

PLAYOFF INTERVIEW: MACKENZIE HUGHES
November 21, 2016



JOHN BUSH: We would like to welcome the RSM Classic champion, Mackenzie Hughes.

Mackenzie, from Thursday on just incredible play this week and to cap it off in that fashion out there making that clutch putt, just get some comments.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Wow.

JOHN BUSH: Yeah.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I mean, what a week. I've dreamt of this kind of stuff, but to do it this week and to do it in this fashion is unbelievable. To shoot 61 on day one, you have these thoughts that it could be a great week, but there's still so much golf to be played. You know, slowly but surely I kept going and kept pushing forward. But it was so hard, every night leaving the golf course being the leader and dealing with all these things for the first time. Tremendous feeling.

I haven't been able to think about all the things that it comes with besides the Masters, I have thought about that already, but there's just so many good things that go along with the win. Just to come out on top against a world-class field like this. There's so many great players here, it's just incredible.

Q. Congratulations, and I saw you taking a lot of deep breaths out there yesterday and maybe a few today. Who's keeping you composed out there out on the course, if not yourself?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I have a great sports psychologist back in Canada, Adrienne Leslie-Toogood, and between her voice in my head and myself, my caddie did a great job as well, Derell, but it mainly falls on myself. I try to hold myself accountable for those things, and breathing and staying in control of all those emotions is a big part of winning a golf tournament. I knew that was going to be the case yesterday and I just made sure I kept myself in check.

Q. Your thought on the putt, what did you think it was for when you made it?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: To tie. I thought basically it was my last chance. I thought if I had missed, one of those guys at least is going to make a putt, maybe two. They were all maybe inside eight, nine feet, so I thought for sure two, maybe one. But the putt, before I hit it, the thought was just make them think about it. Put this putt in first and if you can be the first guy in, put the pressure back on them, and that's what happened.

Q. And how much did it eat at you last night, I guess, that you -- granted, it was dark

but that you had a chance to end it last night, did you think that would come back to haunt you?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I didn't think it would come back to haunt me, but I was definitely thinking about it last night. I watched the replay a few times and I still can't believe it broke left at the end, but it was really dark. I didn't want to put too much thought into it because again it was almost black, couldn't see much and I hit a pretty good putt and I knew I still had a chance. If that was the putt that knocked me out and I had missed it, it would have been different, but I still had a chance and I had to keep telling myself that.

Q. Was there any part of you that regretted putting it and not asking to come back tomorrow for that putt?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, after I missed it, that was the regret. But if I had made it, then there would have been no regrets. So I don't really regret that, yeah, because I would have loved to have won it right there rather than having to wait the whole night and think about that 10-foot putt. No, I don't really regret that, I just wish I would have made it.

Q. As you're sitting there kind of crouched by the green watching the other three guys putt, what's going through your head as each one misses?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: A lot of things actually. I try to tell myself that they were all going to make their putts. As they were all over their putts, I told myself that they were all going to make their putts and that we were going to 18. So I tried to keep myself in that frame of mind that I was still going to be playing golf, not that I just won this because they're all going to miss their putts. I never thought for a second they were all going to miss their putts.

So standing there watching them all putt, I was way more nervous than when I was putting mine just to watch them because as each guy went down, it just became that much more real that it might happen. Then when it came down to Camilo, I was like oh, my gosh, if he doesn't make this, then I'm the winner. I could hardly watch. And then I just kind of caught it out of the corner of my eye, it grazed that right lip and I was at a loss for words at that moment, yeah.

Q. This is going to be a long-worded question, but I'm curious, A, what club you hit off the tee and what the other guys were hitting and how much -- it seemed like everybody went either long or left. Was it hard to calculate distance with the chill?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah.

Q. And was there any thought -- I told you it was going to be long-worded -- any thought of just playing I don't want to say safe, but making sure that no worse than 3 because of the difficulty of the hole, and I'll hang up and listen.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I was trying to play it safe, not hit it long left in that chipping swale,

I'll tell you that. But the hole was 190 yards today into a right-to-left wind, but 3-iron with a 40-degree wind chill, the ball's not going very far. So my thought was to just kind of hold a little cut into the wind with a 4-iron and I just pulled it, and I pulled it so it's going to go a little further. When I hit it where I did, I thought oh, great, here we go, that's just an awful spot to hit it.

As I got up there and everyone else is in a terrible spot, too. I mean, some of them had a better spot than I did, but I was like you know what, no one's in a great spot to make par so just worry about making a 3. It was a hard hole. I forgot the other part of your question?

Q. You pretty much already answered it in terms of what you were trying to do, either playing it safe, which you kind of mentioned.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, I was kind of kicking myself because I was the third guy to hit and two guys already missed it left. I thought, you know, you're an idiot, why are you hitting it where they're hitting it, the whole green's open to the right, just hit it over there. But it was playing really tough with the chill and your body's not moving quite the same as it does when it's warm. It was a very hard shot.

But yeah, so I hit 4, Camilo hit 5. Camilo hits it a little bit lower, though. Blayne hit 5 and I think Henrik hit 5 as well. I was the only guy that hit 4.

Q. How close on your pitch, were you happy with it when it left the club or did you know it was --

MACKENZIE HUGHES: It all depended on that first bounce and the first bounce was a little bit soft, but at the same time I just didn't want to get it on the green running too fast because everything on that green, once it got going down the hill, was incredibly fast. So I knew if I got on the green going too fast I could run it 20 feet by quite easily. And my chip only needed an extra couple of feet. If it just gets on the green and trundles a little bit, it's a great shot.

But yeah, from where I was it wasn't a terrible result. Had it not been a sudden death playoff, it would have been an okay chip ordinarily maybe, but for what I wanted at the time, it wasn't ideal. But I made the putt, so it's just a conventional up-and-down I guess.

Q. I wonder if we can get the Reader's Digest version of how you got started in the game or any interesting stories in the game or interesting stories how you got to Kent State, anything from your upbringing?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, so I started playing when I was seven and my parents were just kind of starting out playing as well. So rather than get a babysitter, the thought was, well, we'll just bring him along. It's just a little bit cheaper than getting a babysitter. So I had a little cut-down driver and a little cut-down putter and I would just tee off on the holes and I would pick my ball up and throw it on the green and putt. That's the best way to play this

game, I think, is to do that. That's kind of how I started.

Then any interesting stories. I don't know. Mom, any interesting stories? I can't think of any off the top of my head.

Q. You never want to bring your mother into this.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: You can think about it.

As far as Kent State goes, I had seen some Canadian guys go there. I knew some guys at Kent before I had gone there and I had wrote to numerous other schools as well, but Kent State has kind of a Canadian pipeline going through it. So I wrote to them as one of my schools and Herb Page came to recruit at Ontario Junior. I remember him watching me, I think it was the first round he ever watched me and I remember being so nervous for him watching me play because it's like a tryout basically. You're like, oh, I don't want to play bad in front of my college coach hopefully. I remember talking to him and he was a really nice guy at the time.

My four years there were some of the best times of my life. I would love to go back and do it again. But I learned so much from Coach Page and my other coach, Rob Wakeling, I had four years of just incredible experience. I wouldn't do it again any other way.

Q. I think you were playing Monday qualifiers on the Web just a few months ago. What's the biggest change from then to now that allowed you to do this?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Just confidence. So I was in the Monday qualifier for the LECOM Health Challenge and I missed the Monday by a few shots, then ended up getting in the next day on my number. So it was like a second chance on life there. And playing in front of a bunch of friends and family that week in New York, I finished tied for fifth. That was really the finish that propelled me to where we are today. I mean, without that tournament, without getting in that week, who knows where I am right now. I might be back at Q-School. So it's pretty crazy to think that that's where I was and here's where I am now.

Q. If we go back to your 12- and 13-year-old days minus the club throwing, that's about the time Weirsy was probably at the top of his game as far as winning the Masters. Any kind of influence there?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: For sure. I remember where I was when he won the Masters, and watching that, not knowing the exact magnitude of what that was like, but knowing it was huge. To see a Canadian on my TV doing great things like that in golf, it was really cool to watch. So I've actually gotten to know Mike a little bit. He was texting me last night a little bit and just telling me good luck. It's pretty cool to have a guy like that to lean on for some advice if I need it. I still look up to him a great deal. I mean, he's the greatest Canadian golfer ever.

Q. How many Opens at the Abbey did you go to as a kid, or at Hamilton, either one maybe?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: As a kid, I probably went to four or five Canadian Opens.

A good story, I've got two. So this summer I played in that Price Cutter on the Web.com when I won. In the last group I was playing with a guy named Steve Allan. I'm not sure if you know the name. Played on Tour, Aussie guy. In 2003 I was a standard bearer in the Canadian Open at Hamilton Golf & Country Club. I was a standard bearer for him during the first two rounds and I was playing with him the final round in Missouri when I won, which just he had a huge laugh out of that.

And then the next year I caddied in the Wednesday pro-am and Mike Weir was the pro in my group. I remember being the worst caddie that day because all I could do was kind of hug Mike Weir the entire day. I was listening to all the stories, trying to ask him questions. And then my player would be like oh, I'm over here in the right rough, do you remember me, you're caddying for me. I was like, sorry. I remember not caring and I didn't get paid very well that day, but it didn't matter because I got paid in experience and just incredible stories, so that was kind of a fun moment from the Canadian Open.

Q. Just kind of some housecleaning. A, does the honeymoon get any kind of an upgrade now?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, we might do a couple more excursions and experiences now. Maybe she'll get a couple more massages. Yeah, because I probably put her through some stress this weekend. Yeah, it will be a nice time off and it will be cool to reflect on it and get away from the game. It's been a long year. I mean, it's been a lot of fun, but it's been a long grind since January. Putting the clubs down will be really nice.

Q. Have you considered, you mentioned Augusta which is pretty obvious, have you considered any other perks such as Kapalua, such as places like Memorial or PGA Championship, things like that?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Yeah, I talked to my wife already and I told her that she gets next week in Hawaii so she's pretty excited about that and I am as well. That's going to be a fun tournament and a privilege to be amongst a tournament of champions. That's a fun tournament. But Augusta is where I've dreamed of playing since I was a teenager and I went there for a practice, two practice rounds in 2010, 2011 I believe. I told myself I would never go back until I was playing. So I'm excited to go, drive down Magnolia Lane and give it a shot down there.

Q. How real did that seem at Napa when you started out. I know what your expectations are each week and what your goals are, but did that seem realistic playing in the Masters this year, your first year on Tour?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: You know, Napa gave me a bunch of confidence because I didn't feel like I played my absolute best. But I finished 13th there, but I was only five away from Brendan Steele's winning mark at minus 18. So that gave me some confidence just to tell me that if I'm just a bit sharper, if I'm a bit cleaner and I have my week with the putter, I can win out here.

So I believed that leaving Napa, I believed that I could win out here, which is huge. That's half the battle to winning out here is just believing you can. So that was a huge week for me and one that's basically set up this fall. To get off to that kind of start, it would be easy to miss that first cut in Napa and run off a few missed cuts because missing cuts out here is not that hard to do, the line is so thin. Even last week in Mexico I played pretty respectable. It didn't play easy over there and I shot a couple 71s and the cut was 2 under. But again, I didn't play poorly, I just got beat by a bunch of other guys. But yeah, that week in Napa was probably equally as big as the fifth place finish I had in New York at the LECOM Health Challenges.

Q. You sort of mentioned it with the honeymoon question but with the win today and your birthday coming up in a couple days, do you have any special things you're going to do to treat yourself?

MACKENZIE HUGHES: I haven't really thought that far ahead. My wife probably has. She's probably got some things that she wants to buy already, but we'll buy a TV, that's been on the list of some things to buy. Probably sound like a really cheap person right now when I say that. We're going to buy a TV, probably a nice TV, and we'll enjoy our honeymoon a little more. I can't really think of what else. Maybe go for a nice dinner. Yeah, we're pretty simple people, but we'll think of some things and we'll enjoy it.

JOHN BUSH: Mackenzie, congratulations once again.

MACKENZIE HUGHES: Thanks, guys.