

# The Sentry

Tuesday, December 31, 2024

Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA

Plantation Course at Kapalua

## Maverick McNealy

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Maverick McNealy into the interview room here at The Sentry, fresh off of his win at RSM Classic to make it here to Maui. Maverick, if you can talk about beginning your season here in Kapalua.

MAVERICK McNEALY: Well, it's the first time I've done it, and definitely hope it's not the last. Everyone who has ever told me about this tournament says, Once you play here once you're never going to want to miss it. And I can see why, it's pretty awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Your here first time as a professional. I think you probably played this course a little bit growing up. Do you have any experience here?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Yeah, my godfather's been actually a member at this golf course for I think 20 or 30 years now. We would always come here either usually in December after a Cisco event that I would do on the Big Island. So it's definitely a lot of great memories playing with friends and family and him around this golf course. Really excited to see it in tournament condition.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about the relief of getting your first win, and talk a little bit about your goals now for the 2025 season.

MAVERICK McNEALY: Yeah, it's definitely a little bit of relief, but it's mostly just excitement and adrenaline and a ton of fun. It was really anybody's ball game there at the end of that tournament, and it felt like it all happened so fast right at the end, two really good shots and it was over.

The best part was just going home and Thanksgiving celebrating with all my friends and family. We were barbecuing for Thanksgiving and Scout may have ended up in the pool before the barbecue, before the food was done. We just had a lot of fun. It was really cool to celebrate with everybody. Definitely want to do it again. I found out that winning is a lot more fun than not winning.

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

#### Q. You had options, why Scout?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Why Scout? Well, for one, Scout was right in between jobs, the timing worked out perfect. And he and I -- he's kind of the brother I go to with golf stuff. I'm the oldest of four. If I really want to get in deep philosophical challenging intellectual questions I go to Colt. If it's family stuff, kind of more of the intuitive side, it's Dakota. If it's golf, it's Scout. He's probably the best player out of the four of us and had some shoulder injuries and played high-level collegiate golf, and so that's probably why I went with him.

#### Q. You said it wasn't quite relief when you won, but I'm curious, a guy who obviously belongs on TOUR, been on TOUR for a while, successful golfer, when you don't have that win, what is that feeling of like waiting for it to happen? You still assume, like, it's obviously going to, or what is that kind of climb like?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I definitely appreciated the win because I realized how hard it is to win. I actually got to the point where my wife is, like, Stop talking about how hard it is, just go out and do what you're doing. That was the big lesson, was that I didn't do anything differently than what I've been doing, it just all kind of fell into place. I had lots of chances. I don't know, I wasn't really worried about not having won. I wasn't really thinking any less. I figured it would probably happen, just needed some stuff to go right. And also kind of figure that the first one's probably the hardest, probably like your first major whatever, each milestone, but Scout's actually been really helpful. My kind of engineering brain wants to do everything step by step by step, and he's like, Why can't we just skip to step 7 or step 8, there's nothing stopping us. So that really helped.

#### Q. What's step 7 and step 8?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I don't know. I just felt like the progression is you get your card, you keep your card, you start making a bunch of cuts, and then you start finishing in the top 10, start playing in the final group, couple chances to win, and then you win. He says, There's no reason why you can't win any given week. I tend to think pretty linearly,



and he's just, like, just go set your sights high.

**Q. I think I recall you said you were going to come over anyway, you were planning to be here for a family wedding, an actual ceremony, right, how did that go?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: So that was great. Maya and I got married last December 6th. It was just the two of us, our parents, photographer, and officiant. We decided we wanted to get married before we could plan a party. Planned the party for the one-year anniversary. And had -- actually Scout officiated, which was cool.

And it was awesome. It was, I guess, such a special day. We're in wedding season now, we're 29 and 26, so everyone's getting married. Had a lot of fun at weddings throughout the year, we just couldn't wait until it was our families and our friends and we knew everybody. And it was kind of like worlds colliding, all the people in her world and all the people in my world, and it was pretty special.

**Q. You didn't stay the whole time? Did you go home for awhile?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: No, so it was back and forth pretty quick. So, first week was Thanksgiving in La Quinta, back home for two days, and then the next week we had the wedding week in La Quinta again, and then had a five-day honeymoon in Lanai, and two weeks at home, and now we are here. So it's like the shortest off-season ever.

**Q. Are you much of a goal setter, and if so how have you reset, now that you have that win under your belt, your goals?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: I'm definitely a goal setter, but I set pretty shortsighted goals, things that I know I can do. I set goals, golf-wise, like physically, relationship-wise, business-wise, and then kind of give back, kind of one for each. And I do it quarterly, do it yearly, three years, and kind of tombstone goals.

I definitely ticked off a lot of goals that I had set for myself that I hadn't accomplished a few years ago. It was nice to get that first win. I wanted to be in the top 50, top 30. I wanted to be a feel like I was a really good ball-striker. I feel like I accomplished a lot of those in the fall.

So, it was fun on the plane ride here, setting my Q1 goals for this year, looking at how many I checked off in Q4 of 2024.

**Q. What's your strategy to get ready for Augusta?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: Getting ready for Augusta. I

would love to get a win before Augusta, that would definitely prepare me well. Definitely want to play final groups before then. I haven't really thought that far, honestly. I'm in Augusta, I'm in the PGA, and my World Ranking now sets me up in good shape to get into the other two majors. But like I said, I haven't thought that far, I've just been thinking of Kapalua the past couple weeks.

**Q. Any idea when you'll take a trip there?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: I might do it the Monday after THE PLAYERS. I'll be over on that side of the world, come back home. I don't think I'm going to be playing in Palm Beach, so we'll probably stop by there on the way home from the PLAYERS, hopefully.

**Q. The decision to be an equipment free agent, was that one where you thought, Well, you know what, if I play better it will pay for itself, or was it simply, I don't care about the money, I just want to play better golf and that's the priority?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: Yeah, well, I think the landscape honestly has changed when they started playing for 20 million dollar purses, that changes the financial calculus. But in honesty, I wanted to see what was out there. Callaway was an awesome partner for me turning pro, invested a lot in me, gave me a chance to invest in myself and my game, and supported me through probably the most difficult years, turning pro, complete change in your lifestyle, years on the Korn Ferry Tour, first few years out here. And then I wanted to see what was out there and, coincidentally, the stuff that's in my bag is pretty much the brands that were in my bag in high school and just, I think, growing up, high school and college is when I got serious about the game. I don't think it's a coincidence that the same style of equipment that I was playing then is what I've gravitated back to now.

**Q. RSM you talked about the road here of swing changes and body changes, injuries, coaching changes. Do you feel like you've re-invented yourself in the process or just continually refined?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: Definitely refined. I've always thought that I had a chance to be a really, really good player, because at every point, or at any point throughout my career I feel like I've been elite in one part of the game, just not all at the same time. I've driven it great, 2021, 2022, approach play was really good in college, short game has been really good lately, and in 2023 I was No. 1 in putting. So I feel like all the pieces have been there, just not together at once. So I think I've done a better job of figuring out, you know, working with Scotty Hamilton, especially on the golf swing, was the biggest piece that's

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

been missing. Figuring out what it was that I needed to get back to elite ball striking, and that's what was holding me back for the last little bit. It was really as simple as getting my swing direction tilted more left and seeing lower fades as opposed to the high draws I was hitting. I think that's the one piece that was kind of missing.

**Q. I saw this clip that Smylie Kaufman posted about you using some hockey training to work on your clubhead speed. Take me through what that, what you did, and why that's helped?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: I played more hockey than golf all the way through high school. Pretty much walked on to the team at Stanford. I was really grateful that Coach gave me a chance. I think the fact that he played college hockey or high school hockey and in Minnesota, kind of had a soft spot for this hockey player here, so I think it raised the ceiling on my potential as a golfer.

It's probably a big reason why I haven't had back problems. So, when you're skating, your hips are really mobile and strong in a lot of different directions, and the No. 1 reason you have lower back problems is your hips aren't moving properly. I shoot right and swing right, so the same kind of rotational speed, core activation. But the things that are the most sore when I go skate are my hands and my forearms, just from catching pucks, shooting pucks, and I'll be thanking myself when I'm hacking out of rough at Torrey that kind of strengthening this bit here. But I also love it, too. It's good cardio. I do miss my hockey days, for sure.

**Q. How good do you think you could have been at hockey?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: (Laughing). Being great at hockey in California is kind of like snow skiing champ in Florida. Dakota was the best hockey player out of the bunch of us. When I played in Canada, and then all of a sudden the big guys could also move, that's when I realized that golf is maybe a little bit better suited for me. I have no idea. I was thinking about playing D-III college hockey and golf at one point, but when Coach Ray made it seem like playing on the Stanford golf team was a possibility, that was my dream.

**Q. Getting a win, what was the difference between some of the close calls, let's say? What maybe got you over the top at RSM that hasn't happened before?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: I feel like I learned something at every close call. I think one of the things I learned the most recently was a close call at 3M. I did a corporate outing the money after in Boston for KPMG and I was flying home, jet lagged, tired but couldn't sleep, and the 3M final

round coverage was on and I just watched it. I was like, Man, I look way calmer than I was feeling out there. I was like, if I was looking that calm and based on how the other guys are looking, they must have been really feeling it. So I just kind of took that to heart where everybody's nervous, everybody's uncomfortable. Standing over the 6-iron on 18 I just executed exactly as I've been doing because it's been working and it's been really good. Standing over the putt I was like, I'm really nervous right now, but that doesn't mean I'm going to hit a bad putt, that has no bearing on me executing the shot any worse than I would. So just kind of went through my routine and it came off perfect.

THE MODERATOR: How many times have you went back and watched that putt?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Probably 10 or 12. It's been pretty fun. Sometimes if I'm just bored on the range I'm like, Oh, that was pretty cool, that's fun.

**Q. What's the shot you think about that most people kind of missed as being important?**

MAVERICK McNEALY: I really -- I don't know. I think the big shots were kind of fairly obvious. That par putt I made from the back fringe on 11 after Daniel canned a 60-footer for birdie, that was important.

I think that back nine was just playing tricky. The ball was going really far towards the water and really short the other way. Drove it really nice. Yeah, that conversation we had on the 18th fairway, it was 183, 185, it's like a stock 7, back into that cold wind, the conversation to talk myself into hitting the 6 and feel really comfortable that I can go ahead and smack it, that was huge. Scout just left me with, Compress it, which is kind of the swing thought I was working with all week. It came out absolutely perfect.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

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