

Sony Open in Hawaii

Sunday, January 17, 2021

Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

Waialae Country Club

Kevin Na

Press Conference



JOHN BUSH: We'd like to welcome the 2021 Sony Open in Hawai'i champion, Kevin Na, into our virtual interview room. He picks up his fifth PGA TOUR victory.

And I know this one is one you've wanted for a long time; if we can get your comments.

KEVIN NA: Yeah, it feels great. I felt like Waialae is a golf course I really have a chance at, and there's not too many of these left anymore, so I have to take advantage of it. What a great feeling to win at a golf course I really feel like I can win at.

JOHN BUSH: You move up to No. 10 in the FedExCup and you get to come back to Hawai'i next year. I know those are all important things. Talk about your goals now for the rest of the year.

KEVIN NA: It's great to get off to a good start back in Maui, obviously here, too. Really looking forward -- already looking forward to next year. It's a nice feeling. I know it's a Ryder Cup year. It's just all positives. I feel great. You know, it's fourth season in a row I've won. It's a great feeling. Nice to get it done early. But I'd like to win another one before the season's over.

Q. First of all, what's the club you hit from the rough on 18? What kind of metal it was?

KEVIN NA: It was a 5-wood Callaway Epic Flash.

Q. 5-wood, that's what I needed, thank you, Mr. Marketing Major. I know you said you had a lot of holes left, but when you're coming off a shorty on 11, three-putt on left, but how do you play those last six holes knowing they're birdie holes but knowing you can't afford to miss many of them, either. How do you find the freedom instead of the pressure?

KEVIN NA: You know, 13 is obviously not really a birdie hole, and I hit it in the left rough, really far back and I hit an unbelievable iron shot out of there to about 13, 14, feet, maybe 15 feet and to make that one and bounce back from

that three-putt, was what kept me in the tournament.

I knew that over the putt, I was like, man, I really need this one and I was really happy to see that one go in. You know, just kind of loosened me up a little bit, too.

Q. I briefly heard you say yesterday you hurt your rib on Wednesday that. Could have been three years in a row. Can you take us through that potential frustration of almost missing out?

KEVIN NA: Yeah, two years in a row I've been here and wasn't able to tee it up because of injuries. This year, Wednesday morning in Pro-Am, warming up and I hit one hard and I pulled my rib and I didn't know what to expect. My trainer that I just added to the team, Cornel Driessen, he helped me out a lot. We worked on, it loosened it, and the next day I woke up, it felt great and felt like nothing happened. Had he not been here, I don't know, might have been a different story.

Felt good during the whole week. I was swinging well, putting well, and a couple things went my way, a couple bounces here there, and that's what you need.

Q. Was there any concern on the lie at the back of 18, anything that had you worried at all?

KEVIN NA: Yes, I called Kenny in to take a look at the lie. The lie looked clean but there was a blade of grass, a little thick blade of bermudagrass that I was going to catch and I was asking him, "What do you think about this? Is this going to be okay"? Because into the grain, the line might look good, but the sole catches it, and you look like just an amateur golfer and just flub one.

He's like, "No, I think it's fine. It's not enough to really affect it." But I told him I was going to put it back in a little bit more in the stance, open the face and get a little more vertical on it, and I did and it came out perfect.

Q. I know you were desperately close to getting a call up to The Presidents Cup late last time and you talked about wanting to get into that team for The Ryder Cup. Can you talk about what it would mean for you to be in



team golf?

KEVIN NA: You know, I haven't made a team golf (event) yet. I've been close a few times. I really thought I had a chance at the Presidents Cup.

You know, I'm a fighter. I'm a good match-play player. I'm a good putter. Making those key putts is going to wear down the opponents, and I think I could be a good pick, a good help to the team.

Q. Just two quick things. You go all those years early in your career without winning and then having won each of the last four seasons, how do you explain that? And secondly, you've talked about courses fitting your game. How much has that played a role?

KEVIN NA: I think experience is the reason why I've been winning, experience, confidence. When you do it again, you know it seems like the next one comes easier.

It's never easy to win but the confidence that you validate in yourself really helps. Support with the family, support with my team. Everyone's believing in me and pushing me to the right direction. You know, all this time waiting is paying off right now.

Q. What is the feeling and your mindset when you go to the 18th tee where you know you make birdie, you likely win. Is there a different feeling than any other tee shot?

KEVIN NA: Yeah, obviously the wind was hard off the left and it's almost an impossible fairway to hit and it's okay to be through the fairway. If you block it out right, that right bunker is no good. Left bunker is better, but still you want to be just on grass, and I hit a great tee shot.

I just made sure, telling myself, don't come out, keep the club in. Drew Steckel always talked about keep the clubhead in and just be patient at the top of the transition, and I did that. That was just kind of a slow transition, made sure the shaft was coming from the inside and I hit a nice, high draw around that palm tree and it's as good as I could have hit it, and obviously just in the rough, a decent lie, a little bit of a flyer. Where I put it that second shot I couldn't have put it in any better spot and to chip it up to a foot, that's what you want for a win, a foot.

Q. And you've won four of your last 55 starts. Does that change your mindset? Do you expect more of yourself going forward?

KEVIN NA: Yes and no. I mean, it depends on what golf course I go to. A golf course like this, I really feel like I've

got a chance and I'm looking, trying to contend, at least try to get a Top-10 in, and if things go well, contend. Certain golf courses, 20th place is maxing out for me.

Do I -- I think more with winning, let's put it that way, since I've been winning more often because I know I can do it. Before, it was like, can I do it? I don't know. Now I know if I put myself in that position, I've got a good chance of pulling it off.

Q. With your length, which is probably middle of the pack on TOUR, long enough, obviously, but do you think that can sometimes be an advantage on a golf course like this, not tempting you to take lines that more power players might take and get in trouble?

KEVIN NA: I don't think so. It's nice to have that option. I've seen some bombers take some lines that is incredible, and it's fun to watch. It's like, wow, it's like what a shot there. But a golf course like this, you still have to hit the fairway, you have to make putts.

Yes, those aggressive lines give you an advantage, but if you run it through the fairway and you have a wedge in your hand from like 70 yards, it's a knuckler out of there. These bermuda roughs are just long enough where it's difficult to control the spin.

So I think on a golf course like this, fairway is a premium, and a guy that puts it in play and has got -- a guy like me has got a good chance, and I don't feel like I'm at such a disadvantage, and mentally, already there, I'm able to compete. Some weeks, mentally it's tough because you know going into the week you're at such a disadvantage.

You look at the winners of the Sony Open, you see guys like Matt Kuchar, Zach Johnson and me, a guy like me having success here.

Q. Kind of along those lines, because this topic has come up a little bit this week, you mentioned this is a better fit for you probably than Kapalua, do you feel there are courses you can't win?

KEVIN NA: Yes, 100 percent.

Q. I'd ask you the same thing I asked Kiz; then why play them.

KEVIN NA: Yeah, he couldn't have said it any better.

Q. He could have said 15th place.

KEVIN NA: And sometimes, look, there's nothing wrong with 20th. I know everyone is trying to win and they are all

looking at the winner at the end of the week, but sometimes a 20th week is a productive week. You're still getting good points, World Ranking points for it, and it keeps you kind of in momentum and keeps your game sharp for the chances for to you win.

Q. Can you think of a place where you have no business winning that you almost did?

KEVIN NA: Yeah, you know what, it's a golf course that on paper probably doesn't look good to me but I always play well, is at Mr. Nicklaus's place at Memorial.

Q. What's your schedule?

KEVIN NA: I am playing next week in Palm Springs and then I'm playing Saudi and then I'm playing L.A., Genesis.

Q. Given some of the good results that you'd had here in past years, does it make it more gratifying to be able to finish it off this time?

KEVIN NA: Yes. I've had some chances here. I've had I think a couple of Top 5s here and things didn't quite go well on Sunday and it's a golf course that I know I've got a chance at, and to be able to validate that is a great feeling.

Q. Did you find the course played any different today than the previous three days?

KEVIN NA: Yes, the wind was a totally opposite direction. Some of the holes played really difficult. You know, what the hole locations were not easy out there today. I felt like today was the toughest conditions out of the four.

Q. Have the goals you set for yourself and the ones you set for yourself now, how much have they changed, would you say, in the last ten years, and can you give us a hint of what means the most to you?

KEVIN NA: Winning. You know, I used to be a really consistent player, a lot of Top 10s, a lot of made cuts. Yeah, winning was still important then but winning felt a little bit distant to me. I knew I could do it; I've done it before. It's been so long and I went so many years without winning that I kind of forgot that feeling, and when I validated it at Greenbrier, it made me hungry for more.

I was playing maybe a little bit more aggressive coming down the stretch, not worrying so much about second or third. More focused on just that winning, and the fact that I know I can do it, and the composure that I've been able to control my emotions coming down the stretch has been really good. Every year, I hope to win and I expect to win, on certain -- on the right golf courses.

Sometimes that adds a little bit more pressure on these golf courses, but I think it's just a mind-set that when you go in, hey, look, if things go well and I play well, I'm going to have a chance.

Q. Do you have a checklist of where you want to be at the end of the year, contending at majors, TOUR Championship?

KEVIN NA: I hit one of the checklist already. The other checklist was I want to be Top-20 in the world, back in the Top-20 in the world before the year is over, contend in a major, and obviously make it to TOUR Championship and so on, and then the big thing is The Ryder Cup.

Q. 23 in the world; three to go.

KEVIN NA: (Smiling).

JOHN BUSH: Thank you everyone for your participation and congratulations to our champion, Kevin Na.

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