

Alfred Dunhill Links Championship

Tuesday, September 27, 2022

St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland

Danny Willett

Press Conference

TOM CARLISLE: Welcome to the 2022 Alfred Dunhill Links Championship. Delighted to be joined by defending champion, Danny Willett, here in the media centre.

To be able to call yourself a winner at the Old Course at St Andrews is pretty special, isn't it. How much are you looking forward to this week.

DANNY WILLETT: Yeah, it is. It's a special week. The Home of Golf, obviously three fantastic golf courses, yeah, to finally win around here, a place that I really enjoy coming back to, yeah, nice memories.

Should be a great week all around. Got a great field again, both pros and amateurs, and yeah, me and Jimmy are hoping to go one better in the team event this year as well.

TOM CARLISLE: You mentioned the amateur side of things. You're one of five players to have won both the individual and the team competition. Just how special is having the team element in an event like this?

DANNY WILLETT: Yeah, it is, me and Smarty did it in 2016 after Augusta, and he carried me that week; I had a few drinks most nights. He was very good.

There's only one thing, I wanted to -- I had a good chance, I can't remember what year it was when Martin won. You know, when you get the feeling, the vibe and how golf is so loved up here and the crowds going around the last. Yeah, I really wanted to be able to say that I won around here.

To be able to do it last year and the way that we did, it played great all week. To be able to win at the Home of Golf is pretty special.

Q. There was a good field last year and Rory and Matt of here this year. Talk about what they bring to an event like this, them being here?

DANNY WILLETT: It's just great, obviously to, have guys who are vying for Ryder Cup points, World Ranking points.

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You know, when them guys pitch up, it adds to an event and it's just nice that, you know, within that, they then bring, obviously Rory is playing with his dad, Matt is playing with his mum.

It just shows how special this week is and what it does for golf as a whole and kind of how much fun this week can be for the guys that are here. It's just a great week.

Q. So how is the mindset after what happened in California? It was a slow one, but you took a lot from that in terms of the praise for the way you handled it. Is that important to you?

DANNY WILLETT: Yeah, I don't know how you else would handle it. Inside, you're obviously screaming at yourself.

You can't look at that week in a bad way. You still finished second. You still picked up a hell of lot of points. Yeah, would you have liked to have re-wound time for two minutes, yeah. But we can't do that. We've got to kind of take from it and when we are in that position, won't happen. Like I say, take the positives from it.

And game is in a nice place. Slightly different weather here. Kind of just crack on, and keep doing the things that you're doing and hopefully give yourself plenty more chances.

Q. Does the experience that you have now having won a major, does that make it slightly easier to move on from that disappointment quite quickly or do you dwell on?

DANNY WILLETT: You know, what every win that I've had, you always think there's going to be a massive climax finish to an event. Dubai, I holed the putt to win back in 2016, and most of the time, people are tapping in from six inches to win. You know, it's not -- how that happened obviously was a little bit of a shock to the system at the time.

But yeah, I mean Max obviously -- he's 15th in the world. He's a great player and he's had a great year last year, coming in there defending champion and favourite. You know, not that it's -- not that it always happens, but if anyone was going to probably do it, it would have probably been him.

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So yeah, you know, we've still won many times around the world and played well on Sundays to win. So like I said, I played great all day. Yeah, the finish obviously wasn't what we wanted but you've still got to take a hell of a lot from a great week.

Q. What makes this event special? Is it the settings of the three courses, the quality of the field obviously, what are the factors that make this special?

DANNY WILLETT: I think you just said them, really. Everything that goes into it. Johann Rupert, he's put so much into golf for the DP World Tour, for the South African guys, for us, and I think that shows in who comes to play, how much money they raise for charity.

You know, I think that when you kind of put all of that in, and you get all of them people in a room like you will do on a Saturday night in a pavilion, you see how much the game means to so many people and what Johann is doing and happy to come play golf because they want to and because he's asked them to and stuff.

The three golf courses we play are beautiful. It's a beautiful part of the world. Fingers crossed, we get lucky with the weather, most of the time. And yeah it just makes for a special week. The Home of Golf, St Andrews, it's a special place. I know the amateurs love coming to play and walking the same fairways that loads and loads of golfers have been in the past. Everything about it, the whole buzz around the town all week. It's just a special place.

Q. You mentioned the weather. The weather forecast is pretty brutal. What is the mentality when you come here? The Dunhill, is it always going to be bad weather and do you brace for that?

DANNY WILLETT: We've had so many years that have been if he nominal recently, and then this year, it does look amazing. Again, if you want to have a good chance of being up there on Sunday, you've got to get a little bit lucky as well in terms of where you draw and on which days if it's windy or rainy or whatever it is. There's always that element to it.

Obviously the golf courses aren't so ridiculously difficult because they want the guys to be able to get around, the amateur guys.

So it's a little more simple within that regard, so when it is difficult, it's not as tricky as it would be in an Open, for example. But basically, if you come in with the mindset that it's going to be rubbish, the weather, and it's not, then

it's a bonus, isn't it.

But yeah, like today, it's been, today, by standards, this week has been amazing. But we still had five minutes that was horrific.

Q. Given your desire to get back in The Ryder Cup, this is the third qualifying event for next year. Do you see this new era coming through with these young guy, obviously there's a core there, and you want to be part of it. Do you see what Rory talked about at Wentworth?

DANNY WILLETT: There's always a transition period. I think America kind of went through it four to six years ago as to where the guys, they got beat in Paris and since then they kind of have -- all the younger guys have stepped up and played well and come through.

Obviously last time was a pretty good beating with the guys, and I was watching that. And it was a tough one to kind of watch, and being a past Ryder Cup player.

You see the guys coming through, obviously Bobby Mac has been playing well for the last couple years now. Guido's good. You've got the Hojgaard twins. You have a lot of good players that are coming through, and you just hope that they can continue to do that all the way through. Hopefully they can get some good guidance from all the people within -- from their nationality. I know Thomas speaks to the twins a lot and tries to help them along the way.

Yeah, at some point we are going to have to go through a transition phase where you're going to have to let guys kind of take the rookie role in 2022 (2023) and see how they cope in preparation potentially for two, four years' time.

Obviously I want to go back there to Rome and help the team, and this is obviously another big week in that journey.

TOM CARLISLE: Thank you very much. Have a great week.

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