

U.S. Open Championship 2018

Tuesday, June 12, 2018

Tiger Woods

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, and welcome again to the 2018 U.S. Open Championship at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club. It's my pleasure to welcome this morning nine-time USGA Champion Tiger Woods. Won the 2000, 2002, 2008 U.S. Opens, as well as from '91 to '96, three consecutive Juniors and three consecutive U.S. Amateurs. Believe it or not, you're playing in your 20th U.S. Open here this week, including 1995 and 2004 here, but your first since 2015.

TIGER WOODS: Correct.

THE MODERATOR: Can you talk about coming back to the U.S. Open and what it means to be back in the field.

TIGER WOODS: Yeah. I've missed playing the U.S. Open. It's our nation's title. It's meant so much to me and my career and, obviously, the USGA, what it has done for golf.

This was, you know, the biggest event you could win growing up, win a USGA event. To have won it nine times is pretty special. So I'm looking forward to playing this week. I've really missed playing U.S. Opens, and this will be another fun test.

THE MODERATOR: We're certainly glad to have you back here at Shinnecock this week. Can you talk about what it means to be back and your impressions of the course so far this week?

TIGER WOODS: It has changed a lot. From the two times I've played it previously, it's a lot longer. The fairways seem to be about twice as wide. It's a very different -- very different test, very different look. So many of the trees are gone.

The greens aren't quite up to probably speed yet, but they're right where they want them. And as the golf course dries out, this golf course is going to be another great U.S. Open test.

THE MODERATOR: Excellent. We'll open it to questions.

Q. Tiger, by any chance, besides reps, have you done anything specifically to address your putting? And by any chance did Stricks take a look last

night?

TIGER WOODS: No, Stricks didn't take a look at it. I worked on it pretty hard this past week. Just had to hit a lot of putts, just put in the legwork, and I was able to do that.

My stroke feels good, and we're back on old bumpy poa. So hopefully hit good solid putts and see what happens.

Q. Hi, Tiger. I come from a Norwegian newspaper. In this U.S. Open, for the first time ever, there's a Norwegian young male competing, Kristoffer Reitan. In 2015, he won the Junior Orange Bowl, 24 years after you did. What kind of advice would you give to a young talent like him, being in a Major tournament for the first time, and if you happen to know anything about him, how do you rate Reitan?

TIGER WOODS: There are so many young faces out here that I don't know a lot of the players. The Orange Bowl at -- I remember it used to be at the old Biltmore down in Miami, Coral Gables. It's a great event, great tournament.

Obviously, he's got a tremendous amount of talent to have won that and get himself into this event, and, you know, it's just a matter of him just gaining experience.

There's so many young, young players out here and guys with so much talent, but, you know, in the end, it just takes a little bit more experience and a little more time to develop, and I'm sure he'll do well.

Q. Tiger, a few of the first-time participants here have already told some traffic horror stories. I was wondering if, in '95, you had any stories, and what advantages are there to staying on your yacht? What is your commute like, and is that part of the equation?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, staying on the dinghy helps.

(Laughter.)

TIGER WOODS: I was fortunate -- my dad and I were fortunate enough to have stayed with one of the members close by here in '95, so it wasn't that bad.

2004, again, I stayed not too far away from here, probably only just a few miles, but I was north as well.



So it makes the traffic so much easier.

Yeah, there are a few guys so far this week have said it's taken them from the hotel 2 1/2 to 3 hours, and, you know, there's a good chance that someone might miss their time. You get a little traffic, you get maybe a little fender bender, it's not inconceivable someone could miss their time.

Q. As somebody who is one of the very few who has completed the Grand Slam, I wonder if you could (no microphone).

TIGER WOODS: Well, I mean, Phil's won umpteen tournaments all around the world, and he's finished second in this event six times. I mean, that's -- of all the events, you would think that this would be the one that he would have, you know, the least chance to win because of the way he's driven it for most of his career.

But that short game of his is off the charts. And, you know, a U.S. Open is about wedging it. It really is. I mean, you can spray it a little bit here and there, but you've got to be able to get it up and down from 100 yards. We're all going to face it. And he's been one of the best of all time at doing that, and so he's given himself -- he's made some of the more difficult pars that you have to make to win this Championship.

It's just that he hasn't, but he's come so close. For him to be able to somehow pull it off at his age, I don't -- well, I don't think it's ever been done at that age. But also, to complete the career Grand Slam would be an unbelievable task and unbelievable accomplishment.

Q. We actually had some fun at Augusta, you know, watching you and Phil interact, and it was fun. You're both back here at the U.S. Open after neither of you being here last year. How do you feel at this point in your career, just looking back and having been so intertwined with his and identified with his? I mean, you're not done, but you guys are the older guys now. How does it feel when you look back?

TIGER WOODS: We're certainly on the back end of our careers. We've been going at it for 20-plus years. That's a long time. You know, we've been ranked 1 and 2 and have gone at it a lot of times throughout the years, and we've developed a pretty good friendship because of it.

It's just that I think that when you're able to do something against someone for two-plus decades, you're going to get to know -- you'll get to know someone pretty well, and we've done that.

Q. Tiger, talk some Xs and Os with us. You said the course is longer and it looks different. Tell us how

it's playing different, in particular, some holes. As the second part to that question, we've been seeing a lot of Coore and Crenshaw architecture here and Pinehurst and other places. Are you going to take any of their ideas in your own architectural designs? If not, what other architects might you draw from when you're designing?

TIGER WOODS: Well, Bill and Ben do a fantastic job of trying to open up a golf course, trying to make it more natural looking, and also provide a lot more shot options. We've got so many different shots that we can play any of these greens and around these greens.

When I played here in '95 and '04, you know, we had that six-inch, four to six-inch high rough right off the greens. It was a very different type of setup.

This is very different, very -- balls run off much further around these greens, and, you know, I think that's what Bill and Ben try and do in all their golf courses. They try and provide more of a natural setting and, also, give the players so many different options to choose from.

It doesn't just have to be a high towering shot. We can utilize the ground and have that be an ally.

Q. Tiger, the last couple months or so, you've had if it's not one thing it's another, one piece missing, it seems like. Is it at all getting frustrating, or is it too early in kind of the process for you to reach that stage?

TIGER WOODS: No, it's always -- I mean, golf is always frustrating. There's always something that isn't quite right, and that's where we, as players, have to make adjustments.

And, you know, you've seen the tournaments I've played in this year. There's always something. Hopefully, this is one of those weeks where I put it all together and even it out, and we'll see what happens.

Q. Tiger, two things on the putting. One is you have the other putter that you use or bring with you sometimes to practice with.

TIGER WOODS: Yes.

Q. Has there ever been, or is there ever any temptation to put that in play? And then the second thing is (no microphone) because they're different than what you faced at Memorial, does it sort of make what happened there not really relevant, or does it still?

TIGER WOODS: Well, when I'm at home, I have a couple practice putters that I have, and I've always been one that likes the heel shafted putter. I like feeling the toe move. I love feeling the release of it.

I try and -- what I've done over basically my entire career is putt with those putters at home a lot. And then I like to feel that in my fingers when I grab my other putter, the one you see me putt with for most of those years, and have that same swing.

What I did at Memorial, I just didn't feel comfortable over it. I couldn't see my lines. And those greens were quick, and I just didn't feel comfortable and didn't hit many good putts. I hit a lot of bad ones.

This is a different week, different setup, different grass. This is what I basically grew up on out there on the West Coast. Poa gets bumpy, and it requires a lot of patience. A lot of times you can hit great putts on poa, and it doesn't go in. The key is to hit putts solid and see what happens.

Q. So a lot of Japanese fans are so excited to see you in the U.S. Open. And, also, we are looking forward to you doing the Majors again. And you have huge influence not only in the United States, but also Japanese golf and younger generation players.

One of them is Hideki Matsuyama.

I know he won your Hero World Challenge at 2016. And, also, you play the Arnold Palmer in the Invitational together. What do you think of his play? And, also, do you see his potential?

TIGER WOODS: Well, Hideki is one of the best players out here. He's really long, hits it, you know, pretty straight, and he's very consistent. He doesn't do anything poorly. He's very consistent. He was on a run there for about a year and a half where he pretty much won everything. If he didn't win, he was always in the top five.

I've had a chance to play with him quite a few times. I think the first time might have been at the British Open, I believe. I've always been impressed the way he plays, the way he manages his game around the golf course. He thinks about what he's doing, and he tries to play the proper shot all the time, and that's to be commended.

Q. Tiger, you chose to drop anchor in the village that I was born and raised in. I was wondering if you'd give us a couple of thoughts about Sag Harbor.

TIGER WOODS: Sag Harbor is a cute little town. I've only been there for a few days now. I haven't really got a chance to walk about a little bit, but certainly will this week. And it's been -- so far, it's been nice to kind of get away from the tournament scene and go there to Karen, my dinghy there, and just really enjoy it.

Q. Must feel funny not to have the biggest yacht in New York, though (laughter).

TIGER WOODS: I'm not opposed to that.

Q. Tiger, two things. How did you spend this week a year ago? Did you watch the tournament? Kind of what were you doing?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I watched as much golf as I possibly could last year. J.T. and Brooksy and Jordan were all up there. They're all playing well. I got a chance to know them just by being at home or on the Ryder Cup the previous year, and, you know, I missed it.

But, also, I was very curious at what Erin Hills was going to present as a U.S. Open venue. It certainly wasn't a traditional site, just like Chambers Bay, and talking and texting with a lot of the guys that week, they were saying that the rough was super high during some of the early practice rounds and they cut it back and gave them more room and more chance to basically drive it.

And it was playing soft, and the guys were -- you look at most of the guys on top of that board, and they're all longer hitters. And what Brooksy did is pretty amazing, and what J.T. did on the final round was pretty amazing as well.

Q. Secondly, as well as you played this year, even though the expectations were tempered, is there part of you that's surprised you haven't won yet?

TIGER WOODS: That's a -- probably. There's two ways of looking at that. I've given myself chances to win, which I didn't know if I was ever going to do again, and, also, then again, not happy with the fact that I didn't win because I loved how it felt being there.

I had a chance at Valspar. I made a nice bomb there at 17. Bay Hill, I was rolling with a few holes to go. And so, yeah, I've had my opportunities. Also, I'm very thankful to have had those opportunities. I didn't know if I was going to have them again.

Q. Hi, Tiger. The first U.S. Open here at Shinnecock saw John Shippen finish in the top ten. How much do you know and appreciate the history here at this course?

TIGER WOODS: Not much. The only thing I truly recall is basically from '86, you know, watching Raymond play well. I remember Greg had the Saturday Slam that year, led all four Majors on Saturday, and I just remember watching those guys play this golf course, and I thought it was just so cool that -- the shots they were hitting. I remember Raymond giving -- whenever he shot the ball down

when he holed it out of the bunker there at 17.

Being able to play here in '95 and get a chance to play some of the practice rounds with some of the best players in the world, and, of course, I got hurt that year. But anything previous to that, I really don't have a whole lot of understanding of it. Sorry.

Q. Tiger, if this question is too personal, I apologize and totally understand. But for the millions of people who care about you, watching that police tape from Memorial Day from last year was a frightening thing, I'm sure for your family and yourself as well. If you're comfortable at all talking about it, how has your life changed since then?

TIGER WOODS: It's gotten better.

Q. As someone who won a U.S. Open and a playoff, what do you think about the USGA's decision to go to the two-hole Sunday?

TIGER WOODS: I understand it because everyone wants to see a result on Sunday. It's pretty interesting. We've got a sudden death, we've got a two-hole, three-hole and four-hole playoffs. It's all about just ending it on Sunday night.

I'm actually very glad that I didn't have to play any more holes in '08. I really couldn't go much further on that Sunday. But I -- it's just interesting because most of, you know, my history, and as well as previous to me, they're all the guys who play in the 18-hole playoff, either after the super Saturday or on a Monday. And so that's going to be different, if it ever happens.

First of all, we've got to see if it happens or not. But I totally understand having a result on Sunday.

Q. Jack Nicklaus recently said that he felt that winning again for you was just a matter of getting used to being in contention again. Do you agree with that, and is it compounded by a Major?

TIGER WOODS: I think that I was very excited to be back in the mix on that Sunday at Valspar. I was right there with a chance. Honestly, I felt very calm. I've been there so many times throughout my career that it was -- it felt very familiar.

But I would like to get myself there more times. Therein lies the trick, trying to get myself there. It's 3, 3-1/2 days of really playing well to give myself a chance. And so far, this year, I've only given myself a few chances, the handful of tournaments I've played.

Q. (No microphone)?

TIGER WOODS: In a Major, obviously, the mistakes are magnified in a Major Championship, as they should

be, and this is our toughest test. So I'm looking forward to having the opportunity and having the challenge. Hopefully, I can play well enough to put myself there. Whether there will be any extra pressure, I think that's just natural there would be. I mean, it's a Major Championship. There's only four of these a year.

That would be a nice problem to have, and so hopefully I can do that.

Q. Tiger, given all the things that have happened to you over the past decade, (no microphone) hasn't happened?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I would think that I have been there on a number of occasions to win a Major Championship since the '08 U.S. Open, and I haven't done it. And no, I don't like that feeling. I've certainly had a nice run where I've won a few. Unfortunately, over the last ten years, I haven't. But for the first few years of my career, I did well.

Q. Tiger, just touching on this time last year, when you watched the U.S. Open at Erin Hills, can you talk about just what a dark time that was for you? And did you, at that point, honestly think that 12 months later you'd be sitting where you are right now?

TIGER WOODS: No, no, no. I had no -- there's really no expectation to have the thought that I could actually be here again.

I was just given the okay to start walking again, start moving around, and this was, what, June. So I hadn't been cleared to start lifting yet. And so it was about just having my standard of life. Forget golf. Can I actually participate in my kids' lives again? That's something that I had missed for a few years, and that was the main goal of it.

And then it was a bonus to say, why don't you go hit some putts today. Really? I can putt? And then it was chip. When I was at the President's Cup, when I saw a lot of you guys there, I had no idea. I hadn't been cleared yet.

So to go from there to where I'm at now, I had no expectation of getting this far. A lot of this is pure bonus because of where I was. To be able to have this opportunity to play USGA events, to play against these guys, best players in the world, it's just a great feeling and one that I don't take for granted.

THE MODERATOR: Again, we are certainly all glad to have you back. Tiger Woods, always a pleasure. We wish you well this week.

TIGER WOODS: Thank you.

