

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
April 3, 2019



GRAEME McDOWELL

JOHN BUSH: We would like to welcome Graeme McDowell into the interview room, making his fourth career start at the Valero Texas Open, coming off of his fourth career PGA TOUR victory last week at the Corales Puntacana.

Graeme, congratulations on the win. What a week, back-to-back 64s in the middle rounds, just an impressive performance. If we can get your comments on the victory.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I mean, I always knew when it came back it was going to taste pretty special. You know, I guess it took a little longer than I expected. I feel like I've been playing quite well for 18 months to two years, but it's been a frustrating kind of little run because I've struggled to make my good weeks into great weeks and that's what you have to do on the PGA TOUR if you want to compete in the FedExCup and you want to get yourself up there in the world rankings. Your good weeks have to be great. You have to be top-10s and top5s and pushing for those victories, and that's what I haven't done well lately.

So last week was very pleasing from the point of view of getting myself up, getting myself into the mix and, like you said, the two 64s Friday and Saturday were huge for me at the time. Sunday I played quite well, Chris Stroud took me all the way and obviously Mac Hughes, the group in front.

But it was a very timely victory and a very pleasing one and certainly straightens out my schedule this year, shall we say. I'm certainly more excited about the next three or four months of golf than I was certainly asking for invites and calling in favors. It was a difficult time, but certainly last week really, really gives me that boost and gives me that little bit of freedom to go ahead and play some golf in the next few months.

JOHN BUSH: And now you come to this course making your fourth start at this event, a tough golf course, just talk a little bit about what it will take this week.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I really like this golf course. It's one in the schedule again had to call in a favor. They've been really nice to me here at this tournament over the years. I like this golf course a lot. Obviously slightly earlier in the year, it looks a little greener out there, chipping areas are a little easier than they normally are here, but the greens are very firm. The golf course is in excellent condition. I'm really happy for Valero that they have the type of field that they've attracted here this week, the week before Augusta. I just hope the weather can cooperate this weekend and we can have a successful event and guys can go away and tell everyone else how great this golf course is and hopefully a great prep for the Masters tournament next week.

Q. How about the way you won last week does that help you going forward, because there were plenty of times where guys win and then they tie to use the momentum, but the way that you did it. You commented that you needed to hit a clutch shot and you followed through with that. What did that do inside?

GRAEME McDOWELL: I mean, you know, confidence and belief is very -- you can't learn that on the range, you can't find that somewhere. You just have to -- you have to do stuff in the moment that gives you that belief in yourself.

I did think to myself walking down 16, I said to myself I'm going to have to do something special-ish, because Chris Stroud was playing really well and he looked like he was going to be very difficult to beat.

I said to myself, you're going to have to do something to win this tournament. The shot I hit to 17 was a really nice shot. It was a shot I'd been working on the range quite a lot that week because it's a shot I've been struggling with really, to be honest. I told myself just to stand there and put a range swing on that I had been executing that shot so well in practice.

But yeah, that belief, that confidence, to do it well, to win well, to hit great shots down the stretch, to feel like I conducted myself well on Sundays. You know, I haven't been playing well on Sundays of late and there's nothing worse than playing badly on payday. If you're going to play well one day, Sunday's always a nice day to play well.

I think it speaks volumes to the amount of pressure I've been putting on myself just for the simple things, the simple things; being employed on the PGA TOUR next year, getting my playing exemption, my playing rights. I finished outside of the 125 the last two years and frankly it was very sobering and a bit of a reality check for me that if I continued down that road that I wasn't going to have long left out here.

When you start having those conversations with yourself about, you know, hey, am I done, am I finished, is this going to come to an end, I don't want to go out this way, it definitely resonates and refocuses. And like I say, that last piece of the pie was being able to play well on Sundays and be able to get it done.

So the win last week, opposite event, best players of the world aren't there. Of course you want to beat the best, but the win was special in a lot of ways because it's going to give me that freedom that I need, that I've been really waiting for, I suppose. To be able to go out and play a little bit more stress-free rather than being worried about keeping my card and how many points is that this week.

It's been difficult, it's been a difficult couple years because I haven't really been focused enough on the big picture. I've been trying to take care of the little stuff and I haven't done it very well.

Q. A couple of things, Graeme. First of all, I saw that you said after you missed the

cut last year it was rum and blacks and feeling sorry for yourself. I take it this was more of a champagne occasion?

GRAEME McDOWELL: It was rum and blacks as well. We drank a little Dominican rum on the way home Sunday night. It was great. I went down there last year, like you say, missed the cut. But I like the golf course. It's a very long golf course actually, which wouldn't theoretically suit me. I think the back nine was 4,053 yards or something on the card and there was no run in the fairways at all last week. I got it done with some long clubs, which is nice.

Q. We saw Poults win the week before Augusta. I know it's a quick turnaround for you, but dreams of the same thing?

GRAEME McDOWELL: For sure. I've got a lot of people texting me thinking I was in Augusta and followup texts going, "Oops, sorry, didn't realize you weren't in Augusta."

Listen, I would love to win this week and go to Augusta next week. Obviously that's going to be very difficult to do, a lot of great players here and I've got to moderate my expectation levels.

You mentioned Poults. Poults has been incredibly supportive of me the last year because he can certainly relate to the position that I've been the last couple years because he's been there himself, so he's been in particular very supportive of me, sending me a lot of messages when I've been in contention on weekends and really pulling hard for me.

And that goes for a lot of people. I feel like a lot of people and friends and, you know, the win at the weekend resonated with them because they understand what I've been through. I mean, a lot of players across all sports go through similar things where they're in slumps and they're trying to dig their way back out of it. So I had a lot of texts and emails that I'm still trying to get through and reply back to people. It's been amazing the amount of love that I've been getting from people and appreciating what I achieved. It's been nice to know people still care, you know.

Q. Graeme, paint me a picture of the low point and just where you think you turned the corner and felt like something like this would happen again.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, there were a few low points. I think was it Hilton Head '17, missed the cut there. Kenny and I were kind of, you know, we were on the edge, shall we say. I think I was probably the most frustrated. The caddie's always the one that sort of, you know, that the guy that gets it in the year, the first, you know.

But I think '17 in Korea, the CJ Cup, my driver had kind of reached rock bottom, I was driving it awful, short, nowhere. I played with Finau the first round, just decimated me off the tee. I started to think to myself if I can't compete on the PGA TOUR driving like this, this is a serious problem.

So that was a turning point from an equipment, technique point of view. I realized I was doing a couple things wrong with the driver that I needed to fix, and I started working on that and from then I started driving it better. That was really in a funny way was a turning point. Picked up plus eight yards against the field last year, drove it better.

Trying to think. Last year there were a few tough moments last year where I just didn't play well on Sundays. But Hilton Head and the CJ Cup end of '17 stick out in my brain as moments when it was feeling particularly tough.

To be honest with you, last year wasn't a bad year. Like I mentioned earlier, I just was turning 5th into 15th and 10th into 25th. I just had a bad knack of not finishing off good weeks. So I knew it was there, it was kind of bubbling under the surface, but I couldn't let it out.

In a funny way, the QBE Shootout end of last year was kind of a big confidence booster for me because I played well on a Sunday. That was kind of the first time I've done that in a while. The McGladrey and QBE end of last year, and then that little bit of a wrist injury in January kind of stopped me from getting out of the blocks, I was ready to go.

Sundays like Bay Hill, Bay Hill was a particularly disappointing Sunday for me. I just felt like every time I started climbing myself back up that ladder, I would get a kick and I would fall back down again and that's the way it's felt lately.

But I think deep inside, and thankfully I've got a great family and a great team around me who have been trying to remind me that things are moving in the right direction and you've got to try and have that little bit of belief, but sometimes you just need some results to help you understand that you're in the right place.

Q. And how do you describe the feelings that you felt being back in contention chasing a title last Sunday?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, it was -- obviously last week was a slightly different mentality nearly because you felt like you should be good enough to play well in that field. No disrespect to any of the guys there; obviously the top-64 players in the world are not there. So there's a certainly element of -- I think that's a little bit of what's been missing in my game the last four, five years when it's gone awry is that in my early sort of 10, 12 years on Tour, I mean, there was enough times where you played mediocre events against not great fields where you could kind of go back there and feel like the big player again and sort of have the confidence nearly as a given rather than try and find it.

I feel like big experience here on the PGA TOUR the last three or four years, especially when I haven't been playing well is realizing that every week is tough out here. The fields are unbelievably strong, the guys are unbelievably good, and you don't have to do much wrong to be going home on a Friday afternoon.

So in a funny way going back to a second-tier event like Dominican last week where it's just not a great field and you kind of have that in-built little bit of confidence, that helped me a lot last week. You know, shooting the 64 on Friday, and I shot 64 again on Saturday, felt unbelievably relaxed doing it and I felt very confident and going into that Sunday, it was nice. Then the screw starts to turn a little bit again. Then it's a Sunday afternoon. Doesn't really matter what kind of event it is, you're trying to win. It was great to kind of go through those emotions and feelings again off, hey, I can mess this up today. I came out of the blocks really great on Sunday, made a few birdies. And Chris Stroud played amazingly well and I had to kind of dig in hit some good shots coming down the stretch.

But like I said, there's something to be said for that little bit of extra belief and confidence that you get from feeling like you're an experienced enough player in that type of field where you should have the ability to be able to compete if you play well.

Like I say, week in, week out on the PGA TOUR, it's hard to do that because the standard is very, very high. That's kind of a big difference I feel like nowadays from what it was like 10 years ago.

JOHN BUSH: Graeme, welcome back.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Thanks, Johnny.