

U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship

Press Conference

Wednesday September 26, 2018

Kevin O'Connell



Q. So just like earlier this morning, you came from behind.

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Uh-huh.

Q. What do you think the turning point in the match was?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Probably hole No. 13 honestly. I was 4-down three 11; I birdied 12, which obviously was at least a step in the right direction.

Really when he bogeyed 13 and obviously I made par and won that hole to go only 2-down, felt like a match again. Kind of felt like I had the momentum. So certainly I would say hole No. 13.

Q. Then do you think your experience this morning -- you went to extra holes -- gave you the confidence to do it again this afternoon?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah. I mean, a familiar spot, you know. As far as the confidence, I mean, you're so focused on what you're trying to do. I was just trying to put one foot in front of the other at that point. At the end of a long day, especially.

So I guess maybe a little bit of that, but I wasn't thinking about it.

Q. Can you talk about the stretch where you won three straight on 12, 13, 14?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Uh-huh. So birdied 12. Just kind of made a pretty standard -- hit it in the middle of the fairway. Hit a 3-wood into the greenside bunker and a great up and down.

Then he gave me 13. Made bogey.

Then I decided to layup on 14. Tee was up. I was thinking about 3-wood, but there is just such little area to hit it into and have an easy pitch shot. I decided to lay it up. I hit in there about 15 feet and made the putt, which was huge.

So couple birdies in there, and then the par at the hard 13th. I felt like I kind of earned it through there.

Q. Ans then on 16.

KEVIN O'CONNELL: 16, so in the morning I was a little disappointed because my 3-wood is one of my

favorites. It's kind of my go-to club off the tee. I didn't hit a good one, so I kind of wanted to vindicate that a little bit.

I hit a perfect 3-wood off there in the afternoon match; hit it in there close about ten feet and made the putt there, too.

So that was huge.

Q. And then take me through the extra hole on 10.

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Sure. Again, was able to tee off with my 3-wood. I love that club. I split that fairway every single time I've played it. I was just down there perfect.

He pushed it five feet, just enough to get into the rough. I was up there in the practice round and knew how tough it was. Long story short, he made a bogey, which you're going to do most of the time out of there, and I just kind of hit it on the green and two-putted. Survived.

Q. And then going into that extra hole, what was your mindset like on that tee?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I was leading, or I was hitting first. Truly just -- I mean, if you put that ball in the fairway there is so much pressure on him, so I just wanted to make sure -- it's all about tempo at that point. In that moment, it's easy to get fast for anybody.

Just reminded myself to kind of swing at a good tempo and hit the ball in the fairway.

Q. With this one you're exempt into the U.S. Amateur next year.

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Okay.

Q. What does that mean to you?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: It's awesome, and I believe it's in Pinehurst. Again, in my home state. I played it in 2008 in Pinehurst, so there is some nice symmetry there. It's really cool. I mean, that's awesome.

Q. And then to be in the finals with another North Carolina resident, what does that say about amateur golf in this state?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, obviously very strong. Brett is a great player and has been for a long time.

We have so many good players in this state. The guy that's on my bag has played in probably six or seven USGA events.

I think there are a lot of good players for sure.

Q. And then what do you think the key is to winning tomorrow?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I think you got to be in the fairway. You can be in the fairway -- they're generous enough that you should be able to hit it in the fairway. If you do, you can at least play this golf course from there.

So for me, I think I've got to drive it well. If I do that, I'll should have a good chance.

Q. When that last putt went in, considering where you had to come back from, what was the emotion of that moment? You had to come all the way back and go through that tension.

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Sure.

Q. Yeah.

KEVIN O'CONNELL: You know, when you're 4-down and you kind of slowly come back the way I did, I don't want to say it gets easier as you keep winning holes, but it kind of feels a little bit easier. You can feel the momentum on your side.

Going into that playoff I totally felt like I was in to the driver's seat, particularly after I hit first and hit it in the fairway. I knew I was going to have a great opportunity to make a 3.

But, yeah, when the putt went in, yeah, I mean, it just capped off a really nice comeback and chance to play in the final.

Q. Did you learn something about yourself today? Maybe not just how to play the game, but from the mental side of it, coming back and winning?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah. I mean, match play is different than stroke play. When you have a bad round going in stroke play, you kind of just want to string some pars together.

Whereas in match play, you know in the back of your mind that you can maybe win some holes with pars, but you're going to have to make some birdies, too.

So it's kind of this combination of convincing yourself that you're still in the match even when you're down 4.

But in terms of kind of what I learned about myself, I think obviously the ability to kind of turn the switch when that's not going well. Yeah, I mean, I did that

today. I was not playing very well through 11 holes.

From there to the house I think I had three birdies and no bogeys through a pretty difficult stretch. So that was nice, yeah.

Q. Last one from me: I know you've played 36 holes in one day.

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah.

Q. But have you ever played a match that was scheduled for 36 holes like tomorrow is?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: No, I have not. I have not. That'll be interesting. Going to be a long day.