

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
October 9, 2019



COLE HAMMER

AMANDA HERRINGTON: We would like to welcome Cole Hammer to the interview room here at the Houston Open. Cole, you're making your second PGA TOUR start. Of course, the first one referring to the 2015 U.S. Open, but being from Houston, I imagine it's pretty special to be playing in the first non-major event here at the Houston Open. Just thoughts on coming into the week?

COLE HAMMER: Yeah, as you said, it's my second PGA TOUR start. Yeah, I guess, first non-major start, so I'm really looking forward to this opportunity. The fact that it's in Houston, my hometown, makes it extra special. This is the first PGA TOUR event I ever came and watched and to kind of have my first start being here where I've grown up, played this course quite a bit, is really cool and I'm just looking forward to the opportunity.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Second amateur in the world, sophomore at Texas. Just talk us through, you've had the Walker Cup recently, what's life like for you right now and transitions into a PGA TOUR event?

COLE HAMMER: It's been a whirlwind lately. I mean, going to the Walker Cup, missing way too much school probably. My teachers aren't loving me right now, but I guess that's the way it goes. But it's been great. I've played two college tournaments since the Walker Cup and the team's played okay, nothing special. Just kind of one thing leads to another and I'm sitting here. It's amazing it's already October and the Walker Cup was about a month ago. That was one of the best experiences of my life, being on a team of guys that I've grown up with and played with for a long time. It was great to get the win over there in Liverpool and to be here having this experience is great.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Hopefully your teachers are watching later this week. With that, we will open it up for questions.

Q. I saw an old photo of you and Mason playing here with the stands up and I guess you guys used to do that every year. How many years was that and do you have any special memories from any of those pre-tournament rounds here?

COLE HAMMER: Yes, so the Nomes -- Mason's on my team at Texas and the Nomes were, I don't know if they still are, they were members out here when we were younger. They had like a reciprocal thing. So every year before the tournament we would come out and play I would say probably two or three times leading up to the event. It was fun for us to come out and see a PGA TOUR setup with stands. I mean, we were probably 10, 11, 12 years old. I can't remember, we were probably playing like the ladies tees out here and looking back at the back tees thinking, man, how do they hit the ball so far? But that was

really special time for me. Mason and I grew up together and to kind of come out here and get that head start, I guess, is cool. To kind of look back on that tomorrow when I'm standing on the first tee will be something I'll remember for a while.

I mean, when our golf course over at River Oaks Country Club was closed down, we joined out here temporarily for like a year and came out here and practiced and played. It's almost like a second home to me, I've been here a bunch, so I'm looking forward to it.

Q. Any particular memories of spectating here that stick out in your mind, opportunities to have met, you know, met a guy or two, got autographs, particular shots? You know what I'm saying.

COLE HAMMER: I remember, I can't remember how old I was, it might have been -- it might have been like 2012, I'm not sure, but I remember coming out, I had like a parking pass for this parking lot and I thought that was the coolest thing in the world. So I sat out here -- yeah, it is. I sat out here and waited by my car and had like Charles Howell come by and I talked to him for a little bit. And I got Rory's autograph. Rory was definitely my favorite golfer at the time, so spent an hour on the range watching him beat balls, which was pretty special.

And I remember I was out on the third hole, the dogleg left around the water, watching Lee Westwood hit a 3-wood. To this day I think it's the purest golf shot I've ever seen hit in my life. He just smashed it, it was unbelievable.

So that was basically my takeaways from that day. I haven't really been to another PGA TOUR event since then, so it's been a while.

Q. Were you old enough then to already be saying "that's going to be me one of these days?" That was already the plan because you were obviously precocious, you were a good player then, too.

COLE HAMMER: Yeah, I definitely took it seriously. I knew that this is something I wanted to do one day. I didn't know that it would come this soon. I've known for a long time that I've wanted to play professional golf.

Q. If you were a tennis player, say you're playing in the U.S. Clay Courts at River Oaks, of course there's a chance you would end up playing a Top-10 player mano a mano. On the golf course of course you're playing the course and you're playing your head, but you're also on the course with guys. Can you reflect a little bit on how you think -- you've experienced it once, but how it will feel? It is just a golf course you know, but the guys around you are not fellow college players.

COLE HAMMER: Right. Yeah, it's interesting. I've obviously -- tennis, as you said, is a lot different than golf, but we kind of get that in match play sometimes. Like in the U.S. Am the one seed will play the 64 and it's like an underdog-type deal, so I've had that type of

experience, but I've only played against the best players in the world one time before.

I mean, as a junior golfer, after I played in the U.S. Open I got the opportunity to play in some of the bigger amateur events, so when I was like 15 years old, these guys who were the top players in the world amateur-wise, I was like, that's as good as it gets. To that point, I've had the same experience before, so now I'm just playing against the pros. Obviously, it's a step up.

I mean, I think I'm just playing the golf course, as you said. Like I'm not worried about who's out here. I mean, last time when I went to the U.S. Open, I was like kind of shocked, I was in awe of what was going on and I really wasn't focused on my golf. I was probably too worried about what was going on around me and I learned a lot from that experience. I need to focus on what I'm doing. The hole's the same size as like amateur and college golf, so just play golf, that's kind of what my mindset is going into the week.

Q. I was going to ask you about Chambers Bay, like what was your biggest takeaway from that week and what do you use from there to apply it to what you're doing now?

COLE HAMMER: Yeah. I mean, I think I touched on that a little bit. I just wasn't comfortable when I was 15 and I think I just kind of saw how other guys were handling themselves and I think that's what I learned from that week.

I mean, I'm going to go out here and just focus on my own business, not worry about what's going on around me. I'm just going to try to stay in my comfort zone and not try to -- try to play my game, not try to play Dustin Johnson's game, because obviously I don't hit it 495 yards. Yeah, just fairways and greens and go from there.

Q. To use another interesting analogy, back in the early 1980s a guy named Sammy Giammalva, Jr., 18 years old, played an ATP tennis tournament in Napa at 18, won the tournament, and the next tournament he had already gotten a spot in the draw at River Oaks and arrived in Houston deciding to turn professional and not go to SMU to be a tennis player. So if you win this tournament this week, you're turning pro, right?

COLE HAMMER: That's not what Coach Fields wants to hear.

Q. I'm, of course, joking, but you have to have the mindset -- I mean, you tee off tomorrow, I mean, you're here to win a golf tournament?

COLE HAMMER: Exactly.

Q. Who knows, right?

COLE HAMMER: Exactly. I think that was my mistake at the U.S. Open. I was like, all right, just try to make the cut maybe. Now, I mean, obviously it would be nice to make the cut, but I'm trying to win the tournament. I don't show up at a tournament if I'm not trying to

win, so that's my mindset.

Q. Kind of piggybacking off of that, it wasn't too long ago that you beat Matt Wolff in the NAAs in a match. He obviously wins this summer on Tour, Collin won on Tour. Is your confidence that you can win this event more after seeing that or do you think it's about the same?

COLE HAMMER: You know what, I think it's about the same. There wasn't really any doubt in my mind that Matt or Collin could come out and win right away. I've played with Tour pros over the last few years, and the top amateurs, there's just not a whole lot of difference. Like guys aren't scared anymore to come out and play with these PGA TOUR players and Matt and Collin obviously showed that right away. Joaquin Niemann's killing it as well.

It's cool to see these guys play well, and obviously I've played with them a bunch and I've had some success against them. I think sure, it gives me confidence, but it's not confidence that I haven't had before. I've always known that the top amateurs have a great chance against these guys. Yeah, I'm not really surprised.

Q. Just curious, how much of it is there a temptation to turn pro before you finish college, because obviously Jordan did it and you see these young guys going out there. I mean, where's your mindset right now?

COLE HAMMER: Obviously there's a temptation to turn pro. I've seen so many guys do it in front of me. But there's guys like Ollie Schneiderjans, Maverick McNealy who stuck it out and stayed for four years and it's worked out for them as well. I mean, I have not like -- it's not in the cards for me to turn pro anytime soon. Like I haven't really put a whole lot of thought into it. I'm just kind of taking it one step at a time right now. I'm loving college, being at UT's been a great experience for me, being on a team is a lot of fun, kind of getting to practice around those guys every day.

But I would be lying if I said I've never thought about turning pro before. I've put myself in a position to where I potentially could, but like I said, it's not going to happen anytime soon, I'm enjoying myself at college.

Q. This is the last year at this course and it's going to go to Memorial Park, which I believe is fairly close to your house, right?

COLE HAMMER: Yeah, it's five minutes.

Q. I think it's about ready to open, too. Have you played it since they redid it or have you played it before they did, and what are your thoughts about the PGA TOUR event being there?

COLE HAMMER: I think it's going to be incredible. I have not played it, it's not open yet. I think it will open within the next month I heard last night. But I've played there a million

times growing up.

It's the local muni in our neighborhood and we've had city juniors there, city amateur championships there. I've played in those and I mean, we go out there and play on Mondays when our golf course is closed with all my buddies.

So I'm really looking forward to it, to it being in the middle of the city because I think that is going to probably draw a much bigger crowd. It will just get the city involved even more, which I think it will be a lot of fun. Obviously what Tom Doak is doing is going to be pretty good, I'm sure. I think it will be a good change. Obviously this has been a great host course for the last few years, but I think bringing the tournament closer to the city will be a lot of fun.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Anything else for Cole? Cole, thank you so much for your time today and good luck this week.