

US Open Championship 2016

Monday, June 13, 2016

Jordan Spieth

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome again to the 2016 U.S. Open Championship at Oakmont Country Club. It's my pleasure to introduce this afternoon our defending champion Jordan Spieth.

We were just laughing, Jordan. It's hard to imagine it's already been a year. Can you reflect for just a moment about the fact that a year has passed since you left Chambers Bay after an exciting victory with the trophy?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah. As I said, each week, it's just kind of weird how much can happen in a year. It was a fantastic rest of the season, springboarded by Chambers Bay and the Masters last year. And into this season, it's been a nice start to this season as well.

This is where it really gets ramped up. My next five events, pending scheduling changes, are all very, very -- either Majors, the Olympics, World Golf Championship. I mean, it just feels like the first half of the year is done. This is kind of how we can start to finish off the year strong into the Ryder Cup.

U.S. Open has been -- wearing the U.S. Open champion kind of flag, I guess, is the easiest way to put it has been a tremendous honor for me. I was fortunate enough to win a couple of USGA championships as a junior, and to win ultimate one, the highest honor in the USGA has been fantastic.

I reflected on it as we conquered the hardest test in golf. That takes place once a year, and it's at one of the hardest venues this year.

THE MODERATOR: You've certainly worn that banner well. Before we turn it over for questions, I would just like to ask, I know you've been here a few times to Oakmont. Can you just talk a little bit about first impressions of Oakmont?

JORDAN SPIETH: I played 27 holes maybe six weeks ago. It was a very tough golf course -- as everyone knows, it always plays that way -- then, but it has definitely changed significantly since then.

I played a full round yesterday, and I played nine holes today. It's in just immaculate condition. I thought, with the wind yesterday, I would have signed probably for somewhere around 75, 76 and shaken everyone's hand and said, I'm going to go back and have a beer

after that round.

But today, with less wind, I thought that it was more playable. Still extremely challenging, where par is a great score, but I thought, if you hit the ball where you were looking, you could have birdie opportunities on quite a few holes.

But at the same time, again, like I said, six weeks ago, I said I'd sign for even par. I don't think anyone's going to be in the red come 72 holes. So it will be a challenge, but I'm certainly looking forward to it.

Q. Hi, Jordan. I know, as you said, the course changed since the last time you were here. Does it change what you do off the tee maybe with some iron selections? And how will you play No. 17?

JORDAN SPIETH: Play No. 17?

Q. 17, the one up the hill, the par 4, the drivable one.

JORDAN SPIETH: 7 or 17?

Q. 17.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, it's much firmer. It plays shorter than six weeks ago so definitely I'm hitting less club off some of the tees.

17, I like driver right now. That right bunker, I hit from all different parts of it to all different pins and felt like if I hit the shot I'm capable of out of that bunker, then I was left with a birdie chance that would require two really solid shots from a layup and a really solid wedge just to get to that point.

So it's been downwind. Downwind, I like that play getting it up near the green. Even though the left rough is brutal, you can still hit the green from it pending an average to good lie. If the wind changes and the tees are back, I think I'll lay up, but it's all going to depend on the conditions.

Q. Jordan, just assess for us the difference in the speed of the greens from when you saw them six weeks ago to now. Obviously, they would be different. And also, compare them to, say, Augusta or other Major Championship venues you've played.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, when we played six weeks



ago, they had come off maybe four straight days of pretty heavy rain so it was softer and a bit slower than I think it normally even is for the members. So it's faster than it was then by probably a couple feet.

How do I compare them to Augusta? Pretty similar. Yeah, you have a lot of similar putts from midrange to short range where you've got to use a lot of feel, and it's very much speed based and really just have to be careful. You can't let your mind slip on these greens for one moment, or else you're going to be left with possibly a 10- to 15-footer on the next putt, if not worse. So really have to be cautious of it.

I think they putt very similar to Augusta and, at some places, are more severe.

Q. Jordan, when you look back to last year and you're thrilled and elated to have won the U.S. Open, is there any part of that celebration internally that's muted in feeling sorry for a guy who kind of had his own little incident on the 18th? And maybe how that compares to your feeling at Augusta when it was fairly clear that was yours the entire week, if that makes any sense.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, of course. I think Augusta helped me realize my feelings for not only my U.S. Open win but also the other side of things. I could say I experienced the other side of things in the 2014 Masters, but it was a bit different, obviously.

I think, at the time, I told myself, listen, this is a 72-hole event. If Dustin three-putts on the last hole, I three-putted 16. That could have been No. 8 and 12. It's just more significant because of where it happened, but everyone was three-putting. People are going to three-putt this week. It just happened at a U.S. Open, and it just happened to be on the last hole on a very, very difficult putt that he had for that first putt.

There's nothing taken away from my win last year off of that, and there's nothing taken away from Danny Willett's win at the Masters this year. The more you look at it, there's no pictures on scorecards. You just count them up at the end of 72. You can dissect everything in between because that's kind of how we dissect it because we want to learn from the good and the bad. You guys dissect it because that's the news on the round and how the tournament played out.

But ultimately, when I look back, I don't remember Dustin's putt. I remember us winning the U.S. Open.

Q. Is there any part of you that feels sorry for him? And when was the first time you ran into him after it was over?

JORDAN SPIETH: It was very soon after, as he was

actually approaching the scoring tent. He couldn't have been classier. I didn't know what to say. He was just, hey, great playing. Really happy for you. And just kind of went in to sign his card.

And I know Dustin really well. We've played a lot of golf together, and I really enjoy spending time with him and playing golf with him. I don't remember what I said to him. I think I said just thank you at that point.

I did, yeah, I certainly felt bad for him. I would have ultimately liked him to have made the second putt, and I would have liked to have beat him on Monday. But, again, 72 holes, add them up, and we ended up one stroke ahead.

Q. Jordan, you spoke about learning from the good and the bad. We always hear players talk about learning more in defeat than victory, but what did you learn from your victory last year?

JORDAN SPIETH: Winning a U.S. Open is a different experience than winning at any other venue. You learn that literally anything can happen, especially out here where the way the course is set up right now, the way the rough and the bunkers, with the amount of sand that's in the bunkers, the fact that it's very rare to be able to hit a green in regulation from a fairway bunker.

If you don't hit fairways on the last five holes, you could lose a four- or five-shot lead like that. Just not even doing anything wrong. You can hit decent shots that just barely miss the fairway. And all of a sudden, you have to do well to have ten feet for par.

It was still kind of that way at Chambers Bay, even though there was no rough. Anything could happen towards the end. I mean, I made that putt on 16, and I was so amped up that I got to 17, and just a slight lapse in concentration, just playing the wrong shot, an unnecessary shot at the time, and here we go. It's not mine to win anymore. Now I've got to play 18 well.

So as much as I speak to Major Championships being like two events in one, you have to have the patience for two rounds each round, it's no more relevant than at a U.S. Open.

Q. Hi, Jordan. Question from Japanese TV station. A young player like yourself and Hideki Matsuyama, every year you can improve so much. How much did you improve since last year when you win a championship? And how much Hideki improve since the last year? And also, do you expect him to challenge you this year at the U.S. Open?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think I'm in the process of improving what we've been working on the whole year.

It feels really good right now. My game feels great. I've had actually very similar results the last year. At least, from our point of view, that's how we're viewing it. And if we have a year that we think is similar to last year every year, we're going to be really, really pleased.

So, yes, we're always trying to improve. I think my long iron play has gotten better, which is certainly something I was looking at. And I think my putting stayed very solid this year. We've been making putts when they've counted. So, yeah, I think we're in a good position.

Hideki, I'm not sure. I very much respect his game, and he's really, really nice to me, he and his caddie. We call him Bubba Shendo. They're very, very nice. You'd have to ask him how he's improved since last year, but very impressive game.

And, yes, I think he's definitely a threat at a course like this. His game, he hits the ball very long and hits a nice, straight ball flight. So I think he's certainly someone that will challenge this golf course.

Q. Jordan, getting back a little bit to the Dustin thing, as it relates to you, you had (no microphone) made this year. Dustin hasn't come (no microphone). Can you put into words how much more difficult it might have been for you to come through Augusta had you not already accomplished that?

JORDAN SPIETH: I honestly don't think it's fair to give an answer just because I don't know, and it's hard for me to imagine. I think it would just make that next hump, just any kind of victory after that be that much harder. It was definitely difficult at Colonial. I really felt it there. That was a huge week for us, especially to win before any of the next Majors. If we can get ourselves in contention there, I can draw back on Colonial, what happened at the end there. I think it would have been that much harder.

But it's hard for me to speak to it. I felt like 2014 at the Masters was bit of a heartbreak, even though there were no expectations. I didn't know what to expect out of the Masters. It was my first one.

So I wouldn't say I went into '15 and was thinking too much about '14. By that point, I thought I belonged more and belonged in the contention in Majors. I just had more under my belt, more experiences.

Hard to speak to if 2016 Masters had happened before I'd won any Majors.

Q. You talked about dissecting, and we dissect things. How did you dissect, or have you dissected

No. 12 at Augusta?

JORDAN SPIETH: I've said it many, many times, that it was just a mis-hit. I wasn't trying to hit it at the hole. I was trying to hit it left of the hole, and I hit it a little thin off the heel, which was my miss that week. You can miss it short right on 16 of the 18 holes at the Masters, and 12 and 13 are the two that you can't. Just happened to be that one swing there that my body started a little before my hands.

From there, I probably should have gone to the drop zone, but I wanted to get a full wedge and made full contact. So two badly timed swings.

Q. From there, how do you move on?

JORDAN SPIETH: I just made two poor timed swings. It happens.

Q. I mean now?

JORDAN SPIETH: I did move on. I moved on. We went and won, and I think that was really big for us to actually win a tournament. Not just contend, but to actually close one out, and so now I can draw back on those last few holes, the pressure that I felt and the speed control and kind of the control of the ball to the most minute detail, which comes down to short game that we had at the end there.

So honestly, I think it's out of our heads now just from that one experience at Colonial.

Q. Jordan, you mentioned earlier talking about the Olympics. Could you just walk us through your thought process?

Looking forward to Rio, you touched on it earlier, the Olympics. Just walk us through your thought process. There's a lot of concerns with Zika and everything else and the infrastructure down there. Why have you made the decision to for sure go?

JORDAN SPIETH: You're putting words into my mouth, sir, but right now I am very -- I said pending scheduling changes earlier. I'm not sure where I'll play next, even after this week. I mean, you just never know.

But right now, I'm pretty confident with what we've heard from not only the PGA Tour but our personal outreach, and I think being an Olympian is just an absolute tremendous honor. Do I think being an Olympian outweighs any significant health threat? No. If I thought that the threat was significant, I certainly would not go.

But based on what's come to my knowledge at this point, it seems like it's going to be an extremely memorable experience and look forward to trying to win a gold for the United States.

Q. Jordan, on the range this morning, there seemed to be an instant where you stopped signing autographs because there was a kid getting crushed at the front. Can you tell us what was going on there? And is the instance where that happened to you regular? Are you used to seeing that?

JORDAN SPIETH: Sometimes. I'm instructed by security that if it looks like not only kids are being crushed but the potential of the gate collapsing, to just stop and say you'll do it a different time or say, hey, I'm only getting kids.

There was a little kid with sunglasses who looked kind of smooshed. He was taking it like a champ, though. He was still smiling and holding out his flag. But I got his flag and said to the guys that were smooshing him, which happened to be eBayers, sellers, professionals. So it was pretty easy for me to tell them, no, you smoosh a kid, I'm not signing for you. I'm going to go sign for the next person over here. It's nice to have an excuse not to have to sign for the sellers because we don't enjoy doing that.

But does it happen regularly? No. It's mainly at the Majors or a few events that have much bigger crowds, and there's only small areas where everyone can go for signing.

Q. Quick one. This run you've had through the Majors, what do you think it is about you and your game that's allowed you to do what you've done in the last five?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think a combination of really feeling like we get into these courses and spend more and more time dissecting where -- I mean, the time that we put in at a Major, you can't put in every single week. There's just not enough time there. You'll wear yourself out. You can't play more than a couple weeks at a time.

I think part of it is just spending that time to get to know the golf course. Part of it is spending that extra time practicing. Cameron's out there with me normally at the beginning of the week, and he's not there all the time. I think part of what we try and do is to have a game that's self-reliant that I can, if something gets off, make my own adjustments without having to have him see every shot I hit. But it's still useful to have him here just as checkpoints, and I think that brings a little extra confidence into it for me.

He's really good at not only getting me mentally prepared but dissecting the golf courses with me and Michael to feel like we have the best game plan. Other than that, a lot of it's just mental. I feel that we've

geared everything up to peak at a Major. And because I feel that way, it makes me as confident as I can be.

Is my game always -- no. The Masters this year, tee to green, I felt much worse than I did at events where I finished 25th at a Tour event, but because I just felt that we were ready and that we could do it and I could draw on past experience, especially at that event, we got into contention. I willed the putts in. I couldn't really describe it to you other than it just being kind of a mental state of being confident at the Majors.

Q. When does Cameron leave?

JORDAN SPIETH: I'm not sure. Maybe Thursday.

Q. [No microphone].

JORDAN SPIETH: No, he doesn't like to watch. He gets really nervous, I guess. He didn't watch when I won the Masters. I don't even think he watched -- he couldn't watch it. He was outside with his kids in the backyard, and his wife was coming out running and screaming or something. I think he came in to watch the last hole. So I think part of it is he doesn't want to watch, but he's going to get pretty mad if he hears that I said that.

No, again, we hit the checkpoints. There should be no reason anything should get far enough off that I can't fix it in the next few days after that since we've been working before that.

So I think, like I mentioned, the time we put in earlier, we put in so much time these first few days that, once the tournament starts, they're almost shorter days. Even though there's a lot more going on in the head, they're shorter days on the course. I'm not going to sit there and grind after the round with him. We've already done that work, and if it's off, I'll go to the range for 20 minutes, and I should be able to get it back by then.

Now, I don't think it would be a crutch if he stuck around. He came back to the Masters this year on Saturday -- Sunday maybe, because I was just, like I said, I wasn't feeling very good tee to green. And it really helped me, I thought, minus one swing.

Q. Jordan, last year at Chambers Bay, I think eight players finished under par. The last few --

JORDAN SPIETH: That won't be the case.

Q. -- I saw here, there were only eight rounds under par for the week. I wonder if you have any sense, we don't know what the weather is going to do, but based on the setup and stuff, if you'll have to get under par to win this championship.

JORDAN SPIETH: If it's like it is right now, I don't think

under par -- I think if you're under par, you certainly win. I don't think it takes under par to win. There's a lot of, it looks like, quite a few different passing storms coming through Thursday from the morning on, and it really could significantly change it. If the fairways are softer, it's going to be a lot easier to hold them, which makes a huge difference because of how much pitch is in these fairways.

A lot of these holes are similar to Olympic, where you have to work a lot of direction into the fairways just to really make them wider, to hold them. If it rains, that changes. You can work a different ball flight. You can even miss it a little, and it can even end up in the fairway, and that would probably produce more under par scores.

So it's tough to tell right now. If it played like yesterday with the 15 mile an hour wind, it's going to be significantly over par. But the rough was actually cut a little bit today in spots where it was really thicker yesterday. I don't think they're going to cut it again. So, yeah, I think I answered it, yeah. If it doesn't change, it will be over par. If it does, if it rains, you can shoot under par.

Q. Jordan, you have a lot of family on the other side of Pennsylvania, in eastern Pennsylvania. I was wondering how they might have influenced your golf career. And then what do you remember about playing around with your grandfather at Saucon Valley, which had the Women's Open, I think it was 2009?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah. I haven't spent a whole lot of time, maybe a couple trips. Maybe a few trips ever over to Lehigh Valley, where my parents are from. Still have a lot of family there. Wish I could make it over there a bit more. My dad's dad is there. My dad's parents are over there. My uncle's in Philly. I've got mom's side of my family still in that area.

But my dad's dad, my grandpa, I played with at Saucon maybe a couple times, and at that time I was 11 or 12. I was a good player, and they wouldn't let me play any of the big courses because I was just too little and they thought I'd slow down play. So I guess we ended up playing -- I couldn't tell you which one we played. I think there's four of them, right? I think that's right.

And then I went back when the U.S. Juniors were at Trump National Bedminster. I went there before, and we went back, and they let me play. I think it was the old course, and it was a lot of fun. It was very pure. It was wherever they had either the Senior or Women's Open there. So it was pretty cool. I have a lot of family making the drive over here this week.

Q. You seem to use the word "we" a lot. Can you talk about your support group, your family, your sister, your caddie? I seem to hear you use the word "we" more than most golfers out there.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I think every player believes that -- when I say "we," normally when I'm talking about the golf course, it's me and Michael. It's the combination of the decisions we made and the reads we had and kind of just how we ended up playing, whether we made the right ones or the wrong ones. Fortunately, we make the right ones 90 percent of the time, and every now and then you have a disagreement.

So I think it's very important to believe that it's on both of you out there. Obviously, I'm the one that's taking the swings and hitting the putts, but I think that the decision that goes into my visualization is a combination of the two of us. So I think most guys believe that. I think it's important, yeah.

Q. Chambers Bay was definitely a different look for a U.S. Open. This year, a different look other than the typical parkland courses, I guess. Have you been able to pick out a distinguishing characteristic in your practice rounds and how that affects your approach here?

JORDAN SPIETH: It's odd because Chambers Bay visually seemed like it would be easier to drive the ball, given there's no trees. Actually, it's the same way here. It seems like it's easier driving the ball because you don't have trees blocking your views. It's very different. Chambers Bay was more lenient off the tee, and this is not.

I think the most interesting thing I found here was looking back into '07, and I think out of the top five or ten guys in fairways hit -- or I think it was the top ten finishers in the tournament, maybe one or two of them were actually in the top ten of the guys that hit fairways, and that really shocked me. I mean, that goes against everything I've been saying, which is you've got to put the ball in the fairway off the tee here, or else it's so hard to just hit it around the green, let alone on the green.

I don't know how the course played in 2007 and how different the rough was, the bunkers. But I think fairways, hitting the fairways are going to be -- I say fairway. Fairways or first cut. The first cut is nice out here, and it will hold the ball up from going into that thick rough.

Fairways or first cut, I think, is the most important statistic for me to focus on this week. But it's interesting, looking back, it wasn't that important at the last U.S. Open, and I can't seem to fathom why. I

mean, out of the fairways I've missed in these practice rounds so far, I've maybe hit a green in regulation once when I haven't been in the first cut.

When I played it six weeks ago, there was very compact sand, and that meant that if the ball trickled into the sand, it wasn't a bad shot. Just barely went into the sand, you could hit the green, no problem. You hit a good, solid shot. They have dumped so much sand into these bunkers, and now it is so tough to get a clean strike on the ball. You could hit it very thin. Or what, ideally, you do is you err on the fat side, if you can get something like an 8 iron on the ball, and it's just hit or miss if it's going to come out fat and 60 yards short or you get it to the front of the green.

So that's changed a lot from when I played six weeks ago. But very, very different track from Chambers Bay.

Q. You may have just answered my question, but in regards to the rough, how different is it compared to when you played it six weeks ago? A lot of players have been reacting to it on social media. Have you ever seen a course with this thickness and this length of rough? How does it compare, and what does it do to your approach maybe especially around the green?

JORDAN SPIETH: I can't remember seeing rough like certain spots. I really like the graduated -- not graduated to where it's like this, but you have the first cut, and then you have the next cut, which if it's not that bad of a shot and it just gets through the first cut, you can get a club on that ball. It's still going to be almost impossible to hit the green in regulation, but you can get it to where you can make par. And then it goes up to the really thick stuff where you can hit a wedge, and you can turn it straight over just trying to wedge it out.

I really think that's a strong play by the USGA. I think that it's really well done. It rewards a better shot off the tee. It even rewards slight misses versus big misses.

Notably, what I remember, Marion, because it was so packed in, the wider you missed, you had a better chance of being where people were and it was matted down. This was a little spaced out to where, if you have a significant miss, you're really in trouble, and that's the way it should be.

Around the green, certain spots where you've seen the videos, it makes sense where that rough is really thick. Left of 17, it just makes it even more interesting on the drivable hole. To the right of 16, you don't want to miss it down there, and that's as thick as it gets too.

So I think the spots where it's -- the short par 3, No. 13, has some of the thickest rough around the bunker

there. But it's an 8 iron, 7 iron in your hands, and they expect us to be able to hit the green with that club.

So I think it's really tough but still fair, and I think that the rough is certainly some of the hardest I've ever been in.

Q. Jordan, this is a whole different scene than going back to Augusta as the defending champion. It's a different part of the world. You don't have that dinner to prepare. What does it feel like to come in here as a U.S. Open champion defending?

JORDAN SPIETH: I haven't felt like a defending champion. Honestly, it's felt very -- there's been no festivities, like you're saying. There's none of that. It just honestly feels like a normal week that I got here earlier for, and I'm preparing maybe harder for. I had a week off. I got my legs under me after a four-week stretch. I feel very confident about my game right now.

I wish the tournament started tomorrow. So coming in as the defending champ, that can certainly help me if I get into contention. But as far as getting moving this week and my preparation, it really feels like a normal event, which is nice.

Q. You mentioned this a couple times about Colonial. How are you different than you might have been had you not won at Colonial?

JORDAN SPIETH: I don't think a whole lot would be different, but if I were to get into contention, it could have a different feeling. I think, if you're coming off a recent win, getting back into contention is a more natural state. If you're coming off kind of a heartbreaking loss, getting back into contention can be fearful, and you've just got to push through the fear.

When I say the fear, the potential for bad memories to pop up, right? And I feel like we got through that. Although our last Major we were in contention was the Masters, I think I'll be able to draw on a lot of pretty special Major experiences if I can't bring it off the Colonial experience itself. Fortunately, when we're in contention -- you know, last year when we were in contention at Chambers Bay, Michael kept saying, listen, you've already got a Major, and these guys don't. You already have a Major, and these guys don't. They're not sure what it's like to win that first one. You do, you've got this. That was a nice feeling for him to tell me, and there is a significant difference there.

So I think I'll be able to try and continue to say that.

THE MODERATOR: Jordan, on behalf of the USGA, we thank you for being such a wonderful U.S. Open champion, wonderful ambassador for the championship and the trophy, and we look forward to

watching you defend this week.