

U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship

Saturday, September 17, 2022

Erin, Wisconsin, USA

Erin Hills

Matthew McClean

Press Conference

Q. How does it feel to have your name in front of, it says U.S. Mid-Amateur champion?

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Yeah, it's unbelievable. To sort of think that a year or maybe less, six months ago, I probably wasn't fully aware of the competition, and just had never thought about it. One of the guys from the Ireland team said, U.S. Mid-Am is on this year at Erin Hills; we should probably go. I was like, yeah, we should probably go. So it wasn't my idea initially, so I thank him for sort of bringing up the idea.

Yeah, it's unbelievable really. I think winning a tournament, I came close on probably three occasions, maybe four occasions this year, sort of winning over in Europe and the UK and Ireland and wasn't able to quite get the job done by a playoff and one shot and that sort of stuff. To get a win was the goal for the year and to sort of have the last one of the year, especially this one with the significance of it, that it brings, is -- I'm over the moon with it.

Q. You've played against Hugh Foley before in stroke play, but this is match play. It's a whole different thing. What was it like out there for the last two days?

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Yeah, as I said I think earlier on, Hugh has probably been the best player in Ireland for the past sort of two months, three months, and top 2, 3 in the UK and Ireland. He's I think playing pretty much the best golf that he's ever played. I've had a really good year myself, and we know each other very well, play a lot of practice rounds, play tournaments.

I never want to play him because your chances -- maybe it might work out 50/50. I'm sure he has similar ideas playing against me maybe. But yeah, it's tough to sort of beat someone you're very friendly with and share a lot of time with.

But we're both obviously going into it with the same intention of we're going to have a very friendly, good game, and thankfully we both played well, and it came down to



two shots over 36 holes in the end, which is next to nothing, really.

Q. How great is it to get the support from the other name Irish golfers? Harrington has tweeted; Shane Lowry has tweeted. I know Rory knows about what's going on here. What's that feel like, that those guys are paying attention to what you're doing?

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Yeah, it's pretty good. As I said, Pdraig Harrington, I saw the tweet last night. The first I was aware of it was probably last night. We were sitting in Dan's house and the TV was on. I think it was an American channel. They had a few highlights of the golf in the afternoon yesterday, so we were watching ourselves on TV at the dinner table, which was a bit odd.

But we sort of heard about Pdraig's tweet about it. I follow Shane Lowry on Instagram, so I saw it on my phone, his post he put up, as well.

If McIlroy is -- he's sort of in a different level compared to us; he's obviously a huge celebrity and massive golfer. To even have the attention of any of those type of players that we've mentioned is pretty good. To even know that they sort of are interested in what's going on here and they're showing interest, it all seems very genuine, which is brilliant.

Yeah, to have their thoughts while we're out here playing these tournaments is pretty good.

Q. To take it one step further, you join Graeme McDowell, Rory McIlroy and Pdraig Harrington as the only Irish golfers to win a USGA championship. What's that sound like to you?

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Yeah, it's good. Yeah, I didn't know any of the sort of history of things like that with regards to Ireland. So yeah, obviously the trophies that they won for the USGA are probably a bit more difficult to win than this one, but I'll take it. To have your name in any sort of list, no matter what it is, with those three guys is unbelievable.

So yeah, I think in a USGA amateur event there's been one person ever to reach a final, I think, back in 1980 at the Senior Women's, so yeah, to have two here was pretty

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good for sort of Golf Ireland and Irish golf in general. So yeah, I'll take it.

Q. Now looking forward, you're in the U.S. Open next year. You'll likely get an invitation to the Masters. There's some other things you'll be eligible for now. The possibility is you're going to be playing with some of those names, at least in a practice round, or you're in the field with them. What's that mean to you as someone who's grown up all your life around those names?

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Yeah, well, I think first I'll probably have to practice quite a bit over the next six months to have a good sort of show of myself there. But yeah, even to be sort of mentioned in the same field as those guys is a bit surreal really. I don't think it will really kick in at all, probably not until I get to the event or maybe the practice rounds before.

We actually met a good friend of Hugh, they're members out at Olympic Club out in San Francisco, so they kindly sort of mentioned that maybe we could go out and have a trip to LA, as well, and we played with a member of LA Country Club at Shore Acres last week. He kindly sort of invited us, as well, so hopefully I can get out and see the place and enjoy the experience.

As I say, it's pretty good having those two weeks hopefully and just sort of all that goes with it. To spend sort of time playing golf in America, it's a pretty good place to be able to play.

Q. You got 5-up on the back nine and then he fought back. Can you talk about the fight he put up and what you were thinking down the stretch there?

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Yeah, at any point in the match I didn't think it was over because I know sort of firsthand what he does and what he can do. He played pretty good. He got a couple bad breaks on the way around. He holed a couple putts, I holed a couple putts. We sort of missed a few putts each, but he definitely got a few sort of unfortunate breaks on the way around, and they sort of went my way today.

But 5-up with 6 to go probably wasn't a fair reflection of how we both played. Then 13, 14, 15, the pins were all tucked on slopes playing very hard, and he birdied all three. I was just thinking, if I can par my way in, I think I'll be okay here. So I was going away from the pins and making pars and he was going at the pins and making birdies.

Yeah, he hit a shot into 16 straight at the flag, as well, after

going birdie, birdie, birdie. I just thought, he's beaten me a few times already. You want just a bit of sort of wiggle room to sort of relax a wee bit, but he didn't give me any. Although I did very nearly finish it off with a 2 on 16, which would have been a great way to finish. Any way is fine, but that would have been pretty good if that putt did go in.

Q. It caught quite a bit of the lip, didn't it.

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Yeah, I think it probably caught as much as it can without going in, but it probably had a touch of speed on it, as well, and it was very fast, so it could have easily gone four foot past, as well. I'll take it.

Q. You guys joked about, what if we meet in the final and all that stuff, and then it happened. What are the odds of something like this happening?

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Yeah, as I said in the speech, probably a million to one, because especially after I'd say the betting after the first six holes of my stroke play would have gone to 10 million to 1. I was 5-over through 6 in the first round of the stroke play. Yeah, to sort of both make the cut was good, to avoid each other on the side of the draw was good, and then to win five matches against very, very good players. The odds are pretty high.

But yeah, as I said, we both probably sort of see it in the long run that at least we both got to the final. Again, it's never nice to have someone who loses and someone who wins, but that's just obviously why we play golf and sport in general. You end up losing a lot more than you win, so I'm just sort of delighted that it could have been me today.

Q. You seemed to be able to put the ball in the fairway a lot more than he did, especially early on in the match. Do you think that was a key to holding the lead and expanding the lead?

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Yeah, I think I struggled a wee bit this morning. I drove it lovely yesterday, found a lot of fairways. The greens are accessible from the fairway, and you can make birdies. But if you hit the rough, it's deep and not easy, and you have just no chance of hitting it to some of those pins. Yeah, I struggled a wee bit with the driver there early parts, and thankfully on the way in was able to just sort of slow down the tempo a wee bit and just keep it on the fairways on the way in.

Yeah, so Hugh didn't hit that many off line I don't think, but again, easy to lose track of things on the way around, as well. It was all good. We both played good. Maybe I hit a few more fairways, but (indiscernible).

Q. How about the shot you hit into 12, was pretty tight,

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four, four and a half feet for birdie there. What did you hit in there? That made it 5-up at that point.

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Yeah, as I said, obviously in match play it can go from looking quite comfortable to sort of very, very tight very quickly.

That was the swing on 12, I think, that actually settled me down a bit. I was hitting a few sort of right and not-so-good shots, so I hit a lovely one down there, perfect position, hit a gap wedge from maybe 120, I think, just a wee sort of little gap wedge, and thankfully sort of took one bounce and spun up to about four foot maybe.

Again, story of the day, I think Hugh hit a lovely shot in there, as well, just drifted by, and I sort of managed to hole it, which was nice, but needed as it turned out, really, after he birdied the next three.

Q. What do you think life is going to be like when you go back to work and your patients come in? Do you think they're going to want to talk about this week with you more than you want to talk about it?

MATTHEW McCLEAN: It depends on if they know anything about golf. I'm sure anyone who follows golf maybe -- especially obviously the people I know anyway or sort of known along the way, I'm sure it'll be brought up a few times along the way, which is good. It's better that than not being able to talk about it. I'm sure I'll get maybe the odd person at work coming in.

Q. Maybe you'll pick up a few patients.

MATTHEW McCLEAN: Maybe. I don't know. I don't know. But I'm self-employed, so I work for myself, so it doesn't matter how many people I see, I still get paid for whatever a day, so hopefully not everyone is asking for me.

But no, I'm sure you'll bump into the odd person who will bring it up, and again, even just sort of conversations about U.S. Open next year and possibly the Masters, it would be -- yeah, it's going to be fun. Fun conversations to have.

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