

Chubb Classic presented by SERVPRO

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Naples, Florida, USA

Tiburón Golf Club

George McNeill

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by George McNeill here at the Chubb Classic, who's making his PGA TOUR Champions debut. How does it feel to be 50 and be competing out here on this tour this week?

GEORGE McNEILL: Being 50, I would say it feels old, but when I come out here, I don't feel so old. Young guy back on tour. What's nice is that I know everybody, or I'd say 90 percent of the guys out here, so that's nice.

But just to be able to play, and I don't want to say I feel like I belong, but I've obviously been waiting a long time for this. I don't think I played the regular tour full-time in about eight or nine years, so it's been something I'm looking forward to.

Q. How special and fitting is it that you're playing this week in Naples where you were born and you live close by?

GEORGE McNEILL: Yeah, that is obviously an added bonus. They've had this tournament here for a long, long time. I've always watched and paid attention to the event, not knowing whether this was going to be my first start or not, and obviously it worked out that way. My birthday being in October, there aren't many Champions Tour events that are available to play other than the playoffs, and I wasn't obviously eligible for those last year.

Playing here in Naples and playing at Chubb and seeing all the guys, and just to start off hopefully my career out here on the Champions Tour is a great way to do it.

Q. Last year you played 13 total starts across the Korn Ferry TOUR and the PGA TOUR. Coming into this week, how do you feel about your game?

GEORGE McNEILL: I feel pretty good. The golf course is very narrow, so we'll see what happens throughout the week, if the wind blows and what have you. Playing the last few years, that was my plan the whole time was to get



competitive and competition ready. It's hard to just show up when you haven't played in a golf tournament in a long time.

Last year on the Korn Ferry and then the PGA TOUR, just getting ready for that and being competitive and tournament tough I think is a big deal. The last event I played in was Sea Island, the RSM. So it's been a few months, but at least I still have that in my mind.

We'll see when it comes Friday, but I feel like I'm ready to play.

Q. What's it been like seeing a lot of the guys that you haven't seen in a long time, just kind of reuniting with a lot of those guys?

GEORGE McNEILL: It's awesome. Everybody has been more than welcoming, especially the guys that I haven't seen in a long time. Rod Pamplung comes up and smacks me in the back of the head. Just stuff like that. All the fun guys that I haven't been around in a while.

Of course I pay attention to how they're playing. Jason Bohn, one of my best friends on Tour; Tim Herron, who I'll see in a couple weeks and stuff like that. Those guys I've always kept in touch with throughout the past four, five, six, seven years, but seeing David Toms, I saw him on the range and the other guys just to say hi, Heath Slocum another one.

Again, I feel like I'm back at home almost. I am kind of at home being in Naples. But back at home with all the guys on tour that I know them, I recognize them, and yeah, it's good.

Q. As far as the nostalgia goes, you've had a great long career and been fortunate to be out and see a lot of it. Are you kind of the sentimental type? Do you look back and think, wow, I've come a long way and I've got a lot of life left in me? Are you nervous as you're making this transition over?

GEORGE McNEILL: I would say I'm a little bit sentimental. Not too much. I know I've been fortunate, obviously, to



play the tour for as long as I have and having been around as long as I have.

But yeah, there's nerves, there's anxious, there's excitement, there's all of that. To me, it means something. If I were just coming out here just to spin my wheels, it's almost not worth my time and it's not worth everybody else's time to put up with that.

As I said before, I've been looking forward to this for a while, and I've tried to prep my game and my body and everything else for this tournament, for this week, to get ready and obviously hopefully a long career. We'll see how my game and my body hold up. But if that does, I feel like I can be competitive and be relevant for a while.

Q. Who do you have coming out this week?

GEORGE McNEILL: A lot of people. Friends, family, wife. My daughter will probably be out on Sunday. But yeah, I'm sure I'll see a lot of people that I didn't even know they were hanging around. I'm getting text messages from everybody. Most of them are, hey, you got tickets? Of course you always get that.

But I'm sure I'll see a ton of people. I played with four guys in the pro-am today that I knew that are members of a club here in town that I'm a member of, as well, so that was easy and comfortable. So I'm sure I'll see a lot of people that either I haven't seen in a while or people that I see all the time at home.

Q. Intended schedule coming up, and how much are you looking forward to being out here and playing?

GEORGE McNEILL: I'm intending to play every tournament I get in, and obviously the better I play, I think the more I'll get in. We'll just have to see -- I know my category is that 50-year-old category, so two spots every week, and priority is based on wins and all that stuff, and then there's career money and all this other stuff, so things shuffle around. We'll just have to see where I fall every week, but my intention is to play every tournament I get in.

Q. Do you have any changes in equipment or your coach? Can you talk about how prepared you are?

GEORGE McNEILL: How prepared I am and equipment-wise? I've got some -- pretty much say the same stuff. I do have a new set of irons, but they're just a newer version of the irons that I used to play, so that's not big. I'm trying a new golf ball this week. I've played Srixon almost my entire career, but this week I'm trying a Titleist golf ball. There's a few things here and there.

But my fairway woods and driver and all that, those are all the same. I've played -- I never really switched a whole lot when I played the PGA TOUR, so I don't intend to do that unless it's truly better. That's the only way I'll switch something.

But most of the stuff I have is from when I was playing the regular tour full time.

Q. Bernhard Langer practices with trying equipment. Do you do the same?

GEORGE McNEILL: No, I'm not Bernhard Langer. I don't think anybody is Bernhard Langer. I look at that guy and he's a machine. He's incredible. If I could have a career like his, absolutely, I'd love to. His records, I don't know if they'll ever be broken. But again, somebody is going to try. I'm not saying it's going to be me, but somebody is going to try.

I think every player out here looks at Bernhard as something to strive for if you can stay healthy. He obviously takes care of his body as much as he takes care of his golf game. Again, that's something to look forward to, and hopefully I'm around when I'm 68. Hopefully I'm around still by then.

Q. Following up on earlier, first tee. You're making your debut on the Champions Tour. The nerves on the first tee, are they going to be a little different and unique than playing in the TOUR events last year?

GEORGE McNEILL: We'll see. I'll see what happens on Friday. I'm sure there will be something. But again, it goes back to it means something. If it doesn't mean anything -- the only time you get nervous is if it means something. So I'm sure there will be a little bit of nerves, a little bit of -- we'll see what happens.

Again, it's a golf tournament. I've played in quite a few of them, 300 -- I don't know how many, a lot. When I get into that moment at the end of the day, I'm just stepping up, trying to tee up a ball and hit it down the fairway and move on. It goes back to being a professional and it goes back to doing something I've done pretty much my whole life.

Again, I'm not going to say I'm not going to be nervous, but I think I'll be fine.

Q. The Black Course here, you played in the pro-am today, so how familiar are you with the Black Course being from here and living here? Talk about Tiburón's Black Course.

GEORGE McNEILL: I've played here only a few times. I

played Monday morning early, just went out with my caddie and I. I played here last summer, which it doesn't even really register because the course plays so much different in the summertime versus the wintertime. It's dry, ball rolls out, and sometimes the ball is just hit and stop.

But maybe if I've played here five times in my career, that might be about it. So I don't have a ton of familiarity with it. But between Monday, today, play again tomorrow in the pro-am in the afternoon, three practice rounds, that's plenty to get familiar with the golf course and hopefully that's enough to get me around for the weekend.

Q. What excites you the most about joining this tour, and why was it something you wanted to pursue?

GEORGE McNEILL: Well, I'm sitting around at home doing nothing. Playing out here is something I've looked forward to since I turned about 40 or 41 years old, when I kind of lost my full status on the PGA TOUR. I was around 41 or 42. I was ready to take a break. I was kind of -- just my mind and my game weren't there. And I did, I took a little time.

I continued to play tournaments throughout those years, but I think the most I played in any given year was 12 or 13 events, and then last year I played 13 events, between Korn Ferry and the PGA TOUR.

Getting out here and having a full schedule, per se, again, I don't know how many events I will get in for sure, but I can control that by how I play. The better I play, I'll get in more.

But having a full schedule, being able to start looking online, and also, these are new golf courses for me out here on this tour and new towns. So learning a little bit about it, there's a little bit of time that I'm having to spend in talking to other players, hey, where do you guys stay and stuff like that. It's exciting, so it's something new. It's exciting.

Q. Here at home is going to be your first one, how fitting is that for you, and was that almost planned for you?

GEORGE McNEILL: I wish it were planned. It would have been nice to play -- I think I was eligible for two events last fall, but I didn't get in either of those. It worked out that this is my first. I am excited. I'm excited to be here, to play here in Naples, in southwest Florida, and hopefully represent the guys. I'm one of very few that are from here and born and raised and all that. I'm looking forward to it.

Q. Is it almost déjà-vu for you now, being a rookie again?

GEORGE McNEILL: Yeah, especially with the players. Again, I know 90 percent of the guys here. It's just nice to see them in the locker room, say hello, and actually know their names instead of walking around the PGA TOUR and these guys are going, hey, Mr. McNeill, and I'm looking around going, who are you talking to, and then I go up to another guy, and I'm like, who's that. I probably don't know 90 percent of those guys, but I know the other side, the 90 percent out here. Again, looking forward to it.

Q. What's the biggest adjustment for you going on to this tour?

GEORGE McNEILL: Riding in a golf cart, using a laser. It's nice. It's nice having a place to sit down. I'll use a cart some, but I'll walk a lot. When I play here at the club, I'm a member at close pines here in Naples, and we walk almost exclusively over there. So I'm used to the walking, but it's nice to have a place to sit down. So the golf cart will be a nice change, and three days, no cut, those are all good things. I've been looking forward to it.

Q. George, overall, how do you feel about your game right now heading into the tournament?

GEORGE McNEILL: The game is okay. I've been playing all right when I'm playing here at home. My club is up in Fort Myers where I'm a member at, and I play with the guys there. I've been playing all right. I've been working on it a lot for the last year and a half. I've been working hard to improve and make sure that I'm ready when it was time to show up out here. I didn't want to just kind of go through the motions and play because I was in the tournament. I want to actually compete. I want to be ready to play when it was time. So my game feels good overall.

Again, tournaments are different than just playing at home with your buddies. So we'll see what happens come Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but I feel like I'm in a good spot with my swing and putting and chipping and everything. Just overall I feel all right.

Q. Playing here, I think you played here way back at the Shark one time, and you played in Fort Myers every year and then at the Yuengling for a long time. Any kind of different approach when you're playing at home and you have that environment with some of the people coming out to see you?

GEORGE McNEILL: Maybe a little bit. Again, it goes back to the nervousness and you're playing in front of your people, in front of family, friends, close friends, stuff like that. But once I get inside the ropes, that's my office, that's my area of expertise, and hopefully I can just drown out

and block off all the outside noise and get back to basically playing tournament golf, which is what I do for a living. Hopefully that'll take over when it comes time.

But I know there's going to be plenty of people here, friends, family, everything, and I'll see them, whether it's in between holes or whatever and I'll say hi, but at the end of the day, this is my job. This is my work. This is my office. So I'm trying to just do that.

Q. This week and going forward do you plan to engage in any social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram or Facebook?

GEORGE McNEILL: I don't have any of those, so no.

Q. Lastly, have any new sponsors approached you this week on possibly becoming an ambassador, or is that something to be determined on how you play the next few weeks?

GEORGE McNEILL: I have not been approached. I've got Stitch and a few others, but I'm sure if I were to play well, play throughout the year someone would -- right now I'm just me, so I'm just showing up and trying to play.

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