 2015 everyone nicknamed Robby Shelton "Xbox" because he hit it so easy it was like a video game. Yeah, there's lots of things that I try and pick up and watch, but at the end of the day I need to focus on my game, which is hitting greens in regulation and letting my putter get to work. That's what I focus on right now.

Q. When you had that great run at Stanford and you won all those tournaments, do you look back and kind of ask yourself questions like, okay, what was I eating? When was I going to bed at night? When was I waking up? Do you get that specific about trying to cultivate that focus again because you're sort of -- everybody is always searching for it, Rory has talked about kind of lacking the focus lately, Phil has talked about it a little bit, lacking the focus. Do you leave no stone unturned or what exactly do you do in that search for focus?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I do, and luckily by good chance actually from great role models Cameron Wilson and Patrick Rodgers at Stanford, since my first round of qualifying freshman year I've journaled every round I've played competitively since then. I journal -- basically I just ask why; why did things go the way they did, why did I play well, why might I have played poorly. I have a pretty extensive now seven-year long paper trail of everything I've done and from that I've been able to eliminate variables or whatever it is; this helps me, this doesn't, this doesn't really matter. So yeah, I do narrow in a lot.

And for me a big key is, like you said, eating, calorie intake. I eat a lot every single round, and to me that's probably the most consistent trend. When I get hungry I lose focus and I lose that fine motor control, and I definitely don't play as well. So that's a big piece of my puzzle.

Q. I think you've talked before about what prompted you to do the journaling, and secondly and more importantly, what have you learned, most importantly, the biggest one or two things the last say two years?

MAVERICK McNEALY: So what prompted the journaling is, again, things that my teammates were doing that I thought could help me and make me a better player. Cameron Wilson wrote down every single day in practice what he did and what he worked on, and it was a lot more introspective. Patrick on the other hand was a lot more analytical, a lot more statistics driven. He kept his stats religiously and wrote down every score he made and all the accompanying stats from every round he played. I kind of combined what was useful for me from both of those, a what happened but also the why, and that's how I started

doing that. Plus I thought when I look back in four years it would be cool to be able to read through my journey as a college golfer, and I honestly didn't know what a helpful thing it would become at the time, but I'm very glad I did it.

And then the second question?

Q. Maybe the one or two biggest things you've learned, be it from that or just picking up things from other players the last say two years.

MAVERICK McNEALY: I'd say the biggest thing I've learned or the biggest challenge for me to get around was breaking down the bare bones of what I needed to do to prepare and play every week. In college I was playing 15, 16 events a year and they were three-day events. Out here my first two years I played 30 events, and there's a full seven days traveling on my own. It's very different. The amount of practice time and golf balls I got to hit between tournaments and workout time and energy, it was all completely different for me.

I really had to trim the fat on the things that I was doing and really dial in on the things that I needed to do and focus on to play well, which for me is speed control putting is number one; number two is I do need to have rest and be physically feeling good and strong because it's a really hard game to play if you're any little bit injured or tired; and the third one is just distance control, trying to figure out exactly how to hit the golf ball the distance I want to. If I do those three things I feel like I'm prepared every week.

JOHN BUSH: Maverick, we appreciate your time, and best of luck this week at the BMW Championship.

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