

U.S. Open Championship 2018

Monday, June 11, 2018

Matt Parziale

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome again to the 2018 U.S. Open Championship at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club.

We are very happy to welcome this afternoon Matt Parziale, 31 years old, from Brockton, Massachusetts, playing in your first U.S. Open. Earned his spot in the field this week as a result of his victory in the U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship last fall. He defeated Josh Nelson 8 and 6 in the championship match at Capital City Club in Atlanta, Georgia.

Matt, can you talk about winning the USGA Championship and sort of what the last few months, what the whirlwind has been like?

MATT PARZIALE: Yeah. Since I won in October, life's changed quite a bit, but I'm having a blast. I was able to play in the Masters. And the USGA announced that the Mid-Am Champion was going to get an exemption to the U.S. Open. So being the first one to do that, I feel very fortunate. Really looking forward to competing this week.

THE MODERATOR: You also, in addition to playing in the U.S. Open obviously this week, you're also participating in the inaugural Celebration of Champions tomorrow, which will bring together all of the 2017 USGA champions.

Can you talk about what it's like to have the opportunity to play in an event like that here?

MATT PARZIALE: Yeah, I'm looking forward to that. When Mike called me and told me about that, the event for the first time, I was very excited to take part. I think it's a good tradition to start. All the champions I've talked to -- I talked to Kelsey and Sean, they're very excited as well. So I have my fiancée caddying for me so we might not get the right numbers, but we'll have some fun.

THE MODERATOR: Before I open it up to questions, I will just ask you, you mentioned the Masters earlier. Can you talk about what an experience that was for you?

MATT PARZIALE: Yeah, it was really cool. I've never been in a situation like that. I've always tried to compete at the highest level and give myself a chance



to do that, and it was unknown, the first tee shot. I knew it would turn into golf at some point. But for me, it was pretty cool it was golf from the start. Even though I didn't play well, I still felt like I was in it.

Q. Matt, coming down off the high of that, what has it been like the last few weeks to get yourself again ready competitively to compete in another Major championship?

MATT PARZIALE: I played pretty bad, so it wasn't that high. No, I'm always ready to play competitive golf. I love doing this. I really look forward to getting ready for events. I played some events, local events at home in the New England area, and I played Fishers Island Invitational over this past weekend.

Yeah, it's like normal, getting ready for any other event, but I real enjoy that.

Q. Was there anything about that experience playing in the Masters that helped you perhaps better prepare for the spotlight here?

MATT PARZIALE: I hope so. Going into this week, I know it will be golf from the start. I don't have to worry about the first tee shot or when it's going to turn into -- you get over all the nerves. I was fine. That was a big surprise to me because I was unsure of that.

So hopefully, that's the same way this week, but you never know. This course is difficult. Hopefully, I'll have a good game plan for it.

Q. You didn't mention the Concession Cup.

MATT PARZIALE: I didn't. That was awesome.

Q. I saw you made one of the best up-and-down pars on the last hole there. Just wondering if shots like that are in your memory bank for a place like Shinnecock, which is going to be a challenge short game-wise this week.

MATT PARZIALE: Yeah, that was a good up and down there. That was unexpected. Yeah, anything that happens good, I try to keep in the memory bank, and that was a good one. The Concession Cup was one of the coolest events I've ever played.

Really cool to compete with guys from around the country against GB&I, and I look forward to hopefully making that team in a couple of years too.

Q. You won on the course that Tiger won on. When you won your Mid-Amateur, he won a WGC event there. Can you tell us about winning on a course of a player that's your idol? And then what happened after you won the championship? You did hear from him and then actually played with him.

MATT PARZIALE: Yeah, Capital City Club was such a cool spot. The members there, they embrace the week. The USGA did an awesome job with the course, set it perfectly. It was difficult, but if you hit some good shots, you could score. Obviously, I liked it.

Tiger did reach out. He sent me a letter shortly after I had won. In the media, I said that I was a perfect age when Tiger Woods started winning, so I was able to watch him growing up and see his drive to compete, his drive to get better.

That's something I've always tried to do. I always try to improve, whether you're playing well or playing bad, and I always enjoyed the process.

So really cool to hear from him, and then I was able to play nine holes with him on Wednesday at Augusta, and that was pretty amazing. And Freddy was the third -- well, I should say I was the third, but I joined them.

THE MODERATOR: Earlier today, we had Garrett Rank with us in the Media Center. He's a full-time NHL referee. You're a full-time firefighter in your hometown. Can you talk about that balance between playing golf at this high competitive level and also having a full-time job?

MATT PARZIALE: Yeah, that's the reason I became a firefighter is for the schedule, so I could do this. I love my career. It's a lot of fun, great group of guys, but very fortunate enough to be able to play quite a bit because we do 24-hour shifts. So I have four days off at times and two days off.

Yeah, the balance, it's -- I mean, it's a job. The more I'm playing, the better, and I'm fortunate enough to be able to do that with my career.

Q. And has that flexibility afforded you a little time to come down and play Shinnecock leading up to this week?

MATT PARZIALE: Yeah. I took a leave from work, just I didn't want to get hurt. Usually every house fire we go into, we leave pretty banged up. You leave too hurt, you might not be playing. I took a leave, and I'm been here, I think, three times before this week. I would have liked to come a little more, but life gets in the way,

you know.

THE MODERATOR: Can you give us some impressions of the golf course and certainly today, arriving and having the spectators here today?

MATT PARZIALE: Yeah, I played nine holes. I just got off the course now. It's hard. It was hard two weeks ago. It's even harder now. It's going to be a challenge. You've got to hit make good shots. Tee shots are important. If you get in the short stuff off the tee shots, you might be able to hit some good second shots to score. If not, it's going to be a long day.

Q. You just said, house fire, you get a little banged up. Can you just maybe go into that a little bit, the rigors of your job and how you get banged up? What happens?

MATT PARZIALE: Well, we tear the house apart, essentially. If it's just a contents fire, not so much, but when it's in the walls, you have to pull the walls, pull the ceilings. It's a lot of labor. Things fall on you. You could get hit with a tool. You never know. Trip on something. So there's a lot of different challenges that come with every fire we have that are always different.

Q. And what would be, I don't know, a common injury or one that you would be most fearful of? I mean, other than, obviously, something that's life-threatening?

MATT PARZIALE: I had knee surgery from -- I was actually in drill school, and I tore my meniscus so I missed four months of work shortly after I got on the job.

Guys always have back injuries. My dad just had a rotator cuff, he tore that. Pretty much anything can happen. You walk into a house, it's pitch black. So just anything goes, really.

Q. I heard your story. And at Augusta, especially, guys were behind you. What's been about this experience that people didn't know about (No microphone)?

MATT PARZIALE: It's been really cool. The support from people I don't even know has been incredible. Obviously, the people from back home that went to the Masters that said they never would have went if they weren't coming to watch me. And when I got home and heard the stories how it was the best week of their life, that's really cool to hear. I think it's a trip for people from Boston that we might have a few crowds here this week too.

Q. Matt, when you say you took leave, how long is that?

MATT PARZIALE: It's undetermined right now.

Probably through the fall maybe, just getting married in August, and then U.S. Am, U.S. Mid-Am. We'll see.

Q. And that began before the Masters?

MATT PARZIALE: Yeah, I took the leave in November. It's been a while, yeah.

Q. One other different question. Last, year we had conversations with Stewart Hagestad about playing. He's in a little bit of a different situation from you and never having turned pro. But the idea of maybe turning pro and whatnot, seeing this experience and whatnot, would that have changed his mind on that.

You've obviously played as a professional. You've gone back to being an amateur here. But did these -- has this time where you've gotten a chance to play in these Major championships at all given you any pause to go, maybe I should have stayed longer or tried my hand at that more?

MATT PARZIALE: No. Every decision I make, I don't have any regrets. I just do what I think is right. I could be wrong. No, I'm still able to play golf and compete, and I enjoy that, and I have a career that I'm able to do, family. I didn't want to miss out on life. I could be 35 years old and never make it happen. Then where do you start?

So I'm glad with the decisions I made and fortunate enough to be able to play and be able to have this be my second Major. So I still have a lot to play for.

Q. Your family members have been supportive. Your father was also a firefighter, just retired. He carried your bag at the Mid-Amateur. How much influence has he had on you? And also talk a little bit about how your fiancée agreed to move up the wedding date so you could play in the U.S. Amateur.

MATT PARZIALE: I wouldn't say she agreed. It was more of -- no. My dad introduced me to the game, he introduced me to hockey, he introduced me to everything. We have the same interests, the same likes. He didn't want me to become a firefighter. He thought I could do better. But I'm happy that I followed in his footsteps. It's a great career, great group of guys.

Yeah, Ali was not -- she did it, but she definitely didn't want to do it. It all worked out.

THE MODERATOR: She understands Pebble Beach, right?

MATT PARZIALE: Not yet. Hopefully she does when she gets out there.

THE MODERATOR: Matt, thanks so much for joining us today. We wish you well throughout the week. Congratulations again on winning the Mid-Am and being here in the field this week.

MATT PARZIALE: Thank you so much. Appreciate it.