

# THE PLAYERS Championship

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

## Alex Smalley

### Quick Quotes

**Q. Alex, 4-under 68 to start THE PLAYERS. How would you assess that round today?**

ALEX SMALLEY: It feels pretty good. Not to have any squares on the scorecard is always a good thing to have, but especially out at a golf course like this. I think it just kind of shows that I played pretty decently well most of the day, kind of minimized my mistakes. But if you told me I would have shot 4-under to begin the round I would have signed the scorecard and probably gone to eat some breakfast or lunch, so, yeah, pretty happy with how it went.

**Q. How did the conditions change out there? You started on the back?**

ALEX SMALLEY: Most of, maybe our first five or six holes there was still some moisture on the fairways and around the greens. Which is always hard to adjust to because the ball kind of I say hydroplanes but it kind of skips and skids a lot.

So like I had a bunker shot on 11 I was just short of the green in two and had a bunker shot, and I might have had six or seven yards of green to work with, between the edge of the green and where the hole was. And I played kind of a chunk-and-run, like I landed it maybe 15 feet short of the green, but like I said, there was water and so it kind of skipped a few times and got up on to the green.

So you just have to adjust because obviously the moisture kind of wears off, and by the time we made the turn it was just about all gone unless you hit it in a few spots in the rough where it's still in the shade. Yeah, the green speeds changed a little bit. They got a little quicker once the moisture went away, but it's still relatively soft out there.

**Q. How would you describe your game coming into the week here? How do you feel about the way you've been playing?**

ALEX SMALLEY: Yeah, pretty good. I've had a decent start to the season. I think I played six events maybe and made five cuts. I've had decent finishes at most of those



events where I've made the cut. So everything feels like it's in a good place. Obviously when you get to a golf course like this, there tend to be a little bit more pressure on certain parts of your game, because if you miss a decent number of greens the rough is pretty nasty and it can be tough to judge coming out of the rough. The greens tend to be a little quicker, so speed control is very important.

I don't know if it puts stress on any parts of your game, but it just needs to be a little more dialed in maybe compared to some of the other tournaments.

**Q. This is your best round here at THE PLAYERS Championship. Are there things from today's round, specific things that you can take going into the rest of the tournament that you maybe weren't, as you mentioned, dialed in in previous rounds that you can apply going forward?**

ALEX SMALLEY: Yeah, maybe just knowing that I can do it is probably a big thing. Knowing that I can come out and shoot 68 and not have any bogeys on the card is a good thing to have in the back of your head. Like you've done it before, so why can't I do it again.

But, yeah, like I mentioned earlier, I kind of missed the greens in good places where I was able to get up-and-down relatively easily. So just kind of I need to keep plotting my way around the golf course and thinking about -- just being smart with where I'm leaving the ball and where I want to have the next shot played from.

**Q. Does that change where you're leaving the ball tomorrow when you're playing in the afternoon as opposed to playing in the morning?**

ALEX SMALLEY: It might, just because it won't -- I'm not sure what the course conditions are going to be like, but I can imagine it won't be as soft as it was this morning. So maybe I just have to take into account a little more of a bounce and a roll than I did today. But I wouldn't say that's going to change where I leave it, necessarily.

**Q. Where have you made the most progress in your game since your rookie year would you say?**



ALEX SMALLEY: Probably on and around the greens. Just getting used to the golf courses, because conditions change from week-to-week. This week there's a lot of thick rough, so you have to, one, judge the lie correctly, you have to guess about how much over spin the ball's going to have coming out. If it's back into the green and in the rough it's going to come out pretty dead. If it's downgrain it's going to come out pretty quickly. So you just have to do some things in the practice round to get used to how the ball's going to come out of the rough.

I would say putting this year especially has been better so far than it has been in years past. I feel like my speed control today was okay. I had some stressful second putts, but was able to make those. I think that's big. Sometimes some momentum comes from par saving putts more so than making birdie putts. I was able to make a few good par putts today that kind of kept me in a good place and kept the momentum rolling.

**Q. How often do you get asked about the hole-in-one at 17?**

ALEX SMALLEY: Not too often. I mean, everybody brings it up once in a while. Obviously it's an iconic hole and a lot of people would love to have one on 17 here, especially to that back right Sunday pin. So, yeah, it's hard to believe that was two years ago, it hasn't seemed like that long. Not too often though.

**Q. Going back to your putting improvement, you changed putter, working with a different coach, what do you attribute the improvement to?**

ALEX SMALLEY: Well, I made changes in both of those areas, but I wouldn't necessarily say that either of those have had a huge contributing factor to my improvement in that aspect of the game.

I changed putters in April of last year, and I've used the same one since.

I did change coaches at some point last year, maybe middle part of the year, a little before that.

But I never started using a line on the ball until last summer. I used to just kind of put the ball down and line it up with my putter. But now I've got a Sharpie line on the ball and I kind of line it up where I want to start it I think that has probably been the thing that has helped me most because obviously, if you're not aiming it correctly, then the ball's probably not going to go where you want it to. So wouldn't say that those two changes have been a huge contributing factor, I would probably say more the line on the ball.

**Q. Who suggested you do that?**

ALEX SMALLEY: The newer coach. But I had kind of played around with it before I had gotten with him, and I just wasn't super on board with it when I had tried it before, and I just tried it again and it's worked. Because I used to be a putter who -- I used to aim about a degree right of my target and then pull it a degree so it would start on line. But I think, you know, lining it up with the line on the ball has helped my aim and I don't have to compensate any more now for that part.

**Q. Who is the coach?**

ALEX SMALLEY: Ralph Bauer.

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