

Valspar Championship

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Palm Harbor, Florida, USA

Innisbrook Resort (Copperhead)

Peter Malnati

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Peter Malnati, the champion of the 2024 Valspar Championship, to the interview room.

Peter, congrats on getting your second PGA TOUR victory. We just want to start off with some opening comments on what it's like to hear that.

PETER MALNATI: Yeah, you know, that moment of winning a tournament and having your family come out on the green and the big hugs and all that, that's something that I've seen other families have and that has been my dream. There's been a lot of stretches of golf in the last nine years when I wondered if I would ever have that experience. I'm at peace with who I am and the way I live and the work that I put into this. If I had never had the moment I had today, I would have been completely fine. But, man, was that special. That was so special. It felt amazing. It was really validating for just all the hard work, all the times I've gotten on that plane and flown away from my family when they have stayed home. It was all preparing for that moment. So to get that second PGA TOUR win, to have it be here at the Valspar Championship, I just -- it's sinking in now, but it still feels completely surreal.

THE MODERATOR: I don't think there's any way to replicate what you gave, such a great speech there at the trophy ceremony, but you kind of grabbed the mic and said there were some words that you wanted to share. Is there a way you can kind of summarize what you were feeling and share it with everyone.

PETER MALNATI: Absolutely. Well, I'll say something in here I didn't say out there because I think it's important and relevant. When my son Hatcher was born in 2019, I removed all my social media from my phone. So I don't do social media anymore and I'm a happier person because of it. Not that it's bad, social media's not bad, but for me, I didn't use it particularly well because I would always read comments. And I wanted to use it as away to be interactive but I just -- it wasn't healthy for me. So I removed it all.

So I don't know specifically what is being said about me, about the PGA TOUR, about our sport in general, but I know the direction that it has been going for the last couple years. And when I was outside, I was compelled to say this. I feel like this win, this win is, you know, first and foremost, it is, it's for me, it's for my family, it's for my caddie, it's for my team of people who support me.

But on a larger scale it's also, it's for Tampa, it's for the Copperheads, it's for Valspar, and it's for all the events on the PGA TOUR who find themselves in this new ecosystem kind of wondering where they fit and if they matter because I wanted -- I said this out there because I wanted the Copperheads and the people of Tampa and the people from Valspar to know that there are thousands of Peter Malnatis out there who are 10 years old right now, teenagers right now, who dream of playing golf on the PGA TOUR, and they want to have the moment that I just got to have. If we don't have communities that believe in what the PGA TOUR does and sponsors who support what the PGA TOUR does, we don't have those moments.

I know that the narrative turns a lot to we're coming up to Augusta, we're preparing for the majors, we're in that season. In terms of the actual people who participate in golf at the highest level, 90 percent of us dream of the moment that I just had. There's a 10 percent that really do probably gear their schedules and focus on the majors, but 90 percent of the people who have made it to the top level of professional golf and a hundred percent of the people who dream of being at the top level of professional golf, live for that moment that I just had. It's amazing. I'm proud of myself, I did a lot of hard work, I'm proud of my family, they supported me, but it doesn't matter, all that hard work and everything. We don't have tournaments to play in if we don't have communities that think these tournaments matter, and if we don't have host organizations like the Copperheads and, you know, several other amazing host organizations around the country, we don't have a PGA TOUR.

So this win is for all the host organizations, all the title sponsors, all the communities that kind of wonder, you know, what the meaning of their event is. Like, it's to have



entertainment come to your community, fulfill dreams for people like me, and give the community something to be excited about in a way that gives back and enriches the community where we play. And I think this tournament is a shining example of that and I'm just really -- I couldn't be more proud and more honored to win, to win here, to win an event like this. This stands out, it's special, it's amazing, but I just want, you know, all the events out there, like, I just want 'em to know that, like, every PGA TOUR event, every Korn Ferry Tour event, every event on PGA TOUR Americas matters because it matters to the community where you play, and we're going to make a difference.

So, anyway, that was something I felt like I needed to say out there and I'm glad I was able to.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Peter. With that, we'll open it up for questions.

Q. Well said. You talked about how nervous you were out there, but you didn't perform that way. What inside you was able to rise out there in that tight quarters?

PETER MALNATI: Definitely a lot of repetition. I've done a lot of work. I feel really lucky. I have amazing coaches that have supported me. I think I was ready, I was ready for that moment, apparently. We see that I was. Because definitely from about the -- I would say, from about the 13th tee in, I didn't really feel like myself over any shot. I was really amped up. I was in a state of really like heightened energy. So I just had to keep going through my process and I had done enough repetitions that I could go through the process properly and for the most part I was able to execute. I hit a nervy shot into 16. I keep coming back to that one because that was the one I would say, you know, disappointed me if I -- but whatever, you hit bad shots. And that's the only real one. Like, I look back and the rest of the day I hit shots, even under that situation, not feeling like I was myself. I'm really proud of that.

Q. I want to ask about two of those birdies you found coming in on the back nine. You had the no-look birdie at 12 and then can you take us through the last birdie at the par-3?

PETER MALNATI: Yeah, the putt on 12 was so interesting. You always say -- I always hear people say, like, sometimes when you win, those things have to -- some things have to happen and go right. I was disappointed in the putt on 12 because I had picked a line where I really wanted to hit a nice -- it was a quick putt. I didn't want to be silly, but I picked a line. I really wanted to hit a nice, aggressive putt, and I just -- the minute I hit it I thought I had left it short, and I was like, aw, that was a good opportunity. I thought I left it short. I was just kind of

like, I don't know what I was doing. I wasn't watching the ball roll because I knew it was going to stop this far short and I was going to tap it in. And then I heard the crowd go nuts and I was like, okay. So that was cool. Awesome little bonus.

Then 17, I think under normal conditions, I would have probably thought about a 4-iron, like, holding it into that wind because I think the total yardage to the hole was, I don't know, anyone got it? I don't know how far it was. But I remember telling my caddie I needed to make a 2 -- I needed to hit it 208. And 208's a pretty big 5-iron for me, but in the situation I was in, it was just a very normal 5-iron.

So I was like, all right, it's a perfect 5-iron, don't have to do anything special with it, start it on the TV tower, let the wind move it over to the middle of the green. The wind moved it actually more than I thought. I actually executed it really how I wanted to and the wind moved it all the way to the hole and even a pinch left of it.

But that was really fun in that moment to just step up, not overthink it, just it's a full 5-iron at the TV tower, go. And to watch that ball fly was a really cool feeling, to have it like tracking the hole there, that was really nice. And the putt was -- I mean, I was nervous over the putt too, but two balls out on left and it's pretty quick, so just tap it in, as Happy Gilmore would say.

Q. Two-time winner on the TOUR, but first time winning as a father. What was that like to see your sons come greenside?

PETER MALNATI: I mean, hopefully, now it's sunk in enough that I handle it better than I did there. But I'm not kidding, you know -- people don't need to know all this. Like, golf wasn't my thing growing up. I wasn't from a golf family, so I shot hoops in the driveway and played baseball against my little bounce-back. I always imagined I was Omar Vizquel when I was playing baseball. He was the best shortstop ever, amazing, and I was Michael Jordan when I was playing basketball. And I was always like that game on the line, tie game, last seconds, make this shot, go, boom.

And then golf became my thing, you know, through high school and college. Like, playing on the PGA TOUR was just a dream. It wasn't even a realistic goal. I was a very mediocre college player at a very mediocre college. Great college, mediocre golf program, whatever. So I was still that kid. I would go out to practice and every 6-footer at the end of my practice session was to win the tournament. And even at that point in my life, like, I imagined that moment when I would be married to the love of my life and she would come running out and we would have our family. Like, that's something that I wanted.

To have that entire dream come to life and to like -- I looked over and saw -- I didn't see my family. I can't remember the exact order because my brain was spinning, but I don't think I saw 'em until after I hit the first putt, but I definitely saw 'em before I tapped in, and I was -- man, I had lost it before I had hit my last shot of the tournament, for sure, but luckily it was like literally 2 inches from the hole. But, yeah, that moment's pretty amazing.

Q. You've been heaping praise on Valspar, and rightfully so, but how fitting is it the guy that plays with the most colorful ball just won the most colorful tournament on the PGA TOUR?

PETER MALNATI: (Laughing). It is fitting, isn't it? I hadn't thought about it coming into this week, that it was a great fit for me to win here with the yellow ball, but, wow, what a -- and the yellow ball is also -- thank you, thank you to my boy Hatcher over there I. Think he's kind of over it now, but it was cool last summer when I first told him that they made yellow golf balls. So I switched because he was into it and now Daddy kind of likes it and I think I'll be sticking with it for a little while and we'll have the most colorful ball on TOUR for at least 12 months, you know, until I go pull a Sam Burns, the most colorful ball on TOUR will be the Valspar champion.

Q. 12-under wins the tournament, which is a low number for most tournaments. What's it like playing on a course and just some general thoughts on the Copperhead course?

PETER MALNATI: Yeah. So you said a low number. Golf always gets confusing because, you know, that is -- relative to what you normally see win on the PGA TOUR, you might see more under par win. This golf course does not let you fake it. Like, anytime you're out of position, you're in trouble. The fairways are narrow, the penalty for missing the fairways is -- you have to get really creative and play an exceptional shot to get yourself back into position, the greens are small, the areas around the greens do not lend themselves to easy up-and-downs.

So every shot on this golf course requires a lot of thought. I think it has one of the best sets of par-5s we play on TOUR. The par-5s, in certain wind conditions, all four of them are reachable, but none is a gimmie of a birdie. You got to work really hard and execute great shots to make birdies on the par-5s.

The entire course, there's not a shot on the course where I feel like you're truly relaxed and oh, you know, I can just, you know, I can just -- even like we played one of my favorite courses on TOUR last year -- or last week as well

at TPC Sawgrass, and I don't think anyone would ever call that an easy course, but if you're on the 9th tee box there or something, it gives you a shot where you can just flail it one and hit it. In certain wind conditions you can't, but I can. You don't have that on this course. Every single shot requires your attention. That shows in the fact that you had a collection this week of 154, is that how many ended up teeing up? 154 of the best golfers in the whole world, and Mother Nature actually provided good playing conditions. We thought we would have worse. Like, it was windy but no more than usual for Florida this time of year, and 12-under par won the golf tournament. That is a compliment to the course and what it demands. This is definitely one of the -- I've always said, I judge golf courses, I analyze golf courses on basically two criteria, like, are they conditioned well enough that you feel like you can -- if you execute well, you can get a good result, and does the course distinguish good shots from bad shots.

This golf course is, I mean, it's 10 out of 10 on both criteria. It's amazing.

THE MODERATOR: You just spoke to how difficult the course is, especially with that closing stretch with the Snake Pit. Are you someone who leaderboard watches or what was kind of your game plan when you were talking with your caddie coming down the stretch?

PETER MALNATI: You know what's funny is I don't look at the leaderboards because I'm, you know, trying to soak in a bunch of information. I look at 'em out of habit. I looked at every leaderboard on the course today. My plan wasn't changing one bit. I mean, one thing that most people probably don't know and wouldn't expect, but I'll admit this, 80 percent of us on TOUR, like, I went into today knowing I could win on the PGA TOUR, but really not wanting to finish 40th because as bunched as the leaderboard was, I could have finished 40th pretty easily. Like, it wouldn't have taken -- you could look it up. What score would I have had to shoot to finish 40th today and it would have been easy to do on that golf course.

So I looked at leaderboards, I knew where I stood, but my plan was the same whether I was two back or two up. I'm going to go out and I'm going to try to hit it between the bunkers off the tee or -- you know, in the 16th case between the water and the trees. Like, it doesn't matter where I am in the field, I'm not changing my strategy. So why I look at leaderboards, I don't know. It was more out of habit than anything else. But I knew where I stood. I obviously didn't have it in realtime knowing what Cameron Young was making on all the holes, but I knew I was -- when I stood over the 6-footer on 17, I was tied for the lead. I knew before I hit my second shot on 18 that I had a two-shot lead, um, yeah, I don't know what I was doing with

all that information in my head, but I had it.

Q. I know you said the impact of just this win and what these events mean to the community, but you are now going to the Masters. Has that sunk in yet? What is that feeling like?

PETER MALNATI: You know, I got asked a lot when I was a kid, my uncle has tickets to the Masters, do you want to come, my friend has tickets to the Masters, do you want to come, and I always said no, I don't want to go watch people play golf. That doesn't sound fun. So I didn't go.

And then as I became a PGA TOUR member and played on the PGA TOUR, became a winner on the PGA TOUR, I would occasionally meet the right person who would say, hey, do you want to come play Augusta? I was like, no. Like, I want to go play Augusta when I'm in the Masters. That's when I want to go play Augusta. So the fact that I -- it's still an invitational. They can choose not to invite me, I suppose, but I think historically they're pretty consistent and I think I'll get an invitation. I'll probably accept that invitation and go play the Masters (laughing), which will be really, really -- I mean, the realization of another childhood dream. Yeah, I mean, I guess, yeah, that's cool. It hasn't sunk in yet at all because, I mean, I'm I -- I guess I'm going to be there in -- when is it?

THE MODERATOR: Three weeks.

PETER MALNATI: Three weeks or something? Wow. That's pretty cool. So, yeah, that's great. I mean, but again, just to reiterate, like, that's amazing. I'm already thankful for that opportunity. I can't wait. But I will come back to this, and I mean it. You know, I remember playing on the then Nationwide now Korn Ferry Tour in 2015. Every single event out there felt like a major to me, every single event that I've played on the PGA TOUR, ever. Like, I remember -- you know, we affectionately refer to some of our events as the Island TOUR, some of our events that are additional field events. Every single time I've played in Puerto Rico, in Dominican, those feel -- I've never teed it up in a TOUR event and not felt, wow, this is, like, I'm nervous, and this is important. And 90 percent of us on TOUR are that way. So, like, I'm going to go play next week in Houston, and, like, there may not be the history and the story and, you know, I may feel something special when I get on the grounds at Augusta, and I hope I do, but I'm going to feel just as amped up on the first tee next week in Houston, because this, playing golf on the PGA TOUR for 90 percent of us out here, is A, really, really hard, and B, the realization of a dream. So, I'm not going to put too much, too much emphasis on the fact that, yeah, I'm in the Masters, that's -- that is, that is cool, don't get me wrong, I'm excited about it and I cannot wait to set foot on

the grounds. That will be amazing. But I think more of what has sunk in to me is, this guarantees me that -- this is my 10th season on the PGA TOUR -- it's guarantees me that I'm going to have 12, at least. Pretty cool. Like, like, that's pretty cool. Like, for where I, you know, it's just always my dream to never get a real job, actually, believe it or not. Like, I never even, I never knew what it was going to look like. When I was a kid I watched my dad work really hard and it didn't look like fun. So I was like, I want to play baseball for a living or tennis or something, and then it turned into golf and now I know for sure I'm going to have a job on the best TOUR in the world for two and a half more years. That's pretty -- that, that's what I think about right now. But I'm sure as I, you know, relax a little bit from here, I'll start wondering what that 12th tee shot to that back right pin at Augusta's going to feel like. So, it is pretty cool.

THE MODERATOR: Going off that with scheduling, you move to 16 in the FedExCup, and you're in the remainder of the Signature Events, like, how important is that for this season?

PETER MALNATI: Yeah, it's really important. I mean, we have really, we put an emphasis, and I think rightfully so, on prioritizing getting the top players in the world to play together more often. I think that's incredibly important. I have work to do to consider myself in that group of one of those, like, one of those top players in the world, but right now I'm 16th on the FedExCup, and I'm going to have a strong handful of opportunities to play in those fields. I've had one access to one so far this year at Pebble Beach and I did well, I held my own. To be in those, you know, is incredibly, incredibly meaningful because, first of all, they're some of my favorite tournaments. I mean, I get to go play Hilton Head. Hilton Head, you know, next to this golf course, is one of the most challenging courses that we play all year. And it's one that I look forward to going to each and every year. So, knowing that I might not have been there this year was, you know, was motivation for me to play really well, and, you know, work hard and try to get there. Now I'm there. It's amazing.

Then our, my wife and I, our closest friends in the world live in Columbus, Ohio, and we stay with them every year at the Memorial. So, to not know if I was going to be in that field, that stinks, because, like, we want to go there, like we want to be there. So now we know. And that's cool. And I've joked, I've joked with Nathan at the Travelers Championship for a long time, that I always tell him that that's my major, because I just -- like for me, the most fun course on TOUR is TPC River Highlands. I guess, fun, this course I would not use the word fun for it, very, very stressful. Amazing, but very stressful. Like, if I'm still alive, which I hope I will be, I take good care of myself, and if I

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

still love golf, which I'm pretty sure I will, I want to be a member at TPC River Highlands when I'm 75. It's just fun to play. I love the course. But I've always joked with Nathan that the Travelers is my major. Everyone else is peaking for all these others, but the Travelers, that's my major. So now I'm in, I'm in my major. Which is particularly cool. Like, just to know I'm going to tee it up a handful of times, knowing I'm playing with the best players in the world for elevated FedExCup points, that's, that's spectacular.

THE MODERATOR: All right, how do the Malnatis celebrate tonight? We've already started with ice cream after green side, but what will it look like tonight?

PETER MALNATI: We got PB&J's in the car for the trip to the airport? Let's go. I will make Hatcher a promise right now. You're probably going to go to school tomorrow, but we won't get you up early for it. You can sleep until you wake up and go in a little late. Does that sound like a good deal?

HATCHER MALNATI: Yeah.

PETER MALNATI: Okay.

THE MODERATOR: Perfect. With that, thank you, Peter, for the time and again, congratulations.

PETER MALNATI: Thank you all so much.

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