

The Sentry

Thursday, January 2, 2025

Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA
Plantation Course at Kapalua

Will Zalatoris

Quick Quotes

Q. Great day. 8 birdies, no bogeys. That's like the Will Zalatoris from a couple years ago. I thought I was watching you from like maybe 2022 or something?

WILL ZALATORIS: Well, hopefully this is Will of 2025. Yeah, no, it's nice to be in a really good spot and really good head space. Body feels great. Put in a lot of great work over the last four months. Purposely didn't play much because I wanted to get some work in. I didn't want to come into the season really trying to find thing it to work on in my game I wanted to just get back to playing the game. I go back to COVID, when things were shut down, and the only thing we could do is just go play and carry our bag, and that was really, really beneficial for me moving up off of Korn Ferry Tour and then eventually almost winning the Masters. So that's the recipe. I don't need to be sitting on the range hitting 300 balls trying to find it, I need to go back out there and play the game.

Q. I haven't seen you in a while, but it looks like you put on some weight.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, after the season -- I typically end up losing somewhere between 5 and 10 pounds every year. I left Colorado at 163, and I weighed in before I left at 182. I've put in, it's been a lot of work, a lot of work in the gym with Damon Goddard, a lot of work with just making sure that -- I want to, you know, longevity, I mean, obviously I could stand up on any tee and pop off a 180 ball speed, but I want to do that for as long as I can. Hopefully, this is something that's going to help for the long-term.

Q. The putter, I know you work on that all the time, looked good today.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I think last year if you really kind of think about it, I really wasn't playing much golf until the November coming off of the injury, and switched putters to the broomstick, and was still trying to figure out how to learn it. I had some good weeks, had some bad weeks, but spent a lot of time -- I mean, it's cleaned up everything inside of 10 feet, which obviously was usually my bugaboo,



but I felt like I needed to make more 10 to 25 footers. So we made some really hard drills, Josh Gregory and I, and I wasn't leaving each day until I completed 'em especially from the 10 to 25 foot range.

Q. You got to be glad to be back to Maui.

WILL ZALATORIS: No better way to start your season than in Maui, it's the best here.

Q. What was the drill from 10 to 25 feet?

WILL ZALATORIS: So, 30 putts, five 10-footers, five 12-footers, five 15, five 17, five 20 and I got to make nine out of 30, and do it until you complete it. So it's basically, like the drills that we do, you look at the strokes gained average from those distances and then maybe try to raise it, maybe try to get to strokes gained plus 1, which make it's that much harder, especially if you're doing it on a practice green that I know. Obviously it paid off today. That was really probably the best I've putted from 10 to 25 feet maybe ever. It's a nice way to start the year.

Q. What's the biggest benefit of the weight gain, and how do you feel different swinging it with the weight gain?

WILL ZALATORIS: I just feel like I'm not swinging 110 percent. I think when you watched me coming out, I was super skinny and wiry and kind of firing off of adrenaline. Now I've been out here long enough that I know what to do, but it's also, I'm able to swing within myself and still carry it what I was doing before. Really, I mean, I was kind of laughing because going up No. 9 is our worst walk we have all year, and normally I'm huffing and puffing, and I was like, Okay, I know it's Thursday and we've been off awhile, but that's the best I've felt. So it's felt really good. I really haven't had to get a cortisone shot or anything in a while, so this is the best I've felt.

Q. You talked about the best you felt, maybe hopefully this is back to the version of you can be. When you look back to last year, were there times when you're on a course you could tell maybe mentally you didn't quite feel like you're back to yourself?

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WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I think the best way I could describe how I'm feeling compared to where I was before this weight gain was I thought I was at my 100 percent, and it still didn't feel good. I would have to take a couple days off and rest my back, or get a bunch of treatment. Not doing that anymore. It's hard when you're limiting your practice to then go out and play against the best players in the world. So now I think the beauty of it is I'm trying to do this for longevity, I'm not doing this for distance. If you look at my numbers, they're all the same, but it feels so much better.

Q. When you look back early last year, you had Riviera you were great, Augusta, then obviously it dropped off a bit. Was there any, what was the challenge of maybe you're coming back from a really tough thing, to feel like you're back and then maybe have to go through some challenges?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I think having the success early was really good for me mentally because when you haven't played for eight months, and especially your first event back finishing in last by nine at Tiger's event, you know, it was really good to feel that good that early. But again, I hadn't finished a season really in the last few years because of injury, and then on top of that this is my first off-season really since 2019, because I was always playing in the fall or I was rehabbing. So this year I wanted to make sure that I kept a club in my hand and played maybe once every five, six weeks, and that's why I played in Zozo, that's why I went to South Africa, but it was more about trying to make sure that I'm giving myself the best chance coming up into this season. So putting a round together like this is, couldn't have asked for a better start to the 2025.

Q. Whose idea was it to put on that much muscle?

WILL ZALATORIS: Me. I was tired of people telling me I have a 22-inch waist and all that stuff. No, I needed it because it was, if you look at the weeks that I had throughout the year, my best weeks were always the first of a stretch, and I always loved playing one, two, three weeks and building in a rhythm. And I've always, the events that I've won as a professional, I've always, it's been in like the third or fourth week. And I just, by the third or fourth week I was down a couple miles an hour in swing speed, I didn't really feel very good, I wasn't driving it great, and it's just hard to play out here like that. I knew I needed to get stronger. It wasn't so much about the speed, I know that the speed will come, I needed the stability to make sure that I was able to do what I'm doing. Down the road if I feel like I'm able to maybe add a couple miles an hour here or there, great, but speed's really not my concern right

now, it's all about longevity.

Q. Do you think you can continue doing what you were doing during the season?

WILL ZALATORIS: Oh, yeah, I mean, I think -- I'm hoping, obviously, you know, that this is something that's going to carry me throughout the year. I started playing a lot more than I was planning on last year, because I wanted to try to get back into a rhythm, and it was pretty frustrating, especially June, July, August, so I'm hoping that this year that my best golf is at the end of the season.

Q. That simplicity theme, where did that sort of come from?

WILL ZALATORIS: It's maybe been one of the more stranger Decembers that I've had in the sense of preparing for a season. Because normally guys will grind their tail off for around the holidays getting ready for the year, and my wife and I went on vacation, and then weather wasn't great in Dallas, so the last round of golf I played prior to coming here was December 12th. So it's kind of nice coming in rested, and when I'm coming out here and everything feels really good, and, you know, not being able to think about mechanics or anything like that is the simplicity, it's a great head space to be in.

Q. What you do think gave you the freedom to do that where the second half of the year wasn't your best maybe?

WILL ZALATORIS: Just trying to figure it out in the fall. We worked on a lot of different things throughout the year that did help, but I wasn't as consistent as I would have liked. I was a very -- I was basically average ball striking, which that's not who I am. When you look at where I was in 2022 I think I was like plus 1.6 tee to green. Last year I think I was like plus .2. So when you go back and you look at it, the putting was basically the same, but I would probably take, I would probably take out really the first six months out of the year because I was really learning that broom. Then really through this fall was just get better at green reading, get better with the speed. It's kind of nice being able to hit the putts three, four feet by and not care anymore. I felt like I had a lot of 20-footers in the past that I maybe left like a foot short. Especially on a week like this, when you know that 20-under or 20 plus or 25-plus under, maybe 30-plus under is going to win, it's really nice to be able to make eight birdies and feel like I left a couple out there on the par-5s.

Q. When was your last cortisone shot?

WILL ZALATORIS: Right after the season. So August. Or

after, yeah, so August. Roughly. Feels great.

Q. Is this the best you felt since...

WILL ZALATORIS: Probably ever. Yeah. I mean, even in 2022 I was fighting it a little bit. Did treatment, but I didn't think much of it. Then, yeah, knock on wood, but I don't feel like I've even had surgery now. So, like I said, the ceiling is something that I wanted to keep raising, because I knew that if I was going to be sitting at 160 pounds and trying to hit it 300 yards out here, it's not a recipe for longevity.

Q. Knowing what Lahaina's been through the last 17 months, how much is that on your mind, and how cool is it to be out here and maybe help some of the folks recovering?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, Sentry's done such a good job of this. Hearing this morning that they're going to be our partner for a very long time going forward. Hawaii's got a really special place in my heart. I spent pretty much every Thanksgiving until I was 25 on the Big Island, so I always loved it here. To see everything that had happened at Lahaina, and then the amount of times that I had even coming here as a kid and, yeah, it's sad to see, but I'm very glad that this week in particular is trying to do the best they can for this community, and that's something that we do every week, but especially this community, for sure.

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