

The American Express

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La Quinta, California, USA

PGA WEST Pete Dye Stadium Course

Nick Dunlap

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome the 2024 American Express champion Nick Dunlap to the interview room. Nick, now you're back here to defend. I guess I want to ask you, walking in here and you see the trophy sitting up there next to us, what's your first thought?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, it's nice to be back. I walked in, saw my brick in the front, that was pretty cool. But it's nice to know where I'm going for the first week, I don't have to find everything for the first time.

THE MODERATOR: Mentioning that, what's the year been like for you, learning a lot of new golf courses, first time out there, obviously you had great success winning at Barracuda as well, what's that year been like for you after winning here last year?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, definitely stressful. I would say early in the week more than once the event actually starts is I have to learn the golf courses almost more of a priority sometimes than rest and recovery. This is my first time playing 26 events or however many events I played last year. This year with being the second time I'll see a lot of these golf courses I know where I'm going, I know the golf course, there's not that urgency of, I have to see it, I have to see all 18 this year. So I can focus a little bit more on my body or recovery or making sure that I feel well going into that week instead of having to see the golf course.

THE MODERATOR: It's been a different start for you this year to the season. Obviously played twice in Hawaii and you're coming in here with two tournaments under your belt and a top 10 last week. What's that like for you starting with a bunch of tournaments instead of coming in here last year and playing this one?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, I normally don't play a ton of golf typically from November, October, end of October to January. I like to take a break. I don't touch the golf clubs really at all. This year that was more from after the playoffs ended until Sanderson, so I did get a month and a half, but it just kind of moved up my break. No, it was definitely nice to be playing a couple events before this one and obviously



I relocated to South Florida, so I can actually play golf in November and December, versus Alabama this time of the year.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take some questions.

Q. So you do remember how to get to La Quinta Country Club.

NICK DUNLAP: I do, yeah (laughing).

Q. I was just over there and talking to Chris Gilley, your playing partner last year, he's looking forward to seeing you again. Last year, after the win, normally somebody comes in, we talk to 'em for 15 minutes, they sign some flags, and they go to the next thing. Your post-round victory was forever last year, seemed like two hours and everybody was out here and everything. When you look back on that, was it like the biggest celebration of your life?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, as of now probably. I didn't really know any different, to be honest. I just kind of was going with the flow and trying to soak it all in and enjoy it and it definitely took longer than just the rest of that night to realize what had happened. Yeah, it was a night that I won't ever forget, some of the memories we made. Obviously I wasn't playing that next week, so we got to enjoy it. Then I wanted to go back to Tuscaloosa and enjoy it with the team a little bit and talk to them about kind of my steps going forward. Yeah, it was definitely a fun Sunday.

Q. You had to, everybody else was going to another tournament, you had to make a career decision at that point. Didn't take you very long to make it. I know you talked about not being at the University of Alabama now and maybe being with those guys, but was it a difficult decision at all?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, it definitely was. It was just a decision that it was either I needed to make it quickly or I was going to wait and kind of finish out that year with Alabama. Because with Pebble coming up and some of the elevated events, and I wasn't, you know, with that card or the two and a half year exemption, I was losing time by not playing, so it was either okay I turn pro now or I'm



going to wait until after NAAs, after the season ends and turn pro then. So it wasn't really a thing of, Okay, I'm going to take one or two weeks and just kind of sit on it. It's like, Well, I'm losing, the more time I take off, the more events I'm losing towards end of the year playoffs, all these points are going to matter. But, yeah, it was, leaving my teammates and my brothers back home, it wasn't easy, and obviously Coach Seawell and Coach Schultz, they put a lot of time and effort into the season, and to kind of leave 'em halfway wasn't something that made me very happy. Then, obviously, to watch them kind of go on and towards the end of the year, it was tough not being there with 'em.

Q. I know that everybody, all year has said, Well, what's like learning this or learning that. You're a year into this now, you've won twice, that's two more than most people get, are you really comfortable now or do you still feel a little off kilter?

NICK DUNLAP: More comfortable than I was, for sure. I wouldn't say really comfortable. I think I'm -- I learned a lot this past off-season. I learned more those first couple months than really anything. I knew that. I knew it was going to be a learning curve. I wasn't expecting to come out and dominate early. You go from college golf to playing against the best players in the world, that's a huge jump, and obviously I kind of was fortunate enough to skip the mini-tour level, if you want to call it, and then Korn Ferry Tour, and kind of jumped right into the elevated events. So this week last year was my first time kind of seeing those best players in the world up and close the first time. I had played a couple events previous, but I wasn't playing with them, I didn't, I wasn't near the lead or making the cut or anything like that, so that was my first kind of eye opening, here they are up close. It definitely took a little while, but I think now I'm a lot more comfortable with myself more than anything and my game will get better as I get older and learn more out here.

Q. The transition was so lightning fast, can you just describe for us those first couple of months going out to play, and I mean you've left your team, you've left your bubble of your team, your friends, your coach, I mean, how difficult was it in those first couple of months, just to, I mean it must have just been this dizzy I think experience.

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, it's just so convenient in college. Everything's kind of there for you. Everybody's there at your service and trying to help you. You have a team around you, you have a team of coaches, and then you have everybody else just all in one circle trying to help you the most they can. You get out here and it can feel a little bit like you're on an island sometimes. Then, not only to say that, you know, I went from playing against college

players to, you know, some of them have proved that they can compete out here as well. But you go from playing against them to Scottie Scheffler every week, and it changes a little bit. I quickly learned how good some of these guys are. It's very eye opening, but also very humbling at the same time, and it's cool for me to see how much I can still get better. I think that was something for me that was really fun to see as well.

Q. How did you manage the anxiety of it of all, the newness? Was that just a function of your personality, that you were able to get yourself through tournaments and make cuts and all that?

NICK DUNLAP: I don't know, I just kind of think -- I took the entire thing as a learning experience. Obviously I'm a competitor and I hate losing and missing the cut's no fun, but I knew it was going to be a big change, and I knew that turning pro when I did I was going to be better off in a year and a half versus staying in college. I think for my game I knew I was getting thrown into the deep end, but being uncomfortable is how you get good in this game, trying to figure that out. So I knew for that first season, season and a half it was going to be a big learning curve and something that was going to help me in the future.

Q. Blades Brown's going to come in here soon, he's turned pro at 17. You were kind of thrust into your situation because of your win. He and his family have made the decision that he wants to be a professional. What would you, I mean, not because he's 17, but now having gone through that first year, what would you tell him, and I don't know if you've talked to him, but what would you tell him about how he should approach the year, just from your perspective?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, it's hard to say how he should, I think everybody's kind of in their own different both and own different agendas, whether it's family or personal or whatever that is. I know how I approached it. I approached it as, okay, this is going to be a learning year, it's a big jump, and I knew that, I knew there was a difference between playing against college players and the best players in the world. I knew I needed to get better in certain parts of my game and seeing golf courses for the first time's different, you don't do that in junior golf and amateur golf, a lot of the courses you play over and over again, a lot of these guys have a one up on me there. But he's obviously a great player, he's succeeded in junior golf. I had a lot of people out here that kind of helped me along the way and reached out a hand, and really everybody out here has been super nice and grateful towards me, so if there's anything I give him, I'll definitely do that. But, yeah, it's a big jump and excited for him, excited for him to be out here and to see him hopefully a couple times this year.

Q. Those of us who cover the TOUR quite awhile, you have these guys who get exemptions into events, and I'm talking about all levels from younger, older, whatever, but that are experiencing the TOUR for the first time, and they get out there and they see guys and they hit some shots, good shots themselves and they think, Oh, you know, I'm, I know I can compete with these guys, that's kind of the standard thing. Is that kind of an overstatement, do you think, for first timers, given what you've now seen week-in and week-out on the TOUR, as far as how truly competitive the TOUR is, and depth of the talent?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, everybody's really good out here. I mean, you, you obviously you have your couple that are unbelievable, and whether they're No. 1 in the world or former world No. 1s or going to be, I think there's that separation between a couple guys, but everybody's really good. They're out here for a reason. It's the top-125 guys in the world playing out here. There's no, they didn't get out here by luck, they obviously did something well, wherever they came from. So everybody kind of has their own stories and everybody's trying to compete for a living. It's a job out here, it's very difficult, and I'm grateful to be out here with them playing against the best in the world every week.

Q. When you compare the life you lived up to one year ago to the life you live now, can you tell me some aspects that you really miss about your old life and stuff that you really enjoy about the life you live now?

NICK DUNLAP: The life I live now, I'm traveling the world, traveling to new places, I just got to spend two weeks in Hawaii, and I'm playing against the best players in the world, living out my dream, so I wouldn't give that for anything. But, yeah, I think I definitely miss -- I wouldn't necessarily say I miss college, I just miss being around my teammates every day. I miss the dumb stuff we used to do as a team, or traveling to an event, if something happened, just the camaraderie we had and the little jokes and jabs we threw at each other every day. Whether it's just all eating dinner together somewhere or going, we used to play pickleball a little bit, going to do that, that's the kind of stuff that I miss more than the golf or college aspect of it, it's just the little stuff.

Q. When you look back to the last 12 months, were there times where it all felt a bit overwhelming, that very sped-up career that you had now, or were you always a guy that goes, I got this, I'm where I belong.

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, I would definitely say it was overwhelming. I had a lot of stuff happen, whether it's on

the golf course or off the golf course that it all kind of came at me pretty quick, and some of it I was ready for, some of it I wasn't, and got blind sided a little bit. I would say, you know, my life got sped up a little bit, and in a good way. Like I said, I'm out here, I'm living my dream, and wouldn't change it for anything, but that, it all doesn't just happen easy or smoothly, I would say there's definitely some bumps and humps in the road that you got to navigate.

Q. The fact that it happened here, do you think that has something to do with the area, with the golf courses that suits you very much or was it just the perfect week that you caught?

NICK DUNLAP: I just think it was the perfect week. Everything kind of fell into place. It was Hunter's first time caddieing for me, I had walked a lot with him in college, he was the assistant coach there, it was just a cool kind of dynamic we had. I played the first three rounds with Wilson Furr who I played a lot with from Birmingham he's a past Alabama player. Got off to a great start, went birdie, eagle, birdie to start, and it just all kind of fell into place, it was one of those perfect weeks.

Q. There's one last new thing you get to experience, and that is that to defend a PGA TOUR event. Top 10 last week, playing pretty well coming in here, what does it feel like as a defender for the first time ever?

NICK DUNLAP: Pretty neat. I had never really got to in junior golf or amateur golf -- I got to defend a U.S. Junior once, but that was about it. So, yeah, just to kind of see my name around and to see some pictures, and it's pretty cool, I'm not going to lie. It's something that I definitely want to experience again, and hopefully next year I can come back to some of the same stuff.

Q. (No Microphone.)

NICK DUNLAP: I'm going to try my best.

THE MODERATOR: Any time that you're the first to do something in history is pretty special, and you were the first player in TOUR history to win in the same season as an amateur and a professional. Winning the Barracuda Championship later in the year, how different were those two victories in your mind, how did you look back on them now, how different were they, and for what reasons?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, I mean, winning's hard wherever it is. I think just my mindset going into this event as an amateur versus playing as a pro was completely different. I had one goal really coming into this week and that was to make the cut, right, that was it. I was kind of chasing that

PGA TOUR U Accelerated, I needed 20 points, and my goal was to make the cuts. So the pressure of, you know, I don't need points, I'm not playing for money I'm not really doing anything, it's a learning experience, I'm coming out here, it's going to be a fun week, I'm in the desert I should be freezing my tail off in Alabama. And then obviously Sunday was definitely a different feeling, I'm no longer just trying to make the cut, I'm trying to win. But, yeah, Barracuda was nice to kind of validate things for me. I think I had struggled a little bit the next couple months, and to kind of come out and to play like I did, needing to play well -- the only reason I went out there was for points trying to make the playoffs, and that was a big one for me. But, yeah, they have their similarities and have their differences. At the end of the day, I mean, no two wins are going to be the same, so but, yeah, definitely grateful to have both those.

THE MODERATOR: Just wrap it up with, you were voted as the Arnold Palmer Award winner as the PGA TOUR Rookie of the Year. That's a vote that comes from your peers. When you heard the news of that award, how did that make you feel, and how special do you think that will be as your career goes on?

NICK DUNLAP: Humbling, yeah. I mean, if you just look at some of the list of some of the guys to win that just in the past 10 years, it's, the track record's pretty good. So I'm very, very grateful to be on that list, and that will be something that can never get taken away from me, so that's also something that I can, that is really, really cool, and, yeah, something I definitely don't take for granted.

THE MODERATOR: When you heard the news, how surprised were you, were you sort of anticipating it, I know there were some other good players in the mix, but...

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, I think between Matthieu, obviously had a great year, won Torrey, and had a really good run in some majors, so, yeah, I think it was one of the best lists of rookies in a little while, so it was nice to be in company with some of them. But, yeah, I think some of these rookies and amateurs and young guys coming out, we're going to start seeing some really cool stuff happen.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We appreciate your time.

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