

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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GEORGE McNEILL



MODERATOR: George, welcome to the 2026 Kaulig Companies Championship. So that is your first time at Firestone, first time playing, and you said that you got here early in the week coming off the U.S. Senior Open. What's your first takeaway of this course so far?

GEORGE McNEILL: Well, as you said, I got here Monday kind of midday and went and drove around. I putted for a bit on the practice green and just went and drove around on the front nine. Never hit a shot, just kind of looking at it. I'm looking at obviously a lot of trees, tree-lined fairways and rough and everything else and the condition of the golf course, and I went, "Wow, this place is incredible."

Again, never been here, never been to Akron. I've only spent a little bit of time in Ohio playing. It was a very exciting and pretty incredible first experience.

MODERATOR: And you're coming off a great week last week, you finished solo third at the U.S. Senior Open and you're currently No. 5 in the Charles Schwab Cup standings. How does it feel as you bring your game into this week? What are you going to repeat or how are you going to approach it?

GEORGE McNEILL: Well, I'm approaching every week the same pretty much. A lot of these golf courses, just like this one, are new to me. I don't think -- I'm trying to remember this year that we played a golf course that I've played in the past and I don't know that I have. Concession at the Senior PGA, I had played a bunch of practice rounds, I have some friends that are members, but I've not played any tournaments at any of them. Same thing with DICK'S a few weeks ago. That used to be the old B.C. Open, I never played that on Tour. So these are all brand new to me.

I approach every tournament the same. I'm out there trying to prep, trying to learn the golf courses, little nuances of the greens, where to hit it where not to hit it, stuff like that. Just trying to get acclimated and see what can happen.

MODERATOR: I know that this is your rookie season since turning 50 earlier in the season. What have you heard from maybe the other players out here on PGA TOUR Champions as they give you advice coming out to Kaulig?

GEORGE McNEILL: They say to hit it straight. This is obviously one of those weeks, I can see that for myself. The guys who have won here, you have Jim Furyk, you have Tiger Woods, you have Jack Nicklaus. Obviously Tiger and Jack won multiple times here.

The best ball-strikers. Hideki Matsuyama, Sergio with great rounds. I mean, those guys are



the ultimate ball-strikers that were on the PGA TOUR.

I know Jerry Kelly won here one year, I think it was 3 under maybe for four days, which is incredible that it was only 3 under. Usually out here on the Champions Tour they're playing 10 to 15 to 18 under are pretty normal every week. This is obviously not one of those type of places.

Just getting that, and the guys are just saying, "Keep it in play, keep it in front of you."

My caddie, Tom, Tom Gillis, who played the Tour, he played this event I think three or four times, he says, "Let's approach everything like Bernhard Langer approaches everything; hit it in the fairway, hit it up on the green or around the green. Just take your medicine if you hit it in a bad spot and then move on."

I'm trying to approach everything that way. Some weeks it works, some weeks it doesn't. I get a little more aggressive sometimes, but again, this is my first year, first go at a lot of these places so I'm just trying to learn.

Q. You were saying you're calling Gilly "Terry" then?

GEORGE McNEILL: I'm sure he would appreciate that, yeah. Yeah, he would be real excited.

Q. We talked at the end of Sunday last week about your year and where you're at and where you need to go now. (inaudible) This is all like real quick coming at you?

GEORGE McNEILL: It's coming at me a little faster than I expected. Honestly, I didn't really know what to expect coming out here playing this year. I knew I could play, I just didn't know -- the level of competition is a lot better than -- I don't want to say a lot better than I expected or knew. Everybody's good, you're not out here just by fluke. I've been prepping for this for a while, for a couple years trying to get my swing and my game and everything ready to come out here.

Again, the results and the performance, I didn't really expect that. Surprising, excited.

I'm starting to get more comfortable. I don't want to say I'm there yet, but some of that comes with again, new golf courses every week. It's hard to get comfortable. I don't know where to stay, I don't know where to eat. A lot of that stuff comes with the whole week of a tournament. It's getting there. Yeah, a win would be fantastic, I hope I can. There's no guarantees, so we'll see what happens.

Q. How much fun are you having?

GEORGE McNEILL: I'm having a lot of fun, but I've always said -- everybody always says, "Go out and have fun." I go, "Winning is fun." I said, "Playing good is fun."



If I go out and shoot 75 or 78, it's hard to have fun, especially this is my job, this is my career, I want to do well. You don't show up to your office job and go, "Well, I just want to be average." You don't do that. If you want to be successful, you've got to take it that way and prepare and put it up in the front of the brain and go, "This is what I'm here to do." So I'm trying to do that the best I can.

Q. This is your first time playing here, first time playing many of these places on Tour. What stands out about Firestone that you've seen so far in your practice round that you haven't seen in other places?

GEORGE McNEILL: The history here, just walking around the locker room, seeing all the pictures. I think it was called the Rubber City Open originally or something, and then through a few different names, now the Kaulig. But the Nichols family, which I know very well, Bobby Nichols, one of the first pros here, he may have been the first pro, I don't know about that, I know him. I know his whole family, his sons, and they grew up here. They've given me a lot of insight into the club, and some of the old employees which are still here. Just knowing that and the history. Again, the pictures, Nicklaus and Player and Jose Maria, who's obviously out here playing. Some of those guys who have played up and down these fairways and everything, it's pretty cool.

Q. Welcome to Akron.

GEORGE McNEILL: Thank you.

Q. Hopefully (inaudible). Talked a little bit, this is a huge course, this is a course that a lot of people (inaudible). What's your read on Firestone so far (inaudible)?

GEORGE McNEILL: Well, just in the short time I've been here, I was driving around, I said they could host a major championship today, tomorrow, next week. Anyone, whether it's a U.S. Open or a Senior Open or PGA or Senior PGA or anything, this is a legit golf course. It's right in front of you, there's nothing tricky. You've got to hit the great shots and putts and everything else.

But just the routing of it. Obviously a lot of the holes go back and forth, but I mean, it's a big boy golf course. You're not going to fake it around here. That's my first impression of it.

Obviously I haven't played any competitive rounds around it, so in my mind I'm driving around, even playing the practice round yesterday, I don't think too much in a practice round or try not to, I'm just basically trying to get a view of everything and looking where to hit it, where not to hit it, stuff like that, but I'm going how am I going to break 80 around this place?

My focus will obviously come in hopefully a little better starting tomorrow, but again, I'm going, this is for real.



We played -- last week was a very tough golf course and they had a great setup there at Scioto, but to me this almost seems tougher, harder. We'll see what happens. There's a lot of great players here and hopefully I'm kind of hanging around come Sunday.

