

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
October 2, 2018

BRENDAN STEELE



DOUG MILNE: Like to welcome the two-time defending champion of the Safeway Open, Brendan Steele. Brendan, thanks for joining us. Hopefully you didn't have any problem finding the media center. I think you're as pretty much of a regular in here as we are.

Just some thoughts on being back to a place where you've obviously enjoyed so much success.

BRENDAN STEELE: Yeah, obviously very comfortable getting back here. Seen this place in a lot of different conditions and just seems to fit my eye no matter what's going on and where my game is coming into the week. It always brings out the best in me for some reason, so it's nice to be back.

DOUG MILNE: I was looking at some of the ShotLink stats that came out and it looked like the two areas that you really excelled were off the tee and approaching the green. What is it about this course that fits your eye so well?

BRENDAN STEELE: I think I know where to be aggressive and then where to be a little more conservative, especially off the tee as far as that goes. And then with the pins and different conditions -- wind, firmness of the greens -- you have to make decisions on how aggressive you're going to be into the green as well and where you can leave it. So there's some tricky shots and some really extreme greens, so you have to be careful and know the places that you can't miss are just as important as the places you want to hit it.

DOUG MILNE: As far as your season last year, or I guess we're technically still in this year, got off to a great start obviously with the win, I think you finished out of the top-20 just once in your first six starts, so obviously got off to a great start, tapered off a little bit towards the end of the season. Where are you now with your game?

BRENDAN STEELE: Yeah, didn't really like how I finished the season. It wasn't very good for the last few months. I just got a little confused with kind of what I was doing, I was making the game really hard, which is never a good thing. It needs to be simple. When you're playing well, everything is very simple, so just trying to get back to basics.

And I do love the fresh start here, being back to zero. Whether you've had a good year or a bad year, there's something really exciting about everybody starting from scratch again.

Q. (No microphone.) How does that happen, you know what I'm saying?

BRENDAN STEELE: Yeah, I do. When I'm playing well, it's very reactionary. You see the

shot that you want to hit and there's not a lot of thought going into it.

When you're playing poorly, it feels like you need to do three, four, five things right in order to hit a six-footer on the line, you know, for instance. So you start feeling like, oh, I need to do three things in my swing in order to hit a fairway or I need to do all these different things right, and then what happens is you start getting misses that are a lot wider. So instead of being five yards into the rough, you're 20 yards into the rough and now you're chipping out instead of being able to get it up by the green. It just kind of trickles through the entire bag.

Sometimes you just get confused with what you're doing. Maybe you don't understand exactly what your coach wants you to do or maybe the feeling isn't the same. He tells you this and you're like, I'm doing that and it's not working, but you're not actually doing it. It can be different for everybody, but usually it's a lot of clutter in your mind.

Q. (No microphone.) How do you get out of that, taking time away?

BRENDAN STEELE: Yeah, a little bit of time off is good and then you just have to simplify everything. You have to just go back to like here's the structure, here's what you want everything to look like, and a lot of it's like energy based at this level. Are you putting confidence into these shots, are you really excited about it or are you worried about it, are you standing into a shot and going, I really don't want to hit this shot because it might go here or there, or whatever. It needs to be like where you're really excited about it and you want to get really positive energy into it.

Q. Growing up in southern California, I know you know what wildfires can do. Were you here last year on the Sunday night, just how tragic it was and what the tournament's doing with that?

BRENDAN STEELE: Yeah, so we left about 8:00. We were headed to Malaysia, Keegan and I. We didn't know anything was going on until we got to the airport probably about 10:00, 10:30. Then didn't really find out the extent of what was actually happening until we got to Malaysia a day and a half later.

My parents had to be evacuated for five days this year for a fire down in southern California, so it's way too close to home for me obviously on all fronts. Just it's such a devastating thing to happen. To have it happen in an area that's so near and dear to my heart is really upsetting.

The community is really, you know, restoring itself. I see people building these homes again back on the same hill. Houses that are already rebuilt, it looks like, almost completely finished out there on the course playing out there today. The community's really rallied.

The tournament has really supported a lot. I was just talking to Bob Miller and Jeff Sanders and they were saying it's going to be a record in donations this year to charity and that's all going back to the fire relief.

For me, I really was excited to get back here and have this event to help the community kind of heal a little bit and give them an activity to come out and have a fun time, whether it's the music or the golf. Then it's obviously important to be able to give back as well.

Q. What's been the expectation (inaudible)?

BRENDAN STEELE: Yeah, I've talked about this a lot throughout the year with one of my coaches, with Chris Mason. He's like, We really have to be careful what we do up there because the expectations are going to be through the roof.

I said, No, I see it just the opposite. I'm not showing up here and everybody's going, oh, he's just going to win again. Nobody thinks that. Who wins three times in a row short of Tiger or Stricker at John Deere, that kind of thing. It doesn't happen that often.

I think the pressure's off of me, like somebody else needs to try to win this tournament, right, at some point. Obviously the course is really good for me, it sets up really well, but I don't think the expectations are going to be overly high.

Now, that being said, when I get out there and I get off to a good start on Thursday, I might be like, oh, here we go again type thing. Hopefully, that will be a good thing.

DOUG MILNE: How did your mindset change after 2015 when you had the struggle in the final round? I know there was the frustration, I was here for that. Then you come back and obviously do what you did in 2016, '17. Was there a sense of, I'm coming back to claim what should have been mine from 2015?

BRENDAN STEELE: Yeah, I mean, a little bit. It was nice to have another opportunity because a lot of the time you wouldn't have that opportunity at the same tournament, so it was nice to do that. A lot of redemption definitely for the next year.

So it was really important for me personally to do that and just prove to myself that I could do it. There was a lot of reasons for that; it was my second win, it had been a long time, I had changed from the belly putter. That year it was raining, too, which I hate playing in the rain, so it was nice to do that. I wanted to win an event in California. There were a lot of reasons that was a little bit more important to me, but definitely the demons of the year before were worse.

DOUG MILNE: Last question barring any other ones from you guys, how far has Brendan Steele come from the Valero Texas Open win to the guy sitting in the chair right here?

BRENDAN STEELE: Yeah, I think a long way. The Valero win was kind of lightning in a bottle, just like no expectations. I hadn't done anything on Tour, it's my 12th start, I hadn't finished better than I think 17th, and I just went out and everything went right kind of thing.

And then the second win was like relief, you know, and then the third one last year was a little bit more of like, okay, this is who you want to be, this is how you can play like as long as you do these things correctly. I think there's a big difference in confidence and understanding of the game and understanding that there's always these ups and downs that you see throughout the year as well, let alone your career. So you just have to try to manage that, not get too high or too low.

Q. Can the confidence you feel on a course you've had success at overcome maybe if you were struggling, can that overcome anything?

BRENDAN STEELE: Yeah, absolutely, I've seen that a lot for me specifically. Happens to me in Phoenix a lot, too. When I get to Phoenix, I play well in Phoenix every year for some reason and I don't really know why, but maybe it's just because I don't care about the noise and everything that's happening. It's definitely enough to overcome poor form, for sure. I haven't been in good form any time I've come to this event and I've played well every year, so I think that's the answer.

DOUG MILNE: Well, Brendan, we appreciate your time as always and hope to see you back here starting Thursday and every day forward.

BRENDAN STEELE: Thanks, Doug.