

U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Tuesday June 27, 2017

Fred Couples



THE MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to welcome Fred Couples into the interview room here of the 38th U.S. Senior Open Championship. Fred is playing in his fourth U.S. Senior Open, the runner-up in 2010 at Sahalee.

Fred, already two wins this year, including last week. How do you feel about your game?

FRED COUPLES: I feel good coming off last week. I'd been home for seven weeks. After Houston, I don't know, something happened with my ribs, and it took me a while to feel where I could breathe and swing. And then, to be honest with you, I practiced a little bit before I went to Wisconsin, and I was planning on coming here and using that as a good week. Then as I kept practicing, I just felt better and better each day.

When I got to Wisconsin, I loved the course. Four days later, after a pro-am, I ended up winning, and I played very, very well.

So I'll hit some balls today, and I'll walk around the course, try to get a feel for it, and I'll play tomorrow afternoon and start Thursday.

THE MODERATOR: When you miss time, either with a rib injury or a back injury, what's the hardest thing for you to do when you come back?

FRED COUPLES: I think everyone says the same. First, finding your tempo. And we all feel like, at our age, we can still hit the ball fairly well.

But seven weeks off is a long time. But really, short game, I putted very well the first day, which kind of gave me a boost. I had a very good back nine the second round, but the front nine was not all that great.

Then on Sunday, for the first 11 holes, I really didn't miss many shots and played very, very well. I had it 6 under, and I got in the lead, and I just kind of hung on. I played well. I hit a couple mediocre shots. But I think, for most of us, it's really tempo and then your short game. If your short game's off and you don't score, you're in trouble.

THE MODERATOR: You've played in 20 U.S. Opens, and this will be your fourth one of these. What do you feel you need to be successful in a USGA

championship, in particular, compared to some of the other weekly events?

FRED COUPLES: Well, the obvious is you have to play four really good rounds of golf. I think in some other events, even in majors, you can get away with an okay round. But in the U.S. Open, you know, you can't just dust off the clubs and go out on a Friday and mis-hit the ball and shoot 71 or 72 because it's hard to make birdies.

And this is just me speaking. When I go to Augusta, I feel like I can make some birdies. Even, you know, 20 years ago, same as a British Open. But most U.S. Opens, and to be honest, I played at Sahalee. I don't even know where I played the other three U.S. Opens. Most of the time, I get to going and playing, and I struggle in the middle of the year with my back, and I've skipped at least the last couple years.

But I'm excited to be here. But you have to play really well. I've never seen the course. I don't know how easy it is or how hard it is, but I know that you have to drive it well. And from what I hear, the greens are very difficult.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up to some questions.

Q. Will you play in the British Open this year?

FRED COUPLES: The Senior British Open, not the regular, no.

Q. Fred, we've watched you play at such a high level for so many years, despite having these constant woes for God knows how many years with your back. What has been the key element or elements in allowing you to keep coming back and coming back at such a high level, as you've just done last weekend?

FRED COUPLES: Well, it actually works both ways. When I was in my 30s, I got really, really frustrated because there's a handful of events you don't want to miss, such as the PGA or a U.S. Open or the British Open or the World Series of Golf.

And then as I got a little older, I just figured, you know, it's going to happen, and I know that after time away -- one of these times, it's not going to come back. It's just

going to be bad and stay bad.

But I'm able to bounce back, and I think it's really the type of swing that I have, and it really doesn't bother me. You know, I was playing really well this year. I went to Augusta, and I had a great time, based on score. That's the only way I can look at it. And I played well there. Then I came back, and I practiced a little bit. Then I went to Houston, and I was a little bit sore, but I still played okay.

Then I flew home, and I woke up Monday, and I'd been seeing this guy, and he says, you've popped two ribs. I said, I just played the 18th hole, I felt pretty good, I flew home. And it's the way I curl -- I don't know what the hell happened, but that is just totally different. But then my whole back gets stiff and tight and things kind of bounce around.

But it's been so long since I've really worried about it. I wish I could be healthier. But at the same time, in seven weeks, I did a lot of fun stuff. I'm 57 years old. Golf doesn't totally dictate what I do. But there are times where I'll text a few friends and basically say, you know, I'm done with this. It gets very frustrating. And if I was just playing okay, it probably wouldn't bother me as much.

For a long time on the regular Tour, I was a good player. When I got in my mid-40s, I could play, but I couldn't sustain -- I couldn't go play three out of four tournaments. So then you go home and you get rusty, and then you come back, and you're playing much harder courses.

I think the guys on this Tour are extremely qualified, a lot of them to win, a lot of them to play well. But for my game, the Champions Tour courses are a little more simpler than Bay Hill or Muirfield, Jack's tournament or Colonial. You can't just be a little bit sore and go play Colonial and shoot 68 or 69.

So that's what helps me a little bit is I can play well on Champions Tour courses because I still hit the ball a long way, and I can birdie a lot of holes, and that helps me. On the regular Tour, you start playing rounds where you don't birdie any holes, you're going to finish 70th every time.

Q. Going back to '91, '92, '93, I was down, I think, for the Nestle when you won that just visiting, and you were on a roll. You were the best player in the world for a nice stretch there. And, obviously, you've had a great career. What happens from turning 50 -- I just talked to Rocco about it -- but your game, what's different maybe than it was in the early '90s to now?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I think, when I turned 50, my game got better by scores, and I was able to shoot lower scores on the Champions Tour. I think I won -- I lost to Tom Watson. I think I was 21 under par in Hawaii my first Champions Tour event, and I thought, wow. And I just kept playing, and I believe I won three in a row. Just my scores were better, and the courses were just maybe a little easier.

It's a given that we're not playing PGA Tour type golf courses. So as I got to be late 40s, I couldn't really, really compete, but I thought there were times I could, such as Davis Love won it on the regular Tour at the age of 50 or 52 maybe. I felt like I could still play well, but not where I could be 12th or 15th or 20th on the money list. But I was still exempt. I still played.

Then the Champions Tour was a huge boost, and it was a place for me to play and feel like I could really compete. And that's my goal. As long as I can keep competing, I'll play out here no matter what kind of injuries I have.

But there comes a time where you'll get to a certain spot, and I can't go play with Jay Haas and Rocco and Kenny Perry and Steve Stricker. Then it's just really, really, really a lot of work.

I know some of these words sound funny, but I've been 37 years on the PGA Tour and Champions Tour. There's going to come a time where I'm going to be done with it. And it's not quite there yet, but it's getting very close.

Q. Fred, I just wonder how many things you've gone through in terms of treatment for your back, if you tried like everything and if you've ever arrived at one thing, or do you still search and still see different people?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I've had Tom Boers for a long, long, long time. And then I had a great guy in Waco, Texas, that passed away.

And then the last year and a half, I have a guy near my house at home who's flying in right now, and he's very, very talented, knows my back, and kind of gets me to work out a little bit. First time he traveled was to Augusta, and I really enjoyed that. So he's coming in for this week.

I haven't really tried crazy things. I mean, I went to Germany, but that was just a medical procedure. I've gone three times, and I wouldn't say it's anything daring. It just really felt good when I was 50, 51. And the last time I went, probably didn't get as much out of it as I did the first two times.

But no surgeries, no crazy things. I just, I have a body

that I'm fairly limber, which helps too, but I get really tight, but I'm able to still swing because of my shoulders and maybe my hips getting through the ball.

The problem is it just bounces around from day to day, and then it becomes a real nuisance. One day it might be on the left side, and I'll try and figure it out on the range, and I'll wake up, and it will move to the right side. Then I've got to figure out how to swing through the ball versus taking it back, and it's just a lot of stuff. But I've been doing it so long that it's just part of it, trying to like figure out how you're going to feel.

Q. So acupuncture?

FRED COUPLES: I've tried acupuncture, sure. But I don't have an acupuncturist that I go home and see or any of that stuff.

Q. You mentioned when you're done. Will there still be room for golf after you stop playing or will you just get away from it totally?

FRED COUPLES: Yeah, I'll play with my buddies at home and hopefully play Augusta until I am -- I don't know how old I can play at Augusta, but I would like to play a few Champions Tour events.

I mean, Bernhard Langer is one of the hardest -- is the hardest worker out here. Scott McCarron. They're really good players, no doubt. They've been good -- Bernhard's been good forever, but they practice really hard, and they're ready to play.

There are guys on the regular Tour that are young that are ready to play. They're just not quite as good as the top 30 guys. You travel a lot. You see it. But they're still really good.

And there may come a time where they get on a little roll, and it may last two years or it may last 22 years. For me, it's lasted a long time, and I don't have -- A, I hate to travel. It really is no fun. I enjoy the tournaments. Like last week, I played with Stricker two times. It was in his hometown. We had thousands of people following us. It was a lot of fun.

But to come out and play and travel and miss stuff that I enjoy doing at home to not play well, I think that's hard for me to do. But I may end up doing it.

Q. Would you try TV or would you give a thought to that?

FRED COUPLES: No, because I'm hoping to play until I'm 60. And then people say, well, what are you going to do? Trust me, I'll find stuff to do. It's not that difficult. I will find stuff. But golf will still -- I'll still play golf, but I won't worry about it.

Q. Fred, I just wondered if you saw much of the Open.

FRED COUPLES: I did.

Q. If you thought about the scores that were shot at the golf course. This is obviously a dramatically different kind of golf course here.

FRED COUPLES: Well, to answer your questions, I've never seen Erin Hills. I'm from Seattle. So I saw what happened at Chambers Bay on a course that no one knew about where it got rock hard and played really, really tough, but the best players were around on Sunday, which says a lot about the course.

I've heard a lot of great things about Erin Hills. It just was a little soft. I think that fairways were easier to hit. Fairways were wider. But as a golf fan, I thought it was fun to see all these guys just pound drivers.

A few years ago, I went and watched at Olympic Club, and it was a totally different game. I mean, guys were doing whatever they could to get it in play and then try to get good yardages to stop them on those greens. I don't know if anyone was there, but that just comes to my mind.

This year it just turned out to be a little easier, and length doesn't scare any PGA Tour players. It may be harder for Jim Furyk to shoot great scores every day than it is for Dustin Johnson, who missed the cut. But length is not a problem.

Those 500-yard holes where they're hitting 5, 6, and 7 iron to a kind of a big green that's not real hard is not a problem. They hit a lot of greens that week, and it played easier than it probably should have. But it was fun to watch. I will say that. It was really fun to see everybody just rip driver.

Q. Fred, you haven't been able to play in this particular championship since '13.

FRED COUPLES: Where was that?

Q. Omaha.

FRED COUPLES: Omaha, okay.

Q. Wondering if you missed playing in this championship. And then, two, what motivates you this week?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I mean, it's the U.S. Open. So I certainly -- '14, '15, '16. So I know two of the years, I didn't play any last year. The year before, I was gone in the middle of the year. I don't know where it was in 2014. Maybe Oak Tree was one of those years.

You guys pick great courses for us. I have heard nothing but fun things about this. I know there was a

Senior Open here before where Bruce Fleisher won, and Bruce Fleisher at the time was probably one of the top players on the tour.

You have to play really well. This is going to be tough on the greens. What motivates you is it's a major championship, and maybe we have too many on our Tour, but the U.S. Open is one that you want to win and play well.

You want to win all of them, but I would love to win a U.S. Open, and I had a great chance my first one ever in Seattle. I struggled on one hole in 72 holes and lost to Bernhard.

But I do like U.S. Opens. In the old days, I probably played well in two of them out of 20. But it's hard. A lot of times, back then, I didn't really have the game to play four great rounds of golf. I would drive it in the rough too many times or not have the short game of some other people. But for me, I'm going to have a good time this week and hopefully play very, very well.

THE MODERATOR: You said you'll get your first look at Salem this afternoon and play tomorrow. How much time have you spent in New England or Massachusetts over the years?

FRED COUPLES: When I first got on Tour, played a few times in the -- I think it was the Boston -- I don't even know what the tournament was called.

Q. Pleasant Valley.

FRED COUPLES: Pleasant Valley, thank you, yeah. So I played there a few years on a very fun course. Been to Fenway Park once. Never seen the Bruins play or the Celtics. But it's just somewhere I've not come to very often just besides a golf tournament. Brookline, that was incredible playing there.

What I like is I grew up in Seattle. So I have a feeling this is going to be a lot like playing in Seattle. Might be a lot tougher course than most that we have, but it will look a lot of the same.

Thank you.