

RBC Heritage

Wednesday, April 11, 2018

Sam Saunders

Press Conference



SHARON SHIN: Please help me welcome in Sam Saunders to the interview room. I'm sure you're aware Mr. Palmer was the inaugural winner here in 1979. How special would it be for you to have a win here?

SAM SAUNDERS: It would be incredibly special. Obviously it would be my first win. I'm still looking for that, so that in itself would be extremely special.

But being on a course -- I've said this a few times this week, I play a lot of tournaments that he won, but unfortunately a lot of them are not on the same course that he actually played. So for it to be the course he played on and won, would just make it that much more special.

I feel like my game is in good shape. And I played golf here last year. I absolutely love coming to Hilton Head, it's a quick trip up the road for me, it feels like a home event. I really enjoy it.

Q. Did your grandpa ever talk anything about Hilton Head or his experience coming here and being the first winner or anything? Did it ever come up?

SAM SAUNDERS: Not necessarily his experience of being a winner, but we did talk about this golf course a little bit. Like I said, there weren't many that we got to talk about that I'm playing that he played. So he loved this golf course, just as I do now. It's so neat that this course has stood the test of time without becoming a long golf course. We all know that it's tight, you have to put the ball in the right spots.

We talked about the way you play this golf course and how you've got to be able to control it off the tee and hit good iron shots. It was nice for me to get some of the knowledge that he had in his success here.

Q. Anything you used during the tournament? Can you think of a shot, grandpa told me to hit it here and hit it there?

SAM SAUNDERS: Not any one particular moment, but it is a lot about the angles out here. You've got -- I think we talked about knowing where to miss it. Because you hit bad shots, at this golf course it's the most important of any on Tour, I'd say, to hit -- you've got to miss it in the right places around here. Because then you have an opportunity to still shape the ball. And I've always enjoyed golf courses where if you hit a shot into the trees you have an opportunity to curve the

ball. And I love that there's not long rough here. Even if you're stuck behind some trees you have a chance to peel one through the trees or hit a big high cut or low hook. It makes it fun, because I feel like there's always an opportunity to recover from an errant shot here.

Q. Last year you did a lot of pretournament stuff, well, you hit a cannon shot, played in the Wednesday Pro Am, there was a lot of stuff that you were involved with. Now that you've had the success on the course, is it a whole different feeling this year? Are you more comfortable?

SAM SAUNDERS: I'm just more comfortable in the sense that it's year four for me out here. I was talking about it with my caddie yesterday, you just kind of figure out how to do this. Not that -- I've obviously done okay. I've managed to make it four years out here and kept my card, although not with any huge success. But I'm here, bottom line.

So you learn how to practice better. You learn how to go through the weekly routine, and you just get accustomed to do what you need to do. I'm more comfortable each and every week out here. I'm more comfortable on golf courses and really know how to get myself from Monday to Thursday a lot better. And then once Thursday starts I feel a lot more comfortable with what I'm doing out there.

Q. But with the success of last year?

SAM SAUNDERS: This is one of those courses that I feel like as long as I'm breathing, I've got a chance to play pretty well. Because I don't have to play perfect golf. No golf course do you have to play perfect golf to win. That's a huge misconception is that people think when a player wins he just hit every shot perfectly all week. And I feel like I have an understanding of how to play this golf course well enough that if I just use my head and stay patient I can be successful here. And then hopefully if I play really well I'll have a chance to win.

Q. Each golf course obviously has its own personality, but is it tough for a golf course to really stand out? Is this maybe one of the few courses that you would consider unique as far as the regular PGA Tour schedule?

SAM SAUNDERS: I think this course is definitely unique. And I think this course is a prime example that

length is not the answer. Obviously not all courses have the good fortune to have hundred year old pine trees surrounding it. But you can always defend a golf course with firm, fast greens.

What's neat about this place is it plays challenging even if the conditions are soft. We talk about that a lot, if it's soft, guys are going to go really low. If it's soft here it's still challenging, because you still have to hit your shots and shape it. And each hole requires a certain way to play it. A lot of golf courses that are wide open, when it does get soft, unfortunately, you can just bomb away and fire at every pin, but under any condition you have to think your way around this golf course. And I think the fact that 50 years and we're still on the same golf course without any huge renovations kind of speaks for itself.

Q. Is there any advice you got from your grandfather that you take with you and use week to week?

SAM SAUNDERS: Absolutely. And that is just to -- he taught me to be very hardheaded in my golf game and not to listen to the voices out there. Because there are a lot of people out there that, with the best intentions, they want to help. And they want to try to tell you how they think you need to do it. But the only person that knows how I need to do it is me. And that's not to say I have it all figured out. Obviously I'm still looking for my first win. But I know what works for me. And I've developed that system that work works for me and I stick to it. That's the advice that I use from him every week out here.

It's very easy when you're struggling to kind of start searching. And I've always talked about if you see a guy in the equipment trailer too much or spending a little too much time on the range seeking advice, that's a guy that's kind of searching for a golf game. And you've got to stick to your guns through the good and bad.

Q. You and Dustin are about to do a really cool ceremony, how cool is that to be a part of that?

SAM SAUNDERS: It's great. Obviously it's a huge honor to be out there with the No. 1 golfer in the world is pretty cool. I've known Dustin for a long time. I'm envious of his success right now, but I'm looking to catch up to him here soon.

But it's such a neat opportunity for me to be here in a way representing my grandfather and what he did here and what he's continued to do for the game of golf. This tournament has done such a wonderful job paying tribute to him. And I'm just excited to be a part of all of it.

Q. Just curious if you watched or followed much of the Masters last week and obviously a lot of guys in the field this week that weren't at Augusta, because of all the hype that goes into that, a lot of people almost consider it the start of spring when the Masters tournament comes around. Does that get the juices flowing any more, to be able to come here and tee it up this week?

SAM SAUNDERS: Absolutely. That's a great point. I love watching the Masters. My favorite two golf tournaments to watch are the Masters and The Open Championship. Since a little kid I've enjoyed watching those tournaments because you want to be there, but also I know the course so well and see my peers out there playing, it makes me hungry, it makes me want to get there.

So I kind of -- I learn from it. I watched the way guys are playing. I watched the way Patrick got an around that golf course, and how confident, successful he was. Certainly I try to use it as fuel to inspire myself, I want to get out here this week and play my best golf and try to win a golf tournament. And it definitely does make you want to get out here.

My nine year old son, he can watch it for about five minutes, I've got to go back out -- I know he's in the backyard, we've got a turf chipping green, and he's out there pretending he's winning the Masters. That's the same way I was. And for me even now it makes me want to get out and play.

Q. How close do you think you are at being at the top of your game right now?

SAM SAUNDERS: Everything feels good. I kind of came into this year with a different mentality of I'm trying to win golf tournaments. Obviously the FedExCup is so important and making the playoffs and trying to make it to The TOUR Championship and the penultimate goal.

But the process in getting there is trying to win golf tournaments. I think the first few years it was easy to get hung up on just having solid finishes. I just don't like that mentality of having a solid finish. A solid finish would be a by-product of not winning. And I have approached every week this year of trying to win a tournament and you're going to fail pretty much most of the time, but I did see early in the year that playing aggressive and having that mentality led to some pretty good finishes and that's kind of what I'm continuing to do.

SHARON SHIN: Thank you for your time and good luck this week.