

MEN'S INVITATIONAL WINNER INTERVIEW
June 28, 2021

TIM O'NEAL



Q. Give me a sense just how it played out there for you today and how you felt with your round.

TIM O'NEAL: It was a little stressful today. I didn't play that well on the front nine and was able to -- had a hiccup on 14 and had the ball spin back in the water, but after that I rebounded and made a couple birdies coming down the stretch and was able to get the win. So super happy, excited to play Rocket Mortgage.

Q. It was really pretty tight, I mean, through 15 on there was a stack of bunch of you guys at minus 3. Tell me kind of where you went from there.

TIM O'NEAL: Yeah, I wasn't really aware of the scores. I had a friend that's kind of walking around and kind of telling me what the scores were late in the round, but wasn't really paying attention to the scores, just trying to make some birdies and just play solid. Yeah, it was obviously stacked up pretty close. I started making some birdies. I didn't know what everyone was doing, but in my mind I just was trying to make as many birdies as possible.

Q. You're the oldest guy in the field. What do you make of that?

TIM O'NEAL: Well, I don't know. Yeah, I am the oldest guy in the field, but it's fine. Age is nothing but a number, right?

Q. So where does this rank as far as other golf you've played, getting into this tournament?

TIM O'NEAL: Oh, I know this is the first time that they're having this tournament and being the first one to qualify for it means a lot. I'm definitely looking forward to playing in the tournament.

Q. The premise behind it, getting golf into more people's eyes and more communities, how important is it that this type of event continues to grow across the country?

TIM O'NEAL: Definitely. With Shippen coming along and having this exemption for a lot of players getting exposure to play in the Rocket Mortgage I think is huge. Hopefully more guys coming behind me will be doing the same thing next year.

Q. A lot of guys have said that playing a Tour course, a course that's going to host a Tour event, it's the biggest golf they've played, and you've played it to a career. You

played a 20-year career. Do you see that as an asset to younger guys getting out here on this type of Tour course?

TIM O'NEAL: Definitely, definitely a difference playing PGA TOUR courses than playing just a regular golf course. So guys are getting exposure playing courses like this, it's going to help them down the stretch, for sure. It's just a little bit different golf than playing a regular tournament. There's no rough, greens aren't as fast, so playing tournaments like this is definitely going to help guys down the road.

Q. This was kind of created to open up opportunities for Black golfers. You've been doing this for 20, 30 years. Given your track record, 48 years old, been grinding it out, do you think you're kind of the perfect first winner of this event?

TIM O'NEAL: Yeah, I guess so. I've been doing this for a long time. For me at 48, still to be able to compete and be able to play means a lot to me. Hopefully it's going to inspire guys not to quit and keep grinding.

Q. Do you have any highlight shots out there, any shots that kind of turned you around?

TIM O'NEAL: No. Well, yeah, I guess so. On 16 Kevin almost holed it from the fairway. I think he was one back and he hit it to like a couple inches, and I hit it in there about eight feet and made birdie on top of him, and then I made birdie on the next hole. That was kind of the highlight. I knew he was close, but I didn't know what everyone else was doing in the field. For me, that was the highlight because I knew I needed to make that putt to keep distance.

Q. What did you hit into 16?

TIM O'NEAL: I hit a little 9-iron.

Q. Where does this rank, this win today and just the opportunity it creates? Even though you said you have played in Tour events, just to be at the age that you are and still competing?

TIM O'NEAL: Yeah, it's like I said, being 48, about to turn 49, it's huge for me. Like I said, being able to still play at a high level and have an opportunity to play in the Rocket Mortgage, that definitely means a lot to me and getting an opportunity to play is nice.

Q. Some guys have said this stands for like a baby step for diversity in the game, events like this. How do you see that?

TIM O'NEAL: Yeah, I mean, it's a start. Hopefully more tournaments will start doing something similar would be nice, but yeah, it is a step in the right direction. We're not there yet, but it is a baby step and it is going in the right direction.

Q. When do you turn 49?

TIM O'NEAL: Oh, August 3rd.

Q. Is there a guy you hope to be paired with, to play with?

TIM O'NEAL: No one in particular, no, no.