

Valspar Championship

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Palm Harbor, Florida, USA

Innisbrook Resort (Copperhead)

Neal Shipley

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Neal Shipley to the interview room here at the Valspar Championship. Neal, you're playing on a sponsor exemption this week. It's your 11th start on the PGA TOUR. But your first here at the Valspar. I think you just got to play yesterday, first look at the course, what's your first impressions.

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, I got to play this golf course my freshman year of college, which seems like a long time ago now. Would he played in the fall and it's dormant, no overseed, the golf course plays a lot different with that overseed, the rough is really long, juicy this week. There's a huge, huge premium on hitting fairways. So that's going to be really important and hitting greens, because the greens are really small. We got some probably three and a half, probably get up towards four-inch rough in some places out there. So it's going to be a great test and really excited for the challenge.

THE MODERATOR: You're playing predominantly on the Korn Ferry Tour this season, you made six starts already, a couple of top 15 finishes. How would you assess your form so far this year?

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, I feel like I'm just kind of getting ramped up. Kind of got off to a really slow start. Missed a few cuts that I probably should have made. Overall if my poor stretch on the Korn Ferry Tour this year is going to be this start where I've missed I think four of my first six cuts, but I've had a 15th in there and a 9th, and that's good for a bad stretch. That's going to keep us in it this season. We're just working towards getting hot later this year and hopefully that starts here this week.

THE MODERATOR: Yeah, you said getting hot later this year. Starting this week, what are your aspirations in the situation that you are, you're hoping maybe to probably get a few invites after this season that you had last year and gained some prominence.

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, yeah, no, starting here, I just love to compete and compete to win. I want to try and do that.



When you think about it, it's an opportunity to play at Augusta, which is something that I really want to do again. There's no better place than Augusta National in April.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll take some questions.

Q. I was wondering nine months or so into your pro career is there anything that has surprised you or struck you about golf or how you feel as a pro and the things you have to work on as a pro compared to in college or does it feel pretty much the same in terms of your process?

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, I think as a professional you have the added dynamic of being on the road for four, five weeks at a time. On the Korn Ferry Tour early like big international travel. Then with that you have to manage your body a lot better. When you're playing in college you go to a tournament for four days, you come back home, you're home for two weeks or a week and a half and have you that time to reset. But out here you're on the constant go and managing your time Monday through Wednesday is so important.

Q. Is there anyone on the Korn Ferry Tour any veterans that you've picked their brains just about that process or anyone in general on the Korn Ferry Tour that you've hung out with over those first six weeks?

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, there's a bunch of older guys. Adam Long, PGA TOUR vet, we're both at the Dye Preserve down in Florida and I've played a little bit together with him he's given me some good advice, been able to talk to him a bit. Just a lot of other guys that have been on the Korn Ferry Tour for a while. I think the Korn Ferry Tour's really cool with all the travel we do and you see the same guys every week. It's kind of a fraternity there and a lot of guys are happy to share a lot of information and a lot of insight. Everyone's looking to get out here and compete really hard against each other, but no, it's a cool kind of fraternity.

Q. Winning the team title here when you were at JMU as a freshman, what was that experience like? I think you shot a 68 on one of the final days there. What was



that experience like, what do you remember about the course and just that experience in general?

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, I remember my first round and second round were like really good and then I think I shot 68, 79, 68, which is pretty much summed up my freshman year of college. I was the perfect 5 man in the fact that I would have two low rounds and one round that was just going to be tossed. I think that having that experience, having two really good rounds out here is huge for me. I have a lot of great memories from this golf course. That freshman year team to me was really, really special. It's unfortunate that COVID kind of cut that team short. That freshman year was really cool for me and it really helped in my development. Hopefully we can get another win out there this week. That will be cool to do.

Q. Speaking to your development, this time last year you hadn't had the experience in the Masters and the U.S. Open, how do you feel like you've grown as a player since this time last year?

NEAL SHIPLEY: I think prior to playing in those majors and playing in the PGA TOUR events, I felt like I almost idolized guys out here and how they played. I think being out here and playing with some great players you just start to realize that the key to playing great golf, it's not, there's no secret, there's no secret sauce to it, it's just about being really consistent and doing, and just being yourself and knowing what you do well and just playing to your strengths. Everyone out here hits bad golf shots. I've seen a lot of bad golf shots from a lot of great players and it's more about how you handle those and also just being like a really consistent player and doing -- Zach Johnson I think is a great example. I seen him play, played with him at the 3M. He knows his game really well and he plays to his strengths. A guy like that, he's been out here for a long time, has had a great career and he doesn't hit the ball that long, but I think a guy like that is just a good example of how you don't need to do anything special to have a great career on the PGA TOUR.

Q. With Full Swing Season Three you're featured on that. What was that experience like having cameras follow you around?

NEAL SHIPLEY: It was fun. It's chaotic. At the same time we had a lot of moments there that on camera that probably were never going to be used because we had so much fun with it. We were laughing a lot. Me and some of the crew got to be pretty close. They spent a lot of time with me. It's a cool little -- it's just a cool thing that I got to do as an amateur and kind of represent amateur golf in this year's full swing and I hope in the future that I get the opportunity to do it again because I think it was really cool

to share with everyone what being at the Masters was like, is like as an amateur and the emotions involved with moments like that.

Q. When did you first get to watch the episode where you were featured and what was your reactions?

NEAL SHIPLEY: I didn't get to watch it until it was released to the public. I watched it on the road while I was in Argentina. It was really, it was just kind of funny to see. I remember saying some of those things and lines, but some of the things I said, I'm like I don't remember, I don't recall making that joke. So it was still kind of fun to watch it back and hear all that. It's cool too because I got to kind of reminisce on some really cool times I had at Augusta.

Q. Any notable feed back from friends family or I guess even random fans or people?

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, I mean I had some old friends reach out and make fun of me, which I appreciate. There's been a lot of talk about like Body by Waffle House and all that, and that's been, that's been a big one. I had a friend of mine who makes ball markers out in Columbus and he made me a Body by Waffle House ball marker which we'll probably debut this week. It's pretty cool. It's just been fun to kind of add in that little, just to have some fun and joke with friends and all that.

THE MODERATOR: Along that same theme, we have seen you on TV ad for equipment manufacturer that you represent like a lot of other players. Can you just give us a little bit of behind the scenes what that's like filming that, the duration, what sort of things you do in that period.

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, I think -- well commercial shoots, it's funny, it might be a 30-second slot, but you film literally all day just for -- maybe I was on camera for 10 seconds of that, and say five words. So it's pretty funny how that works. Yeah, I mean you pretty much, you get to the site at like 7 a.m. and you have a makeup person and I got to do my makeup, do my hair and all that, and that's a whole process. Then you maybe come in to do a couple lines, do a couple things, and then they send you off to sit around and wait to get called back again to do another scene or another thing. I mean, it's kind of a, it's a funny, all-day process, but it was a really cool experience to see the work that goes into that and the creative process that those people go through for those commercial slots. It's given me a bigger appreciation for everything that goes into that type of production.

THE MODERATOR: If you were to give your several marks out of 10 for that commercial what would you rate and what sort of feed back have you had from some of



your peers or friends.

NEAL SHIPLEY: I get texts like every Sunday when that commercial goes off during a PGA TOUR event. So that's been really cool and fun. And people are like, What are you doing on my TV, and I think that's funny. I haven't really seen it a lot, I don't watch a lot of golf anymore. From the commercial shoot, I probably give myself an 8 out of 10. There's a couple lines I struggled with a lot. Like just, I couldn't say, like, "We need these in the bag," for some reason. Like I just couldn't get that line out. I just fumbled over it over and over again. It took me, took us about 30 minutes to get that line going. I think they had someone else say it for me too, because I couldn't get that one going. I don't know why. But we did pretty good in a lot of others and it's kind of actually funny. Like I had, it gives me, I have a really great appreciation for people who do movies and remember all those lines, because they would feed me like one or two sentences and I, for the life of me, I couldn't remember them. It was a very, you know, props to the people on that production, they were very patient with me.

Q. Unrelated to golf. Buckeyes didn't have the strongest season, but are you a March Madness follower, will you fill out a bracket?

NEAL SHIPLEY: Oh, yeah, I'll fill out a bracket. I got to check some of the analytics a little bit more to kind of come up with the pick. I'm not loving Duke right now. I say that because I hope Adam Long watches this, I don't like his Dukies this year. I think they have had like two injuries recently and, yeah, so I'm not going to be probably going with them, even though they're a heavy favorite. But we'll see. I kind of loving the Big East, St. Johns, I think they're a 2 seed, love what they have done this year, turning around that program, historic program. I think they could be one of my favorites in my bracket.

Q. How did you end up at Dye Preserve?

NEAL SHIPLEY: I just had a couple connections out there and I had the opportunity to join. And, I mean, it's one of those golf courses down there that's in pristine condition, and they have maybe 15, 20 pros out there, so there's a lot of games. So that's big. Being around a bunch of pros when your home and having good competition with your friends is I think important.

Q. That top 10 you had in Panama, you had conditional status starting the year on the Korn Ferry Tour, were you giving yourself any -- were you feeling any pressure just to make the cut and get in the shuffle?

NEAL SHIPLEY: Oh, yeah. That's real. The reshuffle pressure, it's kind of tough, I finished in the 151 to 200 category from the PGA TOUR. So if you have TOUR status, you finish 151 to 200 on the FedExCup points list, you end up getting Korn Ferry Tour status, but you're only guaranteed the first four. Then if you don't make a cut you're kind of in trouble. The guys who didn't make a cut, they got Argentina and Chile, but they're not going to get Savannah or Bradenton. So it was huge just making a cut and getting in there. And then also just having that top 10, I mean that gets you enough points where you're probably good for the reshuffle for the next one or two. Then the top 15 on top of it in Chile, I feel just kind of feel stress-free now, I can just go out and play golf. But I could tell you, if I had to go to Bogota without making a cut before the first reshuffle, that would have been -- that's a really nervous tournament, because if you don't play well then I'm back on PGA TOUR Americas for a year and that's, that's not a lot of fun being down there (laughing).

Q. You mentioned the Body by Waffle House, do you remember who came up with that, was it a teammate or what?

NEAL SHIPLEY: So I actually, I have to give props to my host from the Dogwood Invitational. I think I went to Waffle House once or twice and Dogwood's down in Atlanta, there's a Waffle House on every street corner there. And he was just, we were just making jokes and he said, You need to get a T-shirt Body by Waffle House. And I've gotten to use that, I stole that line a couple times now. But, no, that was all time by him. Yeah, big shoutout to him.

Q. What's his name or is that you don't want to put him?

NEAL SHIPLEY: I don't want to put him out there. I don't know if he wants to be out on TV. He'll know it's him.

Q. Do you have a go-to Waffle House order or do you mix it up?

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, so well it's changed. Since Full Swing and filming it at Augusta I have since gotten a nutritionist and we've cut out a lot of things in our diet. But the OG order was always an All-star special with a chocolate chip waffle. I would go hash browns, scrambled eggs, usually sausage and white toast. And I would use the toast, eggs and sausage, I would like cut the sausage in half, because you get two, and I would kind of make the eggs and turn it into a little sandwich, so like a little breakfast sandwich. And then the chocolate chip waffle. That was definitely a big go to.

I know Waffle House is kind of, it's a pretty popular spot out



here. I remember I think it was Zac Blair when I was in Kentucky, I went to Waffle House maybe two or three mornings in Kentucky, and every morning I saw Zac Blair and his family out there. His little boys are so chaotic. But it's kind of a popular little spot out here. I think it's underrated.

Q. You said you order now would be different?

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, no, I probably would just go with the two-egg special now. Can't really do the waffle. I don't really do a lot of gluten anymore. Which is unfortunate. Because the waffle is probably the best part of it.

THE MODERATOR: We touched on March Madness. You have a Master's Degree in data analytics at The Ohio State University. How is that going to help you formulate your bracket and also how does it help you in your performances on the golf course.

NEAL SHIPLEY: Yeah, I think formulating the bracket, if I wanted to really get into it, I could break out an Excel spreadsheet and do a lot of different analysis. Funny enough, in the data analytics program there's a sports data class, and it was essentially like how to sports bet 101, like how to handicap teams. So I have knowledge of how to do that myself for these March Madness games. Which would be pretty interesting. I don't have enough time to probably do that though, so I'll just kind of go off my gut feeling.

But on the golf course, I mean, I have a guy that helps me out with going through a lot of the Shot Link data out here -- one of the cool things about playing a PGA TOUR event is you have all this Shot Link data. You can use the last four, five years of data and you have just a massive data set. You can really see clearly like, okay, on some holes out here, like you have to hit it in certain spots. No. 5's a great example, the par-5 out here. It's a really long hole, and there's that big right fairway bunker out there. If you hit it into it, it's almost like a shot and a half penalty. You're going to average over par on the hole on a par-5. So you got to lay up short of that bunker or you got to be able to hit it over it. So, depending upon the wind, your strategy changes. You might hit 3-wood short of it if it's in the wind. If it's pumping downwind you might hit driver over it. But it's kind of like, it's a good example of, from all this data we have, I can say that bunker is death and I don't want to be in it so we're taking it out of play.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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