

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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MAVERICK McNEALY

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Maverick McNealy here to the interview room at the 2025 AT&T Pebble Beach pro-am. Maverick, being from California originally, having a couple top 10s in this event before, can we get some remarks on the excitement being back here at Pebble Beach.

MAVERICK McNEALY: Really excited to be here. It's my favorite tournament of the year. It's my favorite golf course on TOUR and was a huge focus for me in the fall to try and make sure I played well and locked up that 10 spots coming in. That was a huge circle in my calendar, so pumped to be here.

Q. Being from California, opening up out here on the West Coast Swing, you've got to feel like you enjoy starting the season here.

MAVERICK McNEALY: Yeah, as a West Coast guy, I play pretty heavy West Coast and a little bit of a lighter Florida Swing. Just love the turf out here, familiar with the heavy ocean air. I seem to have a good record on courses by the water, too.

This is the second out of five in a row for me and one of the -- feels like one of the easiest prep weeks for me because I just know the golf course super well and don't have to adjust very much for the turf.

Q. Seventh start in this event and you mentioned a couple of top 10s here before. What about these courses mesh well with your game?

MAVERICK McNEALY: For sure I think the poa annua greens. Poa annua greens help a lot. It's a surface that I grew up playing in high school and know those really well. I just see those really well. Even in my practice rounds, it's just easier to read putts. So that helps.

There's, I think, also just not having to work as hard as I do on Bermudagrass to adjust a little bit.

Q. We're entering another year of the Signature Event series. How would you take stock of how this has gone for the PGA TOUR?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I haven't been involved really in those conversations. I know from a player's perspective, these are where you want to be. Playing in an 80-man field with no cut at Pebble Beach and 36 holes of championship golf against the best players in the world at Pebble Beach this week, it's a dream come true, being able to try and win a tournament here coming down the stretch.

The pro-am partners we have this week are pretty awesome. It's definitely an awesome carrot on the end of the string for us to play for and to get rewarded for having a good year.

As far as the business goes, I don't know how that's going for the TOUR. I hope it's going well. But this is definitely the type of tournament you want to play in as a player.

Q. Do you think that the events have met what the TOUR was hoping to achieve with them, not necessarily from a business standpoint but just from a competitive standpoint?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I don't know. Again, I don't know what the TV ratings are. I don't know what the -- I'm not entirely sure. I just know that I'm really, really excited to be here, and this is a really cool chance for me to try and beat all of the best players in the world, and that doesn't happen very often in our sport. It didn't happen very often in our sport before.

To have everybody here and have a chance to try and beat them at Pebble is going to be awesome.

Q. For people who might be watching this week, how many do you think would be tuning in to watch the field, and how many are tuning in to watch Pebble, and if it's the latter, how many other courses are like that on TOUR do you think?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I think one of my favorite things about the entire PGA TOUR and structure of golf is the fact that we don't have the same field of play every week. We don't have the same baseball diamond or the same 150-yard gridiron. We play on completely different venues and fields of play that reward different types of players and different scenery. It's my favorite thing about the sport.

The field is obviously awesome, but this type of field at this golf course is something you really only see with a U.S. Open, and I think it's a treat for the golf world to get to watch and see the way the best players in the world play this place.

It's going to play completely different than it did last year. It's really, really firm. The rough is down, but it's still hard to hit greens if you don't hit the fairway. It's a completely different test than it was even last year.

Q. If you weren't playing for whatever reason, give me an example of another tournament that people would tune into because of the golf course.

MAVERICK McNEALY: I think TPC Sawgrass is a really compelling golf tournament just based on the finish there and the history there. I think another personal favorite of mine is TPC River Highlands at Hartford.

I know there's excitement about having winning scores that are close to par, but from a player's perspective it's really fun coming down the stretch at Hartford because even if you're six back with six to play, if you hit great golf shots, you can birdie the last six and still give yourself a chance, but you can also make a couple bogeys if you fall out really quick and hit a few bad shots.

You kind of see that at Pebble. 18 you can make a 3 or you can make a 7 really quick, and that's what makes it really exciting.

Q. Just curious if you've watched TGL, whether you've kept up with it and your thoughts on it. Then maybe just a sense for what the players who aren't playing on TOUR, do you feel like they're watching it, tuning in, or is it just happening in the background a little bit?

MAVERICK McNEALY: It was interesting being in the training room on Monday with TGL on in the training room, and a couple of the guys who played a few of the matches kind of commentating. I know the players that are in it absolutely love it. I'm still waiting for my call for the Las Vegas team.

But no, I haven't watched it yet. I really don't watch much TV.

Yeah, I would definitely play if I get the call.

Q. Rory was in here yesterday talking about things that golf could do to become a better entertainment product. Curious about your opinion about where golf stands as a product and whether there's too many different aspects of golf right now.

MAVERICK McNEALY: I think we do have an awesome product. I really do. The tournaments we play, there's always a great story line. The guy who wins has always played unbelievable golf, and that hasn't changed and that won't change.

I think the wonderful thing about our sport is with a 156-player field, anybody can win. That's how deep our TOUR is right now. There's going to be awesome storylines, and you're really coming out to see the best players in the world having one of their best weeks of their years or their careers.

At the end of the day, we love watching golf shots. My favorite things to do are watching rounds stitched together where it's just golf shot after golf shot after golf shot, and even playing and competing, it's fun to see other best players in the world doing what they do and learning from them and watching them.

I think we do have a great product. I just love watching as many golf shots as possible.

Q. Why do you think fewer people have been watching golf then of late?

MAVERICK McNEALY: That's a good question. I don't really know. I think what drives value in this TOUR is legacy and history and the fact that it really matters to win.

This is a personal opinion, but I think the first couple years of LIV weren't very compelling to me because it didn't seem like it mattered much, apart from a big paycheck, to win out there. I can tell you it was a life-changing week for me when I won at RSM, and I think that's what's wonderful about this TOUR is that especially for all of the non-winners out there, every time you tee it up you have a chance to change your life that week

I think that's what makes it really cool and really interesting.

I guarantee you not once on that back nine did the paycheck ever cross my mind, trying to get my first win. To call myself a PGA TOUR winner means the world. To be able to play in AT&T Pebble Beach, play the Masters this year, hopefully get in all the majors, that's what matters to me. The legacy and the excitement -- I think everyone to a certain extent is really focused on the money, and I promise you coming down the stretch, that's not what we're thinking about on this TOUR.

Q. Would you drill down a little bit more on how it was life-changing to win? How so?

MAVERICK McNEALY: You can talk about all of the different things that change in your schedule and whatnot. For me, the life-changing thing was the fact that from the day that I turned pro, I've spent every waking hour and tracking my sleep trying to get a win. That's my goal.

Obviously you get your card, but you're trying to win every single week, and I've got an incredible team behind me that's dedicating their life and their work to helping me perform, and my best friend at our wedding in a toast after said it really well. He's like, it took you eight years to become an overnight sensation. It was really validating to -- a culmination of all the work it took for years and year on my behalf and my team's to make that happen.

So that was probably the biggest change.

Q. In terms of winning and then not having a stretch where you didn't win, has any player asked you on TOUR recently about the balance within the TOUR, and if there's issues with it, since you have such a unique and timely career on TOUR?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Balance as in, like --

Q. As in winning and not winning and how you keep your card.

MAVERICK McNEALY: Yeah, there's been a lot of changes in terms of eligibility. It seems like there's a little bit of a divide between the top players and not top players. It's definitely a good time to play good. I can tell you that.

It seems like the train is leaving; you'd better get your ticket quick, is kind of the feeling.

Whether I agree with that or not, I don't know, but it definitely -- last year and this year and maybe a year or two coming up are some of the most important years to play good golf to set yourself up on the PGA TOUR for sure.

Q. How much did you win from RSM?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I think it was \$1.4 million.

Q. I don't think a lot of people know how much they win anymore.

MAVERICK McNEALY: You know, I don't -- it hasn't changed what I do on a day-to-day basis. But I can tell you, it got me a lot more excited to get out there and practice and get ready for Kapalua.

Q. You played here last year on an exemption. I don't have your record in front of me, but how many Signature Events did you play last year outside of this one?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I played this one, I played -- aside from majors, I played the PGA, I played the Open, I played THE PLAYERS, and that was it.

Q. My question was having gone through a year of not being in the Signature Events, did you find the access to them fair?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I talked about my views on the points. I think last year they were skewed. There were too many points given for the level of play in the middle of the field in Signature Events, so I'm really happy they got that figured out.

My personal opinion is that I have no issue if top players get paid more for having a great year and they get to play in those, but I think equal play should have equal number of points, and starting the season every player should have an equal chance to play their way into the next year.

I think cuts -- again, personal opinion. I think cuts are an important part of the game, and like I said, our fields are so deep. I was a non-winner on the PGA TOUR three months ago, and I'm the same guy. I haven't changed. I'm playing pretty good right now.

But I think that's the cool thing is there's so many players that have the game and the chance to win, and I'd like to see a lot of guys have a chance starting the week.

Q. The points are one thing; did you find the Swing 5, the stretches between tournaments and the top 10 in the FedExCup to be adequate, and did you find yourself at all, depending on how you were playing during some of those stretches, looking at that top 5 list?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I was definitely looking at the list. I think the idea behind it is good. You want to reward the guys, then you kind of give them the hot hand. You want to also reward the guys that are having a great season.

The weird thing about last year was that winning early in the year was way more valuable than winning late in the year because you look at Matthieu Pavon, wins the Farmers, third event of the season, he's in all the Signature Events the rest of the year. He's not going to fall out of that Next 10. Jhonny Vegas won the 3M, he won a 500-point full field event, but he's like barely in the Playoffs.

The timing of the win based on the way that was set up mattered a lot, which was an interesting consequence, but -- and I'm actually not in all the Signature Events. I'm not in Bay Hill yet. I'm hopefully going to get in based on the Next 10 or World Ranking or something. But a fall win got me these first two.

Q. Is there a solution to that?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I'm sure there is. I haven't spent a ton of time thinking about it. I've really just been trying to get my golf game in good shape. Really the best thing I can do for my season is play great this week.

Q. Not to ask you for another solution, but there was a lot of chatter about slow play last week. I'm curious if you feel like it's kind of reached the boiling point to a certain extent and if there was anything that you think could be done to improve it.

MAVERICK McNEALY: I'm going to go back to golf courses and golf course setup. I played all four rounds and that was some of the hardest golf I ever played. You got flags bending like this own on greens that are running 12, 12 and a half, and we're playing for our jobs.

The thing with professional golfers, you've got all kinds of kinds, but everyone is very competitive, that's the one thing we all have in common and we'll do anything we can to play great golf. You're playing a 7800-yard golf course, it's a par 72, the scoring average is 75 or 76 versus how many tournaments have a scoring average of 67. That's a lot more golf shots being hit.

We're walking a lot more distance. I think there's this -- I think we don't really know what we want right now. Do we want -- you know, scores near par. Do we want really hard golf courses, do we want interesting golf courses, do we want fast pace of play? I feel like there's a give and take.

One side we say we want playing opportunities, the other side we want stronger fields.

That's not something we can have both, it's a scale.

If we're going to have a golf course with 20- to 40-mile an hour winds, that's 7800 yards with four-inch rough and 12 and a half greens with a scoring average of 76, I don't think we're physically able to play that fast.

But then again, my personal opinion is I love variety. I love really hard setups and, you know, easier, more gettable setups. That's the beautiful thing about the PGA TOUR is that it's different every week.

MODERATOR: Maverick, thank you for the time and best of luck this week.