

## PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE

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MICHAEL LA SASSO



**MODERATOR:** We would like to welcome Michael La Sasso here to the media center at the Rocket Classic.

Michael, this is your second start in a PGA TOUR event, second one I guess in the last month. I guess if we can open up some remarks what you're looking forward to this week.

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, first PGA TOUR event, pretty special coming to Detroit. I've known about this one for a while, I've had it circled on my calendar. Being here, having the ability to be out here and all the support I've got, it's pretty unbelievable.

**MODERATOR:** Looking back at the last month for you, winning the individual championship NAAs, playing the U.S. Open at Oakmont and now making this start this week, can you kind of explain what the last month has been like for you?

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, been very busy. We were kind of joking about how many flights I've been on. It's kind of something I've not been recently exposed to, but hopefully I can in the future.

Yeah, I feel like I've been on the road consistently, but it's been great. It's something that I'm fortunate to be a part of, and my head's kind of still spinning from everything. Kind of haven't really gone back home yet for a good stretch of time. Definitely after this little stretch is up, go back home, decompress a little bit and be ready to do it again.

**Q. Hey, Michael, I was wondering I guess playing NCAA Championship and if all the perks that came with it, how aware you were of them and (inaudible) at all, and then just in general the celebration of that, how did it feel to win that, kind of what was going through your mind in the aftermath of that?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, it was great. My assistant coach walks with me a good bit so we were trying to just laugh, have a good time, try not to take it too serious. It's definitely hard trying to go to sleep at night kind of knowing what you're playing for.

But kind of the turnaround was pretty quick. We had match play the next morning at 8:00 a.m. and kind of didn't get off the course until late, especially with all the award ceremonies and everything. Yeah, it was kind of a rush thing. Kind of once we were done with the event and kind of had time to decompress, kind of just talking with all the guys and having the ability to just kind of laugh, smile. We were stoked with how far we made it and happy or glad that we know we can make it that far, and we have a good crew returning so try and just do it again next year.



**Q. And I guess in a general sense it's a little of a way back question, but how old were you when you first started golf, who introduced you to the game, and I guess were there other sports that vied for your attention, and I guess what was it that gave golf kind of the edge?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, so I was born into a big baseball family. My dad had season tickets to the Yankees for way before I was born, so I was always into the travel baseball, tournaments kind of going back and forth. Kind of started to pick up a club actually like my sixth grade year, so I kind of got started a little bit later than most people.

I do remember, I did choose baseball over golf because for North Carolina they're both a spring sport. So I chose baseball in sixth grade and finally started to transition seventh grade year to start playing varsity golf actually at the time.

Yeah, was always kind of a constant battle between -- I was in between baseball, tennis and golf. My mom did not want me playing a contact sport so just trying to find something that was like low maintenance on the body and just kind of having the -- yeah, just trying to take it easy, not get any injuries.

So it worked out great. I think I chose the right sport for me. I mean, I don't know where I would be if I was playing baseball, but golf has worked out a little bit.

**Q. Do you have a favorite like golfer growing up that you either emulated or just enjoyed watching them play, and then do you have a favorite baseball player/team as well?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, actually was a funny story. So I played in the U.S. Open two weeks ago. In 2019 like my first real golf experience, I was a standard bearer out at Pebble Beach. I kind of watched a ton of guys growing up there and that was kind of like my first time hearing the shots, seeing 'em, kind of having the ability to like actually watch like how those guys played and like the noise that came off their club.

I walked around with Martin Kaymer was a guy that I followed for a long time because he was great to me, kind of walked around with him. I just kind of loved the way that he played.

Another one was Thomas Pieters, and I didn't even know that he went to Illinois and I had a couple good buddies that play at Illinois now and just graduated so I thought he was also one that was pretty cool to follow and watch.

Yeah, kind of everybody that was a big name. Like I know I was a little bit too young for it, but like the whole Tiger era. I remember we put on the Masters in 2019 and I kind of had no idea what was going on, but my dad was kind of screaming at the TV, he was going crazy.

Kind of being exposed to it a little bit later, I didn't really follow a ton of it. But I mean,



everybody I look up to.

Another big one for me is always Akshay. We've kind of got the same swing coach, he's been to North Carolina for a long time. Kind of watching him grow up, made the decision to skip college, turn professional and kind of seeing the success that he had, it was like the coolest thing ever.

**Q. And baseball, did you have a favorite baseball player or team?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, I was a big Derek Jeter fan back in the day. We went up actually to one of the games and my dad actually got tickets for my grandfather and him and they went up to the World Series up in New York. Kind of being a part of that, that was pretty cool.

I mean, I was kind of always born into a Yankees fan. My dad was just like a complete nerd about it and he would fill me in on everything and all the history and stuff like that.

**Q. Michael, you've had a lot of success in your junior year at Ole Miss, but you still have a lot to play for in your senior year. What can you take from the year that you've had as a junior into your senior year?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, so like I said, I kind of got into golf a little bit later so I never really won as a junior. Kind of had a couple good glimpses my freshman year and sophomore year, that was kind of like the first time I ever held a lead overnight and try to deal with that. Finally was able to break through this year.

Kind of knowing that I'm very much capable of being able to compete on a collegiate level, I won a couple times end of junior year. It was more kind of maturing a little bit, having the ability to realize all right, my time management needs to be in the right spot, kind of just knowing what it takes to actually win.

Most times you've got to think it's perfect golf for all 54 holes for us, but there's going to be some rough stretches in kind of how you handle that and just are able to keep like a good mindset is just kind of smile is what I've kind of just been trying to take into this summer and into senior year.

**Q. How does a kid from North Carolina end up being a standard bearer at the U.S. Open in Pebble Beach?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, so kind of another funny story.

So the golf course that I grew up at, Kevin O'Connell won the Mid-Am and he actually played in the 2019 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach. He actually got food poisoning, so I'm not sure if he actually played but he was out there.



So he was a guy that I played a lot of golf with growing up, so kind of when I saw the opportunity that he had to go play out there, I think my dad just tried to see if I could get a volunteer position for the USGA and it ended up working out. So he kind of surprised me with that. We had tickets and ended up just going out there, and it was like just the coolest experience ever.

**Q. What did you take away from playing in your first U.S. Open?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Golf is hard, that was a good thing.

Just kind of being a part of history. Like Oakmont is like the coolest place ever. I went up there with a couple -- buddy of my agent and we played it with Wyndham Clark the Monday the week before. So kind of just being there kind of before everything was set up, kind of just being able to see Oakmont. It was more of like a low key environment, and like actually seeing the history of everything and kind of how the golf course was laid out, I mean, it was unbelievable. I really -- that whole week is kind of like a blur. It just felt like a dream.

**Q. (Inaudible) kind of thought you were good enough that this would be something you could get to do some day, play on the PGA TOUR?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, I still have goosebumps going to bed at night realizing that I'm playing here this week. It's kind of come pretty quickly at me so just kind of being able to look around and actually enjoy where I am and, you know, kind of just being grateful for the experience.

**Q. Michael, I know Braden Thornberry had a lot of success too at Ole Miss. I'm wondering if you spent any time with him, kind of picked his brain, or just any interactions you've had with him, if at all.**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, a ton. Ole Miss is big on alumni. We have Jackson Suber, Braden Thornberry, Evan Brown's playing this week. But Braden lives in Memphis so he comes down pretty much every Monday when their golf courses are closed. I always try and make time in my day if it's kind of trying to get out of class early or trying to go just like spend time with him, pick his brain.

He's like the nicest ever, and he's great. You ask a ton of questions, he's great to us. Just to have the ability to talk with a guy who's kind of seen everything is something that is pretty underrated.

You know, he's helped us a lot. I actually was calling him a good bit at the National Championship kind of before the final round. Like I know you've had experience with this before. We were in a little bit different of positions but he was kind of saying like you have to go play to win. If you're trying to be conservative, that's where you kind of get into trouble. Just kind of having to lean on him a little bit and just being able to ask him questions and, you know, smile and laugh with him, and now that we're playing together this week in the



same tournament is a pretty cool feeling.

**Q. He's got a unique swing, too. How would you analyze his swing and how would you describe his action and what makes him unique?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, I've played a bunch of golf with him and he's pure, there's no other way to put it. He rolls the rock pretty good, too.

There's multiple ways to get it done. His game and my game are a little bit different, but kind of just seeing what I can pick from his brain and kind of see like what he struggled with in the past or what it takes to play and compete on like the next level, just to kind of have the ability to be able to ask those questions and see it firsthand is, you know, like everybody's different so just being able to find it very cool.

**Q. Were you guys on the team following last fall at the KFT Championship, he had like an iconic final round to get his Tour card. Were you guys aware of that at all?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah. So we were actually playing, we were in a practice round at Maidstone up in New York. It was the Hamptons event and our golf coach had it up in his cart. I think like after kind of like the final putt started to fall and he was kind of in the clubhouse pretty early and I know he was waiting around, I know our golf coach started crying. It was just kind of very cool for him to see because he's been fighting out on the Korn Ferry for multiple years, so it's pretty cool to kind of see him break through.

I hope the world for him. He's been a great mentor, the nicest guy ever to us, so I'm glad it's started to finally pan out for me and he can kind of just play on the PGA TOUR.

**Q. This is one I ask pretty much anyone. You can take it any way. What's one thing that you like about yourself?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Like about myself? You know, I try and keep it pretty light. Something about me is if you're not enjoying what you're doing, there's kind of no point in doing it. I try and keep a smile all the time, take it pretty light and just kind of enjoy and know where you're at.

I mean, it's so easy to get caught up in everything, especially like with all the tournaments and people, it's a little bit of a different environment, but just realize like how cool it is to actually be here, have the ability to play first PGA TOUR event, very special. Just smile, take it all in and just grateful to be here.

**Q. So looking ahead to the PGA TOUR U class of 2026, is that in your mind at all, and how exciting is it that a year from now you potentially could be playing as a PGA TOUR member?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Yeah, I mean, having the -- I think what PGA TOUR U has done is



unbelievable, and kind of like having the success of players that have come out and blitzed it, talking about Ludvig, Clanton's another one, you know, David Ford, kind of all the bigger names that have kind of gone through PGA TOUR U and like now are playing very well, to kind of be able to follow in their footsteps I think is pretty cool.

It's just an absolute blessing just to kind of have a place to play after college and kind of be in the spotlight is pretty cool.

For me, like all of this is pretty new. I know most of these kids have like, especially in my class, we have a bunch of big names, and most of them are ready to turn professional. But kind of like them having the experience of kind of having the spotlight on them.

For me it's a little different, this is kind of the first time in front of lights. So just having the ability to do that and compete and have the ability to be on PGA TOUR U and playing for my future, I think it's the coolest thing ever, so I'm grateful to be a part of it.

**Q. Did anyone reach out to you after you won the NCAA that surprised you or that was kind of unexpected?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** No. I mean, the support was unbelievable. I had, you know, kind of come back home, my elementary school wanted me to go speak for them and kind of talk through some stuff, so I actually have that penciled in on my calendar.

For me it's -- you know, I volunteered at golf camp for NC State the past, I don't know, four, five years so just kind of being able to make time for people that kind of grew me into the game of golf and kind of just trying to go back and make sure I can kind of take care of the people that really brought me into the game is kind of more of what I've paid attention to.

Now, if there's somebody that actually reached out that was pretty cool, oof, one that I thought was pretty cool that I did not think I was get recognized from is Jaxson Dart. He was our quarterback at Ole Miss. Kind of just having the support from other sports at Ole Miss and him kind of reaching out to me I thought that was pretty cool. I wasn't really expecting it whatsoever, but I'm glad he reached out. I actually started laughing when I saw that come across.

**Q. What's the name of the elementary school and what's your message going to be to the kids?**

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** So I went to The Raleigh School. It's changed a little bit since I've been there, but there's still a bunch of teachers. If I had to tell those kids there, it would be dream big. I think that's something that I never thought I'd really be able to stand on this podium right here and be talking to you guys, but just kind of being able to believe in yourself and the sky's the limit. People are always going to try to tell you one thing or another, but if you believe in yourself and have the ability and the courage to speak it, I mean, I think the world is yours.



**MODERATOR:** Thank you for the time, Michael. Best of luck this week.

**MICHAEL LA SASSO:** Thank you.

