

Sony Open in Hawaii

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Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

Waialae Country Club

Will Zalatoris

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, we'd like to welcome Will Zalatoris to the interview room here at the Sony Open in Hawai'i, making his first official start on the TOUR since the spring of 2023.

Welcome back. If we can get some comments on your health and how much you're looking forward to the season.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, you know, I have always loved coming to Hawai'i. Been fortunate enough to have a really great family tradition of going to the Big Island for most Thanksgivings. I love it here. It's obviously one of the most beautiful places on earth.

I feel great. Bahamas was probably a little bit in terms of -- health-wise I felt great, but in terms of where I was in terms of sharpness, I knew it was going to be a lot of trial and error.

But it was really good to get one competitive rep under my belt. Spent a month at home, worked on my game a little bit with my coaches, and got a lot of intel if you will that week.

So feel really good. Been playing some really nice golf at home. I think the difference is now that I think I had only had two, three weeks where I was able to play two, three days in a row, and now there is no restraints.

Took me about a year and a half to get to that point, and there were times where I thought I was 100% where in reality I wasn't 100%. Now I've definitely feel the best I've felt in quite some time.

THE MODERATOR: Good to hear. We'll go straight into questions.

Q. When you mentioned like not feeling 100%, or feeling 100%, but not being able to come back, is there any example of a time where you felt like you were but it wasn't quite there and would've done something different?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I think I was trying to do -- I kind of got away from my DNA in my golf swing for a while. Going through a change and really the rehab that I did from October of '22 to December of '22, it helped, but it didn't solve the problem.

It was kind of just putting a Band-Aid on something that needed way more. So I had six months to really be at home, think about the time over '22, because '23 was shot out of a cannon for me.

And I think that really being able to process how I want to swing the golf club again, what are some things that I need to change in my daily habits, I've definitely seen the benefits. Kind of the adage of -- and I don't know who told it to me -- but injuries are 80% mental and 20% physical.

I've definitely learned that the hard way because this is the first major injury I've ever had. So realizing that each week I'm going to keep progressing, even if I think I'm at a 100% I still could be better in the coming weeks.

I played probably too much in '21. Maybe a little bit too much in '22 in the sense that I really wanted to play -- really wanted to get my first win, was so close in the majors.

It takes a lot out of you. I got kind of a mental freshness and better take of it now. I was looking at the TOUR schedule, and think I've only -- there is only like five or six events I haven't played on tour now, so it's not like I need to get to tournaments Monday morning anymore.

Q. What's your level of trust in your golf swing now?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I mean, 100% now. I'm doing things in my golf swing now where I think the key word is simple. I was changing motor patterns before; now I'm just simplifying my golf swing.

I had the big C at the finish. I had really high hands. The way I would come down with the club is create the reverse C coming down to the ball, and now I'm more rotary, more horizontal. It's a lot more -- it's simpler, so easier to fix.

For me, one week I would have to play a cut, one week



play a draw, and time it up with my hands. Now I feel it's more bigger muscles.

Q. Were you farther away than you thought you were going to be? When you shoot 82 and Scottie is shooting 20-under, feel like you're so far away.

WILL ZALATORIS: So I think the bigger difference is like I go back to COVID, and for three months at home we were able to -- I was still able to walk and carry my bag ever day. Even though we had no competitive tournaments I was still playing games with really good players.

I had basically been playing for two weeks leading up to the Bahamas, so of course I wanted to go out and play great. Yes, it was very frustrating to shoot those scores. Now having a month of literally every day I'm playing money games against really good players, now I'm more mentally in it as opposed to showing up to the first tee and seeing what happens.

The example that I would probably use is cramming for a test the night before for the Bahamas, whereas now I feel like I've been preparing for -- basically December was an off-season for me.

Q. What advice would you have for Gary Woodland to come back?

WILL ZALATORIS: I mean, he's such a good guy. The thing with him, too, his locker is usually right next to mind since he's a W and I'm a Z. I love that guy. He's so funny. If anything, I would be asking him advice because he's always had a great perspective on life. Having going to go through what he's gone through, you hate to see that for anybody, but especially for G because he's such a good guy.

I played golf at home with his caddie, Butchy, and kept checking in on him. For a guy like that, he's a major champion. If anything, keep being G. If anything, I'll keep asking for advice from him.

Q. You mentioned kind of being more mentally fresh now. What are ways you realize you're more mentally fresh? Any examples of things you do differently because you feel more fresh?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, when I came back I guess the fall of '22 going into '23, it was almost like I was trying to -- I'm coming back from an injury but then trying to just continue what I was doing in '22 and having that expectation of that level of play.

Expectations in general aren't a great thing. Looking at the

macro instead of the micro has given me a lot better perspective. I've had my favorite thing on earth taken from me for eight months.

It's the little things that I missed. Hanging with guys, simple things. As much as we hate rain delays, shooting the breeze with the guys, I missed it.

So I think it's given me a lot. Even shooting a million over in the Bahamas, like it was still 72 holes of a lot of the fun. I think to me, keep doing what I'm doing. Look at the macro instead of the micro. You're going to have off weeks. These seasons are long.

So like when you look back at '22, which was my best you're on TOUR, I missed the cut in the Byron Nelson, which was my home event. I'd played that golf course since was literally nine years old, and the next week I was in a playoff in a major. I barely remember the Byron Nelson.

For me, not getting stuck on those bad weeks and getting back into the rhythm week in, week out, I think is something I'm really looking forward to.

Q. You mentioned playing money games back home. How many rounds do you think you played approximately?

WILL ZALATORIS: I mean, it was probably 20, but it's, again, just the sharpness. We can hit putts on the practice putting green trying to complete a drill, but playing for money, chump change on the golf course, you're trying to not lose money. This putt is to not lose money or win money type thing, and that adds a little bit of pressure.

That's where I get my practice at home, is trying to simulate some of pressure we feel out here. Whereas Bahamas obviously I was never in contention whatsoever, so it was more like let's just see where I am. Let's see if I can fix things while I'm out there. Let's find trends in my game.

Now I'm able to go out and play a golf tournament.

Q. Any one of those games from the last month that was super memorable?

WILL ZALATORIS: There were a few that -- like making a 20-footer on 18 a couple times. Stuff like that where it's kind of fun to kind of throw a little dagger in there and makes you feel good before you go have lunch.

Like I said, it's just the pressure simulation that I just missed. I can practice as much as I want and try to



simulate that pressure on the practice putting green or driving range and chipping green, but there is nothing like it compared to competing against guys when I can go shoot 76 and be the high scorer in the group when you're playing against some of the best players in the world every day in Dallas.

Q. Are you able to play several events in a row at this point?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, so definitely going to be listening to my body a lot. The beauty of playing the amount of tournaments that I played in the past, I don't need to come out on Mondays now. I can show up on Tuesday, play nine holes Tuesday, Wednesday, get in some work.

I may randomly add in an event. Let's say the Friday deadline I might throw another one in there. It's just going to be a lot of listening to my body at this point. So far the only thing that I've been told is try to avoid playing three in a row.

When we get through that stretch around May where you have the Nelson and Colonial, that's a 20, 30 minute drive for me. I can show up Wednesday and be fine both those places.

I could play four weeks in a row there, but I have to listen to my body is the most important thing.

Q. How much time before and after rounds do you have to spend on your back compared to what you used to do?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, the biggest change is the post-round stuff I would say, doing ice baths daily. The pre-round stuff hasn't changed a bunch. The post-round, because of -- you know, if I play three weeks in a row something could get off and then all of a sudden we start playing more and more and more and that could lead into something for me.

I have to be cognizant of every little detail. Something in my right shoulder could be connected to my left hip, which could throw off something in my back.

So the post-round stuff of trying to make sure my body is in as much equilibrium I can is probably the most important thing and biggest change.

Q. Any favorite course or off-course thing you liked to?

WILL ZALATORIS: One of my probably the best memory

that I have was we would go to Mauna Lani and my dad and I would show up at like 6:40. Pro shop opened at 6:30. We'd hit ten balls. With the time change it was easy. We'd whiz around in two and a half hours.

If it was on Sunday you would have football on because it comes on so early. Then you would have the Maui Invitational in the afternoon.

Saturdays, Sundays were absolutely the best. You got in a day, able to play golf, able to get in a little bit of work if I wanted to even though we were on vacation, and then able to watch sports all day long. Mauna Lani is always going to be a place for me that's just a haven.

Q. I remember with the Coody twins couple years ago, you made sure to mention both of them, getting maybe more hype. What's it like when you think back to them as young developing players? What was it about them this made you believe they had what it took to get out here?

WILL ZALATORIS: Their work ethic, and I jokingly say this because I can tell them apart. Barely.

But they both were incredibly hard workers even going back to when they first got to high school. They have some similarities. Golf swings are very similar. Pierceson is definitely more of the mechanic and Parker is more of the artist.

But any given day both of them are capable of being the low round of the day out here, winning their first tournament this week. So they've always had that belief. Like I said, their work ethic was really fun, and especially when I was playing with them when they were 14, 15 and shooting 66s. Man, these guys are going to be ready tomorrow if they keep doing what they're doing.

Great kids most importantly. I'm about to go play with Pierceson in a little bit. I'm looking forward to seeing these guys have some success.

Q. Did you play with them over the break?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, a bunch, a bunch. So they're awesome. They love giving each other a hard time. The part that I think is so great, always love the story about Coach Fields sitting them down, and I don't know how much of this was true, but Coach Fields sat them down and said, hey, I know that there is going to be some competitiveness between you two, and they looked at each other like, we're brothers, but we're best friends. We don't care. We push each other.

So that's why seeing both of them get their card in two different ways really, I'm looking forward to spending the rest of our careers together.

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