



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT: WILLIE WOOD
Sunday, August 19, 2012

MODERATOR: In the first playoff in Dick's Sporting Goods Open championship history, Willie Wood defeats Michael Allen for his first Champions Tour win.

Willie, congratulations, you went a long victory drought. I counted up 16 years, 29 days since the Deposit Guaranty Classic victory in Mississippi, 189 PGA TOUR events, 105 [Web.com](http://www.web.com) Tour events, 15 Champions Tour events since your win. You've become the first Monday qualifier to win on the Champions Tour since Rod Spittle in the 2010 AT&T Championship, the 12th time in Champions Tour history. Congratulations.

WILLIE WOOD: Thank you.

Q. Start off if you could, just general comments about the day. Take us through the round and then tell us about the putt on 18, it was a must make, you knew it and you canned it and then you won the playoff.

WILLIE WOOD: It was kind of a strange day in the way it started because I was 3 back and then John Huston holed it on 1 for an eagle, so it just looked like -- and he's such a streaky player, he looked like he was going to run and hide, and then he started kind of hitting a ball in the water and messing up. And then Faxon kind of took control of the tournament until late in the day.

But I just hung in and I played very, very well except for the 4th hole; I made double after I hit an 8-iron in the water. It was an easy tee shot, only an 8-iron, and I hit a terrible hook in the water. Other than that I played real well. I birdied No. 2 from about three feet. I had 95 yards, hit a sand wedge to three feet. No. 4, I hit a sand wedge -- excuse me, not No. 4, No. 3 I hit sand wedge, didn't hit a very good shot, made it from about 18 feet.

And then 6, I made a pretty good maybe about a 40-footer to go back to 1-under after my double on 4. Then made a nice eight-footer for birdie on No. 8. Turned at 2-under, still a couple shots behind Brad. Then I made a nice save on 11 from

about 10 feet and I birdied 12 from about four feet, still one shot behind Brad. We parred and then he made a bogey on 17.

On 16 is when I noticed that Michael Allen had finished at 13 and so I knew that was the number I needed to get to. Didn't hit a particularly good second shot, about 35 feet left of the pin and made the putt. I just wanted to get it to the hole and it barely got there. I actually thought I left it short but it got there and it was quite exciting.

Coming over here this morning I was thinking when the last time I was in the last group on Sunday and it had been a while in a PGA TOUR event. I've been in some state opens and a couple tournaments in Mexico that I played in, but not on the PGA TOUR and this kind of spotlight, so it was quite exciting. I hung in there and hung in there and things turned out great.

MODERATOR: Can you tell me the length of the putt and what you hit in on 18?

WILLIE WOOD: In regulation, I had 143 to the hole. I hit 9-iron to, I guess, about 35 feet.

MODERATOR: And then talk about the playoff.

COREY PAVIN: We went back to 18. I won the tee, hit it in the fairway, hit a nice drive. Then Michael pulled it and it went in the water. I had 149 -- he actually hit next and he hit it into the bunker. Okay, now I just need par really I felt like, hit it right on target left of the pin, very good shot, 15 feet, and I just lagged it down to a couple inches from the hole.

MODERATOR: It's been over 16 years since a victory. Your initial thoughts about that?

WILLIE WOOD: Well, I've worked very, very hard to get back to playing good again. I knew I was playing good coming in. I've played fairly well this year in the tournaments that I've played in. This is my eighth tournament, I think I was 52nd on the money list coming in. My tournament average was 25,000 a week, which I was happy with, it's paying the bills, but I wanted more.

I love playing with these guys out here because they're all friends of mine and it's such a great friendly atmosphere compared to the PGA TOUR. I played in a Tour event in July down in Jackson, Mississippi, and it was with kids younger than my son, my sons, and it wasn't the same. I wanted to be here playing in tournaments, on this Tour playing in tournaments. But I did finish 18th in that tournament, by the way.

So I knew I was playing well and working hard, and I just really had a nice round Monday in the qualifier and things fell together. I didn't play good in the pro-am. I worked on my putting on Thursday and they started going in.

MODERATOR: Just wait for the mic if you could.

Q. I talked to you on Monday. On Monday you didn't even know you were going to be in this tournament and to have to go through what essentially for you has been a seven-day grind; for the guys who have been exempt, the tournament starts on Friday. Talk about how much it means just to be able to not have to deal with that anymore.

WILLIE WOOD: I'm entered into the qualifier in Seattle for Tuesday. I have a flight out at 5:40 in the morning because I needed to get there. I didn't know if I was going to finish top 10 or what, to see the golf course to prepare for the qualifier Tuesday. This is a huge relief.

Now I can go to tournaments on Tuesday and not have to -- and play my practice rounds either that day, the pro-am day, see the golf course, so it's really, really big. We have a tournament in Hawaii coming up that I knew I was going to be close to getting into. Now I can make a plane reservation, now I can make a hotel reservation. It's a big relief, it really is.

Q. Now knowing you can set your schedule for next year as well?

WILLIE WOOD: That's right, I can. There's quite a few tournaments that I have been wanting to play in, tried hard to get sponsor exemptions this year and they just didn't work out, and now I can play in them.

Q. The way the final round was going, was there any point where -- you mentioned John holing out for eagle, but at what point did you feel like you were really firmly back in the mix there?

WILLIE WOOD: Back in the mix? Well, when I birdied 12, Brad and John actually made nice par saves on 12. Brad stayed 1 up. I made a nice save on 13 to stay 1 down. It was nice playing with Brad. He and I have been friends for a long, long time, played college golf, Walker Cup together. We were partners in the team championship together down in Boca when they used to have team events back in the '80s, so he and I have known each other for a long time. It was great playing on Sunday in the last group with a good friend.

Q. Did you know that putt on 18 was pretty darn good right off the get-go?

WILLIE WOOD: Actually, I thought I left it short. I knew I had the line, I thought that I may have left it short.

Q. What goes through your mind when it drops?

WILLIE WOOD: Just I did it, now I've got to prepare for a playoff. My only other playoff on the PGA TOUR was Joe Sindelar in the Hardee's Classic in about 1990 and I remember going to the tee there and wasn't ready to play the playoff. I was -- I was too excited about I got second place wrapped up, but I was young. And so when you get in a playoff, the tournament's not over until playoff's over, and I kept my composure and kept my focus on trying to put the ball in the fairway and win the playoff and that's how it worked out.

Q. You were very steady down the stretch as you said. On 15 though, that bunker shot, how tough a shot was that? Was it routine?

WILLIE WOOD: That was a pretty easy bunker shot because it was a good lie, a little uphill, so it wasn't a hard bunker shot at all. Actually, my shot into 15 from 150 yards, I could either cut it out over the water because I had a limb in my way or hook it and try to get in the bunker or run it through the gap, and so I chose a little safer route. My bunker game is normally pretty good. I'm glad I made that choice. It was a pretty easy bunker shot.

Q. Kind of a squirrely --

WILLIE WOOD: It is a little tender. That green probably had a lot of water on it for a long time.

Q. Could you describe your feeling going in when you saw your opponent hit the water in the extra hole in the playoff so you knew that you had to just keep your composure?

WILLIE WOOD: Yeah, I knew that he could still make 4. He probably had an 8-iron, but fortunately it was his next shot -- his shot first to play, so I could see where he's going to go with that, he put it in the bunker. So now I'm going to play a little bit safer, left of the pin, and I hit a very good shot right at my target. I had a little difficulty seeing the pin, the colors. I couldn't pick up the pin, so I just aimed it at someone with a yellow shirt on and I hit right at my target. I played that hole very good.

Q. When I talked to you on Monday, you were talking about positioning yourself in the reshuffle, likewise on Friday there when you finished your round. At what point in these last three days did thoughts turn less to that and more about winning the golf tournament?

WILLIE WOOD: Actually, see, I was fourth alternate for Seattle at this point after they had already made like, what's it called when they -- reshuffle that's not finalized?

MODERATOR: Provisional reshuffle.

WILLIE WOOD: A provisional reshuffle was done and I was fourth alternate. But I knew if I passed -- I was going to probably pass Jeff Freeman, I might pass Jeff Hart, but Dick Mast is ahead of me, there's a lot of what-ifs. So finally I just decided to play golf and stop worrying about that, and if I finish top 10, that would get me in. Sure enough, I won, that got me in.

Q. Can you talk about the atmosphere at this tournament compared to other tournaments?

WILLIE WOOD: The crowds are very good, very good, hospitable. They were pulling for Brad out there, very obvious, but he is a two-time champion of the BC Open and he's from the northeast. They're great, they're very gracious, a lot of cheers, a lot of yelling. Some events we don't get huge crowds, but other than majors, I would have to say this is as good as they get.

Q. Willie, Billy Ray Brown was covering you 5th and 6th hole today and I know you guys go a long way back. Can you talk a little bit about from a personal perspective. I know Phil said 16 years since a win. Did you think you would get here again and what did you go through to get here today?

WILLIE WOOD: I got a little bit emotional after I made the putt before the playoff. I looked over at Billy Ray and it looked like he may have been crying himself. You always expect it and think about it, but you don't know if it's ever going to happen. I expect to win again, but I don't know if it's actually going to happen or not because things have to go your way and you have to get good breaks and guys have to make some bogeys and you have to make some 35-footers. So it's really difficult to win against competition like this.

Q. Just a followup, Willie Wood, 18th green, En-Joie Golf Club makes a big putt to get into a playoff to win.

Another guy with the same four consonants plus one more has done that at Bay Hill a couple times. Is this the biggest point of your life? Do you remember a time where you rose to the occasion like you did today?

WILLIE WOOD: Actually, that may have been the biggest putt I've ever made on the 72nd hole. When I won in Jackson, all I needed was a two putt, pars, but that

probably is -- I'm actually going back to college, NCAA I didn't do anything like that. So it was safe to say it's the biggest putt I've ever made.

MODERATOR: Anything else for Willie?

Q. Over the 16 years, what was the low point?

WILLIE WOOD: So from '96 on, when I started playing the Nationwide Tour, competition on the Nationwide Tour is very, very good, a lot of young, hungry kids that can play, and we weren't playing for that much money. In the early 2000s when I was making cuts but not making expenses, it was probably the lowest point.

When you're in your late 40s, I'm trying to compete against kids that are really good and half my age. It's almost like it's not a fair fight.

Q. How did you persevere through that?

WILLIE WOOD: Because I was looking forward to this. I knew that when I turned 50, I would have a new challenge ahead of me, a challenge that I may have a chance. People asked me last year, earlier this year, are you going to go play any Nationwide -- [Web.com](http://www.web.com) tournaments? Heck, no, I don't want piece of those guys. Because the money is okay, but the competition's great. I like playing the PGA TOUR, but, you know, those guys are really good, but the money's good. You make a check, you know, if you make a really nice check, you make the cut. In the Nationwide Tour, you can finish in the middle of pack and lose money that week. That's kind of difficult to take.

There's the joke, what does a burger with cheese and the Nationwide Tour have in common? What's the difference? You can feed a family of three with a burger with cheese; can't on the Nationwide Tour.

I'm really knocking it down. It helped me prepare, though, for the Champions Tour or I would have had nowhere to play.

MODERATOR: Willie, congratulations.