

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
August 10, 2021



WILL ZALATORIS

DOUG MILNE: Like to welcome Will Zalatoris to the virtual media center here at the 2021 Wyndham Championship.

Will, you're coming in making your second start in the event. I know you weren't born in the area and I know you don't live in the area, but with your Wake Forest ties, you're certainly one of the fan favorites here this week. If we can just get a little bit of reflection of your time at Wake Forest and maybe how much experience there did you ever have here at Sedgefield?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, you know, it was fun. Coming in Sunday night, I saw Coach Haas yesterday. My fiance and I walked around campus. That's where I met her, so obviously this place is near and dear to the heart.

We came over here a little bit, but I played a junior event here so I probably logged 15, 20 rounds here. I love the Winston-Salem area. We went to all of our favorite restaurants yesterday throughout the day and a lot of really cool memories. Yeah, it will be fun.

I saw Webb in the locker room earlier and we were kind of joking that there's a pretty good chance we'll end up getting paired together. Yeah, it's going to be great. Obviously I played on the Arnold Palmer Scholarship here at Wake and I had a really great time here. Every time I come back, it's almost spiritual in a weird way. Obviously we all love our alma mater, but it was really fun walking around campus yesterday.

DOUG MILNE: That's fantastic, I hope that brings you good luck this week. Guessing what you would call a great season, you picked up your eighth top-10 finish last week at the WGC FedEx St. Jude Invitational and you really seem to be performing at the bigger events, the majors. You've had some incredible showings in the Majors. When you were kind of gearing yourself up mentally to come out here on the PGA TOUR, did you have that bar of major championship performance in mind, or what is it about you that you think has resulted in such good finishes in the majors?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I love tougher golf courses. I've been kind of fighting my body a little bit over the last couple months, specifically over the last few weeks. I love Torrey Pines, so really missing the cut there -- obviously you were talking about all of the good stuff and I've got to go to the negative side first, but Torrey's one of my favorite golf courses that we have on Tour and it really irked me that I didn't play well there.

I think it's just the fact the golf courses are so hard, you've really got to be precise when it comes to ball-striking, and obviously the greens are typically tougher. I think really my first

top-10 I had on Tour was the sixth at the U.S. Open, so I think that really knowing that immediately my first top-10 came at one of the biggest events in the world kind of made everything -- I knew that I could contend and I knew that I could play with the tougher fields on the tougher courses, so it gave me a lot of self belief I think if anything with how tough some of these courses are. At Kiawah, that's another good example, like on 17 there's no bail-out, you've just got to step up and hit a good golf shot, so there's a lot of that when it comes to the majors. Last week is typically one of the tougher golf courses on Tour and we had just absolutely phenomenal weather, that's why scores were so much lower. I love that golf course, I look forward to going back there next year when it's part of the Playoffs.

Q. The putter switch, can you talk a little bit about the switch into the Phantom X 11, kind of what motivated that, what the process has been like and sort of what improvements you're seeing?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah. You know, I had putted with the putter I've been using for about two years. I had felt -- I had a bunch of lead tape on the bottom of it and it eventually started to come off and I had a tough time getting the right weighting with it. The guys at Scotty had built me up a bunch of putters through the years, I guess through the last couple years, and we finally found one that I really liked. I loved how immediately off the face I can feel where it was, where the -- I guess the way I could describe it is I just get immediate feedback. I was starting to lose that a little bit with my putter, but I think if anything, it was kind of one of those things where I picked it up and I just started to really like it. We finally kind of made it work.

I putted with a Scotty pretty much my entire life with the exception of the putter I was using for a while. Like I said, it's more of just kind of that, the feel of it that I can actually, I can feel that ball exactly where it comes off on the face. Kind of the test that we did is I was hitting putts and not looking at where the ball was going and just trying to guess long, short, and I immediately was getting that. I wasn't able to do that with my old one, so right there I know exactly this is the putter I was going to go to and had a really nice week with it last week. Really part of it was just because I couldn't hit balls for two weeks so kind of the boredom was kicking in and hitting a few putts whenever I could. It's been a great switch.

Q. So it's definitely more of a feel and kind of what you're seeing on the putting green rather than going in PuttLab and looking at the differences in the numbers?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, so I haven't gone on SAM probably in a couple years, but the thing that we definitely notice, we use some high-speed cameras to look at it. I thought that the ball was rolling quicker, which we did confirm.

The part that's crazy is they're actually the same loft, same lie, same length, everything's the same, but the ball would tend to have its first skid and immediately it was tumbling over a little quicker. Scotty, obviously they've tried hard to get me in one for a while.

Q. I would imagine.

WILL ZALATORIS: And this is one that when I got it, I put it down -- it was given to me actually at Colonial and I was like, man, when I get some time off I think this could be a game changer just because I could get that feel of exactly where it was on the face and know exactly how far it's going to go.

Q. Just curious, there were a lot of question marks with the health last week in the first start. How did you feel, how do you feel now and has that shored up any of your plans after this week what you might do as far as playing?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I'm doing okay. It's still a pretty big effort every day to get moving. I've got to thank Damon Goddard, my trainer, for getting me back to -- what I said is the Saturday before last week I was 50/50 on playing. I hadn't touched a golf club since the British at that point. I just said, you know what, the docs said here's your parameters, this is what you need to look for, and I went out and actually played on that Sunday and actually felt pretty good, was moving a lot better than I thought. I'm not really getting off my right side. I mean, when you see the distances that I'm hitting balls, you're thinking, oh, he's fine, but I typically like hitting kind of a cover cut a lot and I'm just kind of hanging on my back foot and hitting a really high draw. I'm getting my speed up and it's been consistent, but I'm doing okay. I mean, it's kind of one of those things where I'm just going to keep listening to my body in terms of future plans. Obviously this week, it's win or go home. Second means as much as missing a cut, so I've got nothing to lose this week, but obviously were I not to win, I'm going to keep listening to my body, but as a backup plan, definitely looking at going to Europe.

Q. Are you playing here -- obviously this is the last event but would you be playing if it wasn't in North Carolina?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah. I don't want to go into hypotheticals, but I've played this place 15, 20 times. Being in front of the Wake crowd, it adds to me wanting to be here. This is a place that I think I've played since I was 13, so got a lot of history on it. It's a pretty cool spot. Go Giants.

Q. Hey, Will, you said you played the course 15, 20 times. When was the last time you played here at Sedgefield?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, 2018 was the last time. I had actually played here a lot before they redid the greens and I remember coming back right after they redid the greens. They've just done a tremendous job. They're some of the best greens we've got on Tour. I went out and played the back nine this morning and the course is in incredible shape, so obviously on Donald Ross greens when they're firm and fast, it will be a fun week.

Q. For you and your game, how well do you think it will translate here with the new greens?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I love playing on fast greens. I putted really well last week on fast greens; Augusta, had a good week on fast greens. So I'm all on board for as fast as we can get them.

Q. So I wanted to ask you, Ryan Goble, your caddie, has been with you for a couple years. How crucial has he been to kind of your ascension? He's been there every step of the way as you've played some of these first majors for the first time and joined you there on the web Tour as well.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I can kind of give you a really cool story about Ryan and kind of some of our moments of success.

When I won in Colorado, well, on 15, it's a very gettable par 5. I hit it over the back of the green and I had about a 35-footer and I left it hanging on the lip. Ryan was -- he could tell I was frustrated. We get up on to 16 tee and it's like a 122 par-3 down the hill with a false front and I'm pacing off the yardage. I'm like, "I've got 122." He said, "Pace it off again." I'm looking at him like, "You've got to be kidding me. I'm trying to win a golf tournament. You've got a different number.

And I walk it off again and I get 122. I look at him and he's smiling and I knew immediately what he was doing was actually trying to get me to slow down and just take a moment, don't make another -- don't feel like -- don't press and make a mistake when you don't have to because the first thing if someone tells you to calm down, you're like "Well, no, I'm not going to calm down, you calm down."

So it was a really kind of good little mind trick that he played on me, and I ended up hitting the shot to 8 feet, making birdie and we ended up winning the tournament by one.

He's been there -- we started from I got a spot in the Korn Ferry event in New York, we finished third and he's been with me ever since. He's a good friend, he's a massive goofball. We always keep it pretty light out there. A lot of guys when they see me play, they think I'm more mellow and like very serious, but our conversations are typically completely off topic from the golf course and are a lot of fun. He's a great friend.

And it's kind of funny because he calls me "Junior" because he's 50, I'm 24. We get asked a lot if he's my dad, which I love ribbing that into him as much as I can. He's been a great friend.

DOUG MILNE: Well, Will, that looks like that's what we've got. We appreciate your time as always and certainly wish you the best of luck going all the way this week.

WILL ZALATORIS: Thanks.