

RBC Canadian Open

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Ancaster, Ontario, Canada

Hamilton Golf and Country Club

Mackenzie Hughes

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Mackenzie Hughes to the interview room here at the RBC Canadian Open. You're a Hamilton native, what's it like to be back playing your country's National Open in your hometown?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, it's a lot of fun. I did that for the first time in 2012, and 12 years later it feels quite a bit different to do that because I don't feel like it's quite as big a shock walking onto the property. I remember doing it at 21 years old and being pretty wide eyed and maybe caught off guard a little bit by how big the moment was. I held my own, but, yeah, playing at home is a lot of fun. There's obviously, maybe being pulled in a few different directions that you wouldn't be pulled in otherwise, but I try to relish the fact that I'll have some extra cheers out there and a lot of friends and family.

THE MODERATOR: What's it like to come back and play the RBC Canadian Open every year and represent your country back in and play in front of your country men and your home fans?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: A lot of fun. Amongst the Canadians we talk about this a little bit just in the fact that when we come back for this one week a year you kind of feel like a little bit of a star, which, you know, I would say you go next week and it feels quite a bit different, even though it's a big tournament next week as well. Coming here feels different. The support and, yeah, the way the fans are behind us is really cool. It's probably one of the most fun tournaments to kind of get in contention for, just because of how much support we have.

THE MODERATOR: The last time the RBC Canadian Open was here in Hamilton in 2019, since then the course, there's been upgrades and renovations to the course. What have you liked about them and how do they suit your game?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, the changes are nice. They definitely went away from some of the -- I mean, I felt like some of the greens were quite severe back to front, and I think with the changes they have now allowed



themselves to have a few more pin locations on certain holes. A few new tees, so they added some length to add some difficulty. It's a great test. There was a couple times today -- I played the front nine and there's a couple pretty vicious runoffs, and the runoffs in front of the greens and around the greens are cut super tight, so they're running really fast. So you might have a ball that runs 20, 30, 40 yards off of a green when it was just off the green. That's definitely going to add some difficulty to it, but overall I think the changes are great and guys are going to love the test this week.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. The greens being they look really pure and there's these runoff areas, you're a guy that has made a lot of long putts in your career and are known for your short game. Does any of that excite you that this might be a place that really sets up well for your style of play?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, I think that any time you make it harder around the greens that I think will benefit me. Now, with it playing somewhat soft early on this week, I don't know how much a lot of that will come into play, but, yeah, certainly as the week goes on if it dries up and gets a bit firmer and faster I think that it plays into some of my strengths really well.

Q. Last year with Nick sort of breaking the ice and winning this event, does that do you think in any way free up other Canadians like yourself, sort of seeing that it is possible to break through here and sort of allow you maybe to get your mind into it's really possible?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, I think, you know, as far as the overall weight, I think that that's been lessened by Nick's win, but I show up here with my own personal expectations and desires to do well, so I don't think that like I'm going to be out there thinking about because Nick won there's no pressure on me anymore. I put a lot of pressure on myself to do well every single week, but coming here I really enjoy playing well in front of the home crowd and so I, while we're not answering the question of who will be the first to break the Pat Fletcher or be the next Canadian to win since Pat Fletcher, but I still think that when we come



here we're all pretty eager to do well close to home.

Q. I just wanted to ask you, you touched on it, but that experience of being at an event and getting the Rory treatment, so to speak, where there's a gallery before you on every hole, there's people shouting your name on every hole, doesn't necessarily happen every week on TOUR, how does that affect a player just to have that kind of different experience?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, I think it feels good. I walk around this place often and think about myself as a young kid. I was here a lot as a young kid watching these tournaments in 2003 and 2006. I remember thinking how cool it was back then. I wanted to get close to the players, get autographs and all that. Now there's another generation that's trying to do that and I'm the one signing the autographs. It's really cool. Like I said, we don't do it very often and, yeah, I think it makes you feel, it makes you feel pretty good. I try to make a positive impact on the people that I come across and, yeah, so it's been a lot of fun this week.

Q. On a performance level does it sort of, is it something you kind of have to factor in a little bit or once you tee it up it's all just noise anyway?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: No, I think that you hear it. It's a boost, a positive boost. I always said when I -- I played with Tiger twice, and I thought that the energy that he had in his crowds that he carried around with him, I thought it was worth at least a couple shots in a tournament. Even just playing with him, I mean, I wasn't even the one getting all the big cheers, but I just felt like the whole energy in that crowd and the atmosphere was, you could feel it. Out here this week we'll have a little bit of that, being Canadians, so, yeah, I try to soak it up and enjoy it and feed off the crowds.

Q. Wondering, curious your state of your game right now. I think your season a lot of really consistent results but is there anything specifically you're working on or anything specifically you're hoping to improve on, whether it be this week or as you look ahead to the rest of the season?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, I think in the last few months I've put together some pretty consistent results. Not spectacular, but pretty solid. I feel like my, I guess my bottom feels a bit better right now. So I think that's the biggest thing for me, and then what's been kind of working, or what I've been working on is just a bit of, a bit for efficiency tee to green. I think that for me, if I look at my swing, my tendency is to kind of get a little bit too lateral. I'm working on a bit of tighter pivots off the ball and through

the ball. So trying to be a little more centered and a little bit less, a little less movement. I think that's helped me. Like, I've said this before to many people, but if I can be somewhere in the middle, I guess, strokes gained tee to green, and then kind of be myself on and around the greens, then I think that's a pretty dangerous combination. So, yeah, just trying to tighten that up a little bit. I feel like I've shown some really good signs of that lately. So, yeah, just a little bit more of the same. Iron play is probably the last kind of piece of the puzzle for me. I feel like off the tee I've been quite strong lately, driving it pretty good. My iron play's been okay, good at times and not so good at other times. So that's probably the piece of the puzzle for me that needs to, I would say, tighten up the most right now. But it feels pretty good so far and, yeah, kind of keep working at it.

Q. What's your relationship like with Mike Weir and what are the kind of conversations you've had with him leading in with this being the Presidents Cup year in Canada?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, Mike's been great. We text a decent amount. Just been great at kind of throwing his two cents in there. Even a few times this year he's been good at kind of -- I think he knew how much I wanted to be on the team last time in Charlotte, and I was in his ear a lot kind of prior to those picks. I wouldn't say I was begging, but I was definitely kind of pleading my case. He knew how much I wanted it. I think it affected me last time. I had a pretty good season going and then I think like the last six, seven weeks before the picks came in I just didn't really play that great. I felt like that was hanging over my shoulder every day. I felt like those picks were coming and I wanted to be there so badly. So I think that affected me. He's reached out a few different times to just basically tell me that, like, you know, to go play golf and to not worry about it, to kind of make sure that I'm not chasing it too hard, because he knows how much I want it. That's been great. When I see him at tournaments or here this week it's fun to think about how that dynamic would be in Montreal and having him as my captain. Yeah, no, he's been great. Masters practice rounds and all that sort of stuff, when he's been giving us great advice. He's always there if we need something from him. I think all the Canadian guys out here now on TOUR kind of feel that sort of a godfather-like figure, always kind of there if you need him.

Q. Would you have ever watched him play at the Canadian Open when you were a kid?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, so I think I probably have told this story the last few years, but when I was 13 in 2004 at Glen Abbey, he was, I mean he was a rock star. I mean,

he had won the Masters, had come back the next year, and I was a caddie in the pro-am on the Wednesday and I drew his group. I remember vividly just like tailing Mike the whole day, despite having to caddie for somebody. I was doing a horrendous job caddieing. I remember just trying to be close to Mike, hear what he had to say. I asked him a few questions, and so that was probably my most vivid memory of watching him. Obviously at that time, I mean, he was, his popularity in Canada was through the roof. That was really cool and something that I still look back on pretty fondly.

Q. Obviously Paris Olympics this summer. Is that something that's sort of been on your mind watching the OWGR here with now I think three weeks to go, what would it mean for you to compete in Paris?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, obviously know that that deadline's approaching and what I'm going to need to do is play great for the next few weeks, and, yeah, it's on my mind a little bit, certainly. But, yeah, I can't, like the Presidents Cup, I can't push that too hard or try and force things there. I would love to, yeah, find my way past a few of these guys and be on that team. Yeah, we'll see what happens. I mean, obviously it's not entirely in my hands, but, yeah, I'll be gunning hard for that, one of those spots and we'll see what happens.

Q. Just the nature of golf is you're always chasing something and kind of hard to catch it most of the time. How do you manage that without kind of going a little, I don't know, nuts, nutty? Just always just to be beyond your grasp, except for maybe a couple of weeks a year maybe.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, I think, I don't know, I guess trying to keep a pretty good perspective on things. You can kind of get caught up in the fact that you hit a shot from 160 yards to 30 feet and there are times when you hit that shot and you think, oh, that wasn't very good. Then you realize that's pretty much exactly TOUR average and you think to yourself, like, all right, like I probably don't need to beat myself up that bad for that. I think that while we're certainly chasing getting better all the time, I think for me a lot of getting better for me is like trying less, which sounds very counter intuitive, but I've always been someone that I would never be guilty of not trying hard enough, but I've been certainly guilty of trying too hard at times. I think, for me, especially on the golf course, a lot of that is just trying to find that balance, find the appropriate level of effort that brings out your best golf. I think for me I have to kind of find, I've been doing a pretty good job lately of finding that balance. I had a tournament just two weeks ago at the Wells Fargo and I walked off on Thursday and I felt like I was trying so, so hard to play well, because I was

at home in Charlotte. I just, every day from that Thursday on I tried to be a little bit better as far as like how hard I was trying and just my general care level for how I was doing. The rest of that tournament just got a little bit better and a little bit better as I tried a little bit less. So it's funny how that works, but for me as I try to chase it, I sort of chase different things now. I think when I first got on TOUR I was chasing trying to be more like the top players in the world physically. I think now, knowing my game is my game and I can only do the best version of me, I think that I look at different areas now where I can be better and they're not necessarily the areas that you might think of that are obvious. Like, for someone to say, like, oh, you're not trying as hard, that doesn't make any sense. But I'm a very sort of focused and intense individual when I'm playing and I need to sort of find that balance where it's not that way all the time. So, a bit of a long-winded answer, but I think as I chase it, I chase, I just chase different things, and my perspective on the whole big picture has I think gotten a lot better, so I don't chase things I don't think are necessary anymore.

Q. A year ago this tournament was overshadowed by what was then framed as a merger between LIV Golf and the PGA TOUR. I just wanted to get your take on how you see the state of the game and where it's heading in these uncertain times.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I knew it was coming. Yeah, that's a big question. Obviously a year later you would have thought we had a bit more clarity on that. There's not really much there. I think eventually when we get through this situation I think golf will be in a great spot still. But there's a lot of hurdles to get over right now. I think one of the biggest things I think about is the fan and how the fan has been affected by all this. The fans are just tired of hearing about it, tired of hearing about the money. I don't think the money that's going around is sustainable for golf. I would love for the game to kind of come back a little bit where it's like we're just, we're talking about the golf now, we're not talking about LIV, we're not talking about the money and these purses and all that sort of stuff. Because people don't care. People don't want to hear it. I've said this many times to, you know, the media, the TOUR, I mean, it just, we just, we want to, like, I feel like we're shoving it down people's throats. This is a big tournament for me, you know, I would say far bigger than the one next week, but next week's worth 20 million dollars, this one's worth, I don't know how many, whatever, but that's not something that I care or think about, but I'm here to win this trophy, it wouldn't matter if it was for a thousand bucks or a million bucks, I'm here to play well and win this tournament. I think it's become so much about the money and, again, I would say 99 percent of the people don't care, they don't want to hear it. So I think the state of the game, I would

say right now it's not super healthy, because of the things we're focused on, but I think once we can kind of get past this stuff and maybe the deal happens or it doesn't happen, but we kind of get some clarity there, then we can kind of go forward. Yeah, I was talking to some of the RBC people and, you know, I think that we, as a TOUR, used to really strive for charity dollars, and that was a really big proponent of what we did. Now I think that's become less of a, less of an importance to us and the priority factor for that is not quite as high. To me that was like one of the things that the TOUR was, it was like a badge of honor. Like, we donated more than all the other major sports leagues combined. I would like to see that become a priority again, where we really impact the places that we play and leave them better than we found 'em. So, you know, I do think that golf will come out of this okay, but right now I think it's in a very weird spot and a difficult spot and we need to get a lot of things figured out.

Q. I realize this is a tough one to speak on, but we spoke with Rory about it, and Grayson's passing is clearly something that many people in the clubhouse are still processing. I thought your posts on social media on Sunday was very kind of eloquent and moving, and I just wonder kind of your thoughts and perspective as the days have gone on.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, that was really, really sad. I came on TOUR in 2016, 2017 with Grayson, and, I mean, it was out there for everyone, his ups and downs. His life was well documented, and the fact that he had lots of great moments and he had some moments that he would love to have done over again, I'm sure. But like I said in my post, I always felt like he had a really good heart and wanted to help people. I think he was doing that as well by speaking about what he was dealing with. I think people realizing that professional athletes that are making lots of money are also dealing with the same things that everyone else deals with, would resonate with a lots of people. I mean, if that's going to be his legacy, that's a pretty great one to leave. That, you know, it's okay to be not okay. Yeah, I'm thinking about his family and people close to him, because I know it was so sudden, so unexpected. I know the TOUR now will kind of look at how we can be better there, how we can continue to help people like that that are struggling and hopefully avoid this in the future.

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