

U.S. Open Championship 2022

Saturday, June 18, 2022

Brookline, Massachusetts, USA

The Country Club

Will Zalatoris

Quick Quotes

THE MODERATOR: Will Zalatoris, 3-under 67. 67 in these conditions at a U.S. Open must feel pretty good.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, that was brutal. When I made a mistake, I made sure I was on the fat side of the green or having room where I could maybe at least chip one up there to 8, 10 feet.

I think it took a lot of discipline today. I mean, we didn't aim at a single flag even with some wedges just because you really only have a foot or two to deal with on these greens in some situations.

Normally guys out here when they have wedges in their hand, they're firing at pins no matter what the situation was, but it's just a lot of patience and giving myself as many 15- to 25-footers as I could, and obviously, a couple happened to go in today, and it felt pretty good.

THE MODERATOR: Different conditions, different weather. How much did that impact it out there today?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, there were some big changes. I think I had, like, 312 into 14 on Thursday, and then I had 258 front today.

This place is a beast. When I played during the Am in 2013 I said this was the hardest golf course that I had ever played. It's just so easy to compound mistakes out here, which, of course, you can do that in major championships in general, but especially this one.

I think the biggest thing for me tomorrow, obviously, there's a ton of major champions on this leaderboard, and by no means is the job done. Not even close. But just keep doing what I'm doing. Make sure I just get myself on the green as fast as I can or at least minimize the mistakes.

Q. Given the conditions a lot of people would have just been happy to maintain their position on the leaderboard, but you've made serious progress. That was the plan, to go for it?

WILL ZALATORIS: I just kept doing what I was doing all



day. I didn't have a plan of firing at pins or being aggressive. I knew it was going to play hard and just needed to stay patient.

I knew if I make an early bogey or two, don't change the game plan, don't try to get extra aggressive because that's how you make a mess of it. So, obviously, pretty pleased to be moving up the board on moving day, but just kind of one of those days where the process added up to a good result.

Q. You've contended in a bunch of majors in a very short period of time. What's the most important thing you've learned so far that can push you over the line tomorrow?

WILL ZALATORIS: I think especially coming off the PGA it gave me a lot of belief and confidence that I belong in this situation.

There's a difference in thinking it and then actually being in the situation and believing it. So I think that's probably the biggest change.

I've put myself in this situation a few times in my career, and obviously have to go out and get it tomorrow.

Q. You're obviously going to have a long wait until you tee off tomorrow. What are some of the approaches that you use to kind of calm your mind or kind of keep the thoughts from racing during that long wait?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I've had a few long waits so far in my career. Obviously, it looks like I'll at least be around the final group, if not in the final group. I'll make sure I try to stay up a little bit tonight and make sure I sleep in just to kill some time.

You know, I think the fact that this place is that brutal and there's that many major champions that are around the leaderboard, you know -- I think I'm in a tie for the lead right now. I don't feel like I'm holding a lead and trying to protect it by any means.



You can't play defensive on this golf course. You almost have to play aggressively defensive. You've got to be hitting a lot of shots towards the middle of the greens. There's still no cakewalks. 9-, 8-, 7-irons into this place, you can make a mess real fast.

I'll make sure that I try to sleep in a little bit and just kind of stick to the routine and go play some twilight golf.

Q. You had a really good putting week at the PGA. Another good putting week going on here. What is it about major courses maybe that sets up well for you on the green, and especially those longer putts you seem to have some pretty good success with lately.

WILL ZALATORIS: I think speed has always been the best part of my putting, and I keep giving myself as many 25- to 35-footers that I can out here, and I think it just makes the round a little bit more stress-free.

By no means is it stress-free. I should say less stressful. Just keep getting the ball just around the hole.

Even on the "easier holes" this week, if you make par, just walk off and be happy with it. If you start pressing, that's where you're going to start compounding errors. You can make one mistake and maybe get away with a par out here, but you can't make two.

Q. The PGA, you're been in contention for majors, but leading on Sunday going into a playoff, is it really just the belief that you said that you got from that, or is there anything else you can take away from being in the top position on a Sunday in a major?

WILL ZALATORIS: I think, if anything, it goes back to the week prior when I was at the Nelson, and I was pretty frustrated with where I was and went back and looked at some video with Josh and found something, and it clicked immediately.

I think, if anything, on top of the belief that I belong in these situations, I think it's also the belief that when I'm off, I'm not that far off.

A lot of golfers will attest that we make -- when we're playing poorly, we think we're playing worse. When we're playing well, we think we're Tiger. Just make sure that -- I think that was the biggest thing is the fact I found something literally Wednesday night, and it clicked immediately.

Like I said, that really made me feel that I can be one of the world-class players and one of the best in the world.

Q. What about this golf course makes it one of the hardest or the hardest golf course you've ever played?

WILL ZALATORIS: In '13 we played a different routing. 10 was 9, and 11 we did not play, and I just remember actually our eighth hole was our 14th or -- I can't remember what hole it was, but we literally had from 10 through 15 it was a 480-yard plus hole all the way in, and there was one par-5 on this entire golf course.

Literally when people ask me what's the toughest golf course you've ever played, I've said The Country Club since 2013. Granted, Gil has made some changes, adding in 11, which is a phenomenal hole. I still haven't hit that green this week. It's the "easiest shot" on the golf course.

I think it's got a good mixed bag of short holes and longer holes, but the shorter holes you just make one mistake at all, and you're scrambling for par.

You have your fair share at 500-yard par-4s that are pretty straight, but it's just -- it shows you that the rough this week I think in the four Opens I've played is the shortest that I've ever played, and it's still -- I think I had -- I think I was 1 for 5 being able to go for the green just because of the scenario that's in front of you.

Like on 10, if you hit one in the rough, you're going to have 210 back up the hill with rough basically 50 yards of rough in front of you and some bunkers, so you have to lay up.

Literally every single shot you're trying to, obviously -- off the tee it's just so crucial out here to just hit as many fairways as you can.

Q. Will, I wonder what maybe your formative years playing at Cal Club in San Francisco might have prepared you for handling or liking these kind of conditions?

WILL ZALATORIS: This is a pretty South San Francisco day, for sure. Hitting 8-irons from 145 yards when for me I hit them about 175. Just the heavy air, putting on poa annua. That's how I learned the game, and that's how it really started for me.

Kind of a fun little piece of that, too, is that Arron Oberholser was walking with our group today. I've known Arron since I was probably 3 or 4.

If you ask me, he is going to -- I'm sure Golf Channel guys are going to eat this one up, but if you asked me when I was about 6 or 7 years old who I wanted to be, I would have said Tiger woods or Arron Oberholser. I make sure I give him a hard time every time I see him.

I remember when he won Pebble, and he came back, and everyone was hanging at The Horseshoe Bar at Cal, and obviously seeing Ken Venturi's shrine there with the U.S. Open trophy as well. Got a lot of great memories from Cal Club.

Q. You talked about not aiming for a single flagstick today. Does some of that come with maturity? Do you ever have to hold yourself back because you want to play aggressive?

WILL ZALATORIS: A little bit. I mean, what is it, we played 54 holes, and if you made 54 pars, you would be in the top ten right now. I know that there's, obviously, some pretty tough holes out here, but like on 5 I have laid up every single time. If the USGA is going to give you a wedge, take it. Don't get out of position. Don't make a mess of it.

That's why for me, like I said, there's some times where -- I think I've played 8 in 1-under this week, and I've yet to hit that green. I'm not disappointed with that. Take the pars, move on, knock some holes off the board.

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