

RBC Heritage

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

Branden Grace

Press Conference



Q. Everyone, I'd like to welcome the defending champion, Branden Grace, into the media center. What do you remember from last year?

BRANDEN GRACE: I remember everything. This is my favorite place. Obviously coming back this year is very special. I really look forward to this moment, you see your photo everywhere. It's really awesome, I must say.

Last year to get that first W out here was really special. I always felt like I could do that out here, but getting over that line to do it was pretty good. Like I said, being three back with one round to go, you're always wishing you're going to play well and try to give yourself a good chance. But it's one of those courses where it is possible for a guy at the back to play a good round and then to finish it off. It's one of the toughest golf courses to hit the greens. It's really small. So when you do it, you've always got a birdie chance, a reasonable birdie chance. So it was nice to finish a very special week off in that manner.

NICK PARKER: And 74 in the second round last year, how were you able to turn it around on the weekend?

BRANDEN GRACE: You know, it was one of those weeks where it was playing tough. So even a 74 put me back a little bit. But it didn't really throw me away or I didn't really lose the tournament by it. You have to keep at it. You're going to make some mistakes. Everybody is going to make some mistakes. You have to grind it away and try and make some birdies. And fortunately for me that was on Sunday.

Q. How do you prepare for a course like this with such small greens, and is there any particular shots you practice to prepare for Harbour Town?

BRANDEN GRACE: Well, I played the golf course a lot different to most of the other guys. I play really aggressive. I like to hit my driver and longer clubs off the tees. It allows me to go into the greens with a lot shorter irons than most.

So I think coming here you need to do some wedge play, for myself, some wedge drills, getting your numbers right and that sort of stuff. And work on the sort of shots that you feel you need to hit around this place. I hit that little slow stinger that I hit. So I'm going to head out to the range after this and work on that, but I would like to visualize and feel the type of

shot I need to hit. And as soon as I do that I'm going to give myself chances. Just work on the things that's going to help you this week. For me it's the pitching shots and obviously the driver.

Q. You have had a few victories, but what did that mean -- (no microphone.)

BRANDEN GRACE: Well, I've had some close calls, yeah. Especially in the majors. And you start thinking, is it easier winning a major than winning a normal event, especially when you're playing well in the majors. But, you know, it was nice to get over that thing. Playing Europe, the field is still tough. The courses are tough. So you really have to be on top of your game wherever you win these days.

But I wanted to make a point of being a worldwide winner. I won in South Africa, and you have to step over that hurdle again to try to get yourself winning outside of South Africa. And being on the PGA Tour was really a goal of mine to get a victory here in the States. And then competing. I've been a very steady player. This year has been on and off a little bit. But I feel it's coming around. So it would be great to get another one under your belt.

Q. You saw the course today for the first time since the win, and also since the storm. What's different? What's the same?

BRANDEN GRACE: Well, I think the course is better, to be quite honest. It's in immaculate condition. Obviously it's a little early in the week, it's going to firm up, the greens are going to get quicker, but it is in pristine condition. I don't know what they've done to get it this way, but it is really good.

Then obviously changes happening in October. But the way they've done it has been great. I think some of the trees actually that they did lose might have helped. But there's a lot of holes that you can see that something is missing. But I've heard they've put in -- I've seen that they've put in some new ones, as well. A couple of years it's going to be close to the way it was.

Q. Can you be more aggressive?

BRANDEN GRACE: Yes, definitely. You get holes like on 10, they lost one of the big trees on the right. For me it was that iron shot and you were scared of hitting it through the fairway because it would block out your

second shot. But now it's pretty much I can hit a driver down there on the right. Even if you miss the fairway on the right, you can get over the trees on with the wedges.

Another one on 15. They didn't lose the tree, but one side of the tree, pretty much.

So there again I think you're going to see a couple more guys going for the green this year, trying to give themselves some chances. So there's sometimes we win some and sometimes we lose some.

Q. 61 is the single round course record. 20-under is the tournament record. Are you either one of those in jeopardy?

BRANDEN GRACE: Well, definitely. You know, the golf course is in great condition. There are birdies out there to be made. You still have to do it, though. It's one of those golf courses that just depends on how the guys are playing it. You get a guy like Jim, for instance, he's been successful around this place, doesn't hit awfully long, but his wedge play is phenomenal. A guy like that can get around this place, and probably get that 61 or maybe lower. I see the weather is going to play its part this week, I hope so. If that's going to be the case it's going to be a low scoring week.

Q. What's your report from the Masters last week?

BRANDEN GRACE: For me it was very positive. Coming off the previous attempts there, I think the first one I made the cut, I finished 18th, and then missed three cuts in a row. So just to make the cut was pretty big. I can see myself playing well there, but I've not really figured it out yet. But this year making the cut was a big thing for me. And the weekend I've actually progressed. I felt the game was coming along. I actually hit the ball a lot better than what the score was saying. I think I was maybe from 13 to 15 greens every day, hitting a lot fairways, giving myself chances. So it was nice to have the weekend to do that final prep, coming into this week, to just give yourself a chance to defend the title this week.

Q. (No microphone.)

BRANDEN GRACE: I cannot tell you, it's starting to be my hitting with three cuts in a row. But it was nice to finally get over that one. And now I must say the way that I played over the weekend, I'm excited to get back there.

And obviously Sergio being a good friend of mine, so see him getting it over the line is phenomenal. It was so good to see. And it gives you also that little bit of motivation, being one of the guys that's come so close, being one of the guys that they say being one of the top ones without a major. Now you know with a guy like Sergio finally getting over the line gives you a little

more motivation to give you that push.

NICK PARKER: Thanks so much for coming in. Good luck this week.