

The Sentry

Tuesday, December 31, 2024

Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA
Plantation Course at Kapalua

Nick Dunlap

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Nick Dunlap to the interview room here at the Sentry. Nick, this is the first time we have seen you since winning the Rookie of the Year award. Can you talk a little bit about how that was, and how you felt after receiving it from Jason Gore.

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, pretty neat. Especially receiving it from Jason was really cool, I bugged him for numerous weeks on that. But, yeah just to have him there and to receive that was really, really cool. Obviously the list of players that have won that award and to be in conversation with them is also pretty cool.

THE MODERATOR: This is your first Sentry tournament. Can you talk a little bit about being here being on the course, I'm sure you played a few holes, just the landscape and the scenery.

NICK DUNLAP: It's hard not to look around, I'll say that. I'm not looking forward to walking it, but yeah, it's gorgeous. To be in Maui and first of the year and it's, I could definitely think of worse places to be.

THE MODERATOR: Awesome. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. What did you learn last year?

NICK DUNLAP: That's a loaded question. I would say, off the golf course, just learning how much your team is important and how much you can rely on them during good and bad times, and having those people that have your best interests. It was harder to find for me than I thought.

On the golf course, just learning what I have and how I can make what I have better. I don't have to change anything, I just need to clean a couple things up. I need to do a little bit better in practice rounds, learning the golf course earlier in the week. I think with two or three practice rounds I never, in college it's a little bit different, you get one practice round, I was forced to learn the golf course, and the rough, the speeds of the greens, everything in that one day, and I put more of an emphasis on that. When you get

three days, I felt like I was kind of a little lazy, and I kept pushing it off on what I needed to do. For this year I'm focused on getting comfortable quicker in that Monday and Tuesday versus trying to wait until Wednesday.

Q. Did anyone teach you how to do that?

NICK DUNLAP: Just playing with the guys and seeing what they do in practice rounds. Putting from certain spots, maybe chipping out of the rough, just getting a better grasp of the golf course early on versus later in the week.

Q. Have you tried the new TaylorMade driver and what are your thoughts?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, I'm playing it. I played it at Grant Thornton a couple weeks ago. It was good there. It's in the bag right now. I think it's a lot better for me. The head's a little bit bigger than they have in the past, the core head, I think it's like LS, the core and the Max. And the core head's a little bit bigger, looks more like my Ping. And they switched that, it's gray on the top now instead of black, so I think it looks really, really good. I'm looking forward to playing it.

Q. Any other changes in the bag?

NICK DUNLAP: I think that's it. I'm playing, I've been playing a TaylorMade ball all fall. I've bounced back and forth between the Titleist and TaylorMade for a couple years now, so it's nothing big.

Q. Talk a little bit about realizing your stuff was good you enough for out here. Is that something that you had to learn after turning pro, even though you had won?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, absolutely. It took me until probably May to figure it out of being like, okay, my good weeks are good, and I can compete, but my bad weeks have got to get a little bit more consistent. I think when the playoffs finally rolled around I learned that your good weeks aren't what gets you all those points, it's the bad weeks, how can I turn a 40th into a top 25, or how can I



turn a missing the cut by one or two into making the cut, maybe play well on Saturday or Sunday, just keeping the weeks going. Those add up, and the more reps you get the more you learn. That's just something I kind of picked up.

Q. How do you approach things differently then after that realization?

NICK DUNLAP: Not getting as frustrated. I think I was, early in the year, if I shot 1-under par the first round, I got frustrated and like, Man, I'm kind of out of contention, instead of just sometimes you don't have your best that week and, How can I play my best with my C game, and sometimes that is a top 35, how can I do that instead of just getting frustrated, letting one or two shots get to me and end up missing the cut.

Q. Emotionally what was that like where, I'm sure February and March were just a whirlwind for you, figuring out, all this attention, all these interviews, then from there on you're just kind of learning how to be a pro. What was that emotional switch from everything happening so fast and then learning?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, traveling was difficult early on. I always played a lot of golf, but I never really knew how much golf you play until you get out here and you play literally like six months straight, so that was different.

Finding a team. I knew I needed to get better at chipping, how do I find this right coach. How can I work out on the road. I love the fitness side of things, but I don't play well when I'm sore, so I had to kind of figure out working out Monday, Wednesday, maybe once later in the week, and how travel kind of impacts that as well.

Q. I assume you did not enter December thinking you were going to be a pro that year probably?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, no, no, definitely not.

Q. How different has this off-season been, your first January now where you know you're going to be a PGA TOUR player?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, I honestly can, I played a good bit of golf, I was really just kind of trying to enjoy the couple months we had off. I think with this new schedule, being inside of the top 50, it allows you to take some time off if you want to, and spend some time doing things that don't include golf. For me I was fishing and just enjoying Florida, enjoying life outside of golf as much as I can before obviously you jump right back into it, which I think has been really important for me the past couple years, and I

definitely tried to take advantage of it this year.

Q. There's an excellent chance you may have just answered this had question and I didn't understand it very well, but when you won, did you feel like you belonged out here after you won Am Ex or did it take longer?

NICK DUNLAP: It took a little bit longer. Yeah, definitely, I had played a couple events before that to kind of see where I stacked up, but I didn't play that well, so that was my first time kind of being in contention, being in the hunt, first time even making a cut. So it took me a little bit of realizing, even after the win, I still, I knew my good was good, but I didn't feel like I quite belonged. I still looked at those guys as from as a spectator almost, whether Scottie and Sam and all those guys. Now I see 'em a little bit more as friends than me watching as a spectator. So it took a little bit of time to get comfortable, as anything new would, but I think that's kind of the beauty of it. I'm never going to really get to experience that again, so it was a really cool thing for me as well.

Q. How big in your mind was Barracuda?

NICK DUNLAP: Huge. Not only to just validate that first win a little bit, but also for the playoffs as well. I wasn't a hundred percent going to play that event and I went out there for one thing and that's to try to play well enough to get me in the playoffs, and I did that and then obviously, yeah, playing in the playoffs is my first year was pretty special.

Q. How would you compare the joy of being a college player to the joy, key word there, of being a professional?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, two completely different things. I think college, I wouldn't necessarily say I miss college golf, I miss just the aspect of being on a team and being with guys, cutting up on the road, doing stuff you shouldn't do, that's what I miss. I miss those guys, and just the camaraderie we had on the team.

I think out here it's just the fact that all my life I've worked to try to become the best player I can and the little glimpses of success you have out here, sometimes that could be a top 10, you might make a putt. One of the my happiest moments all year was I made like an 8-footer in Detroit to finish top 10. I was ecstatic just to finish inside the top 10, so just little things like that. I think you have your ups and downs out here, but the ups are definitely worth it.

Q. Was there a time you beat Scottie in a practice

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

round and what did that do for your sense of feeling that you belonged?

NICK DUNLAP: Scottie and Sam are pretty good on Tuesdays, they don't lose often. I think Cam and I tied 'em in Augusta this year, it was really just Cam, Cam played really well. But no, it's just fun to play with them. They're better people than they are golfers, which I think says a lot about both those guys.

Q. Any good advice that Scottie has given you?

NICK DUNLAP: He makes fun of me a lot (laughing).

Q. What does he say?

NICK DUNLAP: Oh he's just needling me about being young. No, it's really nothing in particular, it's just fun to learn and to watch from those guys. I think they're obviously him the year he just had, it's hard to compare yourself to him, because he's pretty much going to beat you in every category, but just to see what he does, see what he practices, see what his routine is. See how him and Teddy attack practice rounds, what they talk about maybe is something that he has a thought that's one or two thoughts instead of maybe just going out there and winging it one day. Just little things that I can grab on to.

Q. If you were still in college or, I guess, if you were in Florida which -- home in Florida, South Florida, would you have driven over to the bowl game?

NICK DUNLAP: (Laughing). It was in Tampa? Yeah. Maybe. I don't know. Maybe. I wish I didn't now that we just lost, but, yeah, being here is definitely a little bit better.

Q. You touched on this early on, and I'm thinking big picture here, I'm not interested in little details, but you win in January, you turn pro, by the summer your involved in an, I don't know if it was a complaint, dispute, lawsuit, whatever the case was, it's a pretty big distraction. How do you think you handled that -- and other people were probably dealing with it, but it still involves you -- how do you think you handled that and in the long run could it have been beneficial to have to go through that?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, yeah, I think that started in right before Augusta, so April. End of March or April. It sucks that I had to go through it, but it made me compartmentalize things a little bit better of, Okay, this is a problem outside of golf and it's nothing that I can really do right now or focus on. And it helped me, Hunter did a great job of saying, Okay, we're on the golf course now, this is what we're doing, this is what we're focusing on, we can

deal with this stuff later. I think that it sucked to go through it my first year when I was already trying to have to learn so much about myself and golf, but I think in the long run it will definitely help me deal with distractions a little bit better.

Q. When you win the way you did and you're on this list of all these greats who won as amateurs, how do you handle expectation when you're so young, you're so ahead of schedule, but also now you are on this list of guys with all these expectations?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, I mean, I think I hold myself to the highest expectation, and sometimes it's good, sometimes it's really bad. For me it's just, I struggled with it early of just trying to be that person and you can't, I mean, I had my AA game that week and you're never going to have that all the time. So just understanding that sometimes, you know, I've got to be okay with I'm not swinging it well that week and how do I score my best with what I've got, instead of, I'm not playing well, this is going to be a bad week, whatever it is. It's definitely something I got better at the end of the season.

Q. You're about to show up at Am Ex in a couple weeks, when you show up and have a chance to reflect on it a year later what's going to be the biggest difference you feel like from you than last year?

NICK DUNLAP: Well, I was in college at that point, so definitely, yeah, I mean, it will be my first time defending. I really only gotten to defend one or two tournaments in my life, which I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing. Yeah, just to go back there, there's so many good vibes there. I went back for the, a day before I flew out here and it was just nice to be back, see everybody, see the golf course. I think they had a couple changes to the greens and some stuff like that. Yeah, just to go experience it, honestly, it's kind of where it all started so it will be nice to see some familiar faces and just enjoy a great week.

Q. Do you still feel like a college kid or do you feel now like adult out in the professional world?

NICK DUNLAP: A little bit of both sometimes. I just turned 21, so I got to experience I guess that a little bit (laughing). I mean, I try not to act older than I am sometimes. I'm still 21. I'm still, I still like to have fun. I still, I've done a lot of stuff on the beach this week, I got my girlfriend here, so we're trying to experience that as well instead of just making it just work and golf. I still try to stay young.

Q. Are most of your friends still college age, like the people in your daily life?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, my best friends are still my age. I think these guys out here, I've gotten to know fairly well, and would definitely consider 'em friends now versus just kind much competitors, per se. But, yeah, my best friends are still my age and still people that I've been around since I was 10 or 11 years old.

Q. Were you ever No. 1 as an amateur?

NICK DUNLAP: I was.

Q. You got to the top. Okay. So you are now a college coach, and you've got a kid coming out of high school.

NICK DUNLAP: Oh boy.

Q. You got a kid coming out of high school who has got a nice career, nice pedigree, etcetera, asking for big NIL money, what are you using to determine whether a kid like that is worth it?

NICK DUNLAP: Worth what kind of?

Q. Whatever kind of money he's asking. On the NIL side, since that's a big topic now. Everyone's good at that age or everyone looks good, you know what I mean.

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, how do I determine how much a kid is worth?

Q. Yeah. What would you look for, Coach?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, that's a good question. One is talent and their upside. But two, I think at the end of the day, 71 beats 72 every single time. So yeah, at some point talent and your dedication and your work ethic and all of that plays a factor. But, I mean, if a kid's beat another kid every day, and if they're ranked No. 1 then they obviously did something really good to get there. To be No. 1 at any level is very, very good and you beat everybody else. I think results have got to play probably a bigger factor than anything else, but obviously size, your athletic ability. I would say I would look very, very hard into work ethic and how much talent a player has, but obviously results are kind of going to trump everything in that aspect.

Q. Not interested in any names here, but through your junior years, I'm talking I guess 14, 15, 16, were there kids that were tough competitors with you who haven't quite made it and have you ever wondered why?

NICK DUNLAP: It's kind of hard to say. A lot of my peers are still in college. Michael was always a little bit older than me, I think I may have played maybe a half a year

with him in junior golf.

Q. Thorbjornsen?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah.

Q. I never got to play with Ludvig. I mean, I'm not going to say nobody's not made it because, you know, my friends were two years older, and they're just 23. So I would say, best case scenario, they get that No. 1 spot on the PGA TOUR U, so maybe one of them, if Gordon gets out here or somebody like that. But I would say I probably better be able to answer that question here in three or four years versus right now.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports