

Sanderson Farms Championship

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Jackson, Mississippi, USA

Country Club of Jackson

Hayden Buckley

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Hayden Buckley to the virtual interview room here at the Sanderson Farms Championship. Welcome back, this is where you made your first PGA TOUR start. What's it like to be back here?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: It's nice. I started here three years ago right as I turned pro. It was a tough -- I think it was later in the year, it was a little colder, a lot of rain was going on during the week, so it was a tough start to my pro career, but I did make the cut, I think it was a huge jump for a confidence perspective, staying Am all summer, waiting to turn pro, going through Q-School for WEB.COM at the time but now Korn Ferry, and it was huge to make a cut, just to get that confidence and sure enough a week later I missed at second stage. So the confidence kind of got hit there real quick and I didn't know what to do, but it's nice to be back in the home state, the course is perfect, everybody's doing such a good job with this tournament, so I had a ton of fans three years ago so I can only imagine how many are coming out this year.

THE MODERATOR: Do you expect to have a lot of family and friends following along?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: Oh, for sure, I've got a lot of texts for tickets and I told them to, I can't get as many tickets as I need, I don't think it's possible, but it's going to be great, I grew up three hours north of here in Tupelo, Mississippi, it's just great to have a professional event in Mississippi. We really don't have anything we have a few minor league baseball teams around, I know there's one in Jackson, I got a friend that actually plays for the Mississippi Braves close by, but it's just nice to have this level of golf, this level of sport come to a city like Jackson and a state like Mississippi. There's five Mississippians in the field which is even better, I think that's got to be the most in a long time, which is awesome and I know all of them really well, so it's just great for the state, says a lot about our junior programs, the Mississippi Golf Association is something that really changed my life, gave me the opportunity to play



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golf, so if not for them I would probably still be pursuing baseball which I played my whole life. So I owe a lot to them and I played a lot of junior tournaments on this course, so it's nice to have this as a career and be playing back on a course where I have so much, so many memories and so much success.

THE MODERATOR: Does that add a sense of pressure that this is kind of like a home game in your home state with a lot of fans and support that will be watching you?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: Yeah, I mean there is pressure there. Obviously you want to play well. There's people that have already reached out and said hey, please make the weekend so I can make it because they're working all week. So play fully they give me that. But it's the same as every week, you want to play a week end, Napa I didn't play well, felt comfortable, luckily I played in three PGA TOUR events maybe four now with Napa, so I feel comfortable playing the events, the hole's the same size, everything's the same and I mean even all the pairings, as a rookie you're playing with the Korn Ferry guys. I'm playing with two guys I think this week that I played with all year. So the comfort's there, everything's there, it's just a matter of playing well and that's just how golf is. So you want to play well, obviously you want to Mississippian to be close to the lead on Sunday, hopefully that's me, you want to give the fans somewhat what you feel like they want. I've heard it from a lot of guys they want to be here late Sunday. So hopefully we can give them that chance and if not we just keep pushing. My goal this year was just to be in this tournament no matter what it was I was going to play here, I knew I was going to play here and that's all I could think about all year.

THE MODERATOR: As a rookie what goals do you have for this season?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: Obviously keeping the card's a huge goal. I don't have goals long-term, I'm not really a long-term goal guy I'm more of a daily-goal guy. On the Korn Ferry I was thinking about how can I stay healthy, I've had issues in the past in college where I sat out months just from not taking care of my body. A few unfortunate injuries. So there's a couple daily goals that I set just to

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prepare myself to play out here for a long time. A lot of the guys you play with are in their 30s, early 40s, even older, so if I want to be that guy that's still out here playing at 40, then I have to do a lot of the things throughout the day to stay healthy. So I don't really have long-term goals, obviously everybody wants to win, everybody wants to compete on the weekend but I think if we're looking at something it's just to play a lot of weekends. I had a lot of really good weekends on the Korn Ferry, a few that I made the cut on the number and finished 10th, around 10th place, so if we can have some decent Thursdays and Fridays, I feel really good coming into the weekends.

THE MODERATOR: From your first start in 2018 to now what you say the biggest difference is in your game?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: Maturity. Obviously, the three years later you got a lot of maturity, but I have a lot more control over the ball. I think back then I had a two-way miss that I just fought and if I was lucky enough that if I was lucky enough to not have a two-way miss I played well and I think Thursday I shot 75 and came back with 5-under on Friday, figured it out obviously that Friday. But now I've got a control over the driver, I think I was second in driving on the Korn Ferry last year, greens in regulation are way up, so I got a lot of opportunities, but my short game's really come around as well, making a lot of putts. It's hard to shoot 5-, 6-, 7-, 8-under par without making putts. So in college I was a guy that hit a lot of greens and made no putts, but now it's kind of come to -- I have a lot more confidence because of the putter. I feel like I can attack pins when I need to because I'm chipping it better, I'm making more putts from five, six, seven feet. That frees up the iron game, frees up the driver and all of a sudden we're making seven, eight birdies a round. That's Korn Ferry, there are some differences out there, a lot more wedge, a lot more accessible par-5s, but I played this course, the par-5s are pretty accessible, I love playing par-5s well and it's softened up a little bit, I expect it to be a little bit firmer out here, but I think we have gotten a little bit of rain, but it's going to be an interesting course. The greens are perfect like they are every year, so it's just kind of a matter of keeping it out of the rough, which is really nasty, and hopefully we can hit a lot of greens like we do.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. You kind of touched on this earlier, but being a Mississippi kid, playing on the TOUR in a Mississippi event, how much more special does that make it just beyond playing on, playing in a TOUR event?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: I mean, yeah, it's everything. I don't think a ton of people think of Mississippi as a golf powerhouse. They talk about the kids from Texas and

Florida and probably the states with a little better weather. But it really shows not just me but the other guys that are playing this event it shows how strong we have been in the last couple years. I know growing up we had a few kids go to Alabama, go off to big schools, but it's special, you play a junior golf tournament here you play the Junior pro-am, I think it was at Annandale at the time that I played right before they transitioned to Country Club of Jackson. But it shows that what they do in Mississippi, the programs they have in place, are setting kids up to have this opportunity, which is huge. 10 years ago if you told me, hey, you're going to play a junior pro-am at the Sanderson Farms Championship. 10 years later you're going to be playing it as a pro I would have thought you were crazy. I really loved baseball growing up and without having those opportunities in Mississippi I probably wouldn't have pursued golf like I did. It's so good for the state. I had a pro-am, a Q&A last night about with talking about charity how much money they raise for the hospital, so it's more than just showcasing Mississippi's talent, showcasing how beautiful the course is, it's a lot of good things for charities and for the hospital and it's just a special place. I grew up so close to here, I have family here, it's just so nice to show them what I do for a living because I spend a lot of time away from them, I live in Florida now, like most golfers do, and I never really get to come back home. So it's nice to show people what I've been working so hard for so long.

Q. Is there a bond between you and other Mississippi guys playing this weekend?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: Yeah, we all grew up together. I know two of the guys that graduated Chad Ramey, Davis Riley, we played a little bit in college together, Andy Ogletree I believe is the other one, he played at Georgia Tech. We grew up playing as well. And then Cohen won our State Am, we give a spot to the State Am winner here which is something that started after I was playing the State Am's which I was a little upset about, but it's great for junior golf, it's great for amateur golf and he's a rising star that's going to be out here just like me here in a couple years. And I love all of them, they're great kids, I grew up playing with them, so it's just great to see all of us find a way out here. It shows -- there's other kids too that could be in this event, I think it shows them that their time will come soon and it's nice, you are out here to compete and personally I'm never too close to anybody, I do like to kind of do my own thing, stay in the hotel by myself, might play a practice round with them every once in awhile, but I'm a pretty solo person, I like to stay alone and just kind of keep my head down. But you go back to childhood, these guys were there, it was great playing against them, me and Chad Ramey actually grew up 30 minutes apart, so there's a lot of memories as kids and to now see us doing this as a career, it's awesome. So you root for them, at the same

time you want to beat them, but it's all, I think they all understand how important this is all five of us being here, it's really important for this state.

Q. You mentioned how you kind of like to be alone. How tough does that make this week when you come back home and I'm sure there's family and friend obligations that you have to do, but you're also obviously preparing for a huge week in your life.

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: Yeah, it's hard. I had a couple requests for dinner that are hard to turn down sometimes, but I have my routines, I have, I do what I do on the course off the course and I like to get my the same amount of sleep I can every night and at the same time you enjoy being home, it's something that doesn't happen much and I know for a fact that I probably won't be back here until Christmas and then after that I probably won't see Mississippi for a long time. So I was actually home last week after Napa, got to spend a whole week at home in Tupelo, so I got all the excitement, I think there was some people that were pretty excited for me just making it out here. So I got a lot of that out of my system last week. But at the same time it's special, it's something that knowing have you that support, it's something I think about a lot. There's times where you're stuck in Florida and you're not sure what's going to happen next. When COVID hit I was sitting around not sure where to go next and you got a support system like that, it's awesome. So it's going to be fun, I don't know how many are going to show up on Thursday, but I know Friday is going to be pretty crazy and if we can make it to a weekend I imagine it's going to be pretty loud out here. It was loud three years ago when it was 50 degrees and raining, so the weather looks pretty good, I think besides Thursday, it might rain, so 75, 80 degrees and sunny, I think that's going to be a pretty fun time for everybody. I think it's great for the tournament, it's great for people back home just to not just watch me but watch other guys and see how much good golf there is out here. The TV shows it but it's something else when you watch it in person.

Q. You said you had a friend on the Mississippi Braves. Who was that?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: His name's Trey Harris, he's an outfielder, he actually went to the University of Missouri with me, so he was a good buddy of mine. I played, threw a lot of BP to him in the Missouri bullpens and spent a lot of time at baseball games watching him. So I think they just clinched the AA -- they just clinched something last night, I think. So he's doing well, I know it's been a journey for him too. So it's been cool to kind of watch him pursue my childhood dream of playing pro baseball, that's kind of what I wanted to do until golf came along. So it's cool to

watch him do that. I tell him all the time I'm really glad I chose golf because I'm 5'-11", 180 pounds and I couldn't hit, I couldn't do anything very well, so I was a pitcher and I couldn't throw it very fast, so I'm glad I didn't go down that route, but I'm glad he's having success there too.

Q. They just won the AA South Championship over the week, I was wondering if you talked to him about that?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: It might have been Monday night. I kind of wish I could have come down and watched it. But I have seen him play a few times and it's pretty cool to watch close friends of yours do the same thing you're doing on a different level or in a different sport and to have success and hopefully one day he'll make it to Atlanta or wherever, whatever team he's a part of.

Q. What's the transition been like from the Korn Ferry to the PGA TOUR? I know you're only two events in, but what's that been like so far, does it make it a little easier that you get to come home, that is been a little different or what's it been like these last two weeks?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: Somebody told me there's really no difference out here except for a couple zeros on the paychecks about the only thing that's different. Everything feels the same. I would say some of the conversations on the range might be different. I heard guys talking about retirement in Napa. You don't really hear that on the Korn Ferry too much. But, yeah, it hasn't been a ton different. I think the Korn Ferry does such a good job preparing us for this. Obviously the, it is tougher, the courses are I would say slightly easier at times, the scores feel like they're a lot deeper. But for the most part they do a pretty good job of getting you ready for pro-am, getting you ready for doing clinics, doing all these things. I had a Q&A last night, a sponsor function, so I'm ready for those things, it's not like they're coming out of nowhere. Just like doing interviews, doing anything, they prepare you really well. So it's nothing new, it's nothing crazy. Napa for me wasn't -- I didn't play well but Napa was not a, wow, this is the first event, let's kind of be in shock. It was just, you know, this is another tournament, I just came off of two out of three weeks in the finals playing some of the best golf of my life at some pretty tough golf courses. I think Evansville's one of the toughest golf courses I've seen and I played Torrey Pines for the U.S. Open, I played the Honda two years ago, obviously played this tournament, but that Evansville is pretty tough for the Korn Ferry finals and I made it look pretty easy, I played really well, I had a lot of confidence, so there's not a ton difference, it's just now you're here, if you want to stay here you got to keep playing well, it's that sense of urgency I think is something I lacked last year. I won to start the year in February but kind of got too comfortable and didn't really, didn't feel the same for about

two months. So I think not falling back into that too much of a comfort level I've been kind of feeling like, hey, we're still fighting for a job. The last few weeks on Korn Ferry are different. It was, you saw it, less guys were talking to you, it wasn't as friendly as it could have been in the past and everybody knew like their job was on the line. Whether that's going to the PGA TOUR or keeping your card on the Korn Ferry, guys were feeling the pressure. So I think just keeping that urgency and just keeping your head down is the biggest thing for me. I don't like to get too much into social media, I deleted Instagram off my phone right before playoffs. I still tweet and I have my girlfriend Instagrams for me, so if I need to, I reach out there, so it's, you know, I just like to keep my head down and keep to myself, so I think I'm ready for this level, it's just the game has to be there and hopefully we can start it this week and get on a roll. I'm a pretty streaky player as well, so hopefully I can get on a hot streak and keep playing.

Q. If you ask any of the TOUR guys who have played out here they just absolutely gush over the course. Peter Malnati said they're some of the best greens in the world. Can you explain what makes this place so special and such a great golf course?

HAYDEN BUCKLEY: Peter is actually one of my few guys I play practice rounds with him out here. I played with him out here three years ago, Missouri guy, another Missouri guy, so he's been great for me. But we both agreed, we were looking at the course and we both agreed it's even better than three years ago. Obviously the time of year we're playing is pretty much the best time to be out here in Mississippi. The greens are perfect, they were, I think they were a little softer than we expected, but that's a Monday and a Tuesday for you. I played on Tuesday morning with him. So I think it's going to be perfect by this weekend. I think the greens are, they're challenging, but they're fair. I think it's, there's nothing that's too impossible out there, but you do have to be careful. I think honestly the hardest part will be the rough. I had a lie on 8 in the rough where I could barely find my ball and I took a wedge and I had 140 yards and just took a wedge trying to chip it out and barely advanced it. So it gave me a little bit of U.S. Open vibe but on a different level. I'm a guy that hits a lot of fairways so I'm hoping that I don't have to deal with the rough too much. But I think if you don't catch good lies in the rough it can be really tough. It's hard to roll the ball up around the greens, there's a lot of grain, so it's one of those, it's almost the opposite of Silverado last week or two weeks ago in Napa, everything was firm, rolling out a lot. Here you got to hit the ball well and you got to hit it in the right places to have success. So I'm interested to see kind of how the scores are and how people play it, but I think if the weather holds off it's going to be a perfect tournament, they just do

such a good job, Steve Jent does an incredible job running this tournament. Obviously giving me the spot three years ago he's been huge in my, he's been a huge part of my success and hopefully this tournament can keep going for as long as I'm here and as long as I can keep watching it. So it's exciting to be here, it's exciting to have such a beautiful golf course to play on. So I'm hoping a lot of fans can see just how beautiful, how much hard work they put into the course.

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