

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
November 15, 2023

CAMILO VILLEGAS



AMANDA HERRINGTON: We would like to welcome our most recent PGA TOUR winner, Camilo Villegas, to the interview room here at the RSM Classic.

Camilo, what a two weeks it's been, first a runner-up at the World Wide Technology Championship and then your first PGA TOUR win in more than nine years.

What's the last two weeks been like and have you had a chance to really reflect?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Yeah, that's an understatement. Obviously those two weeks were very special, very happy to be here. It's been a while since I got called to do a little media day or a little media before the tournament.

It's been a journey. Life is a journey and it goes up and down. Pretty interesting. Sort of kind of go back to that Colombian kid that came here with a dream, played college golf at the University of Florida, played the Korn Ferry in 2005 and then everything gets started on Tour so great, playing Augusta my second year on Tour, winning a couple FedExCup Playoffs in 2008. Yeah, you would think that that kid was on top of the world.

And I was. I was feeling pretty good from a performance point of view. But I look at where I am right now and everything that has happened, I truly believe I'm a better person. Maybe the results haven't been there, but this journey has been pretty interesting. To lose my card, to go through an injury, to lose my daughter, to create Mia's Miracles, to go back to the Korn Ferry, to keep grinding, to have doubts, to have fears, to have tears, have smiles, all of the above. You just never know where life goes.

But I said it last week, with all those things and all those doubts and all the ups and downs, I never stopped waking up early, 5:00, 5:30 in the morning, to do what I like to do because in all honesty, the really cool thing about the last two weeks is not so much the results of the last two weeks, but the process and what's been behind those results. As much as I am enjoying sitting here and reflecting on my win and the energy that I have received from the world of golf, the world of non-golf, trust me, it's unbelievable. I had 900 messages on my phone. I'm going to get to all of them sometime.

Yeah, once again, it's a process. It's enjoying the fact that I want to get better every morning. A lot of people asked me what I was doing going back to the Korn Ferry Tour and I said, listen, I want to play golf on the PGA TOUR and the Korn Ferry Tour is what's going to get me to the PGA TOUR. I had a chance to play the Korn Ferry Tour in 2005 and that's what got me to the PGA TOUR, so that's where I need to be. And I enjoyed this year there being with the younger guys and different places, different courses.



I missed my card on the Korn Ferry Tour because I was doing a lot of swing changes and stuff and they weren't kicking in. And I kept trusting my instructor. He told me it was going to take a long time, and it did, but here we are.

So I'm getting long with this answer and this story and everything, but it's special. I'm proud of myself, I'm proud of those early mornings, I'm proud of my wife, I'm proud of Mia's Miracles, I'm proud of Mia, how she battled for those five months, for the energy she gives us and I'm proud of the journey of life. It's just fun.

Trust me, the PGA TOUR has been so much for me and this is where I wanted to be again. This is where we are. What's to come, who knows. Like I said, life goes in circles, but I'm going to continue to do the same thing. I'm going to continue to wake up in the morning, I'm going to continue to give it my best, treat people the right way and I think when you do that, you can see how happy people get when you get results.

It's been unbelievable being here this week. All my peers just come and gave me a hug, telling me how they were watching, how they were pulling for me. We'll do it all over again starting tomorrow.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: In addition to the win, you won the weekly RSM Birdies Fore Love last week, which comes with a \$50,000 donation I assume you're making to Mia's Miracles. How much are you aware of that and was that on your mind?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: It was. The RSM Birdies Fore Love has been a very special program for us. It's touched us personally, direct, and it's touched those that are benefited by Mia's Miracles. When this program started, there's been a few players that have won the weekly and then the over -- not the overall. Patrick Rodgers finished second last year in the overall and they've donated to Mia's Miracles. They've been kind enough, they know the work that my wife is doing and to the team just to provide smiles to those in need and I'm very grateful for that.

Very interestingly, yesterday I was supposed to tee it up in second stage of Q-School, so I wasn't going to be able to be here, but my wife was going to be here Monday night. She was going to do a little event. She was going to speak about our foundation and she was going to tell the story of how RSM Birdies Fore Love has impacted and benefited our foundation and the people that we help.

Things changed in Mexico after I moved up to 147 in the FedExCup points list, I didn't have to go to second stage of Q-School. I called Todd Thompson, the tournament director here, and he could tell you the story. I called him, I said, Todd, no bullshit, I'm calling you because I don't want to be there, I need to be there. So I don't know how your sponsor exemptions are looking, but I don't know what you're going to do, but I need to be there.

He was laughing, he said I'll call you tomorrow. I figured you were going to call me.



Long story short, next day he very quickly confirmed a spot for me and then what happened happened last week. So I go from not being in the field to being a sponsor invite to being in the field as a champion from the previous two years. That's pretty cool.

So our charter gets delayed. We finally land in Jax after a long day. Hop in the car and I'm rushing to get to The Cloisters to attend the RSM Birdies Fore Love reception. My wife is there waiting for me, and even though I got in a little bit late and probably with the wrong attire from getting off the plane, it was pretty cool. It was cool to share our story. It was very nice to see what this program has done, how much money they've donated. They've raised over \$5 million only with that program.

And again, to RSM, to the world of golf, to the PGA TOUR, to this country, I mean, this country's unbelievable when it comes to charity. We've had a chance to experience it and live it ourselves and we'll continue to open our hearts to help others to grow, to partner with hopefully RSM and the Birdies Fore Love program, keep bringing smiles.

Q. Camilo, when you won you were surrounded by people with champagne and they were spraying you. I sort of knew who one or two of them were, but I was wondering if you could give a quick rundown of who were those people and also what have they meant to your comeback.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: It's pretty cool. It's a little -- our Latin culture and the energy and everything maybe celebrates a little different than the American culture. I got a chance to be there in Puerto Rico when Nico Echavarria -- he's a kid from Colombia, from Campestre, Medellin, same place where we grew up, very close families -- when he won.

He looked at me as an example, which is cool. I've had a chance to spend some time with him and try to help him. Great talent, great player. When he won, it was very cool to be there. I was a little hesitant to just run on the green and just completely spray him, but anyway, we did it, we had fun with it. I guess it was his time. It was nice to see him there, to have him there when they run on the green. I'm just looking up in the sky and I'm just enjoying the moment.

It was mainly the Latin guys, the Latin caddies and it was good energy, man. We hang around, we help each other and that same night, Sunday, I went to dinner with a couple Latin players, some of the caddies and we had a good time.

What does it mean? It means good energy, it means camaraderie, it means kind of Latin culture and it means that we're here for each other.

Q. Camilo, I happened to accidentally catch you doing a co-anchor deal on Golf Channel, I think it was, and I was completely impressed with the way you presented yourself and the way you spoke and how you did the whole thing. I thought, OK, I haven't seen him playing a lot of great golf lately, so maybe he's making a career



transition. Is that something you are interested in doing?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: It was a very interesting week. I'll tell you the story of how that happened. This is a true story. We're doing -- I see Todd there, he's laughing.

Had a chance to spend time with him and his team that week at Wyndham. It was pretty special. I learned a lot, but this is how it all started.

So I have my Mia's Miracles first tournament last year. Todd was very gracious to send us some flags of major champions to us, and Steve Sands was there to help us MC. I know Steve for many years. I'm never going to forget, I'm on the ninth fairway, Steve shows up in another cart, I'm with my wife and we start talking and then he looks at me, he says, hey, by the way, your name has come up on the Golf Channel a few times. Do you want to be in the booth one week?

I told him to F off. Literally, like that. I said, I'm like, man, I'm not ready, I want to play.

And my reaction was because yes, I'm 41, yes, I have been playing terrible golf, yes, you don't know where you're heading, but I enjoy playing, I enjoy trying to get better. I wasn't ready for that.

Called him up the same night and I said, Steve, you know what, obviously I told you that because I know you're my friend and I could use that language with you, but I'm actually very gracious of the comment. It's an honor for me that you guys are thinking about me. I mean, English is not even my first language and it's probably because you guys have seen how I've handled my career and how I've gone about business that you believe that maybe I could do a good job. So it's actually an honor, but I'm still not ready for that.

Then we go to my agent, Clarke Jones, and he goes, listen, bud, I'm not here to close doors. If you really want me to close this door, I will, but if not, you need to give us a week. Just pick the week next year, I'll try to arrange.

So I picked Wyndham, last regular season event of the year, a place where I have great memories where I won in 2014, a golf course that I really know, a week that I knew there was going to be a lot to talk, which made it easier but harder, and we jumped in the booth. Jumped in the booth that first day, producer goes, OK, how about we do a little rehearsal, 40-second opening, and holy crap did I get nervous. And this is true. I mean, I was, I was scared.

We survived that first day. It wasn't my best effort, but I also have to say that everybody that I asked for advice, they kept telling me, just be yourself, be yourself, sit there and be yourself. Then when I was getting ready to start, I go shit, what does "be yourself" mean? I know that, but there's going to be an order to all this stuff. There's going to be rules and do's and don'ts. I felt like I was maybe in the wrong place.



But after the first day, a good friend has done ESPN Spanish for many years, then the producer and my colleagues and Steve and everybody just gave me some pointers. Second day I felt a lot better. Third day I felt even better. I stayed afterwards, after the early show to watch the big boys, how they run the show. It was pretty cool to see the other crew doing what they know how to do.

I learned a lot, I really enjoyed it. The comments were great. Nobody's going to look at you in the face and say, listen, you sucked, it was terrible, but I got a lot of great comments.

And yes, it kind of stayed in my mind. I said maybe we open a door there, but I want to play golf. I guess -- no, no, no, I'm not ready for both. Hopefully we open a door for the future. It was interesting, I really enjoyed hanging with the crew and learning new things, but I think what happened the last couple weeks, I feel that I am where I belong. I feel that I am where all my work has put me and it's time to spend time with the big boys on the PGA TOUR again.

Q. (No microphone.)

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Thank you so much.

Q. Thanks for this this morning, you've been tremendous. You've almost covered every question we could ask.

Can you just compare when you first broke through in Phoenix years ago as a rookie, your golf game then to how it is now; what's better then, what's better now, how it has evolved?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: That's a great question. I was doing something with a Colombian interview this morning and they asked me the same question.

Something you constantly think as a golfer, as a human being, you want to go back to those good moments and you want to replicate what was going on.

But after analyzing the situation many times, I think it's a little tricky and it can be a little bit dangerous to look at it that way because life is evolving. As human beings, we're evolving and we're always different, so to try to be the same guy that you were is tricky. You have different information, you're older, you have different experiences, so it's really hard to go back.

When I finally accepted that, that Camilo Villegas was not the 27-something-year-old that won two FedExCup Playoffs in 2008 but he's the Camilo Villegas of 38, 40, 41 years old and he's dealing with the information and the experiences he has, that's when I decided not to look back so much but just to stay in the present and see what I could work with. It's been very helpful.



Of course we're different, just look at the picture from 2008, long hair, 20-something-year-old wearing pink pants. Now my outfits are completely different. I'm a dad. So many bumps, but so many great things.

They were asking me this morning also about, it was actually pretty cool, they said, hey, what a tough life and everything you guys have had to go through as a family and the personal, as an injury, as a golfer playing on the PGA TOUR, being top-10 in the world, losing your card, all this stuff. That's got to be pretty tough.

Started thinking about that, that question. It wasn't resonating what they were telling me because to be honest, with everything that has happened, that's just life. That's how life goes.

I'm so fortunate. I mean, I'm so fortunate to have the life I have. This kid coming from Colombia going to the University of Florida, accomplishing the dreams playing on the PGA TOUR. Then yes, there were bumps, but that's life. Yes, I wish my little one was here with us, but she's not and she's truly in a better place after a long battle that she wasn't going to win. So I accepted that, too.

And we keep going. We turned that tragedy into something very positive. I mean, my wife reads me messages from people we help on Mia's Miracles every week. I go, man, if Mia was here, we wouldn't be able to do this. You turn it around and my life has been great with the ups, with the downs, I accept it. Obviously it's better when you're playing good, it's better when you're playing on the PGA TOUR, when you're winning golf tournaments where you don't have to deal with those family situations and personal situations, but hey, be ready because you never know when things turn around, for good, for bad, and we'll keep going.

Q. Camilo, you also needed a sponsor invite to get into Cabo. When you're 223 in the FedEx and you haven't had a top-10 since 2021, where does that self belief come from to just make that phone call?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: You know Joe, the tournament director at the World Wide Technology and his crew, Taylor Ives and all their team, they've been unbelievable with me. That's one thing I've always strived for, to just create good relationships with those that run tournaments, with the sponsors. I know how much goes behind one week. It's very easy for us to just show up to the event, pack our locker, unpack our locker, go to the next one. But you've got to realize there's a huge group of people working for that one week a year to happen, to provide a platform for us to do what we do for a living, to play for millions of dollars and to have the opportunity to do what we do.

So I stay in close contact with Joe and the World Wide Technology team and all those guys, and they know how much I enjoyed it when we were playing Mayakoba and I would go to the pro-am dinner and I would always be available to help with anything I could help to make the tournament better.



So when I called Joe again, I said, listen, man, I see you have a bunch of spots, you're going to a new place, I know -- I hear good things and you know I'm always going to call you if -- and I'm not going to push you, too. If there's a spot for me, just let me know, I'm not going to be bugging you. Then he called me, he said we're going to have you.

That's kind of the way it goes. It wasn't a tough call to do, but yes, you get tired of asking for opportunities and spots and sponsor exemptions. But that's another area where I'm very thankful. I'm very thankful for all those tournament directors that understand my situation, that know how much I want to be out here and then that provide me opportunities to play when I'm not in the fields.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Camilo, thank you so much for your time. Good luck this week.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Thank you.

