

The 150th Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 12 July 2022

Will Zalatoris



OLIVIA MCMILLAN: Good afternoon, everyone. We are joined by Will Zalatoris this afternoon in the media centre for The 150th Open. Will, thank you very much for joining us.

You've had a phenomenal run in the majors this year. How much does that impact your excitement for The Open this week?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I didn't need much more than obviously playing on Saturday and walking down fairways with people and their dogs and everything, just on a very casual day. Obviously it's the home of golf. It's pretty special.

Obviously I've had a nice run in the majors, but the excitement level this week is obviously off the charts. I've obviously been very close, specifically in the last two majors. But game's in a great place and in a great head space. This is a lot of fun.

Kind of seeing some of the spots from where guys have pulled off amazing shots at this venue and obviously trying to learn as much of the history as I can of the game, it's pretty incredible.

OLIVIA MCMILLAN: You've obviously had a nice look at The Old Course now. Have you started to figure out a game plan for the course?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, once you've got it figured out, you don't. We're kind of lucky for us that we have pretty much the same wind, or at least coming from generally the same direction, for our first time. I know that a lot of holes obviously will play different depending on which direction. You know, the front nine, if it was downwind, it would be a completely different golf course. Basically, our prep over the last few days would have been almost useless if we had the wind going the other way.

So being able to spend essentially the last four days out here, kind of game plan, if the wind is generally coming from either the south to the west has been very helpful. I've gotten some help from a few local friends. It's been obviously a treat, but also at the same time, I don't think I've written more in my yardage book over the last four days than I think I have in my entire career.

Q. When we spoke to you on Friday, I think in Scotland, you

mentioned shooting some low scores on Tiger Woods 2005, on the console. How does the real thing compare?

WILL ZALATORIS: It's a little bit firmer. (Laughter). Like I said, there's just so many different ways that you can play holes in the States. And, I guess, really just in modern golf courses, parkland courses, you're trying to basically hit fairways and you're not worried about angles.

This week, there are a few times where you do have to worry about that. There's some spots where missing it in one spot is great for some pins and it's atrocious for other pins. So being able to figure that out obviously throughout the week has been a great challenge and has been very interesting.

But, yeah, going back to Tiger Woods '05, I don't think I'll be shooting 48 this week in 18 holes.

Q. Have you found your way into the Dunvegan yet?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yes, I have. I took a picture with Luke and Lucy, and it was a blast. We've been trying to enjoy as much of the town as we can, especially since I had the weekend off last week, and have some fun.

Everyone has said that the buzz of the town, that there's just nothing like it. It just exceeds all expectations. And even that goes to Saturday when the locals are able to walk down fairways with us.

You have Augusta National, which is obviously one of the premier, most private places in really the world. And then you come here, and I'm walking down fairways with 60 people and their dogs. I think that's what makes golf so fun is, obviously this week is much more kind of the people's tournament. And obviously Augusta you're specifically going into the history of Augusta. I think it's very cool seeing the two opposite sides, and I love them both equally.

Q. Finally from me, any dog-related mishaps, or were they pretty well behaved?

WILL ZALATORIS: Very well behaved, yeah. Some of the dogs -- we were sitting up on the tee markers, and I guess some of the locals have trained their dogs to sit right by the tee marker even when they play, which I need to start working on



Luna, my dog, to start doing that.

Q. Any other highlights that you saw in the town?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, Dario took care of us in Little Italy. We've just been trying to walk around and just enjoy it as much as I can. Walking home from dinner the other night, Mark Calcavecchia was walking by, Mike McCoy, who obviously our Walker Cup captain. That's just what makes this town and obviously this tournament so cool is you're just running into people.

Even though that obviously I'm a long way from home, I feel like I'm kind of around a lot of people that I know.

Q. What was your reaction the first time you got to the 17th tee?

WILL ZALATORIS: It's amazing how you can really hit a shot left of the Old Course Hotel logo, and if it's cutting, it's in the fairway. And you can also hit one high and about 30 feet right of that logo and still be almost in the exact same spot. It's pretty unique.

I love being able to hit that burning cut, so I will never say that hitting over a hotel is an ideal look for me, but that shot actually sets up for me pretty well.

Q. By any chance have you ever hit over any building like that anywhere else?

WILL ZALATORIS: So in Dallas there's a place called The Tribute, where they took what they thought were the best 18 holes in Scotland, and they took 1, 18, 17, and I believe No. 11, and put it on the golf course. So they put up kind of a shed for the 17th hole, and we would be hitting over the shed. So I would say yes, but no.

Q. Will, obviously you come here to win. Every player comes here to win. But finishing second would give you a unique position that you'd share with a lot of other players. Would you be able to get any pleasure out of finishing second?

WILL ZALATORIS: I mean, yes and no. Of course I want to win one, but the part I also have to remind myself is we're sitting here talking about me not winning a major, and I've been on the PGA TOUR for 20 months. It's a pretty good spot to be in.

I haven't even -- I don't think I've played double digit majors yet. For me, let's just keep growing on this experience. I'm obviously playing some nice golf. Like I've said, and I keep telling myself this, is let that first one get in the way, and if it happens to be a major, it happens to be a major.

Q. Little bit of a nerdy golf question. Your strokes-gained numbers putting in majors is drastically different than your strokes-gained putting numbers in regular season tournaments. Just curious if you can explain the difference and why it's so good in major championships.

WILL ZALATORIS: I think part of it, if you take basically the run from the PGA going forward, from basically that Wednesday night when Josh and I figured out something, if you really just take that sample size and eliminate the first, I don't know, six to eight months out of the year, I'm doing very nicely on the greens.

It's something that, if you were to take the strokes-gained putting statistics from the events -- and it's tough because you also have to measure it up against guys that you don't know their strokes-gained statistics, but if you add mine in there, they're 36th this year on TOUR.

Last week I was kind of laughing when I got done on Thursday, and people were asking me about, man, the wind's brutal on the greens today; we saw you got winded on 13. And I said, well, I hit two fairways today, so I don't think we need to be talking about the one 5-footer I missed because of wind.

That obviously is something that I -- it obviously hasn't been the strong suit of my game, but it's so far how I've performed on the greens since -- I would say, since the PGA -- we've really taken a leap and we've added another fundamental to my blueprint in how I putt, and that's why I've putted so well since.

Q. Are you a golf historian, and can you appreciate the reverence of St Andrews and in particular The Old Course?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, you can never know enough. I think that it's something that I know that my dad has already gone into the R&A Museum this week, and he's told me about how incredible it is.

I know a lot about the golf course in specific and obviously the champions that have won here. But when it comes to some of the tournaments, I pretty much know the highlights that have been on Golf Channel come November, December when they're showing the best of.

I obviously am a student of the game. I love being around a lot of the guys that were from previous eras like Lanny Watkins, Lee Trevino, Curtis Strange. Wake Forest, the university I went to, we have a lot of guys who have won majors and being successful on TOUR. And being able to pick their brains and tell us stories about how guys played has been a blast.

I thought it was pretty amazing this week that the first couple balls that I ever hit at St Andrews, Lee Trevino is on the range

standing right next to me talking to me. I've known him since I was 14, but that's my introduction to St Andrews is sitting there talking to a guy who obviously I've admired forever.

Q. Just going back to 17, did you experience the Road Hole bunker and the Road, and how did it go?

WILL ZALATORIS: I did. We've been bouncing around all over that green. Obviously the miss is long left. You can't believe how thin that green really is. Even today in a practise round, I think the pin was like 16 and 7 off the right. I played nine holes with Jordan today, and he hits one that looks like it's going to end up about 10 feet, and it basically kicks off that mound and goes into basically right on the wall.

You just can't believe how thin it is. Obviously in practise rounds I'm going to give myself a chance to get out of that Road Hole bunker. I'm obviously not going to be practising anything off the edges, but obviously stay away.

Q. On the Mondays after majors, what's your process for processing it?

WILL ZALATORIS: It's funny. I don't sleep that great Sunday nights. Saturdays I sleep great going into the tournament. Sunday nights, in particular, I'm pretty much up till probably 4:00 or 5:00.

It's not that I'm sitting there stewing, it's just trying to come down from the adrenaline. While I'm playing it, I don't feel it. When I was in those last couple holes against Matt or even in the playoff with Justin, I don't feel that big of an adrenaline push. Obviously I want to win. I'm as focused as I possibly can be, but it's the coming down for me that's hard.

Majors feel like two weeks just by themselves, but when you're in contention, they feel like they're three weeks in themselves. It typically takes me until about Wednesday or Thursday until I start feeling normal.

It's something we've learned in our schedule is that I need to take weeks off after majors. Obviously if I've been in contention, it's worn me out pretty hard. You know, the PGA was a really hard one to swallow because I was that close against Matt. He went out and got it and played some great golf. I have no regrets. I don't ever have regrets walking off the golf course, especially in majors, but when it comes to this past U.S. Open, like I said in earlier press conferences, that shot that Matt hit hitting out of the bunker and making par there was incredible.

I thought I made my putt with eight feet to go, six feet to go, a foot to go, and it just happened to stay out on the left.

Q. So if every kind of person is different, would you say that

maybe you're not the kind of person who agonises over coming close?

WILL ZALATORIS: No, there's a lot of agony on Mondays and Tuesdays, don't worry.

(Laughter).

I think it's -- if anything, kind of what I said with the first -- with my first second-place finish at the Masters, it was such an incredible experience that it was kind of an arrival. The second one was affirmation. And then the third one, it really gave me a lot of belief that I can be as good as I want to be.

So I think that it's a very tough pill to swallow because I would pay a lot of money for about an inch and a half in those three majors considering that I've basically missed out on three majors by three shots. But that's what motivates me. It's why I get up early. It's why even on off weeks I'm still grinding.

It's something that has fuelled my fire for sure, and I know that eventually I'm going to get one one day. We've been this close. That's what I alluded to earlier. I'm not even in double digit majors, and we're talking about me having four runners-up in majors here. I think I'll take that resume, but obviously I'd like to replace some of the silver medals with some gold medals.

OLIVIA MCMILLAN: Will, we really appreciate your time today. Wish you the best of luck at The 150th Open.

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