

U.S. Amateur Championship

Wednesday, August 19, 2015

Maverick McNealy

Press Conference



Q. We've got Maverick McNealy, winner over Austin Connolly, first-round match of the U.S. Amateur. Tough opponent to play first round, and you got the win. Tell us about it.

MAVERICK McNEALY: Yeah, his game blew me away. I was really impressed with his game. For a guy who hits it as far as he does, I would say he's one of the best in the world, definitely the best I've ever seen. I was hitting my 3-wood maybe 30 yards by him, and he was stuffing long irons in about 5, 10 feet, and I was like, where did that come from, that was unbelievable, and he made some unbelievable up-and-downs, clutch putts, the total package, and I can see why he's been so successful. I'm very happy to have gotten out of that match and really happy to have made that putt on 18 because I didn't really want to go to extra holes against him.

Q. But first hole you hit one out of bounds, you make a 3 on your second ball for the halve, and that got your wheels right back on track I'm sure.

MAVERICK McNEALY: Yeah, that first hole you kind of knew it was going to be a good match. I don't think we halved very many holes. It was a really back and forth match. I pulled a drive straight left on 1, and it was way out of bounds, might have hit the train, and he was in the middle of the fairway as per usual, and I just thought maybe if I hit a good second drive I'd get there in two, and I ripped one right at the far bunker, was just in the first cut of rough, hit a Nuck letter 3-wood that came just to the front edge, and a hit a little pitching wedge bump-and-run that just fell in the front of the cup.

Q. The wind was behind you on that hole; how far did that drive go?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Let me check my book. It was pretty good. Let's see, it was 342 to the front edge of the bunker, so I probably hit that probably about 340.

Q. Do you think that that halve propelled you to that 4-up lead because it looked like it might have rattled him a little bit?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I think so. I came off to a good start, I birdied the 2nd, hit a couple solid shots on the 3rd, which was playing pretty difficult, just missed on the 4th, just missed on the 5th, and then made a good birdie on the 6th, and then another good par on the 7th. Got off to a really good start, and I think if I had -- you know, it's funny, when things are going poorly,

sometimes I just feel strangely calm, and after I hit that one dead left, I kind of had that same calmness, and every time it seems that happens, things turn out all right. That one went left, and I was just marking my other ball, and I thought, I feel fine right now. It's just a funny feeling I have sometimes, and I got off to a really good start at the beginning of the match.

I made a couple errors in the middle two holes that I just hit a drive just a little bit left and was in the trees in some tough spots, and then he made like four birdies in a six-hole stretch right there, and all of a sudden I'm 1-down. It's funny how things can change in match play very quickly.

Q. The putt you had on 18, were you thinking, let's just lag it close, don't leave myself a downhill and then you left it short?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Yeah, it was tough -- it was 45 feet, front edge of the green, up and going left, into the breeze, and the breeze was kind of gusting. I was just trying to hit it solid and trying to get the correct pace. I guess I hit it a little softer than I wanted to and probably picked a line that was a little bit too high, so I just subconsciously didn't hit it hard enough.

But yeah, I was just trying to -- I was just saying, just lag this one up as close as I can get it because I don't want to be grinding on the next one. But I was grinding on the next one but luckily made it.

Q. That was a pure stroke, wasn't it?

MAVERICK McNEALY: Thank you, yeah. I had an eight-footer on the hole previous, on 17, to win the match, and I hit a good putt, it just kind of hung out on the left side. I was thinking this one, this is to halve the hole. I've got nothing to lose, I'm just going to pick a good line and hit it with a firm, aggressive pace, and I made a really good stroke.

Q. You looked to be ridiculously long. The miss today was left. Is that kind of standard for you?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I'd say so. My driving has been very inconsistent this year. That's been the weakest part of my game, and I enjoy having weaknesses because it's something I can work on and improve on, and my driving has gotten a lot better over the last couple weeks especially. You know, I have that 3-wood that I absolutely love, and I feel like I can just slide it

down the fairway every time. But the driver is a bit more of a gamble for me, and it pays off on some holes like it did on 1 on my second shot. I do miss it left sometimes, and that's something I'm working on, but it's getting a lot better and it's getting better every day. I have actually seen my club head speed increase about five miles an hour in the last month since I worked with my coach. I think it's just from swinging more confidently and having a driver setup that works really well for me. So I just think a combination of swinging better and being more confident has allowed me to hit it a lot further.

Q. What is your swing speed?

MAVERICK McNEALY: When I rip at it, I can get it 122, 123. It's probably a stock shot like 117, 118.

Q. What's your carry distance with that 3-wood?

MAVERICK McNEALY: 3-wood? If I smoke one, I can probably get it 280, standard. If it's off the fairway, probably 270. If I tee it a little bit up and just rip it, I feel like I can just slide it down there as far as I need to.

Q. How important is it to shore up those driver issues on the North Course because it seems like it's a long course?

MAVERICK McNEALY: It is, it is, and it's kind of going to be a balancing act for me this week, or at least tomorrow, figuring out when to hit driver, which shots suit my eye, and when I need to play 3-wood and just get it in the fairway, even if it's a slightly longer shot in. You can get away with that today because it was -- the greens were very soft, so the 4-irons, 5-irons were holding. I imagine if the greens firm up a little bit, I'm going to be taking more chances and hitting more drivers. I wouldn't say they're driver issues. The misses are generally pretty small. It's just there's not much margin for error out there.

I figure if I can get it -- if I make an aggressive swing and I get it far enough up there hitting a short iron or a wedge out of the rough isn't the end of the world.

Q. In terms of what it takes out of you, what's tougher, 36 holes in match play or 36 holes in stroke play?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I'd say 36 holes in stroke play. I think match play is a little bit more intense and your heart rate gets up, but you play 36 holes much faster in match play. It's twosomes. Not every putt is holed. I think for me at least it's very freeing to play match play because you're firing at more pins, which is a lot more fun and a lot less stressful. You're not worrying about misses as much -- don't get me wrong, you're worried about your misses, but you're not playing to sections and playing to one side of the pin. A lot of times you're just firing at flags, which is a lot more fun, and you

really just have to have a better day than the guy you're playing.

Q. You're in the same quarter of the draw as Paul Dunne. Did you watch him in the Open and what do you make of what he did there?

MAVERICK McNEALY: I did. Actually after winning the Haskins Award he came up to me and congratulated me. He was such a nice guy, and I've been following him ever since, and I was so happy to see him playing well at the Open. You know, what a great guy, what a great ambassador for the amateur game, and to be able to do that on the professional -- on the biggest stage in golf was really cool to watch. Like I said, I was very happy for him.