

ROUND 1 INTERVIEW
March 2, 2018



MIKE SMALL (-7)

Q. Great round out there today.

MIKE SMALL: Thank you. Yeah, it was fun. I had two guys I played with 25 years ago, so it was good to catch up with them. Lovely weather and putts went in today.

Q. How do you know those guys?

MIKE SMALL: We played together back on the Web.com and on PGA TOUR. We played the PGA TOUR together and kept in touch. Sonny and I have been doing club pro stuff the last few years.

Q. So it made it definitely a much more enjoyable round?

MIKE SMALL: Exactly. Had a lot of Illini fans out there, too.

Q. So what was that like? I mean, I saw the whole contingent in orange cheering you on the whole way.

MIKE SMALL: Yeah, and on 18 they got really loud, which is really cool, and I birdied 18. But we had an Illini function the last two nights here, and last night we had an alumni association. There's a lot of Illini out here, they come out and support Strick and I.

Q. Did you have any idea that when you came down here to play this week that they would come out in force for you?

MIKE SMALL: We had this organized that that was going to -- I spoke last night at the alumni association. But they follow us, they follow Strick's career, my career, and the guys on my team's career. It's kind of fun, Illini Nation sticks together.

Q. Absolutely, just like the Badgers, us Badgers.

MIKE SMALL: That's right.

Q. So what do you take from this round going into tomorrow?

MIKE SMALL: I played well, but again, I've done this long enough to where that's just one round. I made some putts today. I've got to be a little stronger tomorrow with some of my around-the-green shots that I'm working on. But for the most part, it's over, it's done, a new round tomorrow, brand new day.

Q. So you wake up and you just start fresh?

MIKE SMALL: You have to, yes, I have to. That's when I play my best, when I don't bring things with me good or bad.

Q. Strick is doing pretty well on the other side. There's a chance you guys would be paired together.

MIKE SMALL: That would be fun. Haven't played together since, shoot, a U.S. Open qualifier maybe back 10 years ago maybe. It will be fun if it happens.

Q. Eight birdies today. Was it the putter?

MIKE SMALL: Yeah, I hit it close three or four times, then I made a couple good birdie putts, and I made a long bogey putt on 3. I hit it in the water; I was punching out and hit it in the water, made a long bogey putt, which was big. Then I hit it close the next hole, but hit it close on the first hole of the day and made birdie, and birdied some par 5s, and then yeah, birdied 18. So yeah, I'll take eight birdies every round, I won't complain about that.

Q. And how do you think that your role as a coach helps and carries over on to when you play on the Tour?

MIKE SMALL: Well, it helps that I've been out here. Playing as a coach, the biggest thing I have to work on is it's a hindrance a little bit because I evaluate people all day long, I evaluate my team, I evaluate recruits, I evaluate my lineup, I watch the guys, I work with them, and the last thing you can do when you're out here playing is to evaluate yourself. I have a tendency to evaluate myself, so I need to just dispose of things and get them out of there. Good or bad, get them out and move on to the next shot. That's what I did today. So for tomorrow I have to put this all behind me and go. I think I've got a lot of support behind me, and it's not life or death for me out here so it's kind of nice so I can just enjoy it.

Q. And what do you do tonight, is there like -- do you have like a go-to movie?

MIKE SMALL: Strick and I were going to have dinner tonight, so we'll see if that still turns out, but we were planning on getting together for dinner.

Q. Even though you're going to probably be paired up against him tomorrow and be rivals?

MIKE SMALL: We've been best friends since college. We were on the same golf team together and in each other's weddings, and we've been friends for a long time.

Q. That's great. What do you think about him wearing some of the red instead of the orange, because now he lives in Madison and his wife is a Badger?

MIKE SMALL: That's fine, I support him on that.

Q. Are you okay with that?

MIKE SMALL: Why wouldn't I be?

Q. Just want to make sure, because there can be bad blood between Badgers and the Illini.

MIKE SMALL: Well, he did choose Illinois to go to school to.

Q. This is true.

MIKE SMALL: His degree is from Illinois. Ask him that one. You have to ask that question. People ask that all the time. I support him. He's one of my best friends, so I support him. And he's a big Illini fan, he supports the Illini, but he grew up a Badger fan. He's no different than somebody growing up in an area and then going away to college and coming back. You support 'em. He's a big Badger fan, but I think he roots for the Illini, too.