

## ROOKIE OF THE YEAR ANNOUNCEMENT

September 13, 2021



### WILL ZALATORIS

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**JACK RYAN:** We'd like to welcome Will Zalatoris into the interview room at the Fortinet Championship. Just 30 minutes ago Will was announced as the 2021 PGA TOUR Rookie of the Year.

Will, first of all, congratulations on winning the Arnold Palmer Award. If we can just get an opening comment on what this distinction means to you.

**WILL ZALATORIS:** Yeah, thank you. Super excited. Obviously won one of the scholarships to Wake Forest, the Mr. Palmer scholarship there, so the fact that I'm again receiving something with Mr. Palmer's name on it is not lost on me by any stretch of the imagination.

You know, the past two years have just been so wild. If you told me that I would have been sitting here as the Rookie of the Year, especially when we had the four-month layoff, and told to have the wraparound season, I would have had a tough time believing you. It's a really great honor and I'm excited to get going.

**JACK RYAN:** You mentioned getting going. You're ready to start your first full season on the PGA TOUR this week, but just again looking back to last season, what was the key to your consistency throughout the season, all those Top-10 finishes you racked up that ultimately led to you sitting here today?

**WILL ZALATORIS:** I think the biggest thing was just sticking to my process and just believing in it. You know, the year, as any professional golfer will go through, there's a lot of ups and downs and obviously you look at my career or my year and you say, well, there really weren't that many downs. You know, there were some times where I felt like I really had to work hard to have a good week and there were some weeks where the game felt easy. I think just being able to play that much golf in a short period of time and realizing the ups and downs has kind of toughened me and prepared me for my -- really the rest of my career, especially going from not even knowing if I was playing on the PGA TOUR and playing in basically just the U.S. Open to then getting special temporary status and obviously having a nice run at the majors. So, like I said, I think it's just really kind of prepared me for the future.

**Q. Can you go back to 2020 and you were playing so well on the Korn Ferry Tour, and I'm just curious like what were your feelings when the Tour announced that there wouldn't be any promotion or relegation? Were you looking at it at that point like I'm going to lose a year in this journey or did it motivate you a little bit more?**

**WILL ZALATORIS:** Yeah, you know, I think my first kind of 10 minutes, once I realized that it was going to be a two-year season, was going to be a little bit of frustration. Then again I knew that everybody else was going to be frustrated, so I had to look at it like an opportunity.

The fact that I was essentially given two years to go win three times and I knew that if I were to go win three times I would be that much more prepared to win at the PGA TOUR level, I had to look at the positives. If I was going to be salty about having no status, I probably would have lost my Korn Ferry Tour card. It really just kind of -- I had to take a step back and really just look at everything at a macro level instead of a micro level and just really work every single day getting better.

**Q. When you look back on your Masters experience, what comes to mind first? And after that, did you feel any pressure sort of to live up to sort of the expectations that followed you from that?**

**WILL ZALATORIS:** Yeah, I mean, I'd probably say every day there I could give you one story that was a highlight of the day. I mean, there's hundreds of highlights to me about that place. Every single moment you're there is a highlight.

I think honestly walking off of 18 with my now-fiancee, Katelyn, and I joked to her, this beats doing Monday qualifiers in Evansville, Indiana, doesn't it? Because when we were in college, she came to visit me and just because we hadn't seen each other in a while and I was just doing a Monday qualifier, it was just kind of a cool moment for the two of us because she's been there through it all with me.

The pressure side of it or the expectations, I guess, I think if anything, when I was playing in the Masters, I wasn't playing with any expectations, I had nothing to lose. My life goal is to win a major and being in that situation to play with nothing to lose, play with no fear. I think if anything I probably was trying to win too hard, trying to make the Ryder Cup team too hard and I really just played my way out of it and then eventually had a freak accident with the back. It's a really good lesson for the future of, like I said, I had that two-year process of basically just go get better every single day and you have basically two years to go win three times. I was just trying so hard to do that when in reality I wasn't trying at all to win, it just happened.

So there was a lot of really good lessons learned, especially over the last three months, but being thrown in the fire and knowing that I can handle it, especially at Augusta, is obviously a highlight.

**Q. So you announced yourself on a pretty big stage at the U.S. Open at Winged Foot and I feel like that happens with a lot of younger players who make a big move at a major but ultimately just kind of fade off in the end, but clearly you've kind of stuck around and have been a little bit different. If I had told you at the start of that U.S. Open almost a full year later you would be holding the Rookie of the Year trophy, would you have called me crazy, out of my mind or anything like that?**

**WILL ZALATORIS:** Yeah, at least. It's just like I said, this was something that two years ago wasn't even on my radar. I guess when we were sitting around in COVID for four months, this was not even a goal just because I didn't think I was going to be playing on the PGA TOUR. The fact that I accomplished it, obviously over the moon. And honestly, I can't believe that I actually -- obviously I'm the Rookie of the Year, I'm kind of shocked by it. But it's a testament to everybody that I've -- everyone that's a part of my team and telling me that I could do this. Like I said, I was telling Ron that the goal is to go win three times and obviously I took a different path and I'm really grateful for everybody that's a part of this process with me that helped me get here.

**Q. Will, now that you are a full member of the PGA TOUR, what are the biggest differences for you, whether it's mentally, physically, planning-wise as you start your season this week?**

**WILL ZALATORIS:** Yeah, I think the peace of mind of knowing where I'm going to be playing schedule-wise is huge. Last year I had a couple sponsor invites in January and next thing you know I played seven weeks in a row and kind of got fried there at the end of February into early March.

So I think really being able to figure out exactly what my schedule's going to be and kind of shape everything around that as opposed to kind of everything being a shotgun is going to be really helpful, especially this year in terms of managing my energy for the -- really once it comes down to playoff time.

**Q. What is your schedule, the beginning of it, do you have that set yet?**

**WILL ZALATORIS:** Yeah, I'll play Jackson, Shriners, hopefully head over to Japan and play Mayakoba and then Dubai.

**JACK RYAN:** Will, I believe those are all the questions we have. We appreciate your time. Best of luck this week as you begin your first full season on the PGA TOUR and congratulations again on being named the PGA TOUR Rookie of the Year.

**WILL ZALATORIS:** Perfect. Thanks, Jack.