

January 4, 2007



An Interview With:

WILL MacKENZIE

JOEL SCHUCHMANN: Will MacKenzie off to a great start here at the Mercedes-Benz Championship, you won the Reno-Tahoe Open last year, and you opened up with a 4-under 69 and currently tied for the lead with K.J. Choi and Vijay Singh is still on the golf course. Obviously it's your first time, but a good start for you.

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, it was fantastic. I hit the ball really well out there for the most part, and I putted well, as well. So it was a good combination. I felt nice, I got a good caddie this week. He's lived here for five years and is a teaching pro here at the Kapalua Learning Center, I think. He knows the course well, and knows the greens.

I made the little eagle on 9; that always helps. You're not expecting to chip-in from 45 yards, and I did that. I was really bummed about making par on 18, but I hit sort of a weak drive and a real bad second shot, and I hit a great third shot and didn't turn out the way I thought it was going to turn out. I haven't hit enough shots into the green from 50 yards and in to know exactly how it's going to react and it just sort of chewed up and left me with about a 15-footer.

Q. Just a follow-up. That story you were telling the other day about Butch and the parking lot --

WILL MacKENZIE: What?

Q. Butch. No, Adam was telling that story the other day.

WILL MacKENZIE: Oh.

Q. Adam told the story about how he bought you lunch.

WILL MacKENZIE: Scotty.

Q. And you asked Butch --

WILL MacKENZIE: Probably like 2000 or 2001.

Q. Thereabouts, in Vegas, and you asked Butch if you could put your car in his parking lot so you could sleep there for the night?

WILL MacKENZIE: I was like, may as well stay out of the facility. I was like, do you have a shower here and I can sleep in the parking lot? It was a real nice facility. I was thinking about, man, when I started playing golf again, man, I was up early. I was grinding from 7:00 to 7:00, basically. I was putting in some pretty long days, plus I was playing catch-up.

Shoot, I was out there at that facility, and you know, my dad had paid some serious cash to work with Claude III, which is Butch's son. I was hoping to thrill Butch with a little bit of my game when I got out there, and he actually did come check me out and watch me swing a little bit. He said -- this is a great one -- if you don't know the swing too much you won't understand this. But he said, "Son, you've got a lot of speed coming from all the wrong direction." (Laughter).

So I had the ability to swing hard and fast and hit the ball in decent ways, but who knows, it was coming from wherever. That was pretty funny.

I was sizing up the facility. That's what I would do. I would size up the facility, that's the first thing; I would stake it out. All right, they have a shower over there, they have towels, they have soap, shampoo.

Q. Vending machines?

WILL MacKENZIE: You know, just a nice little grill on site, usually most golf courses do. But I'd just, you know, I don't know, I was staying at the Motel 6 there, in Vegas, and like I said, you know, last time I was in Vegas, I stayed at like the Mirage on the 26th floor. I went by that Motel 6 and there was like 200 policemen at that motel, I was like, oh, my gosh, murder.

And yeah, Adam Scott, I got to practice with him. He was really nice to me that day. I was like, gosh, this guy is going to be a phenom. He is

a phenom, and he's going to be a big-time player. He's sort of the first guy I hung out with a little bit and watched him chip and watched him hit shots, and I was just enamoured with it. I was like, wow, he's really, really good. He bought me lunch, and I thought that was a huge gesture, and I've liked him ever since. Although I haven't gotten to meet him until maybe last year.

Q. Rio Seco, was that the facility?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, and the reason why I didn't stay going to Butch and those guys, I liked what they had to say, but it was so far away, it cost so much money to fly out to Vegas and work on your game. I started practising in Florida a lot. Of course, it was drivable from North Carolina, and that's when I started going to Leadbetter's school and met up with Kevin Smeltz, one of his understudies, and started working with those guys.

Q. The other day you said you didn't want to come out here to finish last; was that on your mind today?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, definitely. I mean, I want to try to -- of course, I want to win the tournament. You know, this is the great odds, the odds are a little better this week, even though everyone is very good at golf out here.

I would like to start my year off -- when I was sitting back trying to, you know, look into 2007 and think about my goals, you know, it's just really nice to have this tournament. Because you can start with some money in your pocket and then with the whole FedExCup starting, I'm going to play really solid early in the year, quite a few events. I'm scheduled for everything on the West Coast except for Mexico, and whether I'm going to, you know, play all those events, I'm not sure. But I'm not coming out here to try to hack it up for anything. I'm trying to come out here and play great.

But having said that, you know, I tend to get off to a decent start, and I've just got to learn how to play one shot at a time, one day at a time.

Q. Back in your adventurous days of all the extreme sports, what was the closest you got to cheating death coming close, a close scare?

WILL MacKENZIE: He asked me that the other day.

Q. Apparently you can add the Motel 6 to that now.

WILL MacKENZIE: I can't think of one experience. I mean, I don't know if I've ever really come that close to dying. I mean, I've hit my head really hard a few times upside-down on my kayak and maybe was dazed and confused and underwater, and maybe swam out of my kayak a time or two that I should have never swam out of my kayak.

If you hit your head and go unconscious, that's when you die. Fortunately I always wore a real burly helmet. I didn't wear just a little skull cap. I wore one that wrapped around me pretty good, it was like a motorcycle helmet. When I snowboarded, I liked to hit trees with my head because I'd go whipping through trees, really high trees at high speeds, and you would bump your head, lots. So I wanted to be really, you know, really prepared.

I don't think I've ever really come too close to death.

Q. What do you mean, you like hitting your head on trees?

WILL MacKENZIE: Well, I like to blaze through there like really fast, like this (leaning forward), and you're making turns, and the tree limbs are pretty low sometimes, and you sort of duck and branches are about this big, and sometimes you sort of pop them like on top of your head. But I'd have a helmet on and I would see that happen to other people that didn't wear their helmets and they would be almost down for the count. It's like, you've got to wear your helmet there, buddy.

Q. So you're talking branches, not trunks?

WILL MacKENZIE: Trunks, too. I've hit them all. (Laughter).

Q. When you teed off today or just before, did you give any thought to where you had been and where you've come from, and my God, here I am in this champion's tournament and ten years ago I wasn't playing, etc., etc., or do you just concentrate on the moment at hand?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, it's pretty much the moment. I don't even sit back -- the past is the

past. Everything's now. I mean, if I don't execute, I'm going to just get kicked off this tour pretty quick.

This is my life, this is what I'm doing nowadays. You can sit back and, you know, have a beer and for the off-season think about, wow, look what I'm doing now versus what I'm doing ten years ago. But I was pretty much just out there with Murph, my caddie, and sort of like, sweet, we're in Maui, getting ready to tee it up. I'm sort of rushing around like I'm always doing, I'm always a little rushing around, getting medicine, because I'm sick right now, running back and forth, just trying to make my tee time. Just try to make my tee time, that's the important thing.

Q. You made it.

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, we made a good one, too. No, we don't sit back and reminisce too much.

Q. How was the wind out there today? How much of a factor was it?

WILL MacKENZIE: Well, I think it was a huge factor. I think it was -- you know, I've learned nothing other than to play in the wind since I've been here.

So you know, you just take it, you know, that's just the way it's going to be. I felt like we were in some three- and four-club winds out there. I was hitting 4-iron from like 178, 180 a couple of times. You just have to control your ball. You can't let the ball go flying up on you know matter what. You can hit 7-iron from 110, and if it balloons on you, it's still not getting there. So, you know, you've got to take a little 8-iron and just sort of soft it in there and flatten your trajectory out.

It's a lot of fun. Sometimes this easterly, northeasterly wind, sometimes I'm a little in between on whether it's going to quarter in or sort of be straight right-to-left or quarter in out of the right. So there's a little bit of a guessing game as well, and some balls, you know, get taken by the wind a little more than you think or not quite as much.

There's an art to guessing, as well, I guess. (Laughter).

Q. How much of your love for extreme sports is in your makeup as a golfer? Do you describe yourself as an adventurous golfer?

WILL MacKENZIE: I've been told that I do not play golf like I act off the golf course, but that

might change. I think I get out there and try to do the right things a little too much. It has worked a little bit to get to where I am, but I wish I could be a little bit more, just freeing it up a little bit out there, having some fun. I do have some fun. I enjoy hitting shots.

But I think I try to play a little bit too much by the book, and sort of my, what I think a professional golfer is supposed to do, like the guys I've been watching on TV for so long which I'm getting to play with now. Those guys are like stone cold out there. Sometimes I get a little regimented or too strict. What was your question? (Laughing)

Q. Would you describe yourself as an adventurous golfer?

WILL MacKENZIE: I don't think so. I don't think I'm that adventurous of a golfer. There's a little adventure in shot-making. Every swing is different for me. I try to work on, you know, a basis for my golf swing, but I think it's that way for everyone. But I like to carve the ball as much as possible and hit shots, so maybe there's a little adventure out there. I'm not like ducking off.

I do daydream out there quite a bit about whenever I see things that I like. Like I'm down there looking at the bay and I can see every guy that surfs, every single guy that surfs on the wave, and if there's a 6-footer, I'm like, is there like a layman, oh, he's on long board, he's on short board, I can just visualize a lot of stuff. I think my visualization is good because I had to visualize how I was going to get down a river in a kayak, a river that's technical, not just basic and sort of an extreme snowboarding, like a tactical run. Like if I'm going to do something that's like a certain amount of turns that I have to make here and there and there and jump off of something. I think that there's a little adventure in that. I play golf a little like that, but I need to work on that.

JOEL SCHUCHMANN: Will MacKenzie, thank you.