

Fort Worth Invitational

Thursday, May 24, 2018

Kevin Na

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Get started with Kevin Na, our first-round leader at the 2018 Fort Worth Invitational. Kevin, you chipped in for birdie on the 9th hole, your 18th of the day. You had to take a drop away from the grandstand there.

What did you see in that chip, and were expecting to have a chance to make it there?

KEVIN NA: Where I dropped it there was a huge ridge that's going right through the middle, and I had to play up so high. Goes up and down, and before I hit the chip I say Martin Lair's caddie take the bag behind the green and move it, because I can chip it over the green right down the other side.

I looked at that and I go, Yeah, that can happen. (Laughter.) I just hit a perfect chip. I saw it go over the ridge and I was like, This is going to be good. It's going to be close. Then it catches the right lip and goes in. I was like, Oh, my God.

THE MODERATOR: You were 7/7 overall for the day scrambling, and you're the TOUR leader in strokes gained around the green. What makes you such a good player in that area?

KEVIN NA: Growing up that's all I did I think. I feel like I spent a lot of time around the greens and developed a good touch around the greens, and it's kind of stuck along with me.

THE MODERATOR: This is your sixth 18-hole lead on the PGA TOUR and third at this event. What do you think it is about here that brings out the best in you early on?

KEVIN NA: I don't know. Southern barbecue. I don't know. Well, I do know. This is a great golf course for me. Every year I come here I have high, high expectations, high hope coming into this event.

Course sets up nice for me. I've had some success here in the past. I really like coming here. The tournament does a great job of hosting players, too. I wouldn't miss it.

I did miss it last year. Not by choice. I had to go overseas and play for my sponsors, so...

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. (No microphone.)

KEVIN NA: Yeah, it was in the rough, but it was kind of in a bare spot where I felt like I can curb the ball. I had probably at least a 50-yard slice. It was like 180 -- I don't even remember the number, mid-180s.

I pulled out 4-iron trying to hit a 50-yard cut slightly into the wind. Not much. My caddie looks at me and goes, What are you doing? Going to hit it high and round. He goes, You got to hit an 80-yard cut. No, I'm going partly over that tree and it's only 50 yards. I think I can do it.

He goes, Well, short is dead. Obviously water. So I grabbed one more club. He goes, Well, long is dead. Great. I go, What do you think? He goes, I don't like it.

That's when I pulled one more club. I go, Do you like this? He goes, No. I said, Well, I'm going. Move. (Laughter.)

Q. Got off to a hot start. Is it hard not to get too far ahead. There is a lot of golf left.

KEVIN NA: There is a lot of golf left. Look, I'm very pleased with how I played today. Going to go enjoy my dinner. After that, tomorrow it's a fresh day, another day. Forget about today and try to go low again.

Did you hear what he said? I've had the lead a few times. He never said I won, did he? (Laughter.) There you go.

Q. We're all aware of the dominance shown by the Korean women on their tour.

KEVIN NA: Uh-huh.

Q. Why is that compared to the men? You've got good players, but not the success that the women have had.

KEVIN NA: Well, I think the guys are having quite a bit of success on the PGA TOUR. If you count the Korean-Americans, the Korean-New Zealanders, if you count all those guys there are quite a bit of guys out here with Korean heritage. I think they have done very well.

Probably got close to 15, 16 wins including a major for

the Korean heritage guys. That's pretty darn good. I mean, you look at the amount of the Australian guys out here versus the Korean guys. I bet it's pretty close.

You can't really compare against the girls, I guess. Obviously the Korean girls have done a wonderful job, but I think the competition is harder out here.

The Korean-Koreans have to serve two years in the military. Yeah, and obviously Sangmoon, great player. Probably left at the peak of his game. There are going to be more guys like that.

Si Woo is going to have to go unless he wins a medal in the Olympics. I think that has some effect on it, too.

Q. At the start of your round you were just kind of cruising along.

KEVIN NA: Yep.

Q. Just pars. What turned it around? All of a sudden you just went nuts atmosphere last 12 holes.

KEVIN NA: Yeah, I did. So I was hitting it really great, just making some routine pars. I had couple chances, some misses, and then I hit it really close on 16. I would say four, five feet. Made that; felt pretty good.

Next hole made like a 25-footer.

Next hole I stuffed it again -- I didn't stuff it. It was probably about 10, 12 feet; made it again.

Then 1 was I think the one that really got me over. I hit a 3-wood to two feet for eagle. It was a kick-in.

Then 2 I made a bomb. Turned around and I was like, 5-under? 6-under through 5? Pretty good.

I think it's my -- I've had six birdies in a row. I think my second -- probably top three streaks. My best streak was I was I think 8-under through seven holes was my best at the Hope. I like stretches like that.

Q. What's the logo on the visor?

KEVIN NA: It's a goat. I bought it at The PLAYERS Championship for \$22 with the 30% discount that they give the TOUR players. It's very nice. (Laughter.)

I found out what GOAT meant I think early this year. I do social media, but they kept calling Tiger the GOAT. I go, Man, why do they keep calling Tiger the GOAT? That's just mean. Then I realized it meant greatest of all-time.

Thinking of getting it signed by Jack next week.

Q. Are you without a hat sponsor as well?

KEVIN NA: Yeah, I am. Starting the week of The PLAYERS I have no sponsor.

Q. Do you have any plans like definite or anything or...

KEVIN NA: Thinking of maybe wearing my Southern Highlands golf hat. If they make me a visor. I don't think they do. Their loss.

Q. Both last week and this week are really considered specialist courses. You guys play a lot of A-to-B, point-and-click courses. Last week obviously was not that, and this week is more of a work the ball. Does that help you focus more, knowing that you're going to have to pay attention to every hole last week and this week and you don't have to do that on a lot of weeks out here on the tour?

KEVIN NA: I guess obviously last week and this week is a totally different golf course. I know what you're saying ago. It's not one of those hit it as hard as you can and let's go find it and hit it hard again. I kind of like golf courses like this where you have to shape it, you have to think about your angles for the next shot.

This is more of the old school. I know I'm not that old, but I feel like that's just kind of what I grew up on. I feel like I am kind of stuck in between generations with these bombers, the Slumans and the Corey Pavins and the old-school players.

I played with all those guys early in my career. I look forward to coming to courses like this. I think it helps me focus with the tree line and having to shape it.

Q. (No microphone.)

KEVIN NA: Well, I think it was better than what it looked on TV. A lot of the players I thought -- majority of the guys was positive. I really liked it. I showed up Monday. Before I even tee'd it up in a tournament round, showed up and walked three holes just to see a general idea of what the course was like. I really liked it.

I told my caddie, I told my friends, I said, I think this is a great golf course. It's a modern day links, Open Championship style golf course. I remember telling Ross Berlin from the tour saying I felt like I was playing a major tournament practice round.

Obviously the scores were low. They set the golf course up on a little bit of the safe side. They slowed the green down a little bit and the fairways down. But if they get the green -- you know, 11, with these fairways fast, who knows what they're going to shoot.

Coming back to this golf course, it's always in fantastic shape and I love playing here.

Q. Something in your game you feel is going well right now?

KEVIN NA: If you're playing well you can play well anywhere. I'm striking the ball well. I felt like last week I didn't putt all that great so I put a new putter in play; putted great with it today.

I think if I just keep striking the ball well, the way I am, and a few putts fall, I think I got a good chance Sunday.

Q. (No microphone.)

KEVIN NA: No. New putter this week.

Q. Did you use it last week?

KEVIN NA: I had a round mallet, Scotty Cameron mallet. I think this one is called like a square back or something. It's more of a rectangular big block putter. It's awesome.

Q. I'm probably dating myself to ask you this, but what's the logo on your shirt?

KEVIN NA: Oh, this is a clothing line, Korean clothing line that I get sponsored by.

Q. Named?

KEVIN NA: WAAC, Win At All Cost.