

Constellation SENIOR PLAYERS Championship

Friday, July 13, 2018

Mike Small

Quick Quotes

Q. Well, you had a great round. You set yourself up to be in a good position going into tomorrow. What was the key today in your game?

MIKE SMALL: Yeah, I felt good today. I felt better today than I did yesterday starting the round, and then I birdied the first two holes, and I was rolling, and then I just kind of hit a little lull. Played solid the rest of the front nine. Hit a bad drive on 9, and then I had a little three-hole stretch -- I tend to do that sometimes where I kind of lose my focus and pull a wrong club or something. Played a couple bad holes, but then I kind of righted the ship coming in. Last three holes are tough, and I hit really good shots on all three of them, so that felt better going into tomorrow.

Q. You said your back was a little tight; how do you feel today?

MIKE SMALL: I felt great today. The guys worked it out last night. I felt better. No complaints today.

Q. Is this the season climax here for you, or do you have something else to play in?

MIKE SMALL: Well, since I finished top 10 in Wisconsin, I got into the 3M in Minnesota, another Champions Tour, and then the Illinois Open and the Illinois PGA.

Q. The date of the Illinois PGA, that's not any conflict with the college side? Seems like it's a little later.

MIKE SMALL: No, it's the first day of school. That's all. They're getting ready for class. It's not a big deal.

Q. You're not out of it even though your score dropped --

MIKE SMALL: Right, well, it was tougher. I'm happy. I had more hard putts today. Yesterday I hit it in spots where you can make tough, and these greens are very difficult from that point of view. If you hit it in the correct spots, you can make putts here all day long, but if you just get a foot or two on the other side of that, they're hard to read and they're fast and you're playing defensively. I putted one ball off the green today. It screwed me up so much. I hit it that far off the green. I mean, it was terrible.

Today I hit some solid shots, but I kept leaving myself

more difficult putts, and I couldn't make any of them today.

Q. How good is this golf course?

MIKE SMALL: It's good. The more I play it, the better it gets. It's tricky. The conditions make it tough. If it's calm and the greens are soft, in today's modern golf, guys can shoot low. But if the wind gets like this and the greens firm up, this course could be all you want. But the wind switched in the middle of the round today, almost directly 180 degrees, so that made for a tough finish.

Q. Wearing your other hat, are you surprised how well Dylan has started?

MIKE SMALL: He was second in the world at one time, second amateur in the world. When he graduated he was No. 4 in the world, and Nick graduated No. 9 in the world. I think that's the third time we've graduated two guys in the top 10 in the world. Those guys, when they get out, they have success right away, and that's kind of what we like to see. To finish 20th in the U.S. Open, yeah, you can't plan on that, but I didn't doubt that he couldn't do it. He's good. Dylan is one of the most talented players I've ever coached, and Nick is probably the biggest grinder and the most competitive player I've ever coached, so between those two guys, they've got a good future.

Q. How close do you follow what's going on two hours down the road?

MIKE SMALL: Oh, I follow it. I watched it last night and keep tabs on the guys, and they know that. Dylan stopped on campus on Saturday -- or Sunday on the way up to John Deere, and we practiced for a little bit, worked on his putting. We keep in touch.

Q. I don't know exactly how it finished, but it looked like for a while yesterday, both Dylan and Nick were ahead of D.A., they were ahead of Strick --

MIKE SMALL: Yeah. That's all right. You've got a bunch of guys out -- we've got two guys in Europe, we've got three or four guys on the Web.com. We've got two or three guys on TOUR, those two young guys. It's kind of fun to watch them. Kind of fun to see them doing what they want to do, be happy, chase their dreams.



Q. How much will this year be different without those two guys? I know you said once we never rebuild here at Illinois, we reload.

MIKE SMALL: Well, I don't know if I ever said that, somebody else may have said it and I may have agreed. But there's some question marks this year. It's going to be a fun year to coach. The kids know that, and there's an opportunity -- we'll have our biggest team this year I've had in a long time, nine players. There's a huge opportunity for these guys to compete and play. Four freshmen are coming in, so it's going to be a lot of fun from a coaching standpoint because we've got kind of a young team, and it's going to be fun to surprise people because I don't think the country will give us a lot of credit at the start of the season, and we may not earn it at the start of the season, but I think come April and May, we're going to be a pretty good team.

Q. How about your finish at Strick's event, too; I believe that's what got you into this event. When you went into that tournament, did you feel you had that kind of effort in you?

MIKE SMALL: Yeah, I played well there last year. Not that good, but I finished ninth in Iowa at the Champions Tour event two weeks before that, and so I got some confidence there, made a good check, and then I played poorly at the Club Pro, which was probably the worst time I've ever played in that event, the worst I've ever done. So I got back to Strick's event a day early and worked on some stuff with my instructor and started feeling pretty good, and then I just built momentum. Yeah, to finish top 10 was a great thing up there because that was a strong field, so I was excited about that. I knew it got me in here. I had to chip in on the last hole to make that birdie to make it, to finish top 10. Me and my caddie both knew that I had to chip in on the 18th hole to get in this event possibly, and then for sure get into 3M, and I made it, so that's kind of the highlight of the summer.

Q. How many goals do you have left as a player?

MIKE SMALL: I don't know if I have any goals. I just want to enjoy playing. If I still have fun doing it, if I still get nervous and I still get a little bit of anxiety, that's good. That's something I don't get to feel. If you're just doing your normal job, you feel different ways for your players, but I'm just going to keep playing as the opportunity presents itself. I've had a heck of a run. Golf has been very good to me. I've had a heck of a career that's provided a lot of things for me. But if I can do this for three, four more years and still be competitive, I'll do it. If I'm not competitive, I won't. But it's nice that some of these events think that I'm competitive and see it to give me some spots because I can't get in otherwise. That's what makes these things so special is qualifying for this is I did it on my

own.

Q. Are you getting a lot of support yet from the new boss down there? Does he like what you do out here?

MIKE SMALL: Yeah, yeah. He sees what we've done for 18 years, and he sees I'm bored and he has faith in us and what we're doing right, and this helps the program. My assistant is out recruiting, and I'm going to the U.S. Junior next week for three days. What better conversation piece for recruits than this? I played with Bernhard the Saturday of Wisconsin, and that was a great learning experience for me. How better way for a coach to be doing that, still be learning, still growing? I'm making mistakes out here. I make mistakes. They're going to help me coach because I can relate better. I had expectations issues and I had bad plays and I got ahead of myself. I can see my players doing that and I can anticipate ahead of time, and we've done that in the past, and it's helped them. I think they'll even say that. So that's why this is important. This helps my coaching so much.