

# U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Wednesday June 28, 2017

## Tom Watson



MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to introduce Tom Watson into the Media Center here at the 38th U.S. Senior Open. Tom playing in his 16th U.S. Senior Open, a three-time runner-up in 2002, 2003 and 2006.

Tom, one of your first U.S. Senior Opens was right here in Salem in 2001. You finished tied for 16th. What do you remember about the course and that Championship, and how does this course challenge you players out here?

TOM WATSON: Well, I remember when I first played here on the first hole, I remember the green being slower than I thought that, you know, you normally would find at a U.S. Open green. And after playing the golf course, I understood why it was slow, because there was so much contours on these greens, if they got them really fast, the balls wouldn't stay on the greens.

So, yeah, they do -- and the same thing happened here on the green the first practice round on Tuesday. I thought these greens are a little slow, and then it dawned on me. Oh, yeah, I remember why. These greens, they have a lot of contour.

Everything's pretty much right in front of you. You have some nice dogleg holes, but everything's kind of right in front of you. If you come up short on some of the greens, it will roll way back, but short's usually the place to be and not off to the back or the sides of the greens.

Of course, the way I hit the ball anymore, short is normal for me (laughter). Coming up short.

MODERATOR: You had talked before about how important it was for you to win the U.S. Open in 1982. Your dad had memorized the names in the U.S. Open trophy. You've come very close in the U.S. Senior Open three different times. How important is the U.S. Senior Open to you in your career, especially among other senior events?

TOM WATSON: Well, I've missed out. I've come close a few times out here and haven't crossed the finish line ahead of everybody. As I said early on, it's the tournament that I always wanted to win the most was our National Open and same thing in the Senior Tour,

the tournament I've always wanted to win the most. Right now, I'm kind of like Sam Snead.

MODERATOR: 2016 was your final Masters. You haven't played in a regular Major this year. How did it feel this spring when the Masters and the U.S. Open came around? What were you doing, and how did it feel?

TOM WATSON: Well, I was at the Masters. I was at the past champions dinner, which is always a delight to attend and see the -- and see and speak with all the past champions who always show up. It's a pleasure to do that.

Of course, now I'm one of the older ones. Of course, this year was -- there was a pall on the dinner because of Arnie's death. Arnie was the great icon of golf. I always said he was my hero. Jack was the villain when I grew up.

Arnie, when he passed away, I said there's never been a greater friend to the game of golf than Arnold Palmer, and I believe in that.

That dinner was not -- there was a little bit of a pall on it until we started telling Arnie stories, and then it was fun. Everybody got up. Doug Ford, who was the oldest man there, he told stories, and Bob Goalby and Gary Player and Jack Nicklaus, and I had a chance to speak. I'm in that echelon now, the old guys up there.

But as far as not playing in the tournament, it's not my tournament anymore. It's not a tournament that I can fairly compete in, and I don't belong there. So it's nice to be around them and watch the players play and watch how far they hit it. I remember those days myself.

The game is getting harder for me. I don't hit the ball as far or as solid as I used to. I don't do the things. But it's kind of somewhat by choice, because I've kind of gone off in a different direction in my life. I'm trying to -- I'm learning now to be a horseman and competing in a whole different arena, a cutting horse show arena.

So I'm kind of -- golf's -- part-time golfer. Kind of want to be in that arena right there, learning how to compete against the best in the amateur divisions in the cutting

horse show business. So that's my next challenge. I hope that some day I can fairly win a buckle, you know. When you win a buckle, that means you've been somewhere. You win a buckle.

Although I did win a check. I won a check in Carthage, Missouri, earlier this winter. Actually, I didn't know I won a check. I was in a class of six people in the 2,000 limited rider, and I go in to pay my debt. You know, you go and pay your entry fees, and I paid my debt, my \$400 for the two events I was in, and I see her writing a check out.

And I said, what's that? She said, you won a check. I said, I did? I won \$120. I look at that check -- man, I'm more proud of this check than winning the -- I remember winning the World Series of Golf with a \$50,000 check in my hand. I'm more proud of that \$120 check than I was the \$50,000 check. That was pretty cool.

Anyway, my life is kind of going off in a different direction. My wife does this. She shows in the cutting horse show circuit to a degree. She shows quite a bit, and it's something that I'm going to be -- I'm going to continue to do, and I hope I can get better at. I hope my handicap drops from a 25 to an 18 to a 9, maybe someday I get close to a scratch, but I may be too old for that.

MODERATOR: You mentioned Arnold, but the golf world lost another great ambassador in the past week, your close friend, Sandy Tatum. Describe your relationship with him and what his contributions to the game were over the course of his distinguished life.

TOM WATSON: Well, for those who don't know Sandy Tatum, Sandy Tatum was the USGA President in the late '70s. He was also -- his record, his golf record, he won the NCAA Individual Championship back in 1942. He went to Stanford. That's where I met him. I met him in the Stanford freshman -- the Stanford alumni freshman tee matches, where they just waxed us. They had guys like John Brodie, the football player, who could really play. Some really, really good players. We weren't very good, and they killed us.

That's the first time I met Sandy, and we developed a wonderful relationship over the years that -- he always played in the Crosby/AT&T down at Pebble Beach. We were partners many, many times.

Sandy never parred his stroke hole. In all the years that we played, he had a 1 handicap, and he never parred a stroke hole. So we didn't do too well. We didn't get there and win it, but we did make the cut a couple times, which was good.

But Sandy's legacy is more than just playing golf with Tom Watson. Sandy's legacy is his -- the people he has affected in the game, like me, like almost everybody he's ever been around in the game of golf. Sandy affected them in a very positive manner. The positive manner came from his absolute desire to be the best player he possibly could be any time he was on the golf course. He learned that from Hogan.

The second thing is the passion and the respect that he had for the game and what it could give people from all walks of life, what it could give people as a foundation for their life.

Later in years, he was instrumental in the formation of The First Tee program and the Youth on Course program in San Francisco. And he gave an elegant speech about how it can affect you, as a person, and from any walk of life, it can affect you as a person and make it easy for you to make better choices in life, essentially.

And he just had this love for the game and understanding of the game and what it brought to people, you know, the potential that golf could bring to people, and that's what I loved about being around him. We share a lot of the same things about the way golf affects people, affects you.

I played golf with him. He took me in -- we were playing in the Crosby or the AT&T, and he said, Watson, we have to go over and play some of those links golf courses in Scotland we've never played before, that you've never played before. He had played all of them. He'd gone to Oxford, and over the years he was at Oxford, he made sojourns up and played all the little links courses in both Ireland and in Scotland and Northern Ireland, Wales. He had played them all.

And he said, there's some beauties out there. That's when he turned me on to Ballyunion, and I just fell in love with Ballyunion. We went to Royal Dornoch. I'm taking my son and my brother to the Royal Dornoch prior to The Open Championship this year, have both of them play a course I truly love, but that love stemmed from Sandy.

And remember that one story from Sandy there was we had played at Ballyunion. We had gone over and played Troon and Prestwick, old Prestwick, and the last bit of play was at Dornoch. So we go up there, get in the late afternoon and overnighted, and in the morning, we teed off at 10:00 in the morning, most beautiful day, very little wind, sun shining.

We played a round of golf and got in a reasonable time, went in. Donald Grant was the historian for Royal Dornoch, and he had a reception for us, and we went

in and we spoke and had a beer or two.

During that hour, we left the golf course, it started to get cloudy. And we looked outside, and it started raining. Then the rain started going sideways. About an hour into the reception, our glances both hit each other simultaneously. We looked at each other like that, and we said, are you thinking what I'm thinking? And he said, absolutely. I'll organize the caddies. I'll be out there in five minutes.

So we went back, got our golf clubs, and just the two of us and our two caddies played in a driving rainstorm for three hours. That's how long it took us to play 18. I remember on the 16th hole, I turned to Sandy and said, Sandy, this is as much fun as I've ever been on a golf course, and you're beating me. And he did beat me that round.

But just being around Sandy, again, was -- it was special. He wasn't afraid to take a stand. He wasn't afraid to take a stand at anything when it involved the game of golf, which I enjoyed about him. I'm going to miss him.

MODERATOR: He will be missed.

Questions for Mr. Watson?

**Q. Tom, I understand you have a different caddie for this tournament. What kind of a difference does that make overall in how you play, how you approach things? Because I know there's a rapport usually between a golfer and a caddie.**

TOM WATSON: Well, I'm one that I have a caddie right now who couldn't make it this week. He has a real business to do, and the business got complicated, and he had to opt out.

I've got a good caddie here, Ron, the assistant pro here at the golf course. He knows the golf course. He can help me out.

Again, really, I'm pretty simple when it comes to trying to figure out a shot. Try to keep it simple, stupid, that KISS method. So I'm sure Ron will be able to help me out in a few instances out there that I'll need some help.

**Q. Tom, you talked about how your game has changed a little bit, obviously, over the years. When you get to the 1st tee on Thursday, you're known as a very competitive guy, always to win. When you get to that 1st tee on Thursday, is it the same Tom Watson in terms of how you look at winning the golf tournament?**

TOM WATSON: It's the same Tom Watson, but it's

somebody who kind of knows that the game is passing him by. I don't hit the ball as far as I used to or with the authority that I used to. You know you can't compete with the players out here when you're like that.

I still have visions that I can get it, that I'll be able to get it back. It's much like Sandy Tatum's unrequited love essay he did about showing up and all of a sudden your game that has been with you all these years leaves you for another person. And the sad thing about it, or the nasty thing about it, every now and then it shows up on the practice tee, and it tempts you to say, yeah, maybe I still have it.

So I hope it shows up tomorrow morning on the practice tee.

**Q. Mr. Watson, this event, a couple years back in Del Paso in Sacramento, you made a really pretty good run there, obviously, into that Sunday, into the turn on the back nine, really part of that leaderboard. This tournament, for you as a competitor, what is your game plan coming into a U.S. Senior Open, and just how aggressive can you be, based on your experience in this event?**

TOM WATSON: Exactly. That's the whole point. How aggressive can you be with every shot on the golf course? This course gives you a little bit off the tee. You can hit the ball in the fairway. You shouldn't miss too many fairways. But if you do, you're dead.

But the greens make this -- make it. You had better be on your iron game here because you can get in some bad places, you're going to three-putt, you're going to have some real difficulties making par.

The way I look at it is I have a game plan to play it, each particular hole, and I just hope I'm consistently in position to be able to play -- you know, use my game plan and I don't get in too much trouble. We'll see where the scores drop.

**Q. You mentioned the joy of the game. You've never had as much fun as you did with Sandy that day at Dornoch. Speak to the joy of the game for a minute. Is it about -- often, is it about the people you play with? Is it about finding something? What would you say brings the joy to the game?**

TOM WATSON: Well, it's both of those factors. Anybody who plays the game of golf understands that, when the light switch goes on and you find something that you know you're really playing well, boy, life is really good. Your food tastes better, you're smiling, everything is good. But it can turn on you on a dime.

Another time in my life that I don't think I've had any more fun is to watch my son play the final round at the

AT&T. We were partners, and to watch him shoot 71 at Pebble Beach on a beautiful day, that gave me more joy than any other time I think I've ever played, even winning tournaments, to see him succeed.

That's what this game's about is to -- it's always a challenge. Everything's a challenge. Sometimes it's really ugly the way you play. Sometimes it's beautiful the way you play. Been around the game long enough, you know that the consistency is just -- you're just not consistently one way or the other.

I was going through a long stretch in my career, back starting in about '85 that I had a struggle with the game, the way I hit the ball, the way I putted the ball. I won in '87, but I didn't win until '96 again. I had a long stretch in there.

But I found it in 1994. I found the secret to my golf swing. I put it in a video. I said, you know, keep your shoulders level as you go through like this, rather than drop them under. That's what I was doing. And golf became easy again. Again, really, became the easiest that it's ever been.

You look for that light switch. People look for that holy grail that you can get close to perfection as you can. Sometimes you get there. But most of the time, like Byron Nelson said when he went out to play a golf tournament, he said, I don't want to go out feeling I'm playing great. I want to have a little hesitation, a little consternation about the way I'm playing because what that does, it keeps me sharper as a scorer. I will score better doing that.

Another story about Byron, which I thought was -- he told me. Playing at Augusta. I'm just telling you stories about the game, what this game is. He said, he walked off the 18th green after shooting 72, and he hit six greens in regulation, and he's sitting there. Byron could mope, like all of us. He was shaking his head. And Eddie Lowery, the caddie who caddied for Francis Ouimet up here when he won the 1913 U.S. Open, was at the back of the green. He was a friend of Byron. And Eddie looked at Byron and said, Byron, what did you shoot? He goes, oh, I played horribly, a 72. I shot 72, but I hit six greens. The worst round of golf I think I've ever played.

Eddie almost punches him on the shoulder and said, Byron, on the contrary, that's the best round you've ever played here. He hit six greens and shot even par. From tee-to-green, it was awful, but something about it, you score. That's the name of the game. That's what made Seve so great. That's made -- the great players have been able to score when they're playing badly and not throw in the towel and give it up.

And there are all kinds of different personalities. There are some personalities on the Tour today that they throw in the towel. There are personalities that just don't give an inch. They would not give up a shot if their life depended on it. It's just different personalities. That's what the game is.

**Q. Tom, you've talked about where your career is right now. Then why is it so important to play in the U.S. Senior Open this week?**

TOM WATSON: Because it's the most important tournament out here. Again, it's still the tournament I want to win most.

**Q. Where did that -- I know you talked in the past about how it all started, but can you just talk a little bit about how, when you were growing up, the U.S. Open was the most important?**

TOM WATSON: It wasn't the U.S. Open. It was the U.S. Amateur. Actually, it was the U.S. Junior Amateur. I qualified at Indian Hills Country Club, shot 71. It was the low score, and I could have gone back and played, but my dad said no, son, it's too expensive. Can't go.

And then I qualified to play in the National Amateur, and when I got to that course, it was the toughest course I'd ever played. And the next one is the toughest course I ever played, and the next one, and the next one. Four national amateurs. I tried to qualify for the National Open, didn't get there as an amateur.

Then when I got on the Tour, I did get there. When I got to Pebble Beach in 1972 for my first National Open, it was a lot different than the Pebble Beach that I had played when I was growing up in college at Stanford. Greens were dead on Tuesday. They were this color right here, this blue. They had had 200 players play the golf course on Saturday and Sunday at Pebble Beach before the U.S. Open, 200 players.

Look what happened at the last U.S. Open at Erin Hills. How many players played that from the end of September until The Open was played this year?

MODERATOR: Not many.

TOM WATSON: Just the players themselves.

MODERATOR: That's right.

TOM WATSON: It was a different golf course, and that's what I loved about it. It was always the toughest test of golf that we played. And we'd complain, we'd bitch, you know, we'd -- you know, this is too tough. This is this and that, this and all that. But you know what? That's what I liked about it.

If you won -- my dad said, if you win the National Open, you have done something. You have really seen -- you have done something. That's when I was a kid. That just -- looked up to my dad, and he said, if you win it, the toughest tournament to win, you've accomplished something really special. So that's why.

**Q. You mentioned about personalities on Tour, and I don't know if you saw last Sunday, the end of the Travelers last Sunday, when Jordan Spieth is in a playoff, he hits his drive off a tree, it goes backward. It's about a 200-yard drive. He hits the second shot 25 yards short of where he wants it, it's in a bunker, and then he holes a 61-foot bunker shot to win. What does that say --**

TOM WATSON: That's a Watson birdie.

**Q. Yeah, there you go.**

TOM WATSON: Or a Seve birdie. You know, that's the thing. That's what I love about Jordan Spieth right there. I mean, it doesn't matter what you did off the tee. It's over and done with. Let's see what we can do from here.

Bruce Edwards, my caddie said -- when I hit it in the trees, he always said, just give us a swing. That's all we need is a swing so I can advance it somewhere out there.

And that's what you love to see in a player, that type of grit, and he has grit.

MODERATOR: 2:09 off the 1st tee on Thursday. Best of luck, Tom.

TOM WATSON: Thank you.