

Scheffler finds fulfillment in faith and family

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PORTRUSH, United Kingdom (BP)—Success and Scottie Scheffler have become practically synonymous lately. Yet, it's the world's top-ranked golfer's comments on what constitutes true meaning—and, more to the point, what doesn't—that keeps grabbing attention.

Scheffler, a graduate of Highland Park High School and the University of Texas, cruised to a four-stroke win in The Open Championship with a 17-under performance.

The 29-year-old joins Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player as the only golfers to win The Masters, PGA Championship and The Open before turning 30.

He played with little pressure as the world's No. 1. Perhaps because, as he told reporters on July 15, it's just another tournament.

“If I win, it's going to be awesome for about two minutes, and then we're going to get to the next week and it's going to be like: ‘Hey, you won two majors this year. How important is for you to win the FedEx Cup playoffs?’” he said on July 15 of next month's tournament in Memphis. “And just like that, we're back here again.”

‘The highs are ephemeral’

Scheffler was clear in that pre-tournament press conference as well as the one July 20 that featured the Claret Jug to his side: He gets a tremendous amount of joy and satisfaction out of the sport. He has played literally since

he was a toddler. However, it's not where he gets his fulfillment.

George Schroeder—now pastor of First Baptist Church in Fairfield, spent nearly 30 years in sports media. That included stints as senior writer at *USA Today* and nine Associated Press Editor awards covering national college sports.

In his experience, it's rare for athletes to have such moments, he said. Those admissions on the fleeting happiness with a win usually come in private conversations.

"The highs are ephemeral. And they're not nearly as important as they—and we—so often make them out to be," Schroeder said.

The overwhelming majority of the July 15 press conference addressed the course at Royal Portrush Golf Club in Northern Ireland and the upcoming tournament. The last questioner, however, asked Scheffler to comment on the longest he has celebrated something or to describe his most crushing loss.

Known for his Christian testimony, Scheffler's thoughts came with a heavy tone out of Ecclesiastes and covered the final five minutes of the press conference.

"I love putting in the work. I love being able to practice. ... I love the challenge. I love being able to play this game for a living. It's one of the greatest joys of my life," he said. "But does it fill the deepest wants and desires of my heart? Absolutely not."

'Family is my priority'

That comment brought an off-mic question: "What do you find fulfilling?"

Scheffler reaffirmed his love for playing golf and competing, but also the

love of being a father and taking care of his wife and son, of being able to provide for them.

“Family is my priority,” he said. “If golf ever started affecting my home life ... that’s going to be the last day I play out here for a living.”

A priority on faith has always been part of Scheffler’s career. Earlier in last week’s press conference he was asked about the books, particularly those on golf, he was currently reading. There’s a devotional he reads on his iPad, he said, alongside another “spiritual” book that’s “definitely not” about golf. Then there is his Bible.

On Sunday, he said again how his “greatest priorities” are faith and family.

“Golf is third. I’ve said it for a long time. Golf is not how I identify myself,” he said.

Scheffler’s message on the importance of family caught Nike’s eye, as shown in an ad that offered another definition of winning.

“It’s so refreshing that he values his family and specifically spoke of his desire to be a good father more than any and every success in golf,” Schroeder said.

“He clearly loves golf and winning. But having been to the top of the mountain, he’s recognized how unfulfilling that actually is, and how it pales in comparison to the joys of life with Christ, and as he talked about, life with his family.”

A way to bring glory to God

Schroeder went on to describe Scheffler’s self-evaluation in real time in front of reporters “a good, clean fight to have with oneself,” and one we should never back down from.

“Do I prize something else more than the treasure of Jesus? It’s like the parable Jesus told in Matthew 13. He has found a treasure in a field and he’d be willing to sell everything he’s achieved—the Claret Jug, green jacket, the No. 1 ranking—to have that treasure.”

Scheffler’s comments on enjoying the work he puts in every day also leaves something for believers to examine.

“It’s not drudgery for him, but a joy,” said Schroeder, who referenced Tim Keller’s book *Every Good Endeavor*, which connected practice, or work, to worship.

“It’s not compartmentalized away from his faith. It’s a way to bring glory to God,” he said. “I’m not talking about thanking and praising God when he wins a tournament, though he does, but more about seeing every day as a way to bring glory to God by striving for excellence in his work. We can and should do the same.”

As someone who has written about or commented on college sports most of his life, Schroeder has an eye on the high stakes leveled at athletes as young as 17 in the era of Name, Image and Likeness. The pressure has never been higher. Statements like Scheffler’s on what really matters are important for athletes, and fans, to remember.

“We so often see athletes as two-dimensional. Even those who don’t have Scheffler’s foundation of faith in Christ, or who haven’t achieved his level of success, struggle with recognition that even the highest level of achievement does not provide ultimate fulfillment,” he said. “Sadly, many know nothing beyond sports, or winning - and so they keep chasing those highs.

“As fans we need to recognize that our heroes are human. We’re so often so invested in our teams that we lose sight of that—or never see it to begin with. Win or lose, they’re quite often going through the same struggles as

we are.

“If we see them through that lens—as people—we probably won’t direct so much adulation toward them when they win big, or vitriol when they don’t meet our expectations.”