

AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am

Tuesday, February 9, 2021

Pebble Beach, California, USA

Pebble Beach Golf Links

Will Zalatoris

Press Conference



DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome Will Zalatoris to the interview room at the 2021 AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am. Will, thanks for joining us for a few minutes. I saw you yesterday and you commented on how special this place and this tournament is for you. I know this is where you picked up your first paycheck back in 2018 when you made a start here. So let's just start off with a couple comments on how excited you are to be back here this week for the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I've got a lot of memories here. I was born in San Francisco. Probably my first time I was ever here actually I was taking lessons with Greg Copeland who was up at Foster City at Mariners Point and we used to have a little kind of a day camp down here and I think I was probably 7 or 8 and come down, play the Peter Hay course, grab In-N-Out, I mean, it was kind of living the California dream. So a lot of good memories here.

Obviously, like you said, made my first cut here when I first turned pro, playing with Tony Romo, so I've got a lot of great memories here, and obviously looking forward to making some more here.

DOUG MILNE: I was looking at some numbers. You made 16 starts on the PGA TOUR and the first eight you made the cut here and your most recent eight you finished inside the top-10 in half of them. Including the, obviously, the U.S. Open.

Just how, in your mind, how much better of a player are you now? The numbers are evident that you're quite a bit better, but just from your perspective how confident are you with your game right now?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, it's basically, over the past two years I started working with Troy Denton and Josh Gregory and they have been great friends, obviously phenomenal coaches in their own right, but they have both taught me really how to be a professional and how to kind of manage Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday a little bit better. Obviously we, as an amateur you are preparing for Thursday through

Sunday but knowing how to prepare, how to get ready for each golf course, each golf course is obviously a little bit different, and kind of just knowing where I'm at, where, what are things I need to fix. And I've said it before that it is my goal probably about a year and a half ago is to understand my golf game a little bit better. How can I turn maybe a missed cut into a made cut and make the most of it. I think San Antonio for me, from the Korn Ferry last year was probably the most evident where I had a terrible first round, made the cut on the number, and turned into a Top-5. And that's the difference. Maybe I wouldn't have even had the chance a few years ago to make the weekend, let alone turn into a nice week.

So I think that's really the biggest thing. And like I said, I think it's just understanding myself a little bit better, and that just comes with the prep Monday through Wednesday of just knowing where my game's at and knowing what I need to be working on and focusing on throughout the week.

DOUG MILNE: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. How much was that first paycheck here in 2018 and what do you remember about it and what did it feel like for you?

WILL ZALATORIS: I actually I don't even remember what it was. It couldn't have been more than 15 to 20 would be my guess.

DOUG MILNE: Just under 15.

WILL ZALATORIS: Just under 15. All right. Even better. (Laughing.) But probably the biggest memory of it all is playing with Tony. We were playing behind Bill Murray and obviously coming straight out of college and being kind of thrown into that and I actually played well enough on Thursday and Friday, seeing my name, I guess, at one point being tied for the lead on Friday and fell apart at Pebble on the weekend. It's stuff like that that I'll remember forever, and Tony and I have talked about that a bunch. I've been fortunate enough to become pretty good friends with him and play a bunch of golf over the past couple years. He's become a really great mentor. So I



think that was kind of probably the best memory of it was seriously just playing with Tony and obviously playing Pebble Beach doesn't stink either.

Q. Do you expect more of yourself now with every start? As you keep compiling up all these good results, do you expect more from yourself each week?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I mean, I think if anything, it's just keep getting better. I've said the same thing for probably two, two and a half years, and Josh Gregory, every week Wednesday or Thursday he will shoot me a text just saying, Hey, another great opportunity to get better this week.

I know that, I've been asked a lot about being inside the top-50, is that a main goal. It's like, well, it's just part of it. When I was 7 years old it's not like my goal was to get in the top-50 in the world. We all dream about winning a major, specifically kids are making putts on the practice putting green to win the Masters. So that's stuff that, this is just kind of a step in the road and I'm enjoying every minute of it and making sure that I am enjoying it. This past two years, especially I guess the past year with COVID, not knowing, at the beginning of last year my goal was to get on the PGA TOUR and all of a sudden we don't have a chance of getting it unless we win three times, which it seemed like a bummer, but I kind of tried to make sure that I had the mindset of if I go win three times, I'll be more prepared to play at this level, and obviously I did a little bit of a different path and got it through special temporary status. But I wouldn't have -- I probably wouldn't have even tried to qualify for The Open if COVID didn't happen just because I was so focused with the Korn Ferry, and got fortunate enough to get a start and finish sixth at The Open and then turn that into special temporary status.

So that's, that whole timeline, basically, there's no goal or, to try to be on the PGA TOUR by this time. It was so uncertain that just get better every week and good golf takes care of a lot of things.

Q. You've talked a lot about playing with Jordan and Scottie in junior golf. Can you elaborate a little bit on kind of the impact that had, some of the best memories you have of that and maybe how it maybe shaped who you are now as a golfer?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, Jordan specifically was always kind of the, anytime he played it was kind of like, all right, here we go, what's he going to win by. Scottie and I had, we had some great battles through junior golf, obviously being more of the same age. Probably, kind of a story for each guy was, Jordan was 14, we weren't even old enough to drive carts yet. And he, I remember playing at my home

course at Bent Tree and he flared one way out right off the tee, hits a second shot in the bunker, makes like a 30-footer for par and then he birdies 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 to shoot 29 on the front and shot 63 and shot the course record that had been there for 15 years. That's stuff like that when I think I was probably, I guess I was 11, I'm thinking, Goodnight, I mean, that's just so out -- couldn't even fathom shooting a score like that at 14.

Scottie and I, we played the same level of junior golf and amateur golf, college golf. We have been playing I guess against each other for 14 years. So it's been a lot of fun obviously growing up with these guys and I get asked a lot, What's it like playing with Jordan? I said, Well, just expect a couple ridiculous 30- or 40-footers and maybe a chip in per round and that's kind of what you're going to expect. It's been fun seeing these guys grow. Scottie being obviously Player of the Year on the Korn Ferry a couple years ago and being Rookie of the Year last year and Jordan going on to, obviously, you know, 2015 was one of the best years. You could argue it's up there with Tiger in 2000.

So been very fortunate to be around those guys. They have pushed me to be better and obviously the bar always gets raised every year by what one of these guys are doing and obviously -- I was talking with Jordan last week, he said, The more I see ya, I think I'm doing all right. So that's been fun.

Q. Provincial San Francisco question. How much and in what ways did that shape you? If I understand correctly, you left here when you were 7 or 8. How vivid are those memories of starting at Cal Club and how did that sort of get you on this road?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, basically how I got started in the game was my dad would play at Cal Club in the morning on Saturdays with his buddies and my mom would drop me off in the afternoon. We would have lunch. Play 1, 2, 3, 4, cut over to number 9 at Cal and would go have an Orange Julius milkshake and I would probably fall asleep driving home with the milkshake in my hand. That's how I got started with the game. And probably the most vivid memory I have from there I was probably 5, maybe 6 and Mr. Venturi's lifelong member there, honorary member, that's his stomping grounds. The back tees are called the Venturi tees. And he watched me hit balls on the range and showed me how to hold a golf club and he told my parents, he said, This kid loves it. Your job's to stay out of the way. And it's something my dad's very proud of is that he's never been to a single one of my golf lessons throughout my entire career.

So it's stuff like that that you remember forever. And

obviously, at the time at 6 or 7, I thought he was just one of the old guys around the club, and not really knowing the history until I was able to walk through the men's grill when I was old enough to see his U.S. Open trophy there.

So pretty great memories. That's kind of how I got started in the game and obviously it kind of gave me the golf bug at a young age and I've been wanting to do this my entire life and obviously now that I'm doing it, it's pretty cool.

Q. Did you look at the World Ranking on Monday?

WILL ZALATORIS: I was told, yeah, finally in the top-50. Obviously it's exciting. Like I said, it's just kind of a step in the road and obviously keep on keeping on from here. The main -- I'm playing with house money basically. It's basically win or gain some experience. The more I put myself in somewhat contention to keep hanging around these guys and seeing a lot of these guys that I grew up playing junior golf with win tournaments I know that if I keep doing what I'm doing I'll be right up there with them.

So it's exciting, for one, for sure and obviously that top-50 opens up a lot of doors. But like I said, just keep getting better and keep on keeping on. So it's been a fun year and we'll keep on going.

By the way, that's a terrible hat you got on there.

Q. It was not intentional. He obviously hasn't been playing, but being two spots behind Tiger, what has that, anyone tell you that one as well?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah. No, that's obviously, it's fun. Like I said, it's part of it. Obviously, it's a guy who, I guess, was -- I admired him forever and I remember, I was actually talking about this last night with another Cal Club member that my dad's known for 30 years, and he said that Ernie Els came out to Cal Club after Tiger won in 2000, and he said, I can fathom finishing second in an Open. I can live with that. I just can't believe that I finished second and lost by 15. So it's little things like that, and I think Ernie went out and shot like 63 that day and shot the course record.

So I've made a lot of memories here from the Bay Area especially, but obviously being a couple behind Tiger's fun.

Q. When you look at guys like Cameron Champ and, that you obviously played with on the Walker Cup team and Collin and whatnot, does that give you confidence to be able to do things quickly like they have?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, absolutely. They did it obviously way faster than I've done. Cameron coming out

and lighting the world on fire. Collin winning a major within his first couple years of being a professional. But it's kind of the same thing with Scottie and Jordan. We played golf together forever and seeing these guys have success it only gives me the belief that I can do it too. So absolutely.

Q. You continue with the good results, you keep pushing forward in World Ranking. What's the ceiling I guess in your goals for the short-term rather than long-term?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I mean I hate giving you the kind of cookie cutter answer but it's just to keep getting better. If I -- I could finish second the next 25 weeks in a row and still not make the FedExCup playoffs. So every week I've got a chance to go out and tee it up and hopefully win and get myself in those playoffs. But that's kind of what I said, I'm playing with house money. I know my card's locked for next year and the only way I can move up I guess is by winning. So every week it's kind of all or nothing, but at the same time keep gaining the experience and keep getting the exposure and eventually throw myself into contention and hopefully be able to hoist a trophy on Sunday.

Q. The PGA of America just came out with a release today saying that they're going to let distance devices be used at the PGA Championship. You're a young guy, you have experience using distance devices all through your college days, I'm sure. Can you talk about the benefits of using it and if there's some detractors in using it as well when you're playing in a tournament?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, actually I didn't even know that that the PGA of America was doing that. You know, I think hopefully it speeds up the game. I know that that's been a big topic of conversation for a long time. Monday qualifiers have been doing it for a couple years now, we're able to have range finders. So I don't see a down side to it. I think if anything it will hopefully speed up the game, specifically of guys that hit one off line instead of walking over to the side, the one specifically I could think of actually is like a couple weeks ago in Torrey Pines I hit one out right on 14 and we had to walk 40 yards over, 40 yards back, my caddie actually had to even pace it off from the front edge and that adds a couple minutes and next thing you know we're behind and even though the entire group -- I think we all made par -- I'm hoping it helps, I'm all for whatever makes the game faster. I don't really see a down side to it. The reality is even when you see guys walking the golf course or covering the tournament they're just walking up to our ball shooting a number and then we got to walk around and go find it. So I'm hoping that it speeds up the game that's all really that I'm focused on. But at the same

time I'm sure that there's some guys that are kind of being Homers and they want to, the art of getting a yardage, knowing how far things are playing so it will be interesting. I had no idea, actually, until you just said that.

Q. You talk about coming out and just trying to get better, if you were on the Korn Ferry you needed to win. Here you got in a different way onto the PGA TOUR. What is it that shocked you the most when you came out saying, boy, I don't know if I can do that, I need to do these things to be able to get better. What were those things?

WILL ZALATORIS: I think like it kind of goes back to playing with guys like Scottie and Jordan forever is we play at home, Kramer Hickok and I went to high school together, all these guys have been successful. So and I think that if anything gave me the self belief that I can be here. I think if anything it's just, there's really hasn't been anything shocking just because I've been around those guys and seen their processes and how they go about getting better, I think it's just interesting to see how each person does it differently. Some guys will have a heavy load in the gym Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Some guys keep it light. Some guys will be working with coaches and banging balls on Tuesday for three or four hours. Some guys will keep it light. I mean I think that's just the different thing that when you're a young kid or even just a regular fan watching golf you see what happens Thursday through Sunday, but seeing how these guys operate Monday through Wednesday I think has been very interesting and being a guy who, I've always loved understanding people's processes and how they go about it differently, it's been very interesting.

Q. Did you buy anything special when you got that first paycheck in 2018?

WILL ZALATORIS: No, I bought a plane ticket to go to the Monday qualifier for L.A. (laughing.)

DOUG MILNE: All right, Will, we always appreciate your time. We have certainly seen a lot of you in the past few weeks and that's a good thing. So we hope it continues this week and we appreciate your time again. Have a great week.

WILL ZALATORIS: Thanks, guys, appreciate it, Doug.

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