

THE PLAYERS Championship

Friday, March 15, 2024

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Maverick McNealy

Quick Quotes

Q. How would you rate today from a challenging standpoint? Seems like there was a little bit more wind than yesterday?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Definitely a lot more wind, and even compared to playing yesterday afternoon, it's twice as firm. Those fairways are a nice shade of brown. You see the landing areas really start to shrink up, especially off the tee.

17 is the firmest green out there for sure, probably taking two, three more yards of skip than any of the other ones, and that's not really one you want a small target on. It's really fun to see it like this. I haven't seen it like this my last couple PLAYERS here.

Q. This is maybe the biggest perk so far, fulfilling the medical. Is there gratitude for being here because of what you had to go through to get here?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Absolutely, there's a lot of gratitude. I feel really grateful that I was able to be back and ready and able to play in this tournament this year. But I think the most fun thing is the way I've been playing it and ball-striking my way around this place. Looking in practice rounds and even in the tournament at places I've had it in the last couple years, and now to be looking at those places from the middle of the fairway has been pretty fun.

It's a lot easier golf course from the fairway, and it can get you standing on your head pretty quickly.

Another thing, too, with Pete Dye golf courses, I feel like every time I play them, I like them a little bit more. It's starting to make sense, starting to see the greens better and see the shots a lot better, too.

Q. How dramatic is the swing change? Can you take us through maybe why you underwent it and then a timeline of going through it?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Yeah, so I can make it pretty



simple in that I was under the plane and hitting a lot of stuck push draws. That was causing my left shoulder to have to work in pretty aggressively, which is what caused the injury in my collarbone. Going back to 2014, 2015, my first two years of college, I was well over the plane actually and hit kind of steep cuts. Wasn't the prettiest thing ever, and got to shallowing it out and hitting draws, eventually got way too underneath.

As far as swings, it's not super complicated, but in terms of just my swing direction, I've moved mountains, going from four or five out to four, five, six left. It's really weird to aim that far left and there's still a few times where I feel like I'm really going to miss it left, but getting more and more comfortable every day, it's way easier to flight the ball, and I've been driving it so much better.

Q. Any new instructor or anything?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I'm still working with Butch at home and Scott Hamilton out here on the road. It's one of those things where Butch is just an incredible, incredible golf mind, and every time I leave that place I feel like I'm going to win. Scott Hamilton has given me a lot of clarity and just kind of the day-to-day eyes to get things cleaned up on the road if I've got a question, and works really closely with my stats guy Hunter to figure out the little pieces we need to tighten up here and there to be ready for new golf courses.

Q. You talked about the joy of playing this golf course. Earlier in the week Scottie was asked about playing boring golf. Do you feel that way?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Absolutely. It's one of those days where you just kind of cruise around, your heart rate real gets up that high and you play a lot of shots from the fairway. It's not much fun when you hit something somewhere and you're wondering what kind of lie I've got in the bunker, do I even have a shot, what kind of shot am I going to need to play. It's fun just grabbing the putter from your caddie and knowing you've got 20 feet up the hill for birdie.

This place gets really exciting when you're out of the short grass, for sure.



Q. When did you last see Butch, and what did he say that made you feel great about yourself this time?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Yeah, I text Butch every week. He actually just texted me in all caps, You are the man, which makes me feel great. He just checks in, asks what I'm doing, and I say, Butch, I'm keeping the arms outside, swinging left, hitting cuts, and the ball is going at the flag.

It's one of those things where, when your instructor says, Looks good, aim at the flag, go play good, that you're right where you want to be.

Q. How often will he text you right after a round like that? Is that common?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Mostly when I'm playing pretty good, but I know he's always watching. I'm so lucky to get to work with the guys I get to work with. I've learned so much in the last couple years. It's pretty fun to be able to stand up on some of these uncomfortable shots and smash down and left and hit a trap cut, which is the shot I see when I'm under pressure, an uncomfortable shot, or a challenging shot, and that's impossible to do from stuck underneath.

I'm just excited because my little teddy bear shot is back, and I can get that ball in play if I need to.

Q. What does he text you if you don't have a good round?

MAVERICK McNEALY: He'll text me something like, What happened today, Maverick? What's going on? I'll send him some golf swings and it'll be something really quick. But the great thing is with our last couple years of work and my work with Scott is I was hitting it left through eight holes today, and when I pulled that 4-iron on No. 8, I knew exactly what it was. It was just coming out of the posture. Butch always sees it with my right foot coming up early, and that's when that club gets stuck and flipped and miss it left. Walking to 9 tee, I said, for the next 10 holes I'm just going to stay in my posture a little better, and came out straight again.

Q. It's a fairly strong leaderboard. What about TPC Sawgrass has been a good test so far through two rounds?

MAVERICK McNEALY: There's no easy shot. You really have to work the ball both ways. There's not many golf courses that you actually have to hit draws and fades. 1 is a fade hole, 2 is a draw hole, 4 is a fade hole, 5 is a fade hole, 6 and 7, draw. It just makes you hit all the different shots.

I've hit four different clubs off the tees this week. I've hit everything from lob wedge to -- I've probably hit every single club into the greens. There's a very clear penalty on one side or the other, and another Pete Dye characteristic is the closer you hit it to the trouble, the better angle or easier next shot you have. There's really no easy bail-out.

Q. Draws are still pretty doable for you even with the path?

MAVERICK McNEALY: They're definitely more challenging, but again, it's a pattern that I remember how to hit a draw my first two years of college, I just keep my back to the target a hair longer and hit down to kick that path out to the right. It's not hooking like it was before. I know it's not going to miss left. Like I said, it's just a pattern and shots and feels that I'm really familiar with and really comfortable with. I just haven't had those for a long time.

Q. What was the highlight swing of the day after you figured out the miss going left?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I hit a really nice drive on 9, and that's when I was like, okay, I'm on the right track here. I think my best swing of the day was a ball above the feet, wind off the right, 5-iron on 16 from 217, and it was one of those where I'm really going to have to hold off the face, and that's a hard shot for me because I'm so used to having to flip it. So I really had to hold it off, and it came off absolutely perfect, and made eagle there.

I could pick so many good shots. It was really coming out nicely today.

Q. What's the most difficult tee shot for you on this golf course, that makes you feel most uncomfortable?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I would say 2 comes to mind because that's one you really have to shape right to left, and you can't miss right. Then 18 is kind of the exact opposite of that. You can't miss left.

But I talked to my brother, and one of the best feels ever is when you swing as hard left as you can and the ball comes out like a straight ball or a baby draw or baby fade. It's a great place to be. It's one of those good tempo, open up hard, and it comes out nice.

Q. Which brother?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Scout. We talk a lot of golf.

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