

2015 US Open Championship

Tuesday, June 16
Press Conference

Rickie Fowler

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An Interview With:
RICKIE FOWLER

BETH MAJOR: Good afternoon, and welcome again to the 2015 U.S. Open Championship at Chambers Bay. Very happy to have with us this afternoon Rickie Fowler. Rickie is currently ranked 9th in the world, coming off a tremendous win at THE PLAYERS Championship back in May. You're playing your 7th U.S. Open Championship this week. Tied for second last year. Can you talk a little bit about preparing for the U.S. Open and coming into this week?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, it's definitely been a little bit different outlook on a U.S. Open golf course, not the typical tight fairway, thick rough, small, firm greens. This is a little bit more like links golf, and it's fun for me. I love playing over in The Open Championship, but this is going to be a great week here. I'm looking forward to the challenge, the test that's ahead. It's not going to be easy. It's still the U.S. Open. It's typically the hardest test we have all year, and it did demands a lot of your game. So far what I've seen the past few days, it's been fun to hit golf shots around this golf course and looking forward to learning it even more and seeing what they have in store for us and what kind of different angles and tee boxes they will show us.

Q. We saw your obvious success in the majors last year, but Rory did even better at the end of the year. Do you guys in the under 30 generation look at him as the standard setter the way people used to look at Tiger? And what does it take to reach his level?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, we look at him as the best player in the world right now. He's proven that. He's been playing well. Yeah, he did play well in the majors last year. I got him on aggregate, but he's holding two trophies, so he got me there. Yeah, he's the guy out front. There's a lot of times where you see him up on the board and in a way expect him to be there. But



we're ready to go to battle and go toe-to-toe. And personally I want to see him play well and I want to go up against him when he is playing well to go have some fun and see who comes out on top.

Q. Today you're out there with Phil, as you often are before major championships. You know what he has at stake, career slam opportunity. He's 45 years old today. When you look at him out there today, do you see a guy who's capable of winning major championships and U.S. Opens and maybe he's got more opportunities or do you feel like this is a real chance for him to get something done now?

RICKIE FOWLER: This is a great opportunity for him. But I don't look at it as his career, by any means, coming to an end anytime soon. He's still got plenty of power. He's still got all the shots in the bag. You come up with a short game shot and you're not really going to ask anyone else other than him to hit it if there was a must make up-and-down. He still impresses me with his game. Yeah, he did turn 45 today, but I'm not looking to see him go away anytime soon.

BETH MAJOR: What are some of the challenges coming to a venue like Chambers Bay? You haven't seen it; so many folks haven't seen it. What is the challenge in something like this for this week?

RICKIE FOWLER: I guess the challenge being that you don't know exactly how the golf course is going to play. You're not sure as far as scores go. There's a lot of times -- how holes are going to specifically play, where pin placements have been in the past. I know off the U.S. Amateur and some of the guys that have played here, they got to kind of see a test run with that. But it's kind of cool coming to a new course, because it almost levels the playing field a bit. Everyone, for the most part, hasn't had that much experience around here.

Q. Did you spend much time talking to Peter Uihlein during your preparation and if so, what tips did he give you about this course?

RICKIE FOWLER: I actually didn't talk to Peter much at all. I got to watch him a little bit when he did play the Amateur and win here. I was a rookie on Tour. And for the most part, with the way the golf course is, I really felt like it was a course where I had to go see it and

kind of learn for myself. Visually I may see something different than another player. I may be comfortable with a certain shot versus something that someone else will hit. And kind of took everything in from what I heard from other people and what they experienced here and came out and really liked what I saw. I've had fun the past few days getting to hit some shots and see what the golf course has to offer and also figure out where you absolutely do not want to go. And I think it's pretty clear.

Q. Since THE PLAYERS Championship moved to May, there hadn't been a winner of that tournament and the U.S. Open until last year, with Martin, of course. Does that give you some confidence knowing that it can be done, seeing him do that?

RICKIE FOWLER: Obviously Martin had a pretty awesome performance last year in the U.S. Open. He didn't really give us a chance to go catch him. So with seeing that done, yeah, I'd love to go do the same as he did last year. And I really feel comfortable on this golf course. I love playing links golf. I've played well in the British Open overseas. And being that I have played well in the U.S. Open, I feel like putting the two together with the links style and U.S. Open setup could turn out to be a great week.

Q. When you have a year like last year and the way you finished in the majors, does that leave you frustrated or did you try and take some positives from having those top 5, top 10 finishes?

RICKIE FOWLER: I didn't really take any negatives out of as far as how I played. With two of the events, two guys kind of distanced themselves from the field and made it almost to where they were completely in control. They were the ones that had to move back for us to have a chance. The PGA is where I was the closest and actually had a chance of going out and taking the tournament. But looking back on that, and then with what I did at The PLAYERS, I think I'm very much ready to go get in contention in a major and get the job done.

Q. Are the trains a distraction out there?

RICKIE FOWLER: I don't really think they're a distraction. I'm going to try not to hit them (laughter). If we can stay away from that, it would be great.

Q. When Martin Kaymer was in here, he mentioned how brave your finish was at The PLAYERS and how you can tell which guys really want to win the tournament. What do you think that does for you getting over the hump, the way you did in the next closest thing to a major? And how do you think it sets your frame of mind up for this tournament?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, I mean, I'm only going to be draw positives from that. It's the strongest field we play

all year. It's THE PLAYERS Championship on a great golf course. It's a great finish. And to have the amount of guys that were there come Sunday afternoon with a chance, I mean, Kis had a chance to win the tournament outright on 18. And I was playing so far back with six to play and then managed to rally and make something happen. The swings that I made in regulation and getting into the playoff, I was looking at it as kind of had nothing to lose. I wanted to go out and win the tournament after the finish that I had. And just continued to make great swings. It was definitely something that I wanted and it was nice to be able to pull it off.

Q. What did you take out of the win at THE PLAYERS Championship versus the four top 5s in the majors last year? Secondly -- go ahead and answer that.

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, the biggest thing, the four majors were solid weeks. They were solid finishes. I managed to put myself in contention and put together four great rounds and end up making history with four great finishes. But there's a difference between a top 5 and getting the job done and being the guy last standing holding the trophy at the end. I definitely feel like the win at The PLAYERS was kind of the next step to holding the trophy at a major.

Q. Do you feel any different sitting here now having done what you did at The PLAYERS, hit some of the shots you hit and the stuff you just talked about versus a year ago or even more than that ago?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, after my performance last year in the majors, I really felt like I solidified it to myself that I belonged on the big stage and kind of proved that this is the kind of game I have and that I'm bringing in. With getting the win and taking care of business at The PLAYERS, that's where I want to be. I want to be in contention and I want to go out and win golf tournaments. So a little bit of kick in the butt for me and more motivation for me to keep moving forward, keeping grinding, keep putting the work in to be in that position more often.

Q. You mentioned how the U.S. Open is the most challenging of the majors. If you could just explain maybe what typically makes it so challenging?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, as far as just golf course setup goes, usually they push the course almost to the limits as far as firm, fast fairways. The rough is up, greens are firm and fast. It magnifies your mistakes. And with what they do with setups, you can guess a lot of pins and understand where they're going to be. There might be one that might be a little bit different. But typically moving some tees around a bit, and seems like this week they're going to be moving the tees a bit

more than normal. So you have to be ready for anything. And with this setup on a links golf course, you have to understand that there will be some bounces that may not go your way. So as much as it tests your game, it tests you mentally even more so.

Q. You actually started to answer my question there. I was going to say is there an added emphasis on the mental side of the game with a course with as much unpredictability as this course?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, at times it may not be fair, if you look at it that way. But understanding links golf and what can happen, you kind of have to be ready for anything, and you have to be able to take the punches when they come, accept it and move forward. Because if you look at it the wrong way, when those mistakes happen, it really doesn't have to be a mistake. You can hit a great shot and the ball ends up in the wrong spot and if you take that the wrong way, you're behind the eight ball and you're not really going to have a chance. You have to be able to move forward, accept it and move on.

Q. What would it mean to you to be the guy this time holding the trophy on Sunday?

RICKIE FOWLER: I think it would feel great. Being in the winner's circle just a few weeks back, I'd really like to have that chance come Sunday, here. I really like the golf course. I've had a lot of fun playing it the past few days. It would be nice to put a major on the résumé.

Q. Two completely different questions for you. First, with Phil, he hasn't won since the '13 Open Championship and he's kind of been hit or miss with his form. How do you explain the fact that he's still able to really bring the goods in the biggest events?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, I mean, he can hit a lot of shots and he still hits the ball very solid. And then we talked about the short game, he's got a great short game to help him out if he needs it, to get out of trouble if needed. And I feel like Phil is one of those guys that has -- I believe he has one of the best mental games as far as putting things behind him, always moving forward, grinding it out, getting the most out of a round. And that's going to be something that's key here this week.

Q. And secondly, Tiger mentioned earlier that the amount of preparation that he did for this Open was more than he's ever done, just because the elasticity of this golf course and how many different ways it can be set up. Have you found that to be the case in your preparation?

RICKIE FOWLER: No, I've tried to stay as normal as

possible. I didn't want to over-think it or over-prepare in a way as far as wearing myself out and not be fresh and ready to go Thursday. The first time around playing the British Open rotation and playing golf courses over there, they're tough to learn and there's blind spots in understanding links golf. But up until last year, I hadn't gone over before. I played 18 the Sunday before, even when I played the Deere before St. Andrews the first time, I didn't get there until Monday -- I guess it's Monday. So it's not like I had a lot of preparation there. And I'm not sure you can completely prepare for what tournament conditions are going to be. The golf course can change so much from practice rounds or two or three weeks prior. But understanding -- putting forward that game plan as far as knowing where the possibilities are, what the changes could be, where some pins could be, where you play safe, where you can be aggressive. And sometimes you have to make game-time decisions. You can't always know exactly where you're going to be before the tournament actually happens. So when the gun goes off, that's where it all happens.

Q. You took pretty quickly to Open championships and contended over there. You handled conditions pretty well at County Down last month. What is it about maybe your game or your mentality that seems so well suited for the links style of golf?

RICKIE FOWLER: I think it's a little bit of both as far as the way I play or can play, I enjoy hitting golf shots and all the mentality side as far as using my imagination, having fun with it, seeing what shots are possible. Most of the time picking the right one. I've made the wrong decisions at times and that just happens. I don't know, I love playing links golf. Like I said, there's so much variety. You get to show off different styles. It's not exactly just point A to point B. You can play to a certain pin so many different ways. But like I said, it's about picking the right one at the right time, especially overseas. You can get so many different kinds of weather. The golf course can play completely different one day to the next. It looks like we're going to have good weather this week. It seems like the USGA is going to have complete control of the golf course and set it up how they want to. I know it's going to be a tough test. If they keep it -- keep the setup as fair as possible, which they've done a great job of the last few years, I'm looking forward to a fun week here.

Q. Based on what you've just been talking about, can you comment on Mike Davis' comment that if you don't come in before and prepare you pretty much have no hope?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, I like to think I have some hope. I enjoy the golf course. I don't see it as far as needing to have a bunch of different rounds around here and playing a bunch of different tees. I think the

biggest thing is understanding the ground and the greens and different angles and where you can play shots and where you can't hit it to and where you can hit it to. I feel like I have a very good understanding of links golf. I've played well overseas. And so my game is ready and I really have enjoyed what I've seen on the golf course so far. So I'm excited come Thursday.

Q. This is a totally different question. I just wonder if your heritage has helped in golfing or helping you in the tournament, what do you think it would be?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I'm quarter Japanese. And the Japanese side, the heritage is very special to me. My grandpa is the one that got me started in golf, so I have close ties there. I'm really looking forward to having the opportunity to get over to Japan soon. I know I have a lot of fans over there. I haven't been back to Japan since -- I think I was in high school. I played a junior golf tournament there. And the way that -- where golf is in Japan with having Ryo and Matsuyama over here, Matsuyama has been playing very well the past year or so. It would be fun to spend time over there with them and go play in Japan.

BETH MAJOR: Rickie, thank you so much for joining us. We wish you well during the week here at Chambers Bay.

RICKIE FOWLER: Thank you.