

RBC Canadian Open

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Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Oakdale Golf & Country Club

Mackenzie Hughes

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Mackenzie Hughes to the interview room here at the RBC Canadian Open. One of three Canadians on TOUR, winners on TOUR this season. It's been an incredible season for our Canadian contingent here on TOUR. What can you attribute that success to?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: To be honest, it kind of starts a long time ago. I think that the three winners this year, myself, Corey, Adam, were all part of a that Golf Canada program, which started juniors, went to amateur and then young pro. And I think for us we're all a product of that. I'm not saying that we wouldn't have made it otherwise, but it's certainly it was a huge help and a huge boost along the way to have that, those resources available to us and that coaching.

So a long story short, yeah, Golf Canada has been hugely behind us as Canadian golfers and trying to make the PGA TOUR.

THE MODERATOR: We're all here at Oakdale for the first time on TOUR. We'll be back in a few years. So far, what are first impressions of the golf course?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: It's good. To be fair, I had never heard of it prior to it being announced as the venue. Just because I didn't really play much in Toronto as a kid and I live an hour from here. But my first impressions are that it's a great golf course and it's a good test this week for the RBC Canadian Open. I think that it's a good mix of holes. There's some tough ones on the front. Obviously a bit more length on that side. It's going to be probably the tougher nine holes. Then the back nine gives you a few chances to make some birdies. So going to be a good mix of holes, going to be a fun week. I'm sure there will be lots of birdie out there and also some tough holes to kind of navigate through. So it will make for a great championship.

THE MODERATOR: Just comments on your form going into the week.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, it's been not the year I



would have envisioned starting in 2023. I've had some good results, mixed with some average results. But I don't feel like I'm far off. The last couple weeks, the PGA, Memorial, I feel as though I played good enough golf to play four days, but came out on the wrong side of a shot here or there. So had the weekends off. But I don't feel like I'm doing too many things poorly. It's just not going my way at the moment. So I think essentially doing what I've been doing hopefully the ball kind of goes my way this week, get a few nice bounces and make a few putts and get the Canadians behind me and hopefully get in the mix.

THE MODERATOR: No doubt you'll have Canadians behind you. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. A bit of a curve question at you. How much -- have you noticed the smoke out there from the forest fires that have come in from Quebec?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I have. I was at an outing yesterday with RBC and we were in Milton and I honestly hadn't heard of the forest fires, to be quite honest. We were out there yesterday and it was extremely hazy, very smoky. I couldn't stop talking about it. I was amazed, I guess, how far it has traveled and the smoke that we're experiencing here. So, yeah, it's not great, obviously I'm thinking about the people that are affected by that, so hopefully they can get those under control.

Q. Do you have to do anything to make sure it doesn't impact your game at all?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I mean, honestly, I probably shouldn't be out side for eight hours straight. But that's going to be tough this week. So, no, it doesn't really affect our game at all. Just, yeah, probably try and drink lots of water. I probably should be wearing sunglasses a bit more. But other than that, not too much.

Q. Yesterday's news I'm wondering how much --

MACKENZIE HUGHES: What happened? (Smiling.)

Q. How much that's distracting you from your preparation and how much it might take away any of your focus from what's an extremely important week?



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MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, there's no doubt that the timing of it was less than ideal. Back-to-back years. That was discussed yesterday. From the sounds of it, it was something that Jay thought about and couldn't avoid. So it does distract you. I mean, I'm answering a question now about something that's not really pertaining to this week or this championship. But again I think that there is a lot to be unpacked still and it's, everything is very fresh. So I think everyone's coming to terms with a bit more what's going on. The word "merger" has been tossed around a lot. Which, this isn't a merger, it's much different than that. So it is a bit of a distraction. But once we get through today and we get going tomorrow, I think that the focus will be on the RBC Canadian Open and that's where it should be.

Q. As a follow-up, how would you describe how your emotions have evolved from yesterday morning around 10 o'clock to today?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I started out feeling a little frustrated, a little confused and betrayed -- not betrayed, but just blind sided in the fact that we just, to us, we didn't see this coming in any capacity. Maybe not for another five or six years. But now we are here and this is the news that we're dealing with. And, yeah, I would say that now I'm more about collecting information and trying to, I guess, make my own adjustments on what the situation is and if it's going to be good for the TOUR in the long run. Which ultimately I do think that the way the golf has been the last year is not good for the game. I do believe that when the dust does settle and we bring the guys back together, eventually, I do think that's what's in the best interests of golf. Right now it obviously is going to feel different or feel not right or confusing and everyone's got a lot of questions. But I do think that with time this could end up being a great thing. I just, I think people are very quick to jump on it being a really bad thing, but we just, it's too early to say, I guess, one way or the other.

Q. This year in golf's been a lot about there's no-cut events, there's team golf on the LIV side. How important is a tournament obviously like this to you and a true Open Championship and what does that mean for the kind of golf you grew up with?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I was telling my caddie out there today that I've been coming to this tournament from a very young age. Before I was 10 probably. My first experience I think was Glen Abbey in 2000. And just a lot of great memories from Glen Abbey and from Hamilton. To be competing in my national championship, the RBC Canadian Open, and to me it's still a little bit of a pinch-me moment, even though I'm in year seven and I've played in a fair number of these already. It's just, it's still really cool

to me that I could impact the next Mackenzie Hughes, which hopefully they aim higher than that, but I mean at least that's where the bar has been set maybe. But it is neat and I relish these moments to be here vying for this championship. I would love more than anything else to be the guy to break that drought.

Q. Going back to yesterday, have you had a chance to sort of weigh the positives from what you can think they might be and some of the negatives? I mean. You're welcoming the players back from LIV. Can't necessarily be comfortable. But maybe there's more security in the TOUR and potential for, I don't know, like super elevated events or something. Have you had a chance to weigh the pros and cons of what you know yesterday?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: To be honest, not really. Yesterday was a bit of a whirlwind. And I was just trying to collect as much information as possible. Then I really have tried to shift my focus today into this tournament. I've been looking forward to it for months now and my focus is there and I want to have a great week and be focused on what I'm trying to do here. So that stuff will work itself out in time, but for me right now the focus is tomorrow's first tee shot.

Q. Given the timing of last year as well as this year relative to LIV, do you have some sympathy for that badge on your left sleeve there, RBC?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, it's not, doesn't seem fair. That's probably the best way to put it. But just really unfortunate timing, I think. But, yeah, they have gotten the bad end of that stick the last couple years. It's a shame because it takes away from, I believe it's the third oldest National Open or third or -- so to me that's what it should be about is the history of this tournament and the great players here. But golf has never been in a place like this before and it's, there's been so many things in the last three, four years that have just disrupted, I guess, the working order of golf. I mean, from COVID into LIV, it's just been a very unsettled time for golf. The golf ball rollback potentially. This, it seems like day after day there's something new. So I think, if I'm RBC, I kind of accept that this is just the rolling landscape of what we're dealing with. Hopefully, like I said, tomorrow, once we get going, the tournament starts and we got a good leaderboard going, that will be the focus of this week.

Q. We have seen this happen before with Canadian guys too, that you can win and not only do you win you get the exemption, you get a lot of money, a few more demands on your time. In a weird sort of way is it a little harder to focus after?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yes and no. I think your points are all valid. That, you know, when you win there's definitely more demand for your time. You're more sought after. But those are things that we're used to and used to dealing with. So I think, like myself or Corey or Adam, we would be used to dealing with those things and can expect those things. So I wouldn't use that as a cover-up or an excuse for any play that I didn't like or bad results. It's just golf's a hard game and your season, so no matter how good it is, runs in ebbs and flows. So, yeah, I think that that's parts of it that comes along with winning, but something that we expect and know how to deal with.

Q. Just to back to yesterday, one more. The players' call with Jay yesterday. Can you sort of describe how it went for you or sort of the sentiment that came out of it and the feelings around that call that you had or that you sensed other people had?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: The PAC meeting or the player meeting?

Q. The player meeting.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: The player meeting. I think I touched on it a little bit earlier, but I just feel as though the first feeling that guys had was just that they were a little bit shocked. Shocked by the news. I don't really think many people had this on their radar as a possibility. So that was probably the first emotion. Then the other thing was just now guys were trying to take it all in, gather information, ask questions, figure out what the next steps were. So there was a lot of good discussion in there yesterday and a lot of things on both sides that were said that I think will lead to good decisions going forward. So, yeah, like I said, golf has just never been disrupted like this before. We're dealing with a lot of stuff right now. So I think once we get kind of past the initial phase of this or the initial part of this. Like I said, it could be a great thing for golf. We just, we don't know. So that was kind of the majority of the emotion or the feeling yesterday.

Q. Not to -- any sense of like emotional whiplash at all. Sort of like you go a year and this is how we look at things and then all of a sudden one day happens and it's like, oh, we have to look at it this other way. Is that sort of hard to wrap your head around at all?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yes and no. I mean, we've been through a lot. So while there's some aspects of it that may surprise you, you're also kind of used to having bombshells dropped every now and then with LIV forming and having their first events and then to where we are now. There's just been lots of big news over the last year or so. I don't

think that we're, I mean, we're essentially, I guess, we just know you're in a bit of a chaotic time. So there's lots of stuff happening and we're just trying to deal with it the best we can on the fly.

Q. Obviously you talk a lot about how important the National Open is for you. We've got the U.S. Open coming up after that. But then a little more than a year from now, Presidents Cup, it's going to be here, not in Toronto, but in Canada. Just how much is that front of mind for you? We always hear about it from Americans and Europeans of Ryder Cup teams and how important that is to them. With a Canadian captain and it being Canada does that add any more motivation and do you need any more?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I would probably trade both wins to be on that team. I really want to be on that team for Mike. I want to play for him. I want to play in front of Canadian fans. I would like to win the Presidents Cup. Those are all things I do think about. Yeah, I don't need any extra motivation, I guess. I think about it often. I see the Presidents Cup logo on some people's shirts in here and you see the Presidents Cup shield for the international team floating around. So I see Ryan Hart in the back, so hopefully I'll be seeing a lot of him next year. So, yeah, I'm dying to be on that team. So I was obviously close in Charlotte and that would have been a semi home game for me there too. So that stung. So that was probably my extra motivation that I needed. I'll do everything I can to be on that team next year.

Q. I know you don't have a lot of experience on this golf course, but you've seen it now, most of it, I guess. What will be the most important thing for you or anybody to do to be successful out there this week?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: If you drive it really well this week you'll have a great week. That to me, it almost goes hand in hand with all the courses that we play that are lined with thick rough and kind of smallish greens, you just need to be playing from the fairway to score. So to me that's the number one skill or like what the champion will do best I think to me is he'll separate himself off the tee and give himself tons of looks into these greens from the fairway. So I think closely behind that though will be that guy that drives it great is still going to need to putt exceptional because of the amount of slope on these greens. So it will require that person to putt great, have a great imagination around the greens, because you can leave yourself in spots where you've got putts with 10 feet of break. So those putts require a lot of touch and imagination and feel. So that's probably secondary to the driving, but I would say first and foremost drive the ball in the fairway and you have a chance.

Q. You're a guy who's been known to make some long and winding putts, so you think that gives you some advantage?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah. Stanley Thompson designs and greens with a lot of pitch for me are kind of what I grew up on. I'm quite comfortable. I was out in the pro-am today, I had a great group of guys and they had asked me oh what does this putt do and is it like four, five feet and I'm like, just add an extra few feet and you're good. A lot of these putts that are breaking a ton you can't play high enough and you're trying to just kind of marry that line, speed and get that high-as-possible line. That to me is really fun. I almost would prefer a putt that breaks four, five feet than a putt that's 30 feet and dead straight. Just the way my mind works. So, yeah, I'm looking forward to hopefully rolling in a few of those for the crowd this week.

Q. You already alluded to the drought of a Canadian not winning this championship in nearly 70 years. What would it mean to you personally to be the one to break that drought?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, that would be amazing. To be the guy, obviously be a bit of a Canadian hero to do that. I just, I kind of, I picture coming down those last few holes and the way the crowd to be loud and the energy behind me would be incredible. So I have let myself get to that point and think about those things. Like I said, it would be amazing. Yeah, I know everyone of the guys in the field this week feels the same way. That they want to be that guy. So, yeah, if it's not me I hope it's one of them. But I'll be trying to be that guy.

THE MODERATOR: All right, MacKenzie. Thanks so much for your time. Good luck this week.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: All right. Thank you.

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