

2015 US Open Championship

Tuesday, June 16
Press Conference



Graeme McDowell

An Interview With:
GRAEME McDOWELL

BETH MAJORS: Good afternoon and welcome to the 2015 U.S. Open at Chambers Bay here in the Pacific Northwest. We are very happy to welcome today Graeme McDowell, who was the 2010 U.S. Open champion. Graeme, this is already your 10th U.S. Open. Very much different than any of the other U.S. Open's we've had over the years. Can you talk about your impressions of Chambers Bay and your impressions upon arriving last weekend?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Not your traditional U.S. Open golf course, I guess. The first time getting here was Saturday afternoon and heard the reports, kind of saw the photographs. But I think the golf course has been a lot better than I expected. It's important, I think, this week not to fall in love with any certain negativity that players, everyone associated might sort of feel about the golf course. You've got to take it for what it is. Someone's going to lift the U.S. Open trophy this week, and having the right attitude off the bat I think is key. The golf course is incredibly fast and fiery, as pure a links golf course as I think I've ever seen on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. I really, really like the golf course. It's got a few holes which have me scratching my head, but mostly I think it's a fantastic test. And you really have to control your ball, especially with your iron play coming into the greens. There's going to be a lot of long distance putting and scrambling. So it's going to be a great test. I think it's going to look fantastic on TV. I think it's going to be a great advertisement for this side of the States. And it's been an enjoyable week so far.

BETH MAJOR: You were the first European winner of the U.S. Open in 40 years in 2010. There have been several since. Did you think that was a catapult, and what does that say moving forward?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, it's always weird when that happens, first European in 40 years, and now we've had four or five of us now. Tough to kind of put your finger on why. I think the Europeans are becoming so much more comfortable on this side of

the Atlantic, obviously with so many more playing opportunities here by the WGCs and majors, and a lot of us being PGA Tour members, as well. I think it's a comfort factor and getting familiar with the golf courses that you do face in the U.S. Open. And obviously having a purple patch, as well, having guys like Rory McIlroy and Martin Kaymer and Justin Rose, that certainly helps things a little bit, as well. A lot of fun to lead that charge, and would love to continue the roll this week.

Q. This is maybe the second, Pinehurst looked a little bit like this, now Chambers Bay, is this the style of things to come? Would you make an assessment of that in golf going forward?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Tough to tell. I mean, obviously Mike Davis and the USGA, I think they do a fantastic job when it comes to golf course setup. I think Mike is extremely intelligent and articulate and understands the modern game more than most and has done a good job, I think, setting contentious venues up very well. Pinehurst last year was a great tournament, apart from one runaway leader. I think the scoring was about what I expected, again, apart from Martin. So come to a venue like this one and at first glances people think this could really get out of control, it could be kind of crazy. But there are a lot of opportunities to bump tees forward and kind of keep guys thinking and keep you on your toes. And really it will depend on how he sets the course up. People are saying what is the winning score going to be. It really just depends. It's not going to be 10-under, I know that. It's going to be in or around level and it could be 10-over if it was to blow. So it really just depends onset up and what Mike decides to do. But like I say, he's got a history of doing it very well and keeping things fresh and using some forward tees and that's where the preparation comes in. You have to be ready and expect that a little bit, and know what to do when the tees do go forward.

Q. This is kind of a philosophical question. What's the tradeoff for being great at golf? As you've kind of figured out in your career where you want to be, what's the cost of what it does to your life?

GRAEME McDOWELL: That's a very deep question for a Tuesday (laughter). I think we're very fortunate to be playing a game like golf at a high level. Obviously the opportunities and the payoffs are kind of there for

everyone to see. It's a lot of fun, get to travel around the world and play a game that we love to make a living, make a very good living, if you play well. The tradeoffs, obviously the sacrifices you make, packing the bags and leaving young families behind like I have to at the minute. And definitely it has an impact on your personal life. You don't get to -- a 9 to 5 job, Monday through Friday, at least you get home to see your kids every night. The sacrifices are certainly the travel and obviously the dedication that it requires to be great at this game. But I think the pros certainly outweigh the cons. And I think we all feel very lucky and fortunate to certainly be here at the U.S. Open this week. There will be a lot of guys Friday night who don't feel very fortunate. And come Sunday, there'll still be guys that won't feel very fortunate. There will be at least one guy that walks away here this week feeling extremely fortunate and lucky and certainly will have enjoyed his experience at Chambers Bay.

Q. Rory was in earlier and said it feels, this place feels like an Open Championship being played in the United States, I think is how he put it. Two things: One, do you sort of agree with that? And secondly, if so, what course would you maybe equate it most to? And then just a follow-up after that.

GRAEME McDOWELL: There's no doubt that this feels more like a British Open, stroke Open Championship than it does a U.S. Open. It does. It feels like -- I haven't seen a golf course this fast and firm probably since Hoylake in '06, when it got really burned out and we had a really hot summer. It feels kind of like, I guess growing up as a kid and experiencing some of the really, really, really hot summers that we had back in Britain and Ireland, and what the golf courses turned into. They got really yellow and super fast, and the grass just had zero friction to it. The fairways, I know they're trying to get the greens Stimping around 12 and a half. It's more to the point, what are the fairways going to be Stimping, because they are faster than the greens in places. It does -- it's a lot of fun. I guess for someone like me who grew up playing links golf, I guess I feel like I'm in the sort of upper parts of the field regards guys who are familiar with this type of golf. So I feel like I have slight advantages there and being able to adapt my game, going back to my roots a little bit. This golf course is very unique in many ways. It's very hard to compare it to many of The Open Championship venues, perhaps a St. Andrews because of the undulations and the slopes and the way you can use the slopes to bring the ball back into the target areas and the greens. It's a very -- the architecture style of the golf course, I really, really like it. I like the way Robert Trent Jones, Jr. has used the side slopes and the backboards to give you the opportunity to work the ball back into the green areas.

And there are a few holes out there, like I said, that have me kind of wondering what I'm going to do. And I'm just going to have to place those holes very conservatively and try and limit the damage. But he gives you a lot of opportunities to work the ball back and to make birdies.

Q. Just a follow-up, because it does feel much more like an Open Championship, do you sort of from a mental standpoint almost have to forget this is a U.S. Open and maybe take a different mental approach it?

GRAEME McDOWELL: You approach it like a major championship. There's always that added sort of intensity level coming into a major. We're all preparing harder because the test is so much more unique and has so many more variations than a regular golf course. There's so many different ways you can play each of these holes. There's so many ways you can attack the greens with iron shots. And I think everyone is taking the preparation very seriously. Obviously, Mike Davis told us that this wouldn't be the type of golf course where we could just play it one and a half or a couple of times and expect to be able to compete here. Guys have taken it pretty seriously, and they've -- I think there's been a lot more homework done for this one than a lot of the major venues in the past. Like I say, U.S. Open, British Open, whatever, you know, it's a major championship test. It's a lot of fun. It starts off a great summer of some fantastic golf courses to play on.

Q. This grass here, fine fescue, we've heard a little bit more about it than usual, since it's the first Open to be played on it. But it may be more commonplace to you. Can you tell us a couple of courses that we know very well that have it and maybe some of the characteristics that you have to go through to understand it, to play a little differently?

GRAEME McDOWELL: I'm not really much of an agronomist when it comes to types of grasses. I look at this golf course, I don't think about what type of grass it is, I just -- obviously it's got that kind of fast fescue that we expect to see in sort of links, really pure, pure links golf courses. Knowing about the history of this piece of land and the fact it was an old mine and most of the rock structure has gone from underneath and it's left an extremely porous type sand base, I know they're watering this golf course pretty profusely. But it percolates away very fast. You can see that and feel it in the way it plays. It's so fast and firm. Some areas of the golf course, the ball gets away incredibly fast. You are going to see some pretty crazy things happening on this golf course when guys hit bad shots and flying it incorrectly into the greens, and the ball gets away really, really fast. To me there's not a lot of emphasis on distance off the tee apart from maybe a

handful of holes. The other 13, 14 holes to me are about placement, keeping it in play and giving yourself a chance to attack the holes with iron shots. So I like it from that point of view. But it's just a good old-fashioned, firm, fast links golf course. In a British and Irish hot, hot summer where the golf courses borderline got away from you, that's kind of what it feels like. It's quite the test. It's a lot of fun to play.

Q. What kind of player or what type of game is going to get most easily annoyed this week?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Most easily annoyed? I definitely think there's going to be a lot of annoyance factor going on the next few days. But the type of game, tough to say, really. Just the type of player that's not really familiar with playing a lot of links golf. I think the short game around here, there's so much imagination and creativity required in the short game. Long distance putting. The average player this week can probably have putter in his hand up to 40 times around this golf course, I think, because you're putting from long range a lot. Iron shots, if the normal proximity to the hole with an iron shot in a 18-hole PGA Tour event is 25 to 30 feet, I don't know, you probably have to ask the statisticians that one, you're going to have to add another 50, 60, 70 percent onto that proximity to hole this week. Because very hard to get your iron shots close, therefore, you're going to have a lot of long range putting, and there's going to be a lot of inherent scrambling. Even off playing well, you're going to have to really scramble well. It's an interesting one from that point of view. So what type of player is going to get frustrated this week? I think every type of player. I don't think it singles out a type of player that's going to get more frustrated than others. It requires a huge amount of patience and a lot of discipline.

Q. Kind of looking for names.

GRAEME McDOWELL: I know you were looking for names.

Q. I was curious, too, about what you thought of the putting surfaces?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, they're varied. Some of the surfaces are very good, and some of them are pretty average. I think the thing about links golf is that you're never going to see pure, pure surfaces. They're just that type of -- they're that type of grass, and it's very difficult to -- especially the surface areas that we're talking about, it's impossible to manicure those surface areas to the type of perfection we're used to week in and week out, say, on the PGA Tour. They're very puttable, they don't perhaps look that good to the naked eye, but they actually putt a lot better than they look. They're very fast and obviously very undulating. I will say there are a few areas on some of the greens that perhaps pin positions are going to have to stay away from because they're not perfect. But like I said,

the surface areas involved, I think there's a lot of good, usable surface area. And they'll putt okay.

Q. Didn't you lead or weren't you 1-up after the first day at --

GRAEME McDOWELL: I led briefly. I think I was tied after the first day in '06 and put the reverse gear, engaged it pretty quickly after that.

Q. The other question was when was the last time you played on greens that were delineated by white spots?

GRAEME McDOWELL: That did what?

Q. That are delineated, the beginning of the green and the end of the fairway?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Oh, yeah, yeah, to where the definition is so obscured? I've never seen a golf course where they had to spot the edge of the green before to actually let us know where the fairway stops and where green begins. Like I say, the fairways are faster than the greens in places. Some of the fairways are just as pure as the greens in places. Very interesting, very unique setup. The bunkering is great. I like a lot of things about the golf course. I mean, there's a few holes, like I say, which have me kind of thinking, wow, this could be really carnage, you know, if you play it incorrectly. Holes like 18 as a par-4, I'm not really -- still to this point, still to right now, I still don't know what I'm going to do off that tee box. Unless you can fly it 290 over the left side, you have a very, very taxing tee shot. And if you lay up, it leaves you about 255 yards front. So I really don't know what I'm doing on 18. I think 7 is a sleeping giant, if it was to turn back into the wind. There's some good holes out there. But there are some opportunities, as well. It's a good balance.

Q. Your major title breakthrough came at a U.S. Open in 2010. What did that win mean to you?

GRAEME McDOWELL: It was reasonably special. It meant a lot to me, of course. A lot of water under the bridge in the last five years. A lot of good stuff been happening, both on and off the golf course. I've been wrestling a little bit with my level of motivation the last 12 months, especially, you know, getting married and having a baby and all the exciting things in my life happening. I haven't felt the same desire and urge to go out there and grind and practice, and that's affected my game. I haven't played well. But the last three or four months, I've come to terms with that a little bit and I've decided that I want more of this stuff. I want to win more major championships. I have the desire back to practice again and work hard because I love being in contention in the biggest events in the world. Like I say, I want some more of it. 2010 was amazing for me, but I don't want it to perhaps define my career. I think

I'd like to continue defining my career from here onwards.

Q. I've noticed you and a few other guys using Periscope this week during practice rounds. What appeals to you about that? What's the feedback you've gotten and whether you see that becoming more as part of the fan interaction experience?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Obviously Periscope has been a fairly contentious part of social media lately. Been using it a little the last couple of days. I've got it on right now, just giving fans a little -- a bit of a first person view of some of the things we experience out here. The feedback that I've got is that it's certainly revolutionary from a media point of view, being able to show them something a little different from inside of the ropes. I think if used well and used carefully, it can be a very effective way of engaging with people. So I think I'm only on about my fourth ever broadcast, so I'm still scratching the surface. But the feedback I've got, it's been a lot of fun. No one from the USGA has told me to turn it off yet, so I guess I'm going with the ask for forgiveness as opposed to permission. The PGA Tour has given us our guidelines and regulations on how to use it and use it carefully. And I think it can be a lot of fun if done well.

Q. I agree on that. Is there a Ryder Cup factor in the U.S. Open, as well. Rory was saying earlier that's one of the reasons there's been so much European success in the U.S. Open. In your own case, in Glen Eagles last year, you beat the player who is going to be second favorite for this tournament. Is that something that can come into play?

GRAEME McDOWELL: You know, it's not really something I've noticed or I've kind of thought about at all. That singles match at Gleneagles was a pretty special one for me. It certainly hasn't affected Jordan's career much. I think the Europeans are becoming very comfortable here in the States and obviously have enjoyed the successes in Ryder Cup. But that really is just one week every two years for us. The rest of the time we're playing alongside these Great American players and competing with them for major championships. And I fully believe that the purple patch we've experienced the last eight to ten years, I feel it's coming on this side of the Atlantic. I look at the Dustin Johnsons and Jordans and Patrick Reeds and Rickie Fowlers and so many great young players, I feel like they've got their time coming, as well. Not that they haven't had their time, they've been holding their own very nicely. But you feel a strength and a depth on this side of the pond, as well. It's a lot of fun. I think it's great and healthy for global golf. I don't look at it as us against them. I live here and now I'm bringing my family up here, so I'm certainly never going to go with

an us against them vibe. I'm not really into that. I love the Ryder Cup, and they've probably been the four best experiences in my life, the four Ryder Cups and I'd like to play a couple more. But I don't feel that coming into a major championship, it's certainly me against the field, it's more of that. You're just trying to beat the course as much as you can, and hopefully you'll be the last one standing.

Q. Maybe not the first person who's suffered from a lack of motivation due to life changes, but I'm just kind of curious when it's like when you realize it's an issue, what it's like going through it and what's kind of the turning point of changing that or pulling yourself out of it?

GRAEME McDOWELL: It's kind of one of those things that you never think is going to happen to you, I suppose. I love the game and I want it and I'm always up for this game. But I think when it happens to you, you don't realize it. I think it's important to have a good team of people around you to help you acknowledge it and help you sift through kind of where the problems lie. Is it that you don't love the game anymore or is it the fact that you just love being home with the family a bit more than normal? So I think just acknowledging it is obviously a big part of it. It's not fun. I obviously haven't enjoyed the season, early in the year, not playing well, not scoring well, losing a little of confidence and belief. Thinking am I done, finished, washed up, should I think about getting a new job. All these crazy human instinct thoughts go through your mind, and it's just about trying to get back in your processes and trust what you're doing. And knowing that it's not necessarily going to happen fast. You've got to just dig in and start grinding again and go back to all the things that worked in the past. And just start enjoying the game really, I suppose. It's hard. It's not been fun this year, definitely been one of the tougher seasons in the last seven or eight. But I feel like I'm learning a lot from it. That's something I've done well this in my career to this point is reacting well to the tough years and coming out the other side better and stronger and smarter. That's what I'm kind of in right now, I'm in that learning curve and looking forward to being back on the leaderboard very soon.

Q. What other job? What are you prepared for?

GRAEME McDOWELL: I don't know what I'd do. I didn't get my engineering degree, so I can't see me going back to college at this point.

BETH MAJOR: We certainly thank you for spending time with us, always a pleasure and we wish you well this week.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Thank you. Hopefully I'll speak to you again.

BETH MAJOR: Look forward to it.