

U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Wednesday June 27, 2018

Fred Couples



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome to the media center at the 39th U.S. Senior Open at the Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. We're pleased to have World Golf Hall of Fame inductee Fred Couples join us. He's playing in his fifth Senior Open and has never finished outside the top-15, including a runner-up finish in 2010 and tied 4th last year.

Fred, that remarkable success at the Senior Open is something that shows. Is what happened at the Senior Open with difficult conditions, is that what brings out the best in you or is it something else?

FRED COUPLES: Well, if it was that easy I would have it brought out the best in any tournament if I just said I was playing in the Senior Open every week.

They're very, very tough courses. This one is no exception. I played here, and I think it was 1979 or 1980, and I don't remember anything about it. But I played it the last couple days, it's, it might be the hardest -- I don't know what Sahalee, and last year at Salem -- but it's a very, very hard course. And I think the guys who play well will have to do a lot of things, which is what a U.S. Open is all about or Senior Open. You have to drive it; you have to be good around the greens and the rough. And obviously you have to be a really good putter. These greens are, I think they're easier than Oakmont and Oakmonts' the hardest greens I've ever seen. I don't know what anyone else is saying, nor do I really care, but I think they're brutal and I just played -- I don't really remember a lot of them, they're hard to remember.

A lot of the holes are dogleg left, they're 440 to 470, and if you hit a great drive and you have the altitude, you're going to have a 6, 7 or 8-iron to a lot of the holes, some of them are longer. But if you don't get your second shot really in the right quadrant or area, you better be good putting from four to six feet for pars, because you're going to have a lot of them.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, open it up for questions.

Q. Everybody is talking about how hard it is to read the greens and so forth. Does it even matter really the practice rounds and so forth? I mean, when they are so hard to figure out and also what will be the frustration level when you get out there and you are facing 6-footers for par a lot of times?

FRED COUPLES: Well, my voice is going, my nose is so, this air is brutal. The golf course is hard enough and my hands are getting raw and I've played 27 holes. So there's more for me going on. I'm not an altitude -- I didn't really like the International much, although I almost won, I don't even know what it was, was it a U.S. Open or Senior PGA down the road at Colorado Country or Golf Club? But I got through that.

Back to your question, if you said, what's the 6th green like, I don't even know. What's the 12th? I don't remember any of them. They all, you go up there and they're big. And then there's a pin here maybe and one over there and then you got all these ridges to go over. And then the pro came out on the range and he said, you got to keep the flag between your ball and the shrine. I'm like, easy, you know, when they put the pin over here, and I tried it a few times and actually it's not a bad thought, but it's hard to play for 30- and 40-footers. And then it just seemed easier than it really is. It would be nice to play the first hole and hit a good drive, and you're only going to have a nine or a wedge, but when you get out there on some of these other holes, and it's a yardage thing that freaks me out a little bit. Even though I know I have 230 to a hole and it's 202 when you figure it out, I still think of 230.

And I try and -- it's hard to just hit a shot. That's why I struggle on altitude, besides the dryness is I'm more used to -- I don't want to figure out all that stuff, first of all. Uphill it's seven percent, downhill it's 11, sidehill it's six and a half. Downhill right-to-left it's -- no, it's just too much.

But I didn't blow any shots over any greens, most of my problems are coming up short. So I really have to pay attention on flighting the ball correctly. So almost every shot should be like a driving range iron where you just, you're free and you swing and not try and hit any low.

I tried to hit like little cut low 9-irons and they don't carry as far as I think they're going to. So that's my problem with the course.

Q. One other follow-up, you haven't played much golf, how are you playing?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, you know, I got ready for last week's tournament. I played in a three-day member/guest, and then I went there and I played

pretty well. This will be different. I played well today, drove it well, and didn't pay any attention, but felt like I got the course a little better, but it's a hard course. Four days -- I played Mitsubishi. I played Augusta, and I played last week, while everyone else is playing 20 times.

But that's not -- that's fine, because I really do like the course. That helps. It's a fun course to play, it's just hard to remember. All the holes look the same to me.

There are a lot of doglegs left. Kenny Perry told me that -- we shared a plane here with Jay -- and he had the biggest smile because Kenny hits it a mile and draws it. And he says, man, every hole's right-to-left. And I'm like, well, I fade the ball. So now I'm trying to figure out how to get it in the fairway cutting it. So today I just thought I'm just going to try and hit them straight, and I hit them pretty straight. But I got to do that for four days.

Q. You were just talking about this, but you haven't played consecutive weeks maybe this year. You played infrequently anyway. Always an issue with your back. This championship, it's a 72-holer, walking. And I remember last year, I think it was on Sunday you had some issues with your back at Salem. Is this an especially hard championship or a hard week for you? Throw in all the dryness and the elevation and all that.

FRED COUPLES: Well, it's not at the moment. Last week I felt really, really good. I played well. Walking is not a problem. I played at Augusta, somehow made the cut. My back is the big problem, it's not being able to walk or go up and down hills or the air.

Do I feel as good right now as I did last week? No. But I'm done playing today, and I play tomorrow. And if I have a good day tomorrow, then I don't play until the afternoon. So that's a lot of time to thaw out, relax and go from there.

But no, once I get moving, I'm all right. But it can, something can happen walking out of here or on the 4th hole tomorrow or on the 44th hole. And Augusta I was going to play no matter what. And it wasn't a whole lot of fun, back-wise, but being there was and making the cut was -- I did everything I could possibly do to par a lot of holes.

It was kind of -- I was being outdriven by a hundred yards. And I'm still not hitting it very far, but I'm hitting it straight and I need to do that starting tomorrow.

Q. Just a follow-up, and not trying to put words in your mouth, but I think I read something recently, maybe last week, that with the back issues, it's an

old story, a tired story, I'm sure.

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, it's very tiring. So get to your point, please.

Q. Okay.

FRED COUPLES: I'm not being funny I'm just -- if it's about my back.

Q. No.

FRED COUPLES: Let's go to the next subject.

Q. Okay. Well, it's not necessarily about your back, but --

FRED COUPLES: Okay.

Q. But you sort of indicated that you're getting to the point where you can sort of maybe see the end of the road.

FRED COUPLES: Oh, I see it, yeah. I have no problem, I'm 58. In the last four years I've probably played 25 tournaments. And I don't practice. I don't chip and putt. I don't bang drivers, I just show up every now and then and play when I feel like I can.

So if I continue to do this, when I'm 62 I'll have 20 more tournaments. So that's not very many. That's four or five a year. I can handle that. So this is my fourth tournament. I'm definitely going to go play St. Andrews, I hope, and then from Seattle so I'll try and play there.

So, yeah, after Mitsubishi, I didn't know where my clubs were, to get ready for Augusta, and I was in Newport and they were in the desert. And then this next time, after Augusta they stayed in my travel bag and I played a practice round and I played in a member/guest.

And I went to Stricker's tournament, and I feel like as long as I can swing and get off to a -- you know, if I shoot 72 last week, first round, would it have been bad? No. Would it have been good to try and win Steve's tournament? I wouldn't have had a chance.

So I went out and I actually bogeyed the last two holes for 69 and I was kind of disappointed with it, but you get over it quickly. And I just can't keep hurting myself and having everyone tell me they can fix me and then I go play golf and I don't last very long.

It's just part of the deal. It's not that big of a deal. If this is the last tournament I ever play, trust me, I will not have a problem with that. But if I can get in another three or four the next, you know, five months and play a few next year, then that will be great. But I'm not going to play 15 tournaments ever again.

Q. So all that being said, where would winning this

tournament be on your list of goals, how important is trying to win this tournament for you?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I don't come to them to play poorly. Could that happen from being rusty? I don't want it to, but I did well at Stricker's tournament, I mean, it's a great field, I tied for third. I did a lot of really nice things. I got at least back playing.

But, I mean, I want to win every tournament I play in. When I was mid-40s, you stop saying that because no one over 45 really wins a tournament. Davis won. I don't know, is there anyone else? I mean Ernie Els, I watch all the time, and he plays okay. I can't put words in his mouth, but you always want to see someone like that do well. Davis.

Q. Phil did it?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, Phil is remarkable. So there are guys that can do it. But there aren't -- I mean, we're not even naming two people so far.

And so for me I don't come here and feel like if I get in contention then I feel like I have a shot at winning and that's what I want to do. But I could come out tomorrow and you drive it in the rough a few holes, you make a few bogeys out of the rough, it's not like you can say, okay, now I got to -- you just can't make birdies on this type of a golf course.

Last year at Salem it was a real tricky course where, if you kind of attacked a little bit, you could walk off the green with a bogey and say, wow, that's my mistake. Here, I think you're going to make bogey and it will probably be because you've put the ball in the wrong spot on the green and 3-putted or you drove it in the rough and it's kind of hard to get to some of these greens because there's a little bit of a runway up to the green and you can't, you're going to fly it in the bank even if you can hit an iron out of the rough to the green.

So chipping and putting is key. And for me -- Thursday and Friday, that's a long way to go. You don't really ever start thinking about winning until Sunday or Saturday. So I got a long way to worry about that.

But I'm here to do well. I'm not here just to play. It is my fourth tournament. So it's not like I'm worrying about it too much. But when I get there, I don't want to just walk around like I'm another guy; I want to play my best and do well.

Q. Well, curious, if you don't touch your clubs much, how do you play as well as you do anymore?

FRED COUPLES: You know, I think a thing that really helps me is obviously I pick it up pretty fast. I do know my game. I don't have a teacher. I do have a teacher, it was at Augusta, but we no longer worry about it and talk about it. So I don't have any swing thoughts.

So if I'm going out there -- now I heard tomorrow it might be windy. So that's a whole another different ball game on this course. But it's windy for everybody.

So I just went to Steve's tournament and the pro-am, it rained most of the day, we played nine holes, which I thought, wow, that's a bummer. Normally I would want it to be rained out and not play any holes, but this time I wanted to play holes and then I went out on Friday and I -- honestly, I hit a great drive off 1 and it just kept going. So I don't really worry about it. It's not like if I start out tomorrow on the first hole and miss a fairway with a bad swing, then, you know, I know it's a bad swing, but the holes don't really -- there aren't any easy holes here. You got to hit fairways.

So my goal was to pay attention today to driving, worked on a couple things, and got the ball going a little straighter, not as far. I mean, I played with Scott Parel who hits it a mile and he's hitting shorter clubs and it looked pretty easy.

But I think over a four-day stretch, worry about my game, you got to really putt here and I putted well at Steve's, so I just -- it's not difficult for me to pick it up, but it is difficult to hit the ball where I'm looking. And once you do that, then you just kind of look and hit and swing and you keep going.

Q. Davis was in here right before you and you played a lot of golf over the years, won four World Cups with him, so on and so forth. What is it about his game and how has he kept his game at the level to where he did win when he was 51 years old and that --

FRED COUPLES: Well, I think he's had a hip problem and had surgery or a new hip and all that. So, again, when you take that away, he's a good player. He's a very, very good player. He hits it a mile. He still has a lot of length. I played with him yesterday a few holes.

I think he's a good pick this week. I really do. He hits the ball so high and so far. And he doesn't play many of our tournaments. So obviously he picks the biggest ones and he played last week because of Stricker and to go there. And I honestly don't know -- I laughed at him. I said, so some of those drives didn't work very well at in Wisconsin -- he's hitting it 400 yards, it seemed like. And he just kind of laughed.

But you could tell, he's wound up for this week. And that's -- he should be, because he's one of the probably 15 guys that can win. 12, 15 guys.

Q. Just a follow-up to what you were talking about a question earlier, but is there something that you

recognize that shows up in your game for the lack of practice or infrequent playing? I mean, where does it -- where does that show up for you?

FRED COUPLES: Well, in scrappy shots. I did hit a few mediocre irons last week. And then when I did start to play well on Sunday and I got near the lead and people ran past me, but I had a few wedges from like 70 to 90 yards that I, on Friday and Saturday I actually hit pretty well, but on Sunday the pins were a little more tucked, so you had to hit a much better shot to get it in there and stop it.

And I didn't hit a couple that were disappointing to give myself birdie putts. And then you're seeing McCarron, playing with him, he's birdieing some holes and that part. But as far as the physical part, you would either, it will happen or it's not. When it stops happening, then that's another good sign for me to really not worry about it and really stop playing. Because I have no -- it's not a slap at anyone.

It's me -- I have no interest in playing if it's mediocre, I don't even want to leave the house as it is, why would I want to go finish 50th? There's no chance of that happening. So it's all fine.

THE MODERATOR: Have you had a chance to play a practice round with John Smoltz?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: What were your impressions of his game?

FRED COUPLES: I played with him not many times but in the old days. He's pretty long, hits a lot of -- hit driver I think every hole but maybe one or two. So he's trying to attack the course, which I think is smart, because he's not a polished big-time tournament golfer, but he knows where he's at and he knows what he's doing and I think he'll do fine. He's very competitive.

But once again, you got a lot of things going on, you got how far the ball's going to go. And I think if he was in here, one of the weakest parts of his game is putting and you can't be a mediocre putter on these greens, you'll struggle. Unless you can really hit the ball and make some birdies.

And I'm sure when the pins are there we'll make some birdies, but it's a good course, it's very tough, and I think John will -- I think John will be okay, because he drives it a long way.

Q. So you don't play a lot but you come out here and you get to hang out and play and tee it up with Davis and Kenny Perry and guys that you played

with or against for the past 35 years. What's the camaraderie part like, and do you miss that?

FRED COUPLES: Do I miss that? Yeah, that's the No. 1 thing about the still playing on the Champions Tour is getting a tee time and then after you tee off four and a half hours later you have to post a score and I felt like from the time when I was 44, 45 to 50 that I was a pretty good golfer and I stayed exempt on the Regular Tour, but I really had in six years maybe 10 times of winning a tournament. It's a long drought. And when you come out here you're playing against all those guys you competed with and then you're trying to beat them in a tournament and now I'm at a spot even at 58 I feel like I can still win.

So there's a lot of things that go positive with that. If I was 51 or 52 and very, very healthy, I probably would have tried to play both tours, because I really like -- like Davis -- but I think that was really hard and I very rarely play 15 or 18 tournaments.

And if you try and do that on this TOUR, and play 10 PGA TOUR events, you're at 28 tournaments. There's no way I could ever do that. So for me it was an easy decision, but when I watch all my buddies come out here, Steve Stricker is another one, there is no reason for them not to keep playing the PGA TOUR because they're capable of winning. And that's what you want to do.

And I played the L.A. Open a lot of years in my 50s and went and I would make the cut and do all that, but it's -- four days is hard. You can shoot 67 or 68 and then you -- it's hard to do that four days on the Regular Tour. The courses are pretty difficult. Out here, whether it's three or four rounds, it's a fast paced, a lot of events you get there and it's Sunday, I like that, I like 54-hole events. But the competition is the must. I played with Tom Lehman today and Paul Broadhurst who has won some majors who I know I haven't played with, but then if you do well on -- here you play the first two rounds, but then you play by score and you get great players to play with. That's the best thing about the Champions Tour and the best thing about U.S. Senior Open is really the courses they choose. This is a great choice. I don't even know where we go next year. Someone told me. And where do we go?

THE MODERATOR: Notre Dame.

FRED COUPLES: Notre Dame.

Q. Can you get going? Can you feed off of one another?

FRED COUPLES: Sure. Yeah. Yes, you can. But here it's, you pay attention to your own game. Par is going to be a good score. I don't know what they did last time, all I know is the course is a hard course. I

keep saying that because I'm just played it for the first time and I think I have a pretty good feel for an easy course or a hard course, so I'm not really thinking -- you make a birdie, that's great, but I don't see many people going to birdie three out of five holes. The 9th hole is easy, it's a par-5, but the rest of them are brutal. 17's a par-5 but they're playing it as a par-4, so. If you par that, it's like a birdie.

Q. So this course is challenging for a U.S. Senior Open. How challenging would it be on the real TOUR or on the PGA TOUR?

FRED COUPLES: You get asked that a lot, I mean I don't even know if we're playing the back, I don't even know what tees we're playing here. I don't look. They have it set up and there's people around, there's a lot of gallery out there. They don't hit it much further than Davis. It would be a very good challenge. It would be like, it's par 70. It's, which that's hard to shoot 65s or 64s on a par 70. What I'm getting at -- well, it's 72 par, but you get par-5s. If it's par 72 you get a lot of par-5s. Here you got 2 -- and 1 is pretty easy -- that one I think is a very good par-5. So it would be a challenge for them, but I mean not, they would shoot -- I don't know what they would shoot. I'll get a better feel for tomorrow by scores. I really don't even know what we're going to shoot. Maybe I'm looking at this wrong and there will be a lot of 65s and 66s. I don't see it, but I wasn't here last time we played, I don't know if there was much rough, but the rough is, it's very lush. And I don't know if the USGA's planning on making it any firmer or worrying about that, but it's very lush. It's long. But it's Wednesday. So by Friday and Saturday it might play a little easier. And you start putting an 8-iron in your hand instead of a 7, you can make a few birdies. But it's a good course. So what would they shoot? A heck of a lot better than us. But that's fine. They're 30 years old.

THE MODERATOR: Any others questions for Fred?

Q. They're all 25 out there.

FRED COUPLES: Well 30 is old.

Q. 30 is old.

FRED COUPLES: I know.

THE MODERATOR: All right, appreciate it. Thank you.

FRED COUPLES: Thanks, guys.