

RBC Heritage

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, USA

Harbour Town Golf Links

Will Zalatoris

Press Conference

HALEY PETERSON: We'd like to welcome Will Zalatoris to the virtual media room at the RBC Heritage. You're making your 16th start this season with six top-10s and 11 top-25 finishes including last week's solo second in your Masters tournament debut. Just some comments on the momentum and strength of your game heading into this week.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, obviously an amazing week. You know, I think -- I still wish I could put into words how much fun I actually had. I was able to appreciate playing in my first Masters because, of course, like I've said, I really haven't taken anything for granted over the last two years, going from Mondaying for Korn Ferry events to playing on the Korn Ferry TOUR, possibly playing the Korn Ferry TOUR for two years to then playing in my first Masters, it's a crazy wild ride that I've enjoyed every single minute of it.

But obviously to be in contention on a Sunday at Augusta was obviously a dream come true. Obviously to come up one short will sting forever, but I know that I can contend against the best players in the world, and I know I'm capable of getting those two shots somewhere pretty soon.

HALEY PETERSON: You're making your first appearance at this event. Just comments on this week coming into it and what you've seen on the course.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I love the golf course. It's in phenomenal shape. I think it will be a really good place for me. It's very tight off the tee, overhanging trees. Obviously really got to work the golf ball into some of these greens just because of kind of the tight corners.

But I'm looking forward to it. This was a tournament that even though a lot of people on paper did say, well, you hit it far, this place kind of handcuffs your advantage, but obviously my iron play I think is the best part of my game, and so this is an event that I've really been looking forward to, and I think it's one that -- this golf course actually suits me pretty well.

Q. You're in a really interesting place as a human



RBC Heritage

being right now where already before the Masters golf fans were starting to get to know your game, and then obviously took a huge leap at Augusta. Adam Sandler tweeted at you. You're sort of on the crest of becoming famous, and I'm curious what your thoughts are on that. Do you like it, do you not like it, and sort of what is it like waking up with your world sort of changing around you?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, you know, if I didn't like it I'd probably need to find a new profession pretty quickly. It just comes with the territory.

Yeah, you know, I think none of that will really sink in until I get home. It's definitely different, going and picking up some food and people asking for autographs or pictures.

I kind of humble myself and say, I didn't win, I finished second. It's like, I've felt like I've been getting some treatment like I won, but to me it's funny. Obviously I enjoy it, interacting with the fans. They're the ones that we play for. They're the people that obviously are the ones that give us the job.

Yeah, honestly it's been fun. I don't think it'll sink in until I get back home to Dallas. I think that's when things will probably change a little bit.

Q. I think about a month ago I asked you about looking like Owen Wilson, and you had a snappy response immediately, which was very funny. Correct me if I'm wrong; are you somebody who enjoys the stage? Do you like that aspect of golf?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I mean, the Owen Wilson comparison, the Happy Gilmore's caddie comparison, Butch saying I look like a 1-iron without a grip on it, I think it's hilarious. You've got to embrace it. I think it's fun.

Hey, this is entertainment. This is obviously the really fun side of the job is -- yeah, trust me, a year ago if you said that Adam Sandler was going to send out a tweet about me, I would have thought you were on something.

But it's fun. There's so many funny comparisons that I've gotten, and that's like -- I've put all the comparisons on my

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wedges. I put the, "Wow, Owen Wilson" one on one of my wedges; I put, "Mr. Gilmore, I'm your caddie" on one. I just got a new 60 that I said, "You look like a 1-iron without a grip on it." You've got to have some fun out here. We're playing golf. You don't need to take this job too seriously.

Q. Just curious, people ask about the iron play a lot. What do you think makes you a good iron player or has made that a strength of your game throughout the years?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, you know, I think it's just -- in reality it's just trying to give myself as many looks as possible. People will see me knock something tight, like on 17. I heard some comments of wow, he's firing at everything, and it's like, I'm aiming 13 feet left of that flag and I pushed it 13 feet and it ends up being perfect, and the reality is a lot of guys do that out here, but I don't really tend to overdo things. I don't like to -- into a par-5 I don't need to hit the big high fluttery 3-wood in there and try to knock it tight and make 3. I think what I tend to do is I just tend to give myself a bunch of really good looks and make sure you put myself on the green as fast as possible, and when the putter gets hot, the putter gets hot, just like last week.

Last week I really hit the ball well, specifically wedge through 8-iron last week. I really, really struck it nicely and put myself on the right spots to give myself the best looks, and I think that's why I played well.

I think on top of that, too, probably, to get on the technical side, I judge my distance with my irons very well. I really only have a couple shots that I really stick to. If I need to get a little extra distance out of something, I tend to put the ball in the back of my stance and hammer a draw, and if I need to take something off I choke up on it and hit a little cut, but the speed stays the same.

And I think with me being such a high-speed guy that being able to kind of hone in my speed and keep it the same but also being able to regulate distance I think is really the biggest factor as to why I'm such a good iron player.

Q. Having so much success at a young age from making the Junior at 12 and playing it five times and having a good amateur career, before you missed the first stage of Q-school what was the most disappointing thing you'd faced on the golf course?

WILL ZALATORIS: I actually missed the U.S. Junior my junior year of high school, so if I had made that one, I would have set the record -- all-time record for appearances. But obviously winning the last one makes up for that for sure. Yeah.

Q. Does your performance at Augusta, does it increase your expectations when you come to this event and other events going forward?

WILL ZALATORIS: That's a really good question. Not really. I mean, if I told you that I was expecting to just play in the Masters a year ago, I wouldn't have believed you. I haven't really had -- I've said this before, but there's a lot of merit to this, of I really haven't put expectations on myself to play well. It's not like when I was playing at the U.S. Open with just Korn Ferry status that I'm trying to have it, oh, I'm going to go get a top 10 this week or I'm expecting to win or whatever. I've just really done a good job of just kind of playing my game, playing within myself, and I've done that literally since Monday qualifiers on the Korn Ferry TOUR.

Like I've said a million times, I hate the cliché, the media statement of just "trust the process," but it's gotten me to this point now, and there's no reason to all of a sudden now change -- I should go out and win this week or have all these expectations or I should win a major or make a Ryder Cup team. It's like, there's still stuff from last week that I'm really frustrated on that Josh Gregory and I and Troy Dunn and I have worked on that I didn't do my best, and that's all that matters.

The fact that I had a chance to win a major, and especially the Masters, is awesome, but how do I get to that next step is to just fix or improve on the skills that I have.

Q. Kevin Kisner was in here yesterday and said something interesting which is that in his mind the young players coming out are more comfortable with the media, have a really strong perspective, and most pertinently are ready to win faster than he thought he was ready to win and people of his generation were ready to win. I asked Collin about this earlier and I'd like to get your take of why you think that's so, why you guys are more prepared for every aspect?

WILL ZALATORIS: I think you can just thank Tiger for that. Tiger, Jordan -- that's the thing that I've got a really close friend group that of course all of our friends, they tend to humble ourselves, I guess, but that's the thing that we were joking about was wow, finishing second in the Masters, you're only 24, sky's the limit. Jordan did that when he was 20. So you put things in perspective.

But yeah, Tiger coming out of the gates, he's one of the few guys that would turn a four-shot lead into a seven-shot lead. The reality is a lot of times you see more of guys having four or five and then kind of cruising or maybe make a couple bogeys and win by two or three, and Tiger just

somehow always did it, to go from four to seven, when all of a sudden it seems like the last hour of coverage is just a coronation.

I think seeing him do that, seeing a lot of younger guys do that, the reality is obviously none of us have anything to lose out here, but it's just like last weekend, I'm playing in the Masters; I don't have anything to lose. I'm playing in my first Masters; let's enjoy this. I've watched this tournament for 20 years; let's go have some fun.

I think that fearlessness of seeing Tiger do it his carried over over the last 20 years or 20-plus years, and I think that's why you're seeing guys like Collin coming out of the gates winning, Viktor, Matt Wolff, and if you think about it, we were born kind of around when Tiger really started to take off, and so from 2000 to 2010 that was one of the best decades of golf ever, and we got to see it.

Q. I was wondering, you talk about Tiger, but just from your upbringing, whether parents, coaches, someone, was there someone that helped preach that perspective that you showed that impressed so many people last week on the golf course in interviews, that kind of stuff?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I think it's a combination of a lot of people. Obviously my parents, the most influential people in my life; I think David Price is definitely -- I consider him a second father, if you will. We were joking on Monday that, hey, it's a new week, you're tied for last. Last week was fun, but we're starting over, starting back at square one. Even DP, he always gets on me for saying, "you know, um," in media, stuff like that.

Having guys like DP and my parents and Troy and Josh who are there to lift me up, and at the same time -- I've just got such a good support system around me that I'm really lucky, obviously, to be that fortunate to have such great people around me on the golf course helps with what happens on.

Q. Your mom ran track at Oregon, right?

WILL ZALATORIS: She did.

Q. What was her event, and is that where you get kind of your skinny speed from?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, she was a 400 and 800, so basically a sprinted marathon. She's the toughest woman I know. There's no quit in that woman, and obviously I think I got a little bit of her genes.

HALEY PETERSON: That's all the questions we have.

Thank you, Will, for taking the time, and best of luck this week.

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