

ROUND 4 INTERVIEW
August 14, 2022



WILL ZALATORIS (-15, won 3rd playoff hole)

RACHEL NOBLE: We'll go ahead and get started. Like to welcome the 2022 FedExCup St. Jude Championship winner to this interview room.

Will, you've worked all year to get this win, three runner-up finishes in huge events, second player to win a FedExCup Playoffs event as their maiden victory. What's going through your head right now?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, it's kind of hard to say "about time" when it's your second year on Tour, but about time.

Obviously this week was kind of a grind considering the start that I had. I love this golf course, I played well here last year. Yeah, considering all the close finishes that I've had this year, to finally pull it off, it means a lot.

RACHEL NOBLE: Last one before we open it up to questions, this victory moves you to No. 1 in the FedExCup standings. Talk about that and the next two weeks coming up and making it to East Lake.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, there's a lot of golf left. Obviously I'm in a nice spot, but we've got a lot of golf ahead of us.

Q. Will, congratulations. Can you talk about that shot that we all wanted to see you try that you chose not to?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I mean, I thought there was no chance that ball was covering the water. When it landed and saw it bounce a few times and heard the crowd cheer, I knew I got a pretty fortunate break, but I really, I couldn't get the club on the ball. Considering where Sepp was and he had four feet for 5, there's no reason for me to try that shot and make it bank right into the grass and go back in the water and all of a sudden I've lost the golf tournament.

We went back to the drop zone and obviously it paid off. Like I said, it's one of those I guess you could say it's a fortunate break that it stayed up, but obviously I had to earn it after what happened.

Q. Looking at that same moment, Will, was there any part of you that was looking for the optimistic, like maybe I can get this? What was your caddie saying to you during that whole time?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I mean, I knew I wouldn't have played the shot, but I at least was going to take a peek at it. Joel told me about three times, "Hey, Sepp's got four feet for 5, go back, go back."

So I wanted to make sure that I wasn't giving up an easy chance where I could just kind of maybe pop one up on the green and get an easy two-putt and it was just not doable. I couldn't get the club below basically half of the equator of the ball, the lower half of the ball.

Q. This may be overthinking it, but you mentioned maybe it's fortunate in some way. We talked to Sepp and he was under the impression when he went back to the drop zone that you were going to be able to chip up. So in fact maybe there was something there because he thought that, maybe it affected what he did and maybe it ended up being good for you?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, honestly, I saw it bounce three times and I knew it didn't stay on the rocks because I couldn't see it, but I didn't know if it stayed in the rough and was an easy up-and-down or if it was maybe wedged in kind of the collar.

You know, it just shows you, I mean, at that point it's basically match play. Yes, very fortunate in the fact that it looked like I had maybe an easy up-and-down and I didn't, and maybe for Sepp to hit one over there towards the flagstick. Hats off to him, he made a couple of really nice putts just to get to the third hole. Honestly, that's just part of golf, too. His ball easily could have stayed up as well. Pretty unfortunate to take a pretty hard right kick.

Q. Two things, Will. Was there any part of you through Torrey, through Southern Hills and Brookline, et cetera, with the seconds that you ever had moments of feeling sorry for yourself?

WILL ZALATORIS: No.

Q. A little pity party? Never?

WILL ZALATORIS: No.

Q. No elaboration there. OK, let's move on.

WILL ZALATORIS: No. This is why we practice, this is -- this tournament's been here for 60 years. I was actually here earlier this week at Colonial Country Club and seeing Al Geiberger shoot 59, this tournament has some history to it. You know, every week that we're out here there's some story of history. I've wanted to chase history my entire career and obviously that's why I was so vocal about the majors. So obviously it's great to finally get the first one out of the way, but yeah, sorry, it's still just sinking in.

Q. Good, let it sink. Kind of along those lines, one of the great things about someone

winning for the first time is the sense of accomplishment and the sense of belonging, but given how well you've played over two years, did you prove anything to yourself today that you didn't already know?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah. I mean, I think anytime you put yourself in contention you're going to -- you're going to learn something about yourself. The first second at the Masters was life changing because it put me in position to play out here as much as I wanted to and put me kind of on the map. The second at the PGA was kind of affirmation that it wasn't a fluke of a week, and the third one at the U.S. Open gave me that much more belief that I can win a major, I can win out here. It was just a matter of time and obviously this was my week.

Q. Will, on the second shot on the 18 hole when you were in the trees, you took a lot of time deciding what you wanted to do. Walk us through your process before you decided to punch it out.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, so I didn't have any issues with the boundary fence, I could have pulled that shot off, but given the circumstances where Sepp was, it wasn't worth it and I think when I chipped out was immediately when he knew that he should take a drop.

Frankly, if I happened to hit a miracle shot there and happened to pull it off, he probably would have tried to do something as well. So the last thing I wanted to do was make one decision that's going to ruin my chances of winning the golf tournament. I wanted to keep myself in it as long as I possibly could. He hit a heck of a shot in there and obviously had to make another putt to keep it going.

Q. Two questions. First of all, off of that, like what were your emotions like during all of this where you don't see playoffs like this very often where both guys are having to scramble out of trouble like this?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, it's a lot of ups and downs. You're playing match play, like I said. If I try to pull off a hero shot on the second playoff hole and happened to get it around the tree and knock it on the green, he has to pull off a hero shot. Same thing if I lay up, he's going to end up taking a drop. Just like we alluded to in the third part, with him thinking my ball was an easy up-and-down and obviously it wasn't, it's strictly match play from that point.

Q. And then what took you out to Colonial? What reason?

WILL ZALATORIS: We had a FootJoy shoot.

Q. And we were talking to your coach, he's from here. How significant is that to you, a guy you've worked with for a few years and getting your first win in his hometown?

WILL ZALATORIS: He's a softie underneath it all, he cried like a baby. I think I alluded to this when I was handed the trophy that Josh, when I made the putt on the 72nd hole, he jumped up on the side of a hill and I think he pulled his calf or something like that, so I didn't

see him up until I got the trophy. He cried like a baby.

Yeah, it's pretty cool to do this obviously. He's been there for me through the ups and the downs over the last few years and it's pretty cool to do it in his hometown and obviously with him here, too.

Q. You had a new guy on the bag, you had Joel on the bag. First time in your career you've done that. It must be sort of a whirlwind the last week or so. It took you guys all of one round to figure it out. What did you have to learn about him and what did he have to learn about you?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I read all the putts myself the first day. I had a couple unfortunate breaks. We tried to communicate as much as we possibly could Monday through Wednesday to make this adjustment as easy as possible, but you never know what it's going to be like until you're in the heat of the moment.

Joel was really playing more sports psychologist today. He was awesome. He was ripping dad jokes the entire day to try to keep it loose, and they're terrible but it gave us some pretty good laughs and kept it light.

When the moment needed to be serious, he told me to focus on my breathing and just -- so obviously it's a nice intro together and he's -- he did an amazing job.

Q. Will, congratulations. Looked like you cried after you made the winning putt on 18, you got choked up accepting the trophy. You dream about winning your first PGA Tour event your entire life, but how do you describe the emotions when reality actually hits?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, it still hasn't hit yet. I think I've always had the attitude of the job's not done and as great as it is to pull this off, I still feel like I've got some unfinished business going forward. It's obviously very satisfying, but this is our -- this is the peak season for us obviously for the PGA Tour players and the grind continues.

Q. What was the best joke?

WILL ZALATORIS: What's brown and sticky? A stick.

Q. Oh. Actual question: It sounded like when you made the putt on the 72nd hole, you said, "What are they going to say now?" It's probably very instinctual and a kind of emotional moment. Why do you think that's what came out in that moment?

WILL ZALATORIS: I did say that. Yeah, you know, I'm a big Warriors fan and obviously Steph, he's a Cal club guy, he's a pretty big inspiration obviously. I follow the Warriors like crazy and when he said that, it kind of related to kind of my journey so far.

So being that close and then kind of being written off here and there and then obviously finally pulling off, it was -- I actually can't believe I said that actually. At least it wasn't something worse, but yeah.

Q. The emotion, one other thing before this, but the emotion was so strong on 18 in reg and the putt on the 18th on the second extra hole was, I don't know, looked a little bit longer maybe, just as tough. What would you say is the difference between how you reacted to both of them?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I mean, the first one if I missed it, I knew I wasn't going to be in a playoff. I needed to make that first one just out of chance.

Q. Did you see him in the --

WILL ZALATORIS: I saw him in the right rough and I knew that it was an OK angle. I mean, I was obviously expecting him to do something special from there, but I knew I needed to make par. In the playoff, I think it was more of knowing that I needed to make it to keep it going and I needed to keep my emotions in check because I knew that there was more golf ahead.

Q. Secondly, you mentioned kind of the ups and downs. I would just be curious when the last downs were and what's your definition of downs?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I think the last fall was a pretty rough period for me being hurt through the middle of the season last year. I got pretty frustrated with where my game was at really from THE PLAYERS through probably the Nelson and then really from the Nelson -- sorry, from the PGA forward to me has kind of been a new season.

I think Josh and I kind of found our blueprint with the putting and chipping, taking a lot more ownership in my golf swing and I'm now hitting shots freer because some days the cut's going to work, some days the draw's going to work, but just be consistent with it. Like I say, I think the PGA going forward is kind of a new season.

Q. Is part of your process with the putting just see the line, step up and hit it and not dawdle over it? It looks like you're pretty -- you don't mess around over the ball.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I've tried to get a little bit quicker. I think where for me my -- whenever I've struggled, I've been slow. So I do everything, I'm a fast walker, I'm obviously a fast talker, I do everything quick.

But being able to just look at the target, roll the ball to there and move on, accept what happens from there. It's the same thing in my full swing, take a couple practice swings, I walk into it, take two looks and then go. The second my eyes come back to the ball, the club's being pulled back.

So being as reactive as possible is huge for me. Some guys need to be a little bit slower and methodical and I'm a guy that I need to just keep up the rhythm. It's something that told Joel me all week was keep up the flow, keep up the flow. It was on a tape recorder all week. He said that on the greens and off the greens.

RACHEL NOBLE: With that, we'll wrap up. Congratulations, Will, on your first PGA Tour victory.

WILL ZALATORIS: Thank you.