

Sanderson Farms Championship

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Jackson, Mississippi, USA

Country Club of Jackson

Peter Malnati

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Peter Malnati into the interview room. He is making his ninth consecutive start at the Sanderson Farms Championship. He won in his first start here in 2015 and he also has a runner-up in 2020. You make no bones about how much you love this place. Talk about being back at the Sanderson Farms.

PETER MALNATI: Yeah, I just had the opportunity to say this on the radio, but I think people, especially golfers who go back to places where they've won, they talk about being figuratively adopted by the community, adopted by the fans, and I've been literally adopted by Jackson and Jackson Country Club.

The first year I came here, nine years ago now, the first year I came here I stayed with a family that lives here in the CCJ community, and now every year, I think there was one year five or six years ago my wife couldn't make it, and we both got chastised because we are part of the family here. When my wife didn't come, we were breaking up that family, so we got in trouble.

We've been literally adopted by this community. So that's really special.

Not just the family that we stay with, either. When I come out here to play, I played seven holes yesterday in a practice round, and it was late in the day, there was hardly anybody watching, but at least five or six times, someone came to me and said, Peter, welcome back, good luck, rooting for you this week. That's just something that I don't get, I don't get everywhere we go. I've actually got a nice little bit of anonymity. I've been successful enough to stay on TOUR but not so much that anyone has ever heard of me.

When I come here and can feel the community behind me rooting for me, supporting me, that is really nice.

Q. What is it about this specific golf course that you like so much?



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PETER MALNATI: Well, I've always said it, and it's really not hyperbole at all, these are the best greens on the PGA TOUR, and I've made a lot of my success on the TOUR has been with the putter, and so to come in and play here, I think the superintendent here, Stanley Reedy, and these greens, despite any challenges that get thrown at them -- I think the first year I was here, they had had monsoon rains the week before and week of the tournament. Greens were still perfect.

This year I hear they haven't had a drop of rain since like early July. The greens are still perfect.

Anytime I get to putt on greens like this, I get excited.

But the golf course is great. It's just an old, classic golf course, tree-lined, thick rough, no tricks, and I've really liked it.

Q. You entered the week No. 109 on the FedExCup, eligibility points list, so this is a big week and a big fall for you. Talk about fighting to stay in the Top 125 and also ultimately to hopefully get into No. 51 through 60 to get into those Signature Events, the first two.

PETER MALNATI: That's right. I've had a very up-and-down year. I've had some highlights, played really well at Pebble Beach, missed some time with some -- we had our second child, and it wasn't an easy transition. Missed some time, had a back injury back last fall, lots of things.

I didn't come out of the Wyndham Championship where I wanted to be. When I came out I was 116 after the Wyndham Championship.

That five-week break between the Wyndham and the start of the FedExCup fall was an intense five-week period for me. A lot of reflecting. It's been, I guess, maybe since 2018 that I've really been that late in the year -- been this late in the year facing the challenge of keeping my job. So those five weeks were pretty intense.

Coming into the fall, I really chose to look at it as --



obviously I can't hide the fact, I've got to keep my job. I have to finish in the Top 125, so there is that. But I also get this fall, I'm going to play six times. I played at the Fortinet, I'm playing here and then I'll play four more tournaments after this. That gives me six opportunities to qualify for Maui.

A win gets you to Maui, which is still to me the highlight of my TOUR career was my week I spent in Maui. I think it's an incredible place with even more meaning now, given the fires. I want to be a part of help going back to rebuild that.

I've got six opportunities to qualify for Maui, and then ultimately to get into that top 51 through 60 and get those spots into the AT&T Pebble Beach and the Genesis at Riviera, I think the fall -- for me, this fall carries -- clearly starting where I did on the brink of keeping my job versus not, this fall carries tremendous meaning for me, but I think for every player, this will be the most meaningful and impactful fall that we've had.

It may take a couple years for the greater community, our fans to sort of realize what's going on, but I think the FedExCup fall is going to carry a lot of excitement moving forward.

Q. You're off to a good start, T11 in Napa. Talk about the state of your game.

PETER MALNATI: Yeah, the work that I was able -- to have a break in the middle of a FedExCup season was strange. Not being a part of the Playoffs and having that time off was really strange. But I had time to do some work.

I've had a pretty good year statistically once I get close to the hole. Like my short game and my putting have been positive.

But the farther I get from the hole, the worse my statistics are. I've driven the ball terribly for the body of the season.

I had an opportunity in the middle of the season to do some work on that. Like I don't normally get a five-week break. So I worked on that a lot. I drove the ball pretty well in Napa and got a good finish out of it. I think got 65 FedExCup points, which is huge. Still some work to do. My thoughts are looking toward Maui and those Next 10 in out of the fall.

But yeah, I think my putting and short game are as sharp as ever. My long game is developing. It's coming along. I'm not necessarily -- you're not going to confuse we many Jon Rahm when we're hitting balls on the range yet, but it's becoming serviceable. Like I was getting to the point

where I was driving it so poorly I couldn't save myself with good short game, but now I'm driving it well enough that it gives my short game, my wedges, my putting an opportunity to shine, and that was on display in Napa. I didn't drive it great, but I drove it well enough and got a good week out of that, so I'm excited to just build on that.

Q. Going off of the conversation you just had about the FedExCup Fall, you've seen many iterations of what this portion of the schedule has looked like, and as a player director you were a big part of what this was going to look like. In terms of expectations of what it would be versus reality, now that we're into the second event of the FedExCup Fall for you and maybe some of the reaction that you've heard from players.

PETER MALNATI: I actually was pleasantly surprised in Napa because change no matter what, no matter how good something is, no matter how much of a no-brainer, change is hard for people.

I knew that obviously there would be some push-back. I read an article where a player who finished in the Top 125 going to Napa was very disappointed that he was playing for his card in Napa.

We knew there would be that push-back, obviously, but progress doesn't happen without change, but change is hard.

I was really impressed in Napa with some of the conversations I heard. I heard people talking about -- I played with the defending champion here at the Sanderson Farms Championship on Saturday in Napa, Mackenzie Hughes. Mackenzie finished in that dreadful spot, No. 51, so he didn't quite get the guaranteed access to all the Signature Events. I was asking him, what's your fall going to look like, and his answer without missing a beat, didn't pout, didn't whine, he said, I'm planning to play this, this and this, but if I need to play more to stay in the top 60, I will, and I was like, good, you get it. Like that's great.

I heard other players talking about the opportunity -- the guys who weren't in that top 51 to 60 have the opportunity to play their way into that and get some starts in these Signature Events.

Heard my caddie's brother, who caddies for Jason Dufner, Duf looks at this, former major champion, who has obviously not had the year he wants to have, but he looks at this like, I've got chance to keep my card. I finished 170th going into Wyndham, and here I am, I've got four, five, six starts to keep my card and I think it's great. So people are getting it.

The other thing that was really cool is I don't know if the fans understand what's going on yet, and I don't know that they will too maybe a year or two, but some of the volunteers in Napa who have been a part that have event for years are like, this is exciting. We're part of something so meaningful.

Being the first event of the FedExCup season was kind of their thing and they thought that was meaningful, but now it's like, we have got storylines now. We've got guys fighting for their job. We've got guys fighting to move up.

I think obviously change, hard, but it's working. Like it really is. You can already see it.

I think that's really exciting.

Q. Looking ahead to next week at Shriners, it was announced today that Lexi Thompson is going to be receiving a sponsor exemption to be in the field. Have you heard that news, and what is your reaction?

PETER MALNATI: I just got a text this morning, so I don't know much about it. I don't even know -- obviously I know that Lexi at times has been one of the top players on the LPGA Tour, and she's obviously very athletic. Distance won't be a problem. She'll hit it far enough.

My gut reaction when I saw that was like the tournament reaching to try to get -- just trying to drum up interest.

I think I understand that, if that is the case. I don't think we're going to need to resort to gimmicks to drum up interest. I shouldn't have said that. I don't know that having Lexi play is a gimmick, but I don't think the tournaments are going to have to go to those kind of lengths to drum up interest and get storylines that they can sell because I think these events are actually going to have a lot of meaning.

Like I said, change is hard for everyone at every level, so I assume if you're a host organization of a tournament, if you're the Century Club here in Jackson, if you're Wayne Sanderson Farms, you just don't know right now for sure what you have anymore because the fall is completely reimagined.

I'm pretty sure that the fall is going to be a blockbuster hit. I think it's going to be very successful. But these tournaments, they don't know yet.

Having Lexi play certainly will get a lot of headlines, and if that's the goal for Shriners and the host organization in Vegas there, that's great. Obviously she's a professional athlete. She's accomplished a lot. It's not like -- I mean,

who knows what'll happen. She may go play really well and it'll be huge. She may play absolutely terrible and finish 132nd.

Either way, she's a professional golfer. She has a spot in the field. The tournament is -- if it gets them the attention that they want and it works out positively for them, it's great, all for it.

Q. Is the family out here this week?

PETER MALNATI: Oh, yeah.

Q. Just curious how it impacts your week and if it changes your mentality, if it's more fun. What's it like having them out here?

PETER MALNATI: It's definitely more fun. It is harder. Napa, I went to Napa by myself because it's a one-week trip out to California is hard with the two boys. So I went to Napa by myself, and in Napa, I practiced on my own schedule, I slept on my own schedule. Those weeks are important for me.

But they are infinitely less fun. Like they're important. I'm probably more productive.

I think the perfect balance for me and my wife and I have talked about this, I think the perfect balance for me is probably a two-to-one ratio. If I can have my family out two out of three weeks and then have one by myself when I'm traveling a lot, that's probably really good, but then that leaves her one week that she's by herself with two little nuggets, and that's not easy, either.

But I love having them. It's so much fun.

It's impossible at the end of a bad round of golf for it to linger when you get to go home and see the two boys. It just doesn't linger.

But my ultimate dream in golf, like I have a lot of different goals on different levels, but the one thing that I really, really want is I want that feeling of holing out on the 72nd hole to win a golf tournament and having my boys run out on the green. Like I really want that.

They've got to be here for that to happen. So they're here this week, they're going to Vegas next week, so let's go.

Q. Obviously they're so young, so you're not sure exactly what they will or will not remember from being out here during these weeks. Obviously you've got plenty more time. But what do you want them to remember about being out here with you?

support this community and the hospital and keep this going. I'm really thankful for that.

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PETER MALNATI: I want them to know that I really genuinely enjoy what I do. Like I want them to see me have fun. I want them to know that -- I want them to know that their daddy is trying his hardest, and he is giving this all he has. I want them to see me be great, but I want them to know that I'm content with just being my best, them being who they are, and if I win, obviously I just said that's one of my goals is to win a tournament and have them run out. But I want them to know that I love them just as much whether we miss a cut, go home on Friday, or whether they run out on the green on 18. I want them to see me give the same effort either way and enjoy the game, enjoy what I get to do and be appreciative for what I get to do the same either way.

That's kind of what I want. I want them to -- I talk a lot to my boys -- my older boy will turn four, Hatcher will turn four in a couple weeks. I talk to him a lot about the difference between being happy and being content. I think we get confused a lot. We think we're always striving for happiness; we've got to be happy. We're not supposed to be happy all the time. Things happen in life that are serious, that are sad, that make you not -- you're not supposed to be happy.

But if you're going about things the right way and you're doing everything that you can, you can have something disappointing happen and still be content, and that's really, I think, what we're striving for. That's what I want. I want my boys to see me live in such a way that I'm content with what I'm doing and that they can be -- when they're old enough to get it, they can be proud of me and they can look at daddy and say, he did things right, he did it the right way.

And I really hope they get to run out on the green and give me a hug for winning a tournament, too.

But that's the whole contentment versus happiness. I want them to see me work in such a way that I can be content and they can be proud of that.

THE MODERATOR: Peter, we appreciate your time. Best of luck this week.

PETER MALNATI: One more thing. Did you guys know that Joe Sanderson sponsored this tournament and he didn't even -- he knew -- this was one of his lines. He goes, I don't sell chicken on the Golf Channel. I run a golf tournament because it brings the state of Mississippi together and we give money to the hospital. I know Joe Sanderson Farms is not his company anymore, but I'm just really thankful that the new ownership Wayne Sanderson still wants to be part of this event and they still want to

