

A fan favorite, that's Boo



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PGA Tour pro Boo Weekley demonstrates his "Happy Gilmore" high-five he did at the Ryder Cup in 2008. Weekley, a two-time PGA Tour winner, was on hand for the Knoxville News Sentinel Open media day on Wednesday at Williams Creek Golf Course.

PGA pro Weekley thrives on engaging crowd

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Boo Weekley graced the grounds at Fox Den Country Club in Farragut in June 2004 still searching for his rightful place in the world of professional golf.

He arrived for the Nationwide Tour event that week accompanied by the lingering wrist injury that had been having its way with his career for more than a year.

Nothing pointed to him ever being a PGA Tour winner.

Not much foreshadowed him being a Ryder Cup hero.

"But the turnaround (in my game) was just getting comfortable out here," he said, "getting to where I felt like I belong."

Weekley belonged in front

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of a crowd Wednesday, and he comfortably worked behind the podium as the guest of honor during the Knoxville News Sentinel Open media day at Williams Creek Golf Course.

He returned to Knoxville as

a two-time winner of the PGA Tour's Verizon Heritage Classic and as a player who gave American golf fans indelible memories from the 2008 Ryder Cup — going so far as to mimic a bull ride on his driver during the event.

He put on even more of a show Wednesday for media and sponsors while showing gratitude that the Knoxville News Sentinel Open was saved and while showing support for longtime friend Ben Bates, who received a sponsor's exemption into the Aug. 23-29 event at Fox Den.

Bates, 49, holds the record for most made Nationwide Tour cuts.

"If people got out and watched him play, he can golf his ball — if he gets out of his own way,"

Weekley said with a laugh. "You don't stay out here as long as he has and not be able to compete day in and day out."

"I think it's good for the tournament to pick up someone like Ben Bates and give him an opportunity. At the same time, I feel the tournament should be loyal to him, as much time as he's spent up here."

Weekley's appearance in Knoxville, though, was a bit bittersweet. He hoped to have played in this week's British Open at St. Andrews. Of all the courses in the Open rotation, St. Andrews was the one stage he hadn't played.

A shoulder injury he suffered

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Nationwide Tour golfer Josh Broadaway poses with Dylan Pemberton as Dylan's grandfather Jack Copeland takes a photo Wednesday at the Knoxville News Sentinel Open media day at Williams Creek Golf Course.

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at last year's Players Championship has not fully healed. He's 83rd on the PGA FedEx Cup points list this season, but his world-ranking points dropped enough to keep him out of the major.

"My heart was torn when I couldn't go and didn't get in," he said. "I might not play in another one again, which'll be fine. But if I do, I'm going to play St. Andrews and then they can have it. I don't want to play no more."

Weekley isn't lamenting over not talking with the European media, which had a field day in past Opens over his Southern drawl, camouflage garb and comical replies.

He doesn't miss them but thinks they miss him.

"I know they do," he joked. "They just miss someone they can't understand, because we can't understand them when we're talking to them, neither. That's the bottom line. They just needed somebody to pick on, and I was an easy target."

Slowly, Weekley is rounding back into form,

not wanting to have surgery on his shoulder until he's done with golf for good — if it's necessary then. He does rehabilitation exercises, and he's witnessed improvement.

Still, even after having won twice, his ultimate goal remains to build up enough earnings to quit the game and spend time with his family — and, of course, tend to his love for hunting and fishing.

If that happens in the next calendar year for the 36-year-old from Milton, Fla., so be it. Another decade, that's OK, too.

"That's still my motto," he said. "That's my dream."

In the meantime, he'll continue to be a fan favorite whether at Fox Den or Firestone.

"The fans, when they come out, they want to be able to interact with you," he said. "My personality, that's just who I am."

"They say, 'Stay inside the ropes while you're playing.' Well, I like to walk outside the ropes, because I want to talk. 'Hey, you having a good day?' Or you see a little kid over there eating an ice cream, 'Hey, can I have a lick?' Parents and kids enjoy that."

Help Needed: The Knoxville News Sentinel Open still needs volunteers.

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