

# U.S. Open Championship 2018

Saturday, June 16, 2018

## Mike Davis

## John Bodenhamer

### Press Conference

CRAIG ANNIS: Thank you, everyone, for joining. My name is Craig Annis with USGA. We're here with Mike Davis and John Bodenhamer, Managing Director of Championships and Governance. We wanted to talk about a couple of topics that all of you are very interested in after today's round.

John, I'm going to start with you. There's been lots of conversation about the ruling for Phil Mickelson on Hole No. 13. Can you talk about how that came about and the decision-making process that led to the conclusion?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Sure, Craig. This afternoon we watched video of Phil on the 13th putting green. He made a stroke at a ball that was moving.

In doing so, he incurred a penalty under Rule 14-5. We mobilized our committee, and we had a discussion. We looked at it. We discussed everything we felt that was appropriate and made that conclusion. We informed Phil. He was accepting of that and completed his round and signed the scorecard.

I will say this, that Phil did call Mike tonight, had a conversation with Mike, wanted to just have a better understanding of what our decision was. We explained. We clarified exactly what we did. He was grateful for that. I think it clarified. It clarified the rule for him, and he will receive the two-stroke penalty for the 10 on the hole, as you know, and he will play tomorrow.

CRAIG ANNIS: Mike, in terms of course setup, there's been some conversation around the difference between the course setup this morning, the conditions this morning, sorry, and the conditions this afternoon. Can you talk a little about the thinking going into it this morning and how things evolved throughout the day?

MIKE DAVIS: Listen, I think everybody, without stating the obvious, it was a tale of two different golf courses today. Even the first two days, if you look at how the golf course played the morning round, morning wave versus afternoon wave, it was significant reply different in those days as well.

You know, the team that sets it up, there's about eight



of us, part of the setup team that does the U.S. Open. I will tell you that we felt good about the setup when we left this morning when we were done with the setup.

We felt that it would work well given the forecast we had, but I think that, now that I'm sitting here, we would say that parts of this test of golf simply were too tough.

We want the U.S. Open to be tough, but we saw some examples late in the day where well executed shots were not only not being rewarded, but in some cases penalized.

And specifically, I think the one that was the most troublesome was the 15th green, that hole location. It worked fine most of the day, but it didn't work fine later in the day.

What happened is we simply got higher winds than we anticipated. The grass really began to dry out. In fact, if you looked at it at the end, it was almost wilting around there, and it just didn't have enough grass to hold the ball up.

So what happened with the speed and firmness and just that wind, these greens, in terms of the areas, shrunk.

We didn't have a situation in terms of '04, where we had to suspend play because you couldn't play the golf course, but we certainly had a condition in a few places where you'd say, you know what, it was just -- it was tougher than we wanted. So thus the reason we're here with you tonight.

CRAIG ANNIS: Thank you. Questions?

**Q. So can you tell us more about this call Phil made? What was his uncertainty? And did he offer to withdraw?**

MIKE DAVIS: Yeah, good question. Phil really did want to understand how the rule operates because he didn't want to -- frankly, as he said to me, he goes, Mike, I don't want to play in this championship if I should have been disqualified.

That's where we clarified that, Phil, you actually made a stroke at a moving ball, and so we have to apply that rule.

That's what John just took you through. That's different than if he had deliberately just stopped the ball or whacked it in another direction or something like that. So it's just, it's us applying the rules.

**Q. He did say should I withdraw?**

MIKE DAVIS: He actually, he was really wanting information to say help me understand because I've been hearing stuff in the media that maybe it's a disqualification. I said, Phil, that's simply not the case.

And I think -- well, listen, I'm not going to speak for Phil, but it seemed he was very appreciative of that and said, listen, it would be helpful if the USGA clarified that just to make sure everybody understands how that rule operates.

**Q. So he asked you to come to us and explain this?**

MIKE DAVIS: Yeah. And we would have done it anyway, but I think he wanted to make sure that there was nothing ambiguous about how this rule operated.

**Q. Sorry. Last one. But according to the 33-7 rule, you could have DQ'd him because it's an obvious display of breach of etiquette. So you talk like you couldn't have, but you could have.**

CRAIG ANNIS: John, why don't you answer that.

JOHN BODENHAMER: 33-7 is very rarely used. It's used in extreme circumstances. We operated under 14-5 because that rule covers what happened. He made a stroke at a moving ball. He made the forward intention with striking the ball. That is the definition of making a stroke.

So we operated under a rule that covers that situation. It is not an intent-based rule. It is a fact-based rule. You operate under what actually happened.

I know there's been discussion about Rule 1-2. 1-2 is there to cover situations that we don't have other rules to cover. There is an exception in 1-2 that says just that. If there is another rule that covers the situation, you must operate under that rule, and that's what 14-5 did in this instance.

**Q. Mike, I guess for the last 14 years, we've talked about the setup of this golf course when this tournament came back here. And even two or three weeks ago, when we were here for media day, you pretty much assured us that what happened today wouldn't happen. You had technology, all the other information that you needed so this would not happen. But clearly, you seem to be saying now that it did happen. How can it happen?**

MIKE DAVIS: Alex, what I would say is -- I think the way you worded that is that we don't believe that this is the same exact thing that happened in '07, where we needed to suspend play because the course wasn't playable. I mean, we'll start with that premise.

But in this case, I really do think that we used the data we had. We knew the percentage slope on that location. We had gotten the forecast. We knew the moisture content in that green. And, Alex, if that wasn't the case, that hole location worked for most of the day.

So it really was -- it just, it got windier, and it dried down more than the superintendent here thought, our agronomist thought, and our whole setup team thought.

**Q. Mike, are there any regrets about putting the course this close to the edge? And can you really be surprised by the wind on Long Island in June?**

MIKE DAVIS: Surprised by the wind in Long Island, I think no. Point made on that. We got, essentially, the wind from the direction -- that was the prevailing wind today, but it was simply at a rate that was a good bit more than what we had anticipated and our meteorologist had thought.

**Q. Are there regrets about the placement of the pins?**

MIKE DAVIS: Are there regrets? As we sit here, and that's really what I was trying to say, the greens themselves, if you watch shots, the balls could be held. It wasn't as if the greens got too firm. We weren't seeing balls land -- the 14th green would be the one where that green just kind of falls away from you.

But if you watch, even at the end, balls were hitting and holding. This just simply got to be the speed issue with the wind.

**Q. Two-part question. Part 1 is, okay, what happens tomorrow? What remedial measures are you going to take?**

**And Part 2 is taking this back to macro and globally, doesn't this underscore that, perhaps with all the rule changes that are coming into effect next year, that having intent as part of a deciding factor might not be the best idea because it could lead people to thinking that maybe there's a star system?**

CRAIG ANNIS: Let's take that two parts.

MIKE DAVIS: On the first one, yes, the message was loud and clear to the grounds staff and to our team that handles the agronomy part of it is that let's slow the

course down. We must slow the course down tonight, and we will.

So that probably means more water applied and just making sure the greens are -- because we really do believe we're going to have a great Father's Day Sunday final.

I'm going to defer to John on the second question.

JOHN BODENHAMER: I didn't quite hear all of the second part of that.

CRAIG ANNIS: I think it's a question around intent.

**Q. In the new rule changes that are coming into effect; for example, if you accidentally kick a ball in the rough and it moves, I didn't mean to do that, it's no penalty.**

**Now, one of the beefs that I had and other people had with it, maybe they did, maybe they didn't, there's really no way to know. If you take intent out and make it a strict liability penalty -- if you double hit a ball, it's this. If you step on a ball, it's that. Doesn't that lead to more fairness, and doesn't it eliminate the possibility that one group of people might say there was no intent, one group might say there was, and it might possibly end up with the star system situation, where maybe the bigger names get a little bit more of a pass?**

JOHN BODENHAMER: Well, I would say intent, you'd have to -- it would depend on the rule. There are just some situations, we just operate under the facts.

MIKE DAVIS: And there's a lot of situations under the rules of golf where you have to dig a little bit more. You have to be a bit of an investigator. You have to say, okay, you caused the ball to move. Was it purposeful? Was it accidental?

The point being is that I think there's plenty of times where we do need to find out what was the player thinking? In some cases, what was the player intending?

**Q. But he did it purposefully.**

MIKE DAVIS: He purposely made a stroke at the golf ball. Yes, we agree with that. He purposely made a stroke at the golf ball, and we applied the rule.

JOHN BODENHAMER: And it's not like he was not penalized. He got a two-stroke penalty for doing so. I'll just say it that way. Does the penalty fit the crime? I'll let others decide that.

**Q. Mike, are you just personally bothered, as**

**someone running this championship, that a player has admitted now to really violating the spirit of a rule to gain a scoring advantage? He did admit that. And that that might set a precedent for other players who can now hit moving balls on a green and not fear disqualification and perhaps gain a scoring advantage in their case?**

MIKE DAVIS: Well, Ian, appreciate the question. I think that, when we apply the rules, we just have to do what the rules say. In this case, not that I'm part of -- I'm a little rusty on the rules anymore, but I can tell you that, in this case, the facts were that he deliberately -- he intended to make a stroke at that. He intended to hit it.

So that is different than if he had just picked the ball up or whacked it somewhere else. In this case, in fact, he almost made the putt. So he got nailed two strokes for playing the moving ball.

I think that, if you go back on the principles of the rules, sometimes there's a penalty of one stroke, sometimes there's a penalty -- and this is in stroke play. Sometimes two strokes, and sometimes -- rarely, but sometimes a disqualification penalty. And the rules try to, as best as they can, match the incident to the crime with the penalty, so to speak.

So in most case, when you play a moving ball, that's a fairly severe penalty. You know, if Phil really wanted to, if that ball was going to roll off the green and roll to a place it would have gone really bad, he could have declared it unplayable and gone right back up and placed the ball with a one-stroke penalty and played again.

So the point is he got nailed two strokes. He could have made it -- I'm not going to, you know, think about what he would have made, but he could have declared it unplayable, and he would have made less than what he scored.

**Q. I hate to belabor it, but he did specifically say that he hit it toward the hole because he didn't want to chase it down the hill again and start over from there because he could still be playing from there.**

**So he basically said -- and he actually said he was consciously using the rules to his advantage. I mean, is that problematic?**

JOHN BODENHAMER: As I said, 14-5, that would get to intent, and 14-5 operates under the facts that it's not an intent-based rule. It's not something -- he made a stroke. He made a stroke at a moving ball. There are many situations that could occur, whether it be a player make a stroke at a moving ball, and he did it in that instance, and it's just a fact-based decision under that

rule.

Intent does not come into it. Whether that's right or wrong, that's just the way the rule is, and that's how we operate.

MIKE DAVIS: As the governing body, and we jointly write the rules with the R&A, the last thing the USGA would want to do is not apply the rules as they're written. It may not seem like it, but the reality is we apply the rules the way they're written.

**Q. One followup on the course setup. Daniel Berger, you know what he shot today, but he said that on 18 holes, he couldn't think of one gettable pin position. Was that too far, too close to the edge, do you think? And not just because of the wind, but to have them all three feet or three steps or whatever from the edge of the green? Not all, but in that vicinity.**

MIKE DAVIS: I'm not going to question what Daniel Berger -- he certainly has a right to his opinion. If that were the case, you wouldn't have seen some really good scores this morning.

Listen, it's a U.S. Open. It is supposed to be tough, and we make it tough. So you're going to see tough hole locations at a U.S. Open. So listen, there's plenty of times where we'll set a hole location where you can't go right at it, and that's purposely done that way to where a player has to think how am I going to best get at this? Where do I need to leave it to score?

So there certainly were some hole locations out there that were gettable because we saw it earlier in the day.

**Q. Everyone talks about setting the course up on the very edge. At what point do you get to when you think to yourself, instead of erring on the side of having to do things like this tonight, at what point do you get to where you go let's err on the safe side and so what if someone else shoots 6 or 7 under par because you erred on the safe side? Because it seems like year after year after year, we're having to do these things. And I'm curious your thoughts on that. Why is it not okay to err on the safe side?**

MIKE DAVIS: Appreciate the question. If you go back -- I guess I would ask the group, as a group, start thinking about each year and where did we cross the line. You can go back to 2004. You can go back before that. But I think, by and large, we've done a very good job since really 2005.

I can tell you, we're doing exactly what you said. When we were going into Thursday, knowing we were going

to have incredibly high winds, we changed a hole location at the 18, we slowed the greens down, we gave them extra water. So there are examples every day.

Now, you look at what the scores were that first day, and that was clearly a softer setup. And yet Mother Nature, who has a big seat at the table, had incredible influence on what the scores were.

Look at yesterday, Round 2, you had a softer golf course because it rained, and the golf course was actually, if you looked at it, definitely set up harder Round 2 than Round 1, yet the scores were much lower because you had a softer golf course.

I think that we base it on weather forecast, we base it on data, and today was a day where we wouldn't be here tonight talking to you if we didn't feel like late in the day we had some things get away from us, and we did.

**Q. John, with respect to 33-7, and you mentioned 14-5 not being an intent-based rule. 33-7, can it be applied to a non-intent rule?**

JOHN BODENHAMER: Can it be applied to a non-intent rule? Well, 33-7 gives discretion to the committee to use its judgment, but I can tell you 33-7 is used very rarely in extreme situations.

Look, we viewed this, our committee, unanimously, we looked at that, we considered that, and we felt we had a rule that we could operate under, and that's exactly what we did.

**Q. Did you consider 33-7?**

JOHN BODENHAMER: Yes, we talked about it.

**Q. And just from a crossing of the Ts, it can be applied to a non-intent rule? Didn't in this case, but it can?**

MIKE DAVIS: 33-7 was really put in there to give the committee some ability when you have an outright, egregious situation. It tends not to be applied when a player just reacts with some quick intent.

So, you know, for instance, you will see kind of under that rule, if somebody damages the course out of temper, typically what a committee would do is say, you do it again, and we're going to remove you from the competition, but you typically wouldn't do that the first time unless it was so egregious.

So it's there, but it's rarely -- 33-7 is rarely used. Wouldn't be appropriate in this case.

**Q. Mike, you have the situation with Phil. You have**

**some questionable pins on 13, 15, balls rolling off greens, a leaderboard that basically got flipped upside down today, and on top of it all, you get players put on the clock. Were you disappointed with the message that it may send to golf fans watching this tournament around the world?**

MIKE DAVIS: Well, I appreciate the question. I think there's certainly some fans around that will say, I didn't like what I saw today. I think there's certainly some players who are amongst those that played this afternoon that would say the same thing or even, for that matter, this morning. And we appreciate that. We accept that.

But at the same time, what I've seen over the years is that you have other fans who they enjoy seeing a real tough U.S. Open. I mean, we at the USGA, again, what I would say is we want it to be a tough test, but there were parts of this that, simply put, were too tough today, this afternoon.

Thanks very much, everyone. Have a good evening.