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An Interview With:

WILL MacKENZIE

TODD BUDNICK: We thank Will MacKenzie for dropping by the Mercedes-Benz Championship and the inaugural FedExCup season. Your first trip to Kapalua and the Plantation Course. Have you had a chance to play it yet and take a look at it?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, I played the Pro-Am right when I got here and that was fantastic. I had a great group of guys. The golf course, it's just awesome, man. There's so many fantastic golf shots out there to hit. It's a little bit open off the tee which is nice, for the first event of the year.

It's just, you know, I've got to get my mind on playing golf a little bit instead of looking at the views because I'm out there gaping looking at all of the beautiful views and watching whales breach and whatnot.

TODD BUDNICK: Talk about what it's like to be a winner and coming here for the first time.

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, when you're one of 34 guys, that's a great way to start off the year. I was saying if for some reason I just can't catch a victory this year, I might just comeback and hang out next year before the Sony because I'm enjoying myself so much.

It sort of brings you back to reality; hey, I did win, and I'm being rewarded for doing that by being here.

TODD BUDNICK: Before we go to questions, what have you done in the off-season and what are your goals towards the new year?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, my off-season just flew right by. (Snapping fingers) I went to Australia and played the Australian Open and the Australian Masters, and that took about 17, 18 days and had some major jet-lag coming back.

Then I spent some time in Florida at my home and then I went back up and hung out with the family and my mom and brothers in North

Carolina for the 20th through 28th before I came here.

I played some golf, obviously Australia and I came home and sort of chilled and fished a little bit and went home and duck-hunted for a few days, tried to be a country boy because it makes me feel good. So I need to work on my golf game really quick. (Looking at invisible wrist watch).

Q. So that's the end of the interview; you have to go?

WILL MacKENZIE: (Laughing).

TODD BUDNICK: Goals for this year?

WILL MacKENZIE: I haven't sat down and really done them. I know that's what you're supposed to do, but, you know, I definitely -- I've had that little goal that I'd like to come in top 70 on the Money List. Obviously I've gotten a little better every year, I finished 179 and I finished 100. I need to have maybe a goal of winning No. 1 on the Money List. But, I need think you need to have some attainable going. Hopefully I can be a Top-70 player, hopefully I can be a Top-50 player and just keep working. I'd love to get into contention a couple of times, a few times and see if I can pull another victory out. That's sort of the main idea.

Q. This seems like your kind of island, have you done anything besides golf?

WILL MacKENZIE: I've surfed three days, I surfed Little Max and I surfed at Shitty's the last two days, that's the nickname for it, we call it Ironwood. I've just been surfing and I would like to do a hike because I know they have some amazing trails. Yeah, just mainly, know, surfing.

Q. I know you probably told this story quite a bit at Reno, but for those of us who were not there and would love to be regaled by it, can you give us an idea of some of the stuff you did this your time away from golf?

WILL MacKENZIE: Well, I moved to Montana when I was 19 and snowboarded, kayaked and rock-climbed and worked. That's all I did, every day. And I had a nice little trip to Costa

Rica where I surfed for three months in '99, that was very, very, very nice. Then I started playing golf again. Did a little three-month little session in late '99, October, November, December to see if I sort of fell back in love with the game, which I did.

Q. So you fell out of love with the game?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yes, I did.

Q. At what age?

WILL MacKENZIE: 14. Just wanted to go do something different. Because I was a little bummed out because my summers were being taken up by golf. And it's that little age of 14, 15, shoot, where I came from, we had a lot of fun activities that I enjoyed besides playing golf, we lived at the river, I loved to water ski, fish, barefoot, just all those little things. I.

Played a strenuous little schedule when I was 14 and I remember coming out of it going, good, gosh, summer, I'm going into 9th grade and that's all I did was play golf. That's what you were supposed to do I, I guess, if you're going to become a great player.

I burned out sooner than later, and I think that's probably a blessing for me. If I had gone to college and done that, who knows. I might be right where I am now, but I might have burned out in college and not be here.

Q. How did you pick Montana?

WILL MacKENZIE: Just seemed like, I went up to Taos, New Mexico, drove 40 from North Carolina, went up into Durango, went up to Telluride, checked that out went and did all that stuff, checked everything out in Colorado, cruised over to Crystale Butte and got a job and thought I might stay there; don't really like this too much. Went north again, Salt Lake, nah; then I went to Jackson Hole and ran out of money. Went to Taco Bell to work at Taco Bell for two weeks to get a little cash and I just journeyed three hours north of Jackson Hole and found Big Sky, Montana and it was just like home. I was like, this is the spot.

Q. This is right out of high school?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah. It was the most like the North Carolina mountains which I loved, really vegetated, really homey and people were just really nice and I just fell in love with it. And I happened to have an amazing mountain there to

play on and awesome trout streams. And the Gallatin River in the spring, it's a classic spot for us.

Q. Doing what?

WILL MacKENZIE: Kayaking. Big Sky Montana.

Q. How did you fund yourself? Did they have a Taco Bell in Big Sky?

WILL MacKENZIE: (Laughing) I originally went out there and got a job as the security guard for Big Sky, and they were paying me so much money for some reason. I think they thought I was somebody else, like they were paying me some -- I don't know, I was getting paid decent like \$12 an hour or something, or \$15. I was getting big paychecks and I was living in my van. I'm like, gosh, I'm loaded, I'm getting these \$1,600 by-weekly paychecks and I'm like, this is great. I didn't like to shave either.

And then I got a job, this is all right before the first season, probably '94-'95 winter, and then I got a job in the Huntley Lodge doing dishes and they gave me a free ski pass. Just everything was great from there. And about halfway through the year, I started meeting people and people started liking me, and I got a little job down the mountain as a place called Allgood's Bar and Grill, and started doing dishes on the side.

And they elevated me to the cook, and then I just strictly worked down there for the rest of my little Big Sky career. I was working in employee stuff, you know, the big corporate deal. And then I got a job at Allgood's and I'd just buy my ski pass out right and I worked at Allgood's for a year. It was awesome. Lived in my van.

Q. What does that -- I was telling these guys, I had to ask you, what does it entail to live out of a van or what do you give up living in a van?

WILL MacKENZIE: I slept in my van. But, I mean, I had it made there. I was living, I had hot tubs, jacuzzis, pools, access to the Huntley Lodge sort of sneaking around a little bit maybe.

Q. Maybe a lot.

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, I just slept in my van. This was a day for Will MacKenzie waking up. Wake up at 7:00. Wake up when I'm too cold and I can't sleep anymore or either it's, you know, I

know it's going to be a great day, wake up at 6:30 or 7:00. Put on all my gear, my long underwear on and my socks on in my sleeping bag so I'm warm, you know, because it's warm in my sleeping bag. But the van is still around probably 30, 20 degrees, you know, it's taking the elements off, no wind or anything.

Then go get a little breakfast up there at the mountain and I stayed right in the sort of free skier parking lot, probably an eight-acre lot and there's places to park.

I'd try to be the first chair up. Our mountain is insane, it's one of the best mountains in the west but it's not really known that much. We have stuff like this steep and it's like a super playground (indicating upright incline).

Wake up and go snowboard pretty much all day, drive my van down the mountain to Allgood's at 4:00, work to 11:00, go to sleep, every day. Pretty monotonous. (Laughter).

Q. Allgood's was a restaurant?

WILL MacKENZIE: Allgood's was a restaurant.

Q. And now you're slumming at the Ritz.

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, it's terrible. (Laughter) It's terrible. I should be ashamed of myself.

Q. Is that like actually a come down to go to the Ritz when you would probably rather just be sleeping out on the beach?

WILL MacKENZIE: You know what I don't really want to sleep in the van anymore. I'll sleep on a night that's about 40 degrees, 30 degrees, but I don't want to sleep when it's warm. Like the summer, it's miserable in the van. In Montana it wasn't because it was nice there.

But I lived in North Carolina for two summers in between my 11th and 12th grade year and right after high school, before the next winter, I lived in my van and worked at a place called Frost's Seafood House and worked up there when I was 17 and 18 and lived in the van. In Eastern North Carolina in the summer, it's like 100 and humid.

Q. You lived in the van when you were in high school?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, in between high school summers, the summer of my 11th and 12th grade year, just to surf. Just to be there.

Q. Would you get a shower every day somewhere?

WILL MacKENZIE: Then, no. At Big Sky, yes. I was not very into showers back in the days.

Q. What was the longest you went?

WILL MacKENZIE: Probably about 30 days. That was Alaska. I went to Alaska for about 30 days, and I don't think I took a shower the whole time. But it's so cold, you don't sweat much. (Laughter).

Q. Right.

WILL MacKENZIE: But my feet, I don't have feeling in a couple of toes, honestly.

Q. From hypothermia?

WILL MacKENZIE: From a little frostbite, just a little circulation problem.

Q. Shower wouldn't have fixed that anyway, though.

WILL MacKENZIE: Well, shower would have helped. Because I was living out in the snow, basically.

Q. Did you sleep in a cave?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yes.

Q. Where was this?

WILL MacKENZIE: This was Alaska. Valdez is the town. I was 30 miles, I don't even know if it's north or south, it's been so long in a place called Thompson Pass where they have all the heli boarding, the most famous heli place is in Alaska and I was there to heli ski.

Q. Have you ever come close to death?

WILL MacKENZIE: Death? (Pondering). You know, not really. Probably for the layman, yes, I've edged off cliffs and been like, oh, no, about died there where I was going to die or had to hike out or something, come up on like a 50-foot gnarly cliff with rocks at the bottom that I had to jump off of but realized I was going to die. I've been upside-down in my kayak thousands of times and I've hit my head pretty hard. Fortunately, I've never been knocked unconscious.

I had not been around too many of my friends that died doing the things I did when I left Big Sky, one of my good friends died in an avalanche and when I was kayaking, you know, you were always hearing about this guy dying, this guy dying, this guy dying. You know, one or two a year doing just really insane stuff.

But, I've been pretty fortunate. I mean, I can't really think of any time that I cheated death. Probably several times though.

Q. You just didn't realize it maybe.

WILL MacKENZIE: Oh, yeah.

Q. So how does golf compare as a pressure gauge to some of that?

WILL MacKENZIE: You know what, it is pressure.

Q. Oh, it is?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, yeah.

Q. I would think it would be no big deal.

WILL MacKENZIE: I'm not feeling like pressure off the first tee box or, you know, but I felt pressure when I was coming down the stretch at Reno. I felt pressure when I just started back in golf. I can remember missing a putt like this (indicating three feet) to win this little one-day tournament, my first tournament in 2001, I could have won for \$2,000 or \$1,000. I remember just shaking in my boots and missing a little bit and feeling like, oh, this is not good. If I'm missing this, I'm in trouble.

Q. Still you're talking about being underwater in a kayak and going to ledges of cliffs and 50-foot drops.

WILL MacKENZIE: You have to be very, very patient. You know, whenever you're underwater for a long time, just like in surfing, you have to just go "hom" (chanting). You have to slow down, because as soon as you speed up, your heart great goes faster, breath gets faster everything start happening so quickly. If you would just be patient, you'll usually be all right, especially underwater.

Q. Does it help you in golf to deal with that?

WILL MacKENZIE: It should. It should. I mean, I'm sure it's helping me and I don't really

know it, but golf comes with it's own little set of rules and it's own little set of -- it's own little pressure-packed situations. Because you want to succeed in whatever you do. You know, you don't want to choke or whatever they call. I don't know, I mean, I hope my past is helping me with my present for sure.

Q. Did you stay in touch with your parents during your ventures?

WILL MacKENZIE: Oh, yeah, not as much, I mean, I'd call my mom. She'd be like, "Well, son, you haven't called me in two weeks." It's usually like once a week at least.

Q. Were they behind you doing this?

WILL MacKENZIE: They were. They were. My parents are just unbelievably great people. Yeah, my father was really excited when I started playing golf again, because he did have dreams of me playing golf. And then I started doing other things. I went out to Montana and finally I lured them out there and they said, wow, this is pretty sweet; I can see why you want to be here.

Q. Did you shower before they showed up?

WILL MacKENZIE: Probably not. (Laughter).

Q. How long all together did you live in the van, would you say?

WILL MacKENZIE: I mean, I slept -- let me crunch some numbers real quick. I mean, you know, 365 days in a year, I've lived in my van, you know, well over 1,000 nights. Or outside in a hammock or outside on the ground when the weather is right and I know bugs are not going to get me. I love to just sleep outside. I just got really enveloped in it. I was like, I'm going to be the most hard-core guy out here. People were always like, it's 19-below at 7,500 feet where I lived at Big Sky at the base of the mountain, it's about 7,500 feet. They were like, bud, why don't you come in tonight.

There's people that are living, bivwhacking in Alaska right now and everywhere, and in the Alps and people living outside, not just like little hippies or something living outside. They are doing it as a challenge and they are loving it and they think it's the only way.

I was getting to that point where I really wanted to tackle some big mountains and I was probably going to Chamonix or Val d'Isere in France or somewhere in the Alps had I gone back out there, because I was just sort of tired of Big Sky. It was sort of like my college, obviously. You've got all the guys who don't go to college, are there, or any of these ski resorts, they are all there. So people knew me like the back of their hand. I was a little -- I was very known.

Q. Who were your peers, if you had any, at age 14, junior golf? Anyone out here today?

WILL MacKENZIE: I played in tournaments with all of the guys. I mean, Justin Leonard, Phil Mickelson, I played on the AJGA tour, Hank Kuehne, a lot of guys, you have to remember, they don't make it all the way. But those were the predominant guys, those were the studs, and they are in the older age group than me. Not Hank, but Justin, Phil, Duval, those guys were like in the 15 to 18 age group and I was like in the 12 to 14.

But I never came back out for the 15 to 18. I did play golf in my 9th and 10th grade high school but that was just to get out of school early because we played 18-hole matches. Get out at 9:00 a.m.

Q. I thought I heard a story when you came back to Carolina, one of your buddies didn't quite recognize you. When you came back, did you look the way you did when you left; long hair, beard?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, probably. I always had, you know, I either had hair or no hair. I'd shave it and then I'd let it grow and then I would shave it. I always had a lot of goat hair, I had this stuff, it's terrible, I have pictures of me, I had a goatee down to here, it's not like a full beard, it just random hair. (Laughter) I looked like Jesus.

Q. What was the occasion of you wrapping your hands around a club again?

WILL MacKENZIE: What do you mean, what was the occasion?

Q. What made you do it? What made you eventually just decide?

WILL MacKENZIE: Originally, I was back home, I watched Payne win that darned U.S. Open and it was very dear to me. I liked Payne growing

up, I liked his style, flair. Just that 'Proud to be an American' type guy (singing). I'm not like that at all really.

Q. But you liked him?

WILL MacKENZIE: I liked him growing up. I liked he wore knickers, I thought that was pretty school.

Q. But when did you actually then say, okay, where are my clubs?

WILL MacKENZIE: I was selling some hammocks, I had imported some hammocks -- everybody knows this story. I was going around trying to make a fortune in the hammock industry. I'm from North Carolina, we have the big white hammocks with the wood. Well, they are manufactured there and I was coming in with these little hippie nylon colorful hammocks like hey, these are better, I just lived in one for three months in Costa. They were like, we wanted Hatteras Hammocks, we like to be uncomfortable. It's tough to get people into it so I didn't sell that many.

I thought it was going to be a good idea. I thought I was going to get them on the Internet or something. Yeah, I didn't start right then, that was June of '99. I didn't start until like September or October of '99 and I just sort of went around Eastern, North Carolina selling these hammocks. I don't remember the day or whatever. I mean, it had to be after that, I went out and hit some balls for the heck of it. Because you're in the flatlands, what else are you going to do? There's nowhere to surf in North Carolina. I just came back from Costa, the waves are this small back home. I don't even want to go out on that. What do you do in the flatlands? You tee it up. That's about all there is to do.

Q. Your old clubs?

WILL MacKENZIE: I went out to my parents little barn and I did brush off these little Cleveland square-groove Manganese Bronze blades that are unbelievable that I must have got I was 14. I went out and hit some balls and just sort of pured it, or so I thought. I had some fire in me because of the Payne win and I hit some balls and I was like, that's pretty pure.

Went to my dad, we just hung out and said, "Dad, what do you think? I want to go tee it up."

He's like, "Go tee it up." Go see if you can go out to Greenville Country Club or Ironweed, which we call it Ironwood; Ironweeds, it's pretty crappy.

Q. Do they call that Shitty's, too?

WILL MacKENZIE: That's why I was stoked. Surfing in my home track. (Laughter).

I don't know, just went out there, hit some balls, thought I was decent. But shortly there after, I realized I wasn't, you know. I looked the other day, I was looking through some stuff that my dad had written on a legal pad -- I don't think he knew how to use a computer. But he wrote these little things because we were trying to get sponsorship and he'd go: "Will is really learning how to score now. Shot 77-76 in the Hooters Tour event. Shot 78-77, needs to work on his short game, hits the long irons like a Tour pro." He would do these things to try to sell me to the men in town to try to get me a little bit of cash. It was just hilarious.

Yeah, I met with a lot of non-success early but I just persevered. I knew, I'm the type that I'm like, I-don't-stop-until-I-get-there-type deal. Almost like right from get-go, right from that first day, I started hitting balls. I said, okay, I'm going to be on Tour. I don't know when, but I'm going to be there. And everybody tells me, yeah, right. You quit, bud, you can't just get it back.

You have to have, whatever you do, you have to just a real intense self-belief.

Q. What were some of your, say, breakthroughs; what steps, get to go which place?

WILL MacKENZIE: Breakthroughs, the tour through North Carolina winning a couple. Big ones were going to Florida in probably 2002-ish, coming down to the wire in these little one-, and two-day events with Patrick Sheehan and Bart Bryant, who have been out here for a while and got a couple of victories against those guys. Big time for me. I mean, that was big time. Like, these guys have been on Tour, they are not world-beaters, but they have been there. I just hung with it. That was huge.

Chopped it up on the Canadian Tour. Made like \$11,000 in 2002, started out in 2003 there and only played two events. Hank Kuehne invited me down to West Palm and said: Live at my place, free of charge, play on this Golden Bear Tour. I bought 11 events from the old professional

hockey player, Dan Quinn, for 11,000. I think the mini-tour guy's dad gave me the money. He wanted me to pay him back, too. I'm like, come on, buddy, you're loaded. (Laughter).

So I played well, I made like \$60,000 and was living for free, that really changed things around. Like all of a sudden, I had a little bit of cash and could pay him back real easily, my dad didn't have to support me anymore. Men in town didn't have to support me anymore, so I started funding myself. I had a lot of confidence. I played in the winter there.

Went into the 2004 Hooters Tour, after playing with Hank after he came home, because he had just went out there and went, boom, second, third, third, second on Houston, BellSouth, got his card or having conditional Nationwide. When he came home, I played with him, he had a lot of confidence in me. He always said, you've got a lot of skills, just keep working.

He would come home and we would get to play with Jesper and some other Tour guys. So I was the little Golden Bear Tour player, but when the guys were home, I got to run around in golf carts and play with tour players. That was huge and I saw that there's really not that much difference. They are just smarter than me. They just manage their game better.

In 2004, went out on the Hooters Tour, Player of the Year, went to Tour School and made it on the number, shot 77 on the last day. And then, you know, learning curve again, you know I got on the Tour. I expected some big things to happen in 2005 and played a lot of good, two days, getting to 5-, 8-under, and then trying too hard on the weekend, which I still do. Lost my TOUR card, but fortunately regained it, and then played sort of not very good last year, but I won.

So, I'm a little inconsistent. (Laughter).

Q. You talked about your goals of early in the interview of being Top-70, Top-50, Top-30, does the FedExCup fit into those goals for you?

WILL MacKENZIE: Well, as we know, you need to be seeded as high as possible in this FedExCup the way it's going to work out. So, shoot, man, I need to be about fifth on that list to tell you the truth to have any legitimate chance.

I'm just going to see how it goes. I'm going to work hard and try to be in it. You know, try to be professional out there, not lose my composure like

I tend to do and chuck a week off as I get two or 3-over; nice game you've got working here, bud, and I might go through the motions a little bit.

You know, you've got to go there on Thursday thinking, you're going to be in it on Sunday, and then you start thinking, right, like Tiger does every single week. He expects to win, he expects to be there and no matter how he's playing, he somehow just hangs around, and then he strikes.

I want to just hang around a little bit more. And that's usually a good short game and it's something that I have ability in the short game, but if I look at my stats, they need to be worked on.

Q. So what would you say is the tougher competition then, Tiger, or Hatteras Hammocks?

WILL MacKENZIE: Tiger. (Laughter) Well, I don't know, Bud, they are both hard.

Q. How many hammocks did you import, approximately?

WILL MacKENZIE: Not that many. Probably like about 500.

Q. And how many do you have left?

WILL MacKENZIE: About 400. (Laughter) you know, if you guys need one, give me your number, I'm serious, just trying to get them out. They are sweet. I give them away all the time.

I probably have 50 hammocks left. Those chair hammocks cost you, though. They cost too much. I think I was importing them for 6.99 and selling them for about 50. But next thing you know, I was like, two for the price of one. I'm not good at that, man. I'm never going to make any money in retail.

Q. Being one of 34 guys here and a \$5.5 million purse, how big is it just knowing that even if you finish 34th, you're starting the year off with some cash in your pocket on that Money List?

WILL MacKENZIE: Oh, it's huge. It is huge. I told myself when I got in this, I said, don't let's come over here and finish last. Let's come out here and friggin' get into contention, let's get a big piece of that cake.

You know, my off-season has been a little funky and I started to have a little too much fun and I haven't worked super hard. So I'm going try

to be good to myself but I'm expecting to play well. This golf course is all day for me, but it's probably all day for everyone. It's open off the tee. I usually can control my ball in the wind a little bit. I do like bermudagrass. I like bermudagreens.

But, you know, I think playing here a couple of times is key, because of the natural grain coming off this mountain. You know it's going to go towards the ocean, but you can't imagine how much faster putts are, and swingy putts are. You've just got to hit some putts a few times. Jim Furyk, he knows certain putts are just extra-fast, and maybe he knocks it by this far (indicating two feet), and I knock it past this far (five feet). It's no fun putting dead into the grain, either. Because as far as they are downgrain, they are that equally slow going into the grain.

You know, I'm not going to make any excuses. The golf course is right there for me. It should set up well for me.

Q. Maybe you can ski down it?

WILL MacKENZIE: There's some spots, if they had snow here ...

Q. If money was not an issue, would you rather spend your life on the mountain or TOUR?

WILL MacKENZIE: It's all golf now. I'm getting too old for snow boarding and kayaking. I can go out there and make turns and have fun, ride powder, ride groomers, too, but just stay on the ground. But I just don't have that in me. When I get on the snowboard, I'm ready to launch. I'm ready to go flying into something Indy grab like this (bring leg across body).

Q. Can you feel those toes? Which ones are they?

WILL MacKENZIE: I really hurt this ankle and that might be some of the problem. (Indicating left).

Q. But doesn't affect golf?

WILL MacKENZIE: I was getting injured pretty good. That might be partly why I quit, too.

Q. Were you with Bridgestone last year?

WILL MacKENZIE: Yeah, I'm staying with my same equipment. I'm happy with that. You have such a quick turnaround; I came back from

Australia, if I had come back and switched gear; I'm playing the same old stuff.

Q. We've kept you a long time, apologize, but it's been fascinating. Just to wrap it up, it's a little silly and cliché at that, do you ever look at where you are now and pinch yourself a little bit?

WILL MacKENZIE: I'm sure maybe, but I just know that this is a fleeting game. I mean, I know that this is a fleeting game and I'm not to the point yet that I feel that, you know, I've got it wrapped up for a while. You know, I know that I've got to play great golf to stay out here, so, yeah, I mean, I'm just very blessed that I'm here. But I'm not like, wow, I've got out here. This is what I set out to do. This is where I planned on being. That's it. I planned on being here and I want to stay here.

TODD BUDNICK: Thanks, Will.