

US Open Championship 2016

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Jeff Hall

Thomas Pagel

Press Conference

Q. The ruling on 5 on Dustin, he said if it was a tournament, he wouldn't have gotten penalized. Why did you guys penalize him?

THOMAS PAGEL: As far as why did the Tour penalize him? It's Rule 18-2 talking about a ball move. In making a determination about whether a player caused the ball to move, you look at a number of factors. Certainly, there's a recognition of Oakmont's greens. We recognize that. But a couple of the other considerations you look at are the player's actions and also the time that elapses between the player's actions and the time that the ball moves.

In Dustin's case, he did ground his putter near the ball on two occasions, and it was immediately after -- or shortly after, excuse me -- he ground his putter the second time that the ball moved.

Again, in weighing the evidence, the interpretation of this rule tells us it's not free of doubt. It's not going to be 100% clear, yes, the player caused the ball to move, but that's not the standard we're dealing with. We're dealing with the standard what is the cause of the ball's movement? If it's more likely than not what was the cause of the ball movement? If you think in percentage terms, 51 percent chance or greater that the player caused the ball to move. Again, as a committee, when we removed the tape, we looked at it and said, given the timing of his actions and the ball moved, it was more likely than not that Dustin was the cause of the movement.

Again, there's doubt there, and we understand not everyone is going to agree with that. But the standard is not 100 percent. It's more likely than not.

Q. Obviously, you used the preponderance of evidence standard. The question is in the same situation with Lowry, he said that he made it move. Did you review that? If not, why not?

THOMAS PAGEL: So the Lowry situation was a little bit different because the conversation Lowry had with the referee, he didn't question whether or not he caused the ball to move. He went to the referee, and this is -- Alex, I should say that I'm hearing this secondhand. I talked to the referee, and as I understand the facts, he turned to the referee and said, I caused the ball to



move. The question was where do I play it then? Do I play it from its new location, or do I have to play it back?

Q. The question is this: In that similar scenario, maybe he was wrong, just like you're suggesting Dustin Johnson was wrong, but you don't review those situations. You just review this situation.

JEFF HALL: Again, the situation, we have evidence, and the one thing that everybody needs to understand is there were 66 other players that made the cut. 155 other players in the championship. When we have evidence and we review it, we need to act on that evidence, and that's what we did as a committee.

To speak to your first question directly, have I seen the Shane Lowry? Did I look at the Shane Lowry? The answer is yes. It was a similar situation of rounding club, ball moves. We had several situations, one this morning with Mr. Wattel, I believe is his name, where there was a significant lapse of time. We're talking maybe six seconds from the time he grounded his club and the ball moved.

Again, every situation is going to be a little bit different. You have to look at the evidence of every situation. That's what we did in this case. Again, as a committee, we made the determination that it was more likely than not that he was the cause of the ball's movement and it was a one-stroke penalty.

Q. I guess the question is why didn't you assess the penalty at that moment? Is it that you weren't at 51 percent until you spoke with Dustin after the round? And he doesn't think he did it, so I'm curious what changed -- what pushed you over the threshold of the 51 percent?

JEFF HALL: The sequence of events -- I was out as a rover shadowing the last few groups and received a message from one of our staff who saw the video, came in to review that video, certainly was concerned. Thomas being our rules -- lead rules expert, I wanted him to look at it as well. By the time we were able to do that, Dustin had already played through the front nine and was headed down the 10 hole and was coming back down 11.

We agreed that we were concerned about what we saw and felt obligated to have a conversation with



Dustin about it, and the 12th tee presented the best opportunity to do that. We had that conversation with Dustin. We told him that what we saw was a concern, but we also asked him a couple of questions. We effectively -- was there something else that could have caused the ball to move?

As we had that discussion, it became very apparent that we weren't going to get to a resolution there. Furthermore, there was some confusion about -- he was quite adamant that he had not grounded the club, and that was certainly the case. He had not -- again, he was certain he had not addressed the ball. And that was the case, but he did ground the putter proximate to the ball.

As Thomas explained, the grounding of the putter near the ball and the ball's immediate movement after the club had been grounded, we put Dustin on notice. We just wanted him to realize that we were concerned, and we wanted to make him aware of that so that he could strategically make decisions that he needed to make for the balance of the round, and that based on the conversation as it evolved, we said, we'll show it to you when you come in. We'd like you to have the benefit of what we have, of what we've seen, so that hopefully he could get more comfortable with the situation.

Q. But if you determined at that point that he had grounded his club and you determined that he incurred a penalty, why not assess it then?

JEFF HALL: There was a further conversation to have. Again, we asked him a question, was there something else that could have caused the ball to move. It was clear we needed a further conversation, and the 12th tee did not seem to be the right place for that.

Q. You mentioned essentially protecting the field or the committee's role in doing so. Does it give you pause that so many players weighed in from Jack Nicklaus to Tiger Woods, on down the line, that they didn't see this as something that was essentially protecting the field, that they didn't agree with the decision?

THOMAS PAGEL: Yeah, Jeff, I think with this rule -- and keep in mind that there was a rule change in 2016 with relation to 18-2. I think there's some misinformation out there, and I think that a lot of individuals are operating under the belief that a player's not penalized unless there's an absolute certainty that the player was the cause of the movement, and that's simply not the case.

Again, there's going to be doubt in these situations, but on balance, based on the evidence that we saw, we are comfortable that a one-stroke penalty was to be incurred.

Q. Why, though, when you knew that Dustin Johnson had indicated that he felt he hadn't caused the ball to move, you clearly felt that he had, going back to that point about why couldn't the penalty have been imposed then, within the context of this being an event that is being beamed all over the world and anyone that was watching it and the participants had no idea what exactly the score was, what exactly the situation was, is that not -- does that give you cause for concern and give you -- make you prompt to think, well, maybe we should change protocols going forward?

JEFF HALL: Like every situation has its own unique circumstances, and we feel pretty comfortable with the process that we had to resolve this one. We did notify the other players before Dustin finished the 12th hole. Thomas was the one who handled it. He put out an all call to the other referees, and we verbally advised each player what could happen so they had the same benefit as Dustin did, so they'd know there could be an issue. So we did communicate appropriately with the other players.

Again, when we had the conversation with Dustin on the 12th tee, it was clear we needed additional conversation. Furthermore, we wanted him to see -- he didn't have the benefit of looking at the video. We had already seen the video. And we had an opportunity and an obligation, we felt, to explain the rule, and doing that in the middle of the 12th tee just didn't seem like an appropriate time.

Q. To that point, is there a fundamental problem that video review causes, when it can potentially affect the integrity of a competition, by making you wait until it's over? Players don't necessarily know if they're a shot behind going into 18 or not. Is there a fundamental issue that has to be addressed about how video review is applied?

THOMAS PAGEL: I think video review is essentially in applying the rules. It's no different than any other form of evidence you might get, whether it's a fellow competitor or a spectator. Again, we need to act on the evidence as it's presented to us.

Again, that's what we did here. We had evidence. We saw it. We had to act on it. And by acting on it, the process was put in motion to where we knew we had to have a discussion with Dustin, and as Jeff mentioned, when it became apparent there was not going to be a resolution to that, we didn't feel it was appropriate to draw the conversation out on the 12th tee.

So we informed him that there was a possibility of a penalty, and he was accepting of that, and we just said, hey, we'll talk when you get in. And he was okay with

that, and he played on.

Q. You guys both talked about the benefits of sort of waiting and talking to Dustin and gathering more evidence as opposed to making a quick ruling right off the bat. Do those benefits outweigh the damage done to the public perception of the USGA? By that I just mean, players, all the world's golf stars, everything on Twitter, fans expressing their outrage, et cetera?

JEFF HALL: With the rules of golf, it's about getting it right, and there are times when a decision has to be made, and some will agree with it, and some will not.

Q. I came a little late. Is the essential point or premise that it only has to be 51 percent in favor of a certain direction on your decision?

THOMAS PAGEL: Yeah, the decision, if you want to look it up later, 18-2/0.5 it doesn't talk in terms of percentages, but it's more likely than not. If you were to transcribe more likely than not into a percentage, it's 51 percent or greater. Again, there's a recognition that there could be some level of doubt there.

Q. It just seems like a standard in law is innocent until proven guilty. It just seems like it's a high preponderance of evidence. It seems like a higher standard than what you guys are using to the point where the championship could have been decided by the barest of margins, it seems like, for something that used to be you had to have absolute certainty. Isn't that a big leap?

THOMAS PAGEL: There was never absolute certainty under a Rule 18-2 situation. We used to have a Rule 18-2b that said, once you addressed your ball, if your ball moved, you were deemed to have caused it to move even if we knew something else that caused it to move.

So there's been this evolution, when handling these situations, in a ball that's moved. That evolution led us in 2016 to withdraw Rule 18-2b and deal with all situations and the facts as they're presented. Again, it talks about you have to gather all the facts, weigh the evidence, and make a determination.

When you're answering questions of fact, when you're weighing the evidence, those are the most challenging things you could ever do as a committee because you know there are going to be people that disagree with you. But the end of the day, we weighed the evidence, and we felt it was more likely than not, and we were comfortable with that and wanted to get it right.

Q. Is there any kind of sense of relief knowing that at least this didn't impact the outcome?

JEFF HALL: I think after the fact it is what it is. But

when we had a discussion with Dustin, we certainly didn't know what the outcome was going to be. Again, the rules of golf are the rules of golf. We can't waver about the rules of golf. We play by the rules.

Q. I don't think there's too much of a problem with the ruling, but perhaps the handling of how it was rolled out. So if I was a spectator -- I'm in the media, we're watching it and we have close-ups. We had a good understanding that Dustin was probably going to face a penalty. But if I had spent a lot of money to come here as a spectator, walking down 18, seeing the leaderboard, Dustin Johnson 5 under par, and then all of a sudden, that's changed to 4 under par, I wouldn't know why. Did you not feel that you should get the message out to the spectators as well as the players?

JEFF HALL: Certainly, with Thomas and myself, our concern was about the conduct of competition and working through that. We certainly kept -- that's the focus. We're focused right here on getting the conduct of competition right, making sure we get to the proper answer.

THOMAS PAGEL: And I would say, I would just add to that that, at all levels of play, there are plenty of situations where rulings are handled within the scoring area. It's not like it's uncommon for a penalty to be applied within the scoring area. Just happened to be at the U.S. Open today.

Q. But is it not damaging to golf, that this wouldn't happen in any other sport? If you were watching a sport, you would always know the score. You would always know who is leading and what their score is.

THOMAS PAGEL: Again, our concern today is we weighed the evidence and looked at it, is we wanted to make sure that Dustin had the benefit of a conversation, and we wanted to make sure we got it right.

Q. If I'm not at the U.S. Open and I'm playing in a sectional or a local and the same thing happened where there is no benefit of videotape and the competitor, my playing competitor, says you didn't cause it to move, I say I didn't cause it to move, under your scenario, what happens?

THOMAS PAGEL: Again, Alex, you take the scenario that's provided to you, and in that case, you would weigh the evidence. If you don't have the benefit of the video evidence, then you could reach a conclusion that the player didn't cause the ball to move. Again, in this case, we had evidence that we had to act on. If you don't act on evidence that you have, I think it could be detrimental to the game. I really do.

Q. Jeff, did the imposition -- the existence of video replay in other sports, has that placed any pressure on the USGA in instances like this?

JEFF HALL: I don't think so. As Thomas said, we've tried to use whatever information we can to get it right. We've got a situation today where we're discussing the use of video information that resulted in a penalty being imposed, but there are cases where it's helped us get to a point where there was no penalty. So I think it can cut both ways, and at the end of the day, it's about getting it right, and that's what we -- I feel pretty comfortable we got it right today.