

Sentry Tournament of Champions

Tuesday, January 3, 2023
Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA
Plantation Course at Kapalua

Will Zalatoris

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Will Zalatoris to the interview room here at the Sentry Tournament of Champions. You got your first PGA TOUR victory at the FedEx St. Jude championship, which allowed you to get here. Just kind of talk about what it's like to be starting your year off at the Sentry Tournament of Champions, Maui, the course, all that good stuff.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, it's been an interesting four months, to say the least, since Memphis. But, yeah, beautiful place. This is probably the tournament that I watched the most growing up, just given the fact that you're watching it at night back home.

So pretty cool seeing some of the holes for the first time after all the years of watching it on TV. So a lot of fun and obviously pretty happy to be here, given the win and then the last three months of being off.

THE MODERATOR: And then how were the holidays? You got married.

WILL ZALATORIS: I did. Yeah, it was great. Caitlyn and I got married in December. It kind of feels like we've been married for awhile. We've been together for so long. But it was a lot of fun, a lot of great celebration.

THE MODERATOR: Awesome. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. When you're on outside looking in at this tournament, you're playing well, you're having success, but you just can't quite kick down the door, how satisfying is it to finally be here and be part of this?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah. It's such a cool spot. I think I've just been so close so many times, so I think, if anything, after having the time off, it's kind of hard to remind myself of all the second places.



But, yeah, it's pretty cool to be with all the champions from this past year and then obviously the guys who made it to East Lake as well. So this is the best of the best.

Q. It's exclusive, right? There's only 30 guys at the TOUR Championship, but this is otherwise the smallest gathering you have all year. So do you feel like you're finally in the club?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, a little bit. I mean, you see these, we see each other a lot throughout the year, but it's kind of fun this week playing practice rounds in carts and kind of roaming around with the boys and we're all making jokes about maybe being a little rusty.

But like I said, this is the best of the best. So it's fun being here with, playing against the best competition in the world.

Q. How are you balancing just having fun and easing into the season versus this is a huge tournament and there's a lot at stake?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah. I think coming off of injury, I think it's mainly just kind of getting my feet wet again. I feel really good with everything. I had a couple really great sessions at home. I've learned a lot about my body, probably more than I think I ever wanted to. But the speed's the same, everything feels really good. So just keep doing what we're doing and let the next win get in the way.

Q. Can you recap exactly what you learned about your body in terms of what was wrong, how you fixed it, and do you have any issues going forward?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah. No, I spent some time with Dr. Greg Rose at TPI. We basically kind of went through a whole assessment of seeing where I'm at and it was really I think keeping longevity in mind as opposed to anything else. It's hard when you're the No. 1 player strokes gained tee to green this past year, or at least approach, to want to go in and say, hey, you need to make some changes.

So of course whenever we maybe mention something that you maybe want to change, I think all of us kind of had



some red flags go up. But I think the big thing for me is we spent a lot of time understanding the pressures of my golf swing and understanding how I push off my right side. And I do it later than a lot of guys, so what that does for someone with a lot of side bend is that gets my right hip high and on my spine's tilted back, and so as Dr. Rose said, duh, no wonder I had a back issue.

But it's a good thing that it was just a motor pattern as opposed to something that was structurally wrong because that's something that you can fix just like that. I was given a 12-week recovery period and I probably, if I needed to push it, I probably could have made it nine, but I don't think anyone's ever complained about taking too long coming back from injury.

So my speed is, actually I'm playing a shorter driver, about an inch and a quarter, but I've actually got the exact same speed, so eventually once I go back to the 46, I'll actually be net up speed once I go back to my original gamer.

Q. Why did you go to the shorter driver?

WILL ZALATORIS: It just helps with turning around the corner a little bit. Having the longer lever makes a wider arc, so missing shots out to the right. So giving me a little bit more time helps bring shots back to on line.

Q. You said it was not structural it was motor?

WILL ZALATORIS: Just more of a motor pattern than anything. Like I said, the right hip got a little high with side bend. Side bend is really not a bad thing as long as you do it right, and I just wasn't doing it correctly. And so really just trying to, there's just a few things here or there that I needed to change, really just at setup. I'm not really focused on anything when it comes to how I do it in the golf swing. Even though it is a motor pattern thing, it's how I set up at address is how I'll fix that.

Q. I was just going to ask what you're changing in your actual golf swing or preparation to account for the new information that you have, but it sounds like it's more of a setup thing than anything else?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah. So I basically am trying to get more, be a little bit more centered as opposed to having kind of ball forward with more spine tilt at address. So I'm trying to get more centered over it and work more around my right side, so more of a turn as opposed to kind of a lateral shift, because like I said, when my right hip gets high and the spine tilts back, you're now all of a sudden creating all that stress on your back.

So it was actually nice because I was able to bring the ball

flight down, which, I mean, I know living in Texas you're used to hitting the ball low, but it's doing it by itself as opposed to having to manipulate it. So it was actually kind of a nice fix.

Q. When you have a break like that, what do you miss most?

WILL ZALATORIS: Competition. I mean, I was just so bored when I was out. Like, I felt like I would go out and hit a few chips or maybe have a few beers and -- or have a few putts and then maybe need to go grab a few beers with my boys.

But, yeah, especially being in contention as much as I was last year there's just no better feeling than it. Whether you win or lose, it's just what you practice for. So not being able to have a club in my hand for a couple months was, I don't think I've done that probably since I was like eight or nine.

But watching some of my friends play, going to the Presidents Cup, kind of keeping my mind active and spending some time with the guys back home, even just riding around in a cart while they were playing, keep my mind active even though my body wouldn't let me. Then once I came back, it was pretty easy to get the competitive juices flowing.

Q. Did you ever have any back trouble before or did this come out of the blue?

WILL ZALATORIS: July of 2021 I had an issue there, but that was muscular not structural. So I think this one was, really what I was told it was out of the blue. I did a pretty deep dive with Damon, my trainer, with Dr. Rose, Dr. Duffy. I mean, we've looked at everything that I was doing to make sure I was doing the right things and we were checking all the boxes and it was just strictly a motor pattern thing, which is kind of a good thing and a bad thing because it's, when you're that, when I was hitting the ball the way that I was, it's hard to want to change anything, but at the same time, I actually saw some benefits.

I'm more efficient in my golf swing. So that's why my speed is the same actually with the shorter driver. It's just because of the efficiency now of how I push into a golf ball.

Q. When did you resume playing and how much have you played since then?

WILL ZALATORIS: So December 1st, I think, was the first day I was cleared for full activity and really just have been doing as much as I can since then.

Q. Pick up any new hobbies?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I found the end of Netflix.

No, we've been pretty busy at home. I mean, obviously getting married, and then I've got a dog at home now, so it's been fun.

Q. For us we're going to make a big deal about this is the start of a new era on the PGA TOUR and the elevated events and a whole new schedule and all of that. Do you feel any of that? Does it feel different, what you're embarking on this season?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yes and no because it's already kind of been that way. I think we're really, you know, you've kind of, like I was talking with some of the guys earlier, it's like there's some of my friends that I only saw two or three times last year. So part of it is because of playing the schedule that I was playing, you're kind of already playing in elevated events because we just call them invitationals.

So now we have a series of elevated events where now you're going to have the same guys show up for 20 events a year, and I think really it's just trying to get, you know, I know you guys have probably heard this a million times, but getting the top guys to show up together at the same time.

Why does F1 work? Well, you know Lewis Hamilton's going to be there at every single race. So is Max Verstappen. So now when you have these elevated events, you know that the top guys are going to be there, as opposed to maybe one guy plays one event in the fall, you would almost be surprised that they're playing.

Well, now we have a structure to where you know these guys are going to be here this many times and they need to be here one time in the fall, give or take. So I think in reality it doesn't even, like my schedule doesn't change at all, actually. It's just kind of a rebrand or a rename, however you want to look at it.

Q. Talking about your friends you didn't see very much and there's still another 30 TOUR events out there that don't have that elevated status or they're not going to get a lot of the stars. Do you worry about the viability of those tournaments? And is there going to be another TOUR for your buddies to play?

WILL ZALATORIS: I wouldn't put it as not allowed to play. I would put it more in the sense of our premier events have our premier players and we're at a limited field and you have your regular TOUR events and we need to play three of 'em. So you're going to see us at plenty of the other

events.

So I think, if anything, you're just trying to make sure that our top guys, you're seeing as much as possible together because when you have 47 events, you want to be careful of maybe watering down the product, and now we're just making sure that our product is as strong as possible. And, quite frankly, no, I'm not worried about these other events, worrying about their viability or whatever it is going forward.

If you look at our title sponsors going forward, next year we have the same amount as we have had in other years and we're locked in for a pretty long time with a lot of the other ones.

So like I said, I think having these top guys show up together is only going to make our product better as a whole.

Q. Do you anticipate you'll skip any of the elevated events?

WILL ZALATORIS: I don't think so. I think -- I got to listen to my body this year. I don't plan on skipping any of 'em. I think, you know, with being in the room in Delaware, being on the PAC, I think me skipping an event is only going to be because of health-related issues than it will be anything else. Because why would I -- I mean sorry to sound like a little ignorant here, but why would I turn down any of the nine events where we're playing for 20 million dollars against the best players in the world? You know, when I'm at home I would be playing golf anyway, so I might as well play it against some of the best players in the world.

Q. Is there anything you have to do warming up and stretching differently than, is it a different process now getting ready to play?

WILL ZALATORIS: More post-hab work for sure. Pre-round stuff a lot of the same. Like I said, because we checked all the boxes in terms of the pre-round, what I do in the gym with the activations.

But the after, if I'm going to play as much as I would like to play, I need to make sure that maybe my hips don't get out of line type thing. So a lot of work after I'm done with a round is going to be crucial to make sure that I'm able to play four, five weeks in a row like I like to.

Q. Is there possibly a scenario where, if all the top guys are playing all the same tournaments, that it gets old or it loses, it loses the amount of buzz that it has maybe in the first time you go around? This becomes the new norm and it's --



WILL ZALATORIS: I see your point.

Q. It's not a point, I'm --

WILL ZALATORIS: No, no. I, no, I see your point. But if you're sick of the top guys playing evens each other then maybe go watch something else? Like, you know what I mean? Like I think that's what makes the majors so much fun is you look up on a leaderboard and typically you've got a lot of the top -- or leaderboard at majors or leaderboards at in the playoffs or whatever -- now instead of having 'em just stuck in four weeks, five weeks whatever it is, now you're going to have it spread out throughout the year.

I think that's, there's more implications for each week now. Which I think if anything will now make people be incentivized to watch more. Because there's going to be more at stake in the fall going forward. I mean that's something that we obviously, why we went to the wraparound season.

So obviously we're going away from that, but now these guys are going to be fighting to obviously playing for you know, whatever it may be, these elevated events going forward, if you will.

So that's where I think every week now has an implication going forward. Now if you have every week has an implication, now you have more of the top guys together, this is the best way we can promote our product.

Q. I wouldn't call it a point I think I was reaching actually. But what made me think of it is, you brought up the majors, is we have these moments with all the top guys and it's cool. And I'm just thinking aloud here in terms of how much separation you would get from guys being there week after week after week, 17, 18 times a year. It's still better than the alternative.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I mean if you get sick of watching football, I mean they got 18 weeks too. It's the same thing. Well 18, however they're playing now.

But I think this is a really good thing for us going forward. Because as long as we can get the top guys playing together we're going to have our best product. If you're not allowing our top players to play against each other, then all of a sudden you're going to get to the end of the year -- and I understand what you mean by there could be some implications of, you know, hey, these guys are finally going head-to-head. Well we're going to give that to you January through August.

Q. Just because you said that, going forward, because

this is so critical getting to 2024, is the most critical part in your mind making sure that the people who aren't the top players yet have a chance to become that?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, you're talking to one that two years ago I don't think anyone had heard of me so of course. As long as we keep our avenue of college guys, Korn Ferry guys, guys who are coming up the ranks all the way through, like I was, up playing off sponsors invites, keep the pipeline going.

I mean, this is what makes us so great. It's a natural born competition. Any one of you guys can go Monday and try to beat one of us. So that's what makes this TOUR so great is any week anybody can win. And having 150 guys every single week where there's a chance to win, that's what got me here. So you can't, I don't ever want that to change.

Q. We got one guy, maybe two this week, Ryan Brehm will be one of them, who is playing in his first tournament that doesn't have a cut. I'm just trying to think if you recall what was the first for you when you got on TOUR? I'm sure it was a WGC or playoff event.

WILL ZALATORIS: It was the Match Play which I got out very quickly.

Q. Still didn't make it to the weekend?

WILL ZALATORIS: Luckily there was a tee time on Saturday, I think. No it started on Wednesday, so, no, I didn't make it to Saturday.

Q. What was your first stroke play no cut? If you recall.

WILL ZALATORIS: WGC Workday at Concession. And I was, that was week No. 6 of 7. So I was glad that I had a tee time that weekend.

THE MODERATOR: All right, appreciate the time as always.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

