

# U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Saturday July 1, 2017

## Kirk Triplett



THE MODERATOR: It's my pleasure to welcome Kirk Triplett here into the Media Center. Rounds of 62, 67, and a 66 today for a 15-under-par total of 195. That is the lowest 54-hole score in U.S. Senior Open history.

Kirk, just to start off, how much fun are you having out there?

KIRK TRIPLETT: Well, it's fun when it's going good. You have to enjoy it. Kenny made that long putt on 16, and I made a comment to the crowd. You know, you got to enjoy the heat of the competition.

I was watching the "30 for 30" this morning about the Lakers and the Celtics, which people my age were thrilled with that basketball. When those guys look back on it and tell the stories about it, they may have been really in it in the heat of the moment, but when they look back on it, they absolutely love what they were a part of.

That's sort of my goal with this. I want to embrace it. I want to love having a chance tomorrow to win a USGA championship. I mean, that's what I want to do. I might not do it, but I want to love having the chance to do it.

So that's easy to say sitting here at this table. It's not so easy when you snap hook it under a tree or something. So you try and carry that attitude through.

THE MODERATOR: What did you say to the crowd on 16?

KIRK TRIPLETT: I just said that Kenny Perry is not a very nice man.

(Laughter.)

THE MODERATOR: Let's go into your round a little bit. You started off with an eagle on the 6th hole. Your short game was working, even if you weren't on the green. A chip-in on 9 and a great, great bunker shot on Hole No. 6.

KIRK TRIPLETT: Yeah. I think that was kind of where I was trying to hit the ball, with where that pin was. I felt like short or in the right-hand bunker would be better than through the green.

Kenny was in the same bunker two feet behind me, hit a beautiful bunker shot to a foot. And it just looked so easy, I just kind of tried to duplicate that.

Really, I did. I wasn't really like thinking about making it or anything. I was just trying to get the ball to end up just short of the hole and have an easy birdie. And when it goes in, you enjoy it.

THE MODERATOR: And then the 9th hole, you were short right in two.

KIRK TRIPLETT: Yeah, I misjudged that hole all week long. I think the fairway must run away from me a little bit because I've hit the right edge of that green three days in a row.

Yeah, that was a very straightforward shot. Again, that particular club is my most lofted Ping sand wedge. It's an I2 sand wedge. I've used that model of club since probably 1987. It's had a number of different groove configurations, but I know what that club does. It's a weapon.

I've always been what I consider a reasonable to very good chipper. You know, I don't think they're going to go in all the time, but I'm not that surprised when they do. In tournaments that I've had success or won over the years, once in a while, there's -- I'm not afraid to chip the ball in.

THE MODERATOR: Didn't need the putter there. But then, on 10, made a great putt, little left-to-righter.

KIRK TRIPLETT: Yeah, I said earlier to someone that I'm seeing the amount of break better than I think a lot of the guys are. I'm seeing more break than almost every player. I think the combination of the slowness of speed and the slope of the greens, guys are really under reading a lot of their putts, both speed-wise and break-wise.

And I think that was one where I think if I told my pro-am partner to hit it on that line, he would have looked at me like I was crazy. But the minute I hit it, I knew it had a pretty good chance to just kind of go in that top edge.

THE MODERATOR: And then 14, the par 5, another

great bunker shot.

KIRK TRIPLETT: Yeah, that was a really poor 3 wood to end up in that bunker with that long bunker shot. It is one that I practice. But to hit it under those conditions, I'm not going to lie to you, I was thinking about some of the things that could happen.

But to hit that in there behind the hole and -- I wasn't thinking too much about making that putt. It was a pretty shifty putt coming down that shoulder. And then Kenny knocked his putt in, and I thought, you know, I'd better just really try and read this one because it was one where you really had to figure out the line and just tap it and trust that it would roll down that line. I probably spent more time reading that putt than any other putt.

So we were both feeling really good when we walked over to 15 tee.

THE MODERATOR: And as you both started to pull away from the rest of the field, did you have kind of a match play mentality, or were you still just trying to do your thing on the golf course?

KIRK TRIPLETT: I think that would have been really easy to fall into. I try to treat it even more like a stroke play event, you know, like when he would hit a good shot, I'd be like, "Oh, man, great putt, bro. Way to go. Way to knock it in." Instead of being like Pacquiao and the other guy standing face to face, staring at each other.

I think what we probably both wanted to accomplish today was to get some cushion on the field. When I saw that Brandt Jobe had shot 8 under, which, you know, kind of upsets me, but that's all right. I'll share.

But I was worried that all these guys at 5, 6, and 7 were going to throw up a bunch of 5s and 6s at us today. You kind of look and see what the scores are early. And if there's some really low scores like that, you feel like, well, the course is probably gettable.

And there were a couple of guys that did that. Vijay did well. Tom Lehman got off to a good start, but they both kind of fell back a little bit because it was tricky. The winds were gusty and a little bit different direction, and you had to make some changes to your strategy.

But kind of by early in the back nine, I was looking at it going, man, if we can get in there at 14, 15, and have that five-, six-shot cushion, that's what the mini goal would be for today if, ideally, you were looking for something.

THE MODERATOR: In fact, you two were the only

ones in the last seven groups to shoot under par coming in. So conditions did seem to play a little tougher.

The last question I'll have before we open it up, you're behind Kenny a little bit off the tee.

KIRK TRIPLETT: A little?

THE MODERATOR: At the same time, do you think that gives you an advantage that you're hitting in first and could potentially put pressure on him?

KIRK TRIPLETT: Being 30 yards behind somebody is never an advantage. Never. I play with my son all the time, and he hits it 30 yards past me. So I'm used to it.

THE MODERATOR: Fair enough.

KIRK TRIPLETT: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. You mentioned the Celtics and the Lakers rivalry. Which side of that were you on, or did you have a different team entirely?**

KIRK TRIPLETT: Well, I was certainly a Larry Bird fan always, yeah. I played golf with Kevin McHale actually about two or three months ago and had maybe one of the most fun times playing golf in my whole life.

**Q. You're not just saying that because you're here?**

KIRK TRIPLETT: No, no.

**Q. To get good with the fans on your side?**

KIRK TRIPLETT: You had to pick sides before he was a Celtic. You had to pick sides in that Michigan State-Indiana State game. So I picked sides long before that.

**Q. Kirk, obviously, you haven't won a Major yet. Just what would it mean for you to be able to prevail in this event?**

KIRK TRIPLETT: Well, I think outside of my first PGA Tour win, I think this would really be the most important thing that I would have accomplished in my career.

You know, I've won some tournaments. I enjoy the chance to win them. I think it's really exciting. But this is something different because I played in the USGA Public Links Championship, I played in the U.S. Amateur Championship. I played in 15-plus U.S. Opens. I've played in four or five of these. I've been around these USGA guys a lot, right? So good experiences and bad experiences with them.

**Q. So at this point in your career, do you still feel pressure tomorrow?**

KIRK TRIPLETT: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. That's why I'm still playing. If there was no pressure, I wouldn't be out here doing it. It's more fun to shoot a good round when it really means something than on Tuesday afternoon at the club.

**Q. 16 is one that got away from you, but to be able to bounce back and get up and down at 17, how big was that for you to come in with that?**

KIRK TRIPLETT: I think for both of us -- I hit a poor second shot there. I haven't figured out that hole yet. It was probably my divot my second shot was in over to the left there.

But to hit a nice little chip up there and pretty straightforward putt. But yes, after the putt before where I just kind of -- I had one of those ones where I said don't miss it left so I didn't. I missed it to the right. And to hit a really nice putt there -- I think Kenny gave me a little bit of a reprieve there too. He hit his first putt way too hard. Then we had about the same length putt, but he was a little farther away, and he put a beautiful roll on it right in the middle.

I was like, that's what you got to do. You got to find a way to make a 4. I did. I picked my line and stayed true to it and hit right on it, and it just caught the right edge and went in.

Yeah, that certainly made me feel pretty good because -- I think I said it earlier in the week. 17, 18 are going to -- they still have a role to play out here, and I think they probably already played it a little bit with some of those groups coming in today where the guys made some larger numbers or bogeys, and it kind of stopped their momentum.

**Q. Kirk, I'm not sure if you're aware of it, but you and Kenny were the only two players in the last seven groupings to play under par this afternoon. Maybe it looked not necessarily easier, but obviously there's a lot of potential pitfalls out there. How good was that 66 compared to the 62 you shot in round 1?**

KIRK TRIPLETT: Well, they were different kind of rounds. I mean, the 62, there were a lot of good scores. You were in a completely different mindset, you know, not worrying -- it was more of you were just trying to make more, right?

It becomes more calculated by Saturday, right? There's a lot of chips in front of you. You don't want to just start shoving them all in, right?

You might put in a little bit at a time. I'm going to play, you know, that pit on 11 is up there on the shelf. I'm just going to take a club that I know is not going over

the green, right, and hit a perfectly good shot and walk up to the green and go, I'm fine with 30 feet up the tier here.

So that aspect of the strategy is different from early in the tournament and because of the conditions that were on Thursday.

But I think, in my mind, I still thought the course must have been playing fairly easy because I saw that 8 under, and I saw Vijay at 5 or 6 under at one point during the round.

But, yeah, by the time we were in the middle of the back nine or early in the back nine, nobody else was doing that. There was a whole bunch of even pars and 1 overs.

I've never been a guy that looks away from the scoreboard. One quick look, and I can see what's going on. So I think I had some good fortune, made some birdies, made some good saves. Kenny hit a lot of good shots. He and I were just, I think, trying to keep pace with each other more so than the guys behind us, if that makes sense.

THE MODERATOR: Kirk Triplett, you're the 54-hole leader. Best of luck tomorrow.

KIRK TRIPLETT: Thanks guys. Hope to be here again.