

THE PLAYERS Championship

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Austin Smotherman

Quick Quotes

Q. Walk us through the decision process to come back in the morning for that putt.

AUSTIN SMOTHERMAN: Yeah, just getting so dark. Greens are getting -- I mean, the rain softened them enough to where spike marks, footprints, all that stuff's kind of adding up.

So 15-, 16-footer whatever I have, I mean, it's not worth it right now to get fresh greens in the morning, which is the benefit of that. Do I wish I hit the chip in the morning as well? Went back and forth. The fact I was even questioning it, I probably should have maybe backed off. I felt like I wanted to hit it where I could be a little more aggressive because I knew it was receptive, and I just hit it a little heavy and luckily it tumbled.

Q. How were you able to get your back and body ready for this championship?

AUSTIN SMOTHERMAN: Saturday was kind of a long day. Came off the course kind of dejected, wanting to play with Tommy for the first time, wanting to play the weekend at Arnold Palmer Invitational and Bay Hill. Fortunately enough, I got some friends that recommended some of the physios here and got on the table Saturday afternoon, slept that night. Came back for a physio Sunday morning, drove here, rested here. Saw physios Monday morning. I chipped and putted Monday. Back was fine. Tuesday woke up and was like a 9 out of 10.

I was like, this is -- if I left Saturday at Bay Hill, it was probably a 2, knowing that I just don't have it, and so just a lot of time on the table, light prep this week. My practice rounds I only played 16, 17, 18, 1, 2, 3. So I've seen all these holes for the first time right now. That was just the prep.

I did my work on the range hitting it where I wanted. I was like, I just need to go execute on the course. My caddie's been here 15 times. It's a hard golf course anyways. Once you're out of position, it's not like you need to go practice those shots. It's a hack-out wedge, and I'm not



going to hit that with my back being on the edge and wasn't going to push it. So that was what the team and me and my caddie decided on, and here we are playing nicely today.

I kind of stole some with the long putts, which has kind been my MO lately with kind of my first round all way back at Cognizant. Same thing, making a ton of putts, two three-putts today, and then hopefully roll in a little 15-footer in the morning.

Q. Do you have trust in your back?

AUSTIN SMOTHERMAN: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I'm giving myself maybe the extra 30 minutes arrival at the course just to get that extra time to slow roll it, but I got a very quality bed this week. Who knows if the bed at the Airbnb last week was just soft enough to mess it up, who knows. I'm not one to be prone to have back issues. I mean, maybe the occasional back is sore and tight and you're throwing kids around kind of thing.

But yeah, I think it was just a buildup of fatigue, like long week at Cognizant. I played Seminole pro-member Monday and then I went to Bay Hill and walked and played 15 holes until they blew the horn on Tuesday. So it's like bam, bam, bam, here's Thursday and Friday, execute nicely, make the cut, which is the first box to check, and then Saturday morning just something switched overnight, whether it was how I cooled down Friday, just a little something extra or not right, and then just a quick movement Saturday morning that made me have to push through my warm-up and have physio on the putting green just to go hit the first tee shot, and I was like, I'll go as long as I can, I want to go play with Tommy.

Q. Final thing, since graduating back up here to the PGA TOUR, you've played well. You seem very comfortable and confident with your performance out here on TOUR. Why is that?

AUSTIN SMOTHERMAN: I think it's just the belief that -- not that it wasn't there in my prior three years out here, finishing 125, 135, 155 on the FedExCup, but the season of going back down to the Korn Ferry TOUR, having the season we did, which I felt like I was doing nothing different, really, it was just a culmination of just trusting the



process. And then a stretch of some good putting and some good habits there, short game kind of came around and just trusted my ball striking, but that belief kind of maybe elevated another level or two and then here we are back on TOUR where it feels like I know everybody. Out there on the Korn Ferry I felt like the old guy at 31. And here we are kind of right in the thick of it, even though the average age this year is like 26 for a PGA TOUR winner.

So just putting my good rounds in and fortunate enough to have them be enough early in this season to where it's freed things up getting into a Signature Event and playing my way into the PLAYERS, getting access to all these extra points when you want them.

Q. I know you are expecting a baby. When is the baby due?

AUSTIN SMOTHERMAN: Her due date is March 23rd, Monday of Houston. I left a couple weeks ago to go play the Florida Swing, and our my job was just to go play golf until I got back to hopefully Houston and could just drive up to Dallas if the baby came then. My wife's giving me the okay to play this week, just keep rolling no matter if I was shooting 5-under or 5-over, I guess. The plan's to still play Valspar next week. We'll reassess, depending upon whatever goes on here. It's still just 17 and a half holes in, so just keep playing golf, go have a baby whenever the baby shows up. She's not getting induced or anything, so we're just kind of letting it roll. Our first two were a week and two weeks late, so at least an on-time arrival would be early enough, late enough.

Q. Just to be clear, if you're in the mix and the baby is on the way?

AUSTIN SMOTHERMAN: She's like -- I don't know what she's going to do. She doesn't know if she's going to try and contact me, contact my caddie, and then figure out if he relays the info or if I just play. We just we don't know. I'm just playing golf.

Q. But the plan is to stay?

AUSTIN SMOTHERMAN: Yeah, yeah. The plan is to stay. Wild.

Q. No. 3.

AUSTIN SMOTHERMAN: No. 3, but, but the nuance is that this is our first one that we have not found out gender. So that's the difference is like, to not be there, and be like, is it a boy or is it a girl (laughing).

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