



76th Annual CHARLES SCHWAB CHALLENGE Golf Tournament

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Interview with Will Zalatoris

ZACH DIRLAM: We'll get started with Will Zalatoris. Why don't you tell us where you're at after another really good major championship performance in the PGA Championship.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, it's nice to be home. I've had a few days of rest to kind of process things. It'll be fun to obviously play in front of friends and family again this week. It's kind of almost feeling like having three weeks at home in a weird way, considering Tulsa is just up the road, and then having the Nelson and obviously here. So yeah, obviously super excited to be back out.

Starting my week on a Wednesday is pretty strange for me; I'm not going to lie. I got out here today probably about, I guess, 11:30 on a Wednesday, which normally for me I probably would have played about 27 holes by now.

But no, just trying to get the energy level back a little bit. Obviously pretty tired from this past week. It didn't really hit me until the last couple days. Obviously game feels like it's in a really good spot, so I'll be pretty excited to hopefully contend here in front of friends and family.

ZACH DIRLAM: Does it help maybe after such a stressful week coming to a place that feels like home to get back into things?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, sleeping in your own bed obviously helps. You're only a 30-minute drive. I've played this place a bunch, played here a lot in college. This is my second time playing in this event. It's a lot of fun. The crowds over here are pretty awesome, pretty rowdy. I'm looking forward to this weekend.

Q. How have you processed what happened Sunday, all of it?

WILL ZALATORIS: I mean, I still am. I think it was a blur for sure. It's obviously a position that I've wanted to be in my entire life, and obviously it stings to come up basically one shot short. But I think if anything, this is the closest I've been.

I know that we're doing the right things. I believe I can do it. I now know I can be one of - obviously guys out here say it to themselves because that's what obviously you're supposed to do, where you think you can be or you are one of the best players in the world. I now firmly believe that. Sorry if that's arrogant, but I think there is a difference. I mentioned this last week in the media, when people are asking, hey, Scottie, what was the difference between you winning your major and the four events that you won and not winning over the last two years, and he just said it's belief.

I think this past week being under the gun, and JT played an absolutely flawless playoff and I was obviously one shot short of that, so being able to handle that pressure under the gun was awesome.

Q. Two weeks ago at the Nelson it's a very wide-open, low-scoring event. Then you have a major up in Tulsa. Now you have a very narrow target golf course I guess you could say. As a pro is that change week-to-week something you look forward to, or how do you manage having those three different courses that are very different in that regard?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, that's a good point. Any major typically plays pretty hard. The Nelson is perennially going to anywhere where 20-plus under is going to win, and here we've had years where 20-under has won and you've had years where 6-under has won.

It's just different each week. Obviously we're trying to check all the boxes in our game, but there's just different stresses on different aspects of your game. This week you want to hit as many fairways as you can. Obviously super small greens, so this week in particular is a pretty good place for ball strikers. Granted, you've had a lot of great putters that have won here, too, but it's a very funny golf course how basically three feet can be the difference in you making birdie or bogey very quickly.

I think that speaks wonders to this golf course.

Q. One follow-up to you being a Dallas area native. Did you attend this tournament growing up with your family?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I did once. I came, I want to say it was '07. I still have the signed hats from -- because we went to the Nelson and The Colonial and back when they had the international final qualifying, which was actually at the course in basically my parents' backyard for the British Open, and so we went back-to-back-to-back to see them all, and I still have that hat that was signed by a bunch of guys that were in this tournament. It's kind of funny. Kind of brings everything full circle when I'm signing autographs for kids after a round.

Q. The bunkers last week were kind of a topic of conversation. It seems like a lot of guys are split on the idea that they were a different kind of challenge versus maybe they were too much. Do you have an opinion on that?

WILL ZALATORIS: I mean, my bunker play last week was great, so you're probably going to get a more positive attitude out of me than the other guys. I think one thing that I think that was eye opening to me as an amateur golfer was when we went down to Australia to play in the Masters as amateurs playing at Royal Melbourne, their bunkers are hazards. They're not meant to be perfect. It's basically a dug-out hole with sand in them, and that's how bunkers are pretty much internationally.

On the PGA TOUR we're spoiled week in, week out with amazing conditions, the best agronomy staff pretty much every single week, playing the best golf courses, and so I hate being kind of the, hey, go play better, but if you're hitting it in bunkers you're probably not going to be playing well to begin with.

I thought that -- I played out of them great last week. I made some really good up-and-downs out of them, so I do have that bias. But I think when I went to Australia and realizing, hey, it's not supposed to be perfect sand, a perfect four inches of sand in every spot, I think that just kind of made me realize, hey, bunkers are hazards essentially.

Q. How do you recalibrate after a week like the one you had last week? You're back here just days later getting ready to start another tournament. How do you reset?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I have no idea. I mean, I try to make sure that I -- like I said, I got a lot of rest the last few days. I practically just slept -- I didn't realize how tired I really was. You can even still kind of hear it in my voice a little bit. But it's back to work.

Like I've mentioned before, my career goal is to win a major, and now the prep starts for the U.S. Open, and Brookline is -- I think Brookline was the hardest golf course I had ever played. I think it still might be. I haven't played Oakmont, but that step that we had for the U.S. Amateur there in 2013 was by far the hardest competitive golf course I've ever played. I typically like hard golf courses.

Q. A lot has been made about your putting, a lot of success early last week, first in strokes gained on the green. What are you doing that's been working and how are you feeling about your overall state of putting right now?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I mean, I had a really good couple days with Josh leading up to the week. I think the part that's great for me is being able to obviously see the failures and being able to go back and kind of eat humble pie and say, okay, what was your attitude over these certain putts or what did we do wrong, which I think it's -- when I'm hitting there watching it, I want to throw the remote and break the TV because I know that I'm going to miss, but at the same time, I think it's putting myself under pressure and knowing that my putting is going to hold up.

I think that's something that I definitely learned this past weekend. Making the putts on 17 and 18 were huge for me and something that I'll never forget.

We've just basically been trying to just stick to the basics. We've tried a lot over the last year to almost be too perfect, and I got in my own way, and now I'm trying to be a lot more reactionary, and I think it's helped. I really do.

I got off to a slow start this year, but obviously it's picked up over the last few weeks.

Q. You mentioned attitude there. Last week it seemed like you had such a good demeanor. You were there enjoying the course, enjoying the event. Where does that come from, the ability to check out and just enjoy what you're in right now?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I think it even goes back to Thursday and Friday, playing in front of Tiger. That was the first time that I had been able to watch him inside the ropes, and that course was so tight and intimate, tee boxes were crossing over other holes, and so there were a lot of times where I had to stop and watch him play.

You've heard the vets say, hey, just don't watch him, you play your own game, and it's like, come on, this is the first time I get to see him really play in person and see the crowds. The crowds Thursday-Friday I thought were bigger than Saturday-Sunday, at least in my groups. It was nuts. I played a practice round in front of him Wednesday and it was 35 people deep on 8. It was just absurd.

But being able to just appreciate those moments and kind of just be present and enjoy it, that's why to me I almost had to -- it almost felt like I am imposter syndrome where I look back on it and go, wait, you were in a playoff for the PGA Championship, but at the same time my job was to just hit the best golf shot I possibly could.

I think really, like I said, kind of going back to his question about processing everything, I still am for sure, but there's a lot of things that -- obviously the coverage shows the golf shots, but the stuff in between the golf shots like watching Tiger and seeing the crowds and stuff like that is something that I'll never forget.

ZACH DIRLAM: Thank you.

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