

Men's Olympic Golf Competition

Tuesday, 27 July 2021

Saitama City, Saitama, Japan

Kasumigaseki Country Club

Corey Conners

Mackenzie Hughes

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with questions. Just some opening statements about representing your country and having a chance to go for a medal here at the Olympics game.

COREY CONNERS: It's a great honor anytime you can represent your country and this is kind of the biggest stage to be able to do that so I'm really excited to be here. Really excited to be here with Mac, close friend. I think we're both playing really well heading here coming into this week and I like our chances to get on the podium and look forward to having a good week. But quite an honor to be here representing Canada and I know a lot of people back home are cheering us on.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Just like he said, I think that's, this is the highest stage that you could represent your country on and I'm not sure either of us thought that this was a possibility when we were growing up, so really cool to be here. And, yeah, to do it alongside Corey, who is a great friend of mine, couldn't ask for much more.

Q. The Canadian golf population is a very proud golf population. Curious if you feel like you are kind of always representing Canada, even when you're just playing in an any TOUR event.

COREY CONNERS: I would say I definitely do. We get a lot of support week-in and week-out from people all across Canada. So definitely proud to represent Canada every week on TOUR. Definitely feel a lot of support every week and no different here, but a little bit more so.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I think that people tend to think that hockey is our No. 1 sport, which I think we're probably the most passionate about, but I think from a numbers standpoint we have more golfers than we do hockey players. So it's a huge sport in Canada and we definitely feel that support when we're playing on the PGA TOUR



and it's been amazing. I think that just because we have not quite as many guys maybe as, say, the U.S. would have on the PGA TOUR, you definitely feel like, if there's only four or five of us playing in a given week or something like that, you definitely feel like there's a little bit of extra support behind you just because of the popularity of golf in Canada and just kind of how few of us there are, I guess, in comparison to some of the other country. But that number's growing very quickly and hopefully we'll have a bunch of guys on the PGA TOUR here soon.

Q. This wasn't the actual question, but what percentage of hockey players play golf?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: It's a very high percentage. I think hockey players make great golfers so maybe that's why we're starting to produce some really great players here. They're starting to realize that you can maybe do both. And Corey and I both played hockey growing up and it's still one of my favorite sports ever but golf worked out all right for us.

Q. Question for both of you. Has it been difficult at all or what's it been like to have such a good week at St. George's, come off that, and all of a sudden ramp up for something that's also special?

COREY CONNERS: I think that we both can take a lot of positives away from the week at The Open Championship at The Royal St. George's. Knew this was following it. So it's exciting that this is here. I think the state of our games makes it a little more exciting and, yeah, it will be pretty fun. It's cool, we had a week off to kind of think about it and get rested up and get ready to go for this week, so yeah, definitely very excited and it's going to be fun.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I think that's just kind of how it is these days because if you look at our Super Season, if you will, I mean every month we have a giant, we have a big event. Starting at THE PLAYERS we have had a major it seems like every four weeks. So to have the Olympics following a major seems quite normal, it just seems like we have another major and it seems like that's all we have played this year is one major after the other. I think we're kind of used to that, like having a big week kind of winding



down and then gearing back up and I think we're both kind of used to that and ready for that challenge.

Q. You guys both played the Masters for the first time you don't leave Augusta thinking, man, what a great week, I am now a Masters participant. But you do leave here thinking I'm an Olympian now. What's the, why is it different like that?

COREY CONNERS: I think it's just such a unique experience and the Masters happens every year. It's probably a goal of both of ours as junior golfers and amateurs golfers to try to earn our way to Augusta one day. This was a little, well, golf hasn't been in the Olympics for a number of years, since whatever, before 2016, but once that happened I was definitely excited to try and qualify for a team and I think we're definitely going to leave here and regardless of the performance going to take a lot from the week and being able to call myself a Olympian is definitely really special. I think the Olympics only happens once every four years and it's maybe even tougher to qualify for than Augusta, depending upon where you're from. But, yeah, a pretty cool opportunity and going to be a good experience.

Q. Both of you grew up in southwest Ontario. Have either of you received any special messages from those in your hometown or maybe even other past Olympians, any support messages from back home specifically?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I haven't really, I guess, gotten anything super notable, but definitely tons of support from my hometown and people in Canada and I just feel like, yeah, people are very into the Olympics. Every country is a little bit different, I guess, but I think in Canada we're very proud of our, very proud of our own and very proud of our athletes and you definitely get that sense that all across the country, whether you're a golfer or not, people are pulling for you just as a Canadian. So it's been really cool and it will be fun to be in the mix come Sunday for one of those medals.

COREY CONNERS: Pretty much the same here. I know a lot of people back in my hometown are cheering me on. I got some pictures, people with Olympic flags kind of hanging outside their house, and that's really cool. I got a picture of a billboard that is in town with a picture of me, kind of, you know, cheering me on, supporting me. I know everyone in the town is behind me. And I think a lot of communities across Canada, like he said, whether golf fans are not, I think Canadians are very patriotic and they will be rooting really hard for us. And, yeah, it will be fun to have that support.

Also talked a little bit with David Hearn and Graham Delaet who played in the Olympics for Canada in Rio and just kind of picked their brain a little bit about their experience. And, yeah.

Q. Question for both you guys. When you were growing up obviously golf wasn't in the Olympics. Do you guys have a sport, I'm going to go with other than hockey, since you guys both played hockey, that you may have wanted to compete in, you kind of dreamed of competing in in the Olympics?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I wouldn't say, yeah, probably not. I think that some of them, like, gosh, like bobsled seems kind of cool. I don't know. But it also seems super scary going down an ice tube at 120 miles an hour. So yeah, I don't have a sport that I guess I thought about playing as an Olympian or dreamed of other than hockey or something like that. But, yeah, I just remember watching those sports, though, and thinking they were so cool and they were so, they're so unique to the Olympic games. Like, you don't see bobsled on TV very often or you don't see skeleton or ski jumping. I just thought they were all so cool, the events they had. I always had a lot of fun watching the Olympic games and I hardly missed a minute when it was on. So those are my memories of watching the Olympics.

COREY CONNERS: Yeah, it would be tough for me to say I kind of dreamed of playing something else other than hockey. I was a pretty good badminton player but was realistic enough to know when I watched the Olympic badminton players play that I had a lot of work to do to try and get there, so I knew that wasn't really a possibility.

Love watching a lot of the track and field events. Competed in track and field in high school and elementary school. But, again, knew it was not really realistic that I was going to have a shot at being an Olympian, but it would be pretty cool watching on TV the track and field events, the 100 meter, fastest people in the world is pretty exciting. And like he said, there's so many really cool sports that are, don't receive a lot of coverage throughout the year, but the Olympics, they're on the stage and it's great to watch people who are the best in the world at what they do.

Q. Your thoughts on the golf course here?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Golf course is amazing. Really like the way it looks. And the golf course is in the best shape you could ever have because they have not had a round of golf here since May 1st is what I was told. So hard to find many divots out there and the greens are perfect. So it's, I love the way it sets up. It's right in front

of you. Not really overly complicated I guess. The greens have a lot of undulation and slope, but there's not really much tricky about it. You just got to hit really good golf shots and put the ball in the fairway because the rough is quite tricky to play out of. So yeah, very excited for the challenge this week and I feel like it suits my game pretty well.

COREY CONNERS: Echo a lot of those things. I really love the golf course. It's in incredible condition. Visually it looks good to my eye. Greens are rolling really nicely. There's definitely some tricks. If you get the ball in the rough or can be much more challenging around some of the greens. There's some pretty deep bunkers around the greens. But it is right in front of you and, yeah, I feel like it sets up well for my game also.

Q. Are there any Canadian golf courses it compares to?

COREY CONNERS: It's hard to say. It has some similarities to courses we play on TOUR, I would say. But the grass is a little different in the fairways and rough than we see in Canada, so it's hard for me to get past that and kind of compare it to something there. But it is a really good golf course.

Q. The differences playing here, is it just having Canada on your golf bag, having the leaf on your hat, does that make a difference? Just what's the feeling that you've had so far this week compared to other weeks out on your career.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Well, I think that, I mean, right away you're not just playing for yourself. There's a different sense of unity and pride of being part of a team. Even though Corey and I aren't competing with each other or we're competing together, you just have that sense of unity as a team with coaches, staff, with Golf Canada. There's a sense of community there. So I think it's a bit different in that sense. And then, yeah, we are here competing for hardware for our country, basically, and there's not like, you know, week-in and week-out on the PGA TOUR you play for FedExCup points and money and this week it's not about any of that. It's just about, yeah, making that podium. So it's a bit of a different feel that way and you need to get off to a good start and get yourself in a good position. So it will be a little bit of a different feel, but at the end of the day it will be a lot of the same stuff that we do on week-to-week basis, just the stage feels a bit bigger.

COREY CONNERS: Yeah, definitely feels special to put on the Canada shirt every morning, walking around with the Canadian flag on the golf bag and hat. It's definitely a

special feeling. Been fortunate to represent Canada a number of times in amateur golf and junior golf and special every single time, but this has a little something extra and it definitely feels amazing to be representing Canada and like he said, part of a team, but still obviously competing individually.

Q. Given the amount of Canadian pride you guys have both experienced over your careers, do you have any sense of what it must be like for Hideki this week to not only be playing Olympics in Japan, but doing so as the Masters champion?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I'm not sure you could ever relate to what he goes through. I think that -- I mean not even just here but week-in, week-out on the PGA TOUR we see the throngs of Japanese media that follow him wherever he goes. It's quite impressive to do what he does and play as well as he does, with the microscope on him all the time. And I have to think that the Masters win probably lifted some of that pressure off of him so I feel like maybe this week he's still under a great deal of pressure to perform in his home country, but he also did bring a Green Jacket to Japan so that's really cool and I was really happy for him because he's heck of a player and a good person so that was good to see. But he's definitely under the spotlight here, but I guess rightfully so because he's really good.

Q. I think I overheard you guys say you're not staying in the village. I'm curious if you gave it any thought and what kind of was the thought process on where you wanted to stay this week?

COREY CONNERS: Gave it some thought. I think staying in the village would be a really cool experience, but thought for my preparation and being ready to play and focusing just on golf, we are here to win a medal, and I thought staying in the hotel, a little bit closer to the golf course, was the best option. And hopefully we'll maybe be able to go check out the village, but here to focus on golf first and foremost and the hotel is the best spot to take care of that.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I think had it been a little closer it would have been a pretty easy decision to make, but at the same time we both have our wives here this week and they're not allowed in the village, so that makes it really tough. And we're both happy to have them here, so that definitely factored into our decision.

Q. How was your trip, did it go smoothly, any interesting adventures in your travels?

COREY CONNERS: Pretty smoothly for me. I actually stayed in Europe after The Open Championship, and with the thought that it was a little closer to here, but it was still

a 12-hour flight. The time change I think I've been able to adjust a little quicker, not having to completely change the time. But pretty smooth, straight flight here and had a few nice days of rest after The Open Championship.

Q. How closely have you been watching some of the other Olympic sports, some of the swimming medals early on and any celebrations to go along with those or any reaction to just seeing some of the other sports in the Games?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, we turned it on a little bit. But I would say between preparing and trying to do what we're doing out here it's tough to get the TV on for too many hours in the day. But it has been cool to see that Canada has got on the board with a few medals and had some great performances, so pretty fired up about that. And obviously Corey and I are hoping to add to that tally. So yeah, very cool to see and to be able to kind of watch those different events.

Q. Curious, your wives are here. Are they like signed up as your coaches or your managers this week?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, they're personal coaches.

Q. Have they taken advantage of that?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Oh, yeah, there's lots of on-course instruction out there and I know that my wife only expects the ball to go in the hole from anywhere on the golf course. So it doesn't matter where I am, it needs to go in the hole or it's not up to par. So I'm working on it. Working on being perfect out there.

Q. Either one of you can take this, but you look at all those other sports and you have a pretty good sense of who is supposed to win the gold, will win the gold or silver. Comes to golf, how do you explain that one where the medals aren't exactly predictable?

COREY CONNERS: That's something that I've kind of been thinking about watching some of the events where there's some heavy favorites or it's a disappointment for someone not to win gold or at least win a medal. And golf is a different sport. A lot of people playing for those medals, and I think some days you have it, some days you don't, anyone can have a good week at any time. Hopefully both of us can have a really great week this week and we'll be up there.

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