

2015 US Open Championship

Tuesday, June 16
Press Conference

Tiger Woods

An Interview With:
TIGER WOODS

BETH MAJOR: Good morning. Welcome to the 2015 U.S. Open Championship here at Chambers Bay in the Pacific Northwest. It's my pleasure to welcome this morning Tiger Woods, three-time U.S. Open, nine-time USGA champion. You're playing in your 19th U.S. Open here this week, and I think there's been a lot of buzz. This obviously is an Open that does not look like any of the others you've played in previously. Can you talk about Chambers Bay and your impressions of the golf course?

TIGER WOODS: Well, it's certainly different for a U.S. Open, that's for sure. We normally play pretty traditional golf courses where back of the tee is narrow, fairways are high and from fast greens. They have that here, but some of the holes you can move up a hundred yards. And the greens are getting firm, but it's more of the shape of the golf course. There's so many different ways that you can play it, and sometimes you have to be able to play it. I think one of the more dramatic things I've noticed is how different it plays from morning to afternoon. It gets so much faster and drier. You just feel it as the day wears on how much this golf course can dry out, and it certainly will. The morning times versus afternoon times, it's very different.

Q. Of the courses you've played, which does this most resemble or is it kind of its own thing?

TIGER WOODS: I think it's its own thing. Before I even got here, it was said that you could roll the ball up on every hole, right? Well, we had -- when I first came here, it was the Monday and Tuesday of Memorial and, yeah, you can run it up, but problem is it was raining and it was cold. I played off the back tee on every hole. It played almost 7,900. And I was hitting driver, 5-wood and driver, 3-wood to a couple of holes. And it's so different now. Now that it's fast, those holes have turned into driver, 6-iron, 7-iron and 8-irons. And plus we've had two different winds, one has come out of the southwest and one out of the northwest. And it plays traumatically different. It's just amazing how much it plays differently, with the different winds. It's like a links



course in that regard, for sure. It's very different when the wind switches. The only thing it's comparable to, anytime in The Open Championship is how fast these fairways are getting, and how much the ball is rolling out.

Q. In respect to major championships, I wonder if you feel the pressure on you, either from within yourself or outside intensifies or eases off the longer you go without having won one and why do you feel that?

TIGER WOODS: I think it feels the same. From my very first one to now, it's the same. I want to win these championships. I love them. I love playing them. My first major was being the Masters and my first U.S. Open at Shinnecock and then obviously the British at St. Andrews. For me it was a pretty good introduction to Major Championship golf, and I've loved it ever since. There's pressure, of course there's pressure. You're trying to win the biggest events against the best fields and that's the fun part.

Q. What is the state of your game now and how do you feel like you hit the ball today?

TIGER WOODS: I hit the ball pretty good today. It's getting better every day. I'm starting to get the feel for, more than anything, for this golf course and what I need to do off the tees and where to miss it around the greens to certain pins. And playing some of the back boards. You can't play them all. Because if you use it too much, actually, it can roll off the greens and into the bunkers. So how many of these backboards can you use, I think that's more the thing I'm really learning as I've played this golf course is, yeah, there are places you can't get up and down from. You just can't, unless you make a 20- or 30-footer. But then again, you're obviously firing away from the flag 70, 80 feet sometimes to get the ball close and you can't, which is unlike any other tournament. You hit it pin-high 70 feet away, and next thing you know it ends up right next to the hole. That's the feel of this golf course and trying to understand that to each pin location. I think Joey and I have got a pretty good handle on that now.

Q. What do you feel like you have left to accomplish in golf?

TIGER WOODS: More wins.

Q. How important is that to you at this stage in

your life?

TIGER WOODS: That's why I'm still playing.

Q. A couple of the guys, Jason Day yesterday, I know you played with a little bit and Rory today, were talking about advantage of length here at this particular place, carrying some of those bunkers. How much of a factor, more so this week, is that, do you think? Do you believe that a longer player is going to end up winning this thing?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I guess you could say that, but also we don't know, none of us, none of you guys in this room, none of the players, know what Mike is going to do on the setup. And so it's hard to predict that. Is he going to play -- for instance, Pete Dye always believed make the long holes long. If it's into the wind, put them all the way back. If it's downwind, put them all the way up. We don't know what Mike is going to do on the different winds and the different days. So, yeah, we could say that the long hitters have an advantage, but maybe not. Depends on what Mike does.

Q. Cole Hammer said today that his first memory of golf on television is you pumping your fist at Torrey. Make you feel old? And which is your first television memory of golf?

TIGER WOODS: I think part of my most -- well, television memory or just memory of professional golf? Because my dad took me down to the old Andy Williams, down in San Diego, Torrey, and I got a chance to follow the So Cal guys, John Cook, Mark O'Meara. And I remember watching Andy Bean hit a 1-iron into 18. That's my first memory of professional golf.

Q. On TV?

TIGER WOODS: Probably when Jack made that run on the back nine in '86. I've never seen anyone actually pump both fists up in the air when he hit that 4-iron into 15. That was different. We've seen guys walking in like he did on 17, but I've never seen anyone celebrate a 4-iron into a par 5 like that, that was different. And that certainly stood out in my mind.

Q. At the Memorial you sort of suggested that you're in this swing change for the long haul and you expected some dips along the way. How do you match that up? How do you take that long view and match it up with trying to compete now?

TIGER WOODS: Sometimes you have to make a shift, and I did. And short-term suffering for long-term gain. I've done this before when I've made changes in the past I've struggled through it. I've come out on the good side. But I had to make those -- it's more of a commitment than anything else. I had to make a commitment, and I have. And things are starting to come together piece by piece. And just all the big

change is already in and now it's just refining it and actually now playing more golf, playing more tournament golf. Because I haven't played that much early in the year. And now throughout the summer, I've got a very full summer schedule. It would be nice to get back into the realm of playing tournament golf again.

Q. Do you feel you still have that in you to get back to the top?

TIGER WOODS: Top of --

Q. Golf.

TIGER WOODS: Yeah.

Q. So is the challenge -- is the challenge as much now a challenge about swings and mechanics or is it about the devotion that it requires to get back there?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I wouldn't have made the changes if I wasn't devoted to the game of golf and winning golf tournaments. I want to be out here. I want to play. I want to compete, and I want to win. And to me it's so much fun having a chance to win on the back nine on Sunday. There's plenty of times where I haven't gotten it done. But there are also times when I have gotten it done. But you've got to be there. And that's one of the reasons why over the course of my career I've made a few changes here and there in search of becoming a little more consistent to put myself there more often. And we're doing that. This year certainly has been a struggle. But for me to go through what I went through at Torrey and Phoenix, to come back and do what I did at Augusta gave me a lot of confidence going forward.

Q. You mentioned distance earlier. What are the factors that you think will come into play on Sunday when we look back and see what the winner did over the four days?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I think in order to win -- well, to win any Major Championship, you're going to have to be patient. This one in particular, because there are so many different variables, unlike any links golf that we play, we don't have elevation changes like this. So that's a variable that's certainly very different. You're going to get some funky bounces out there. The ball is going to roll and catch slopes. You're going to see guys hit terrible golf shots and end up in kicking range from the hole. You're going to see guys fire at the flag and get a good one and get a hard bounce and end up in a hard spot. I'm more curious to see how many guys hit sprinklers this week, because the sprinklers are literally sometimes six inches off the green. And some of the hole locations you'll be firing -- if you fire at it, you're flying right over the top of sprinklers to land it. It will be interesting to see how many guys hit it or how

many guys just roll the ball off the green and they're on the steps or up against the steps, take a ruling, have to drop it in the bunker and have it buried. Now you're going to have a lot of fun. You're going to see some different things this week than you have probably any other Major Championship that we play.

Q. What do you think of this 15-year-old kid that qualified? How old were you when you tried to qualify and how big were you when you were 15 years old?

TIGER WOODS: When I was 15, I think I was -- after doing a bunch of push-ups, I was probably maybe 110 (laughter). I wasn't a real big kid, you know that. Let's see, the first time I tried to qualify. I tried to qualify for the U.S. Open. The U.S. Junior championship gets you into the sectional qualifier, and I had already finished the semifinals in the U.S. Junior when I was 14 at Lake Merced. So I tried to sectional qualify when I was 15, probably when I was 16 years old at Lake Merced and failed miserably. And then after that I don't know if I tried to qualify for any other one or -- I probably did, but I don't remember. I just remember my first U.S. Open being at Shinnecock.

Q. We've known each other since you were 14. I appreciate you being forthright and honest about my golf course and all the odd bounces you're going to get. Do you think we gave you enough alternatives to play it in different ways, and is this a thinking golfer's championship as well as a shot maker's?

TIGER WOODS: Well, it's a golf course in which how you built it is that we have so many options. And I think that it's -- what we don't know, as I told you, none of the people in this room know and all the players don't know, we don't know what Mike is going to do and when he's going to do it. What tees he's going to move up, what tees he's going to leave back, and to what pin locations are, where he's going to the put them at. We have a general idea. But it's unlike any other major championship I've ever had to prepare for having to hit so many different tee shots. There's three or four different tee shots on almost every hole. Basically Mike has an opportunity to play basically 36 holes and 36 different options, somewhere around there. So many different options that it's harder to, I think -- one of the harder Opens or any championship to prepare for given that there's so many variables. Yeah, can you run the ball up? Yeah, you can. But also then again sometimes you really can't. You've got to throw the ball up in order to keep it somewhat from going over the back. Some of the holes we're trying to figure out, like on 9, when he plays some of the top tee, where is the pin going to be. The bottom tee, obviously it's interesting, hitting off the top tee. When I first played here, I hit 5-iron and 6-iron. I went to the bottom tee

and I was hitting 5-wood. So it was actually -- the top tee was actually longer. And to have that big a discrepancy, there's so many options. It's going to be interesting to see what Mike does. I'm kind of happy that I'm playing actually in the afternoon the first day, get a chance to watch what some of the guys do in the morning to get a feel for it and see what's going on.

Q. The dynamic with Jordan Spieth, playing with him this morning, were you almost like a big brother or mentor, how would you describe that dynamic?

TIGER WOODS: I would have to say he's a friend. And I like Jordan a lot. I've watched his career. When he first got his first exemption into the Byron Nelson, he was still in high school, and to see what he did in Texas and obviously come out here right away. And what he did at -- the whole Quad Cities, what he did there, holing a bunker shot, and obviously from then on how impressive he's played. To be with him on the Presidents Cup team at Memorial, he's a heck of a kid. He's got all the talent in the world. And it's going to be fun to watch him grow and mature into the player that he will become.

Q. Do you feel as prepared for this event as you expected to be when you set out your summer schedule?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I am, actually. I'm actually -- I didn't realize -- I'm thankful that Mike had mentioned that you probably have to see this place more than just tournament week. I was talking to Jim Furyk yesterday after I had just played, and I finished my practice session, he was putting, and he hadn't seen the golf course yet. And Fluff was out there, following us a little bit and walking the golf course. And he said, I can't get a feel for this place. I don't know how Jim wants to play it. And I think that's going to be interesting to see guys who just have been here for first time this week. Luckily, if you played yesterday and you played today, you've had both winds. You've had the north wind; today, you got the south wind. I hadn't played the north wind yet until I played it yesterday. And boy, that changed the golf course a lot.

Q. Can you explain for me the difference in what went wrong in your game Phoenix, Torrey Pines, versus Memorial?

TIGER WOODS: Well, early in the year, we were just now starting to implement some of the things. And, yeah, the full swing was what it was. The chipping, I didn't realize some of the patterning that I had developed over the years, under Sean, that we were trying to change. And it kind of showed its ugly head, unfortunately. And I had to go back to the grindstone and work it and implement basically a whole new pattern. At Memorial, I made another baseline shift,

just like I did pre-Masters. And it's rough going through it. Obviously I've got to do it in front of the world, and sometimes it's tough. I've got to suck it up and do it. The good news is I've done it before in my career, I know what it feels like, I know how tough it is to go through those rounds. But for me, I was very proud how I grinded out those first two days to make the cut at Memorial. And I decided to make another shift at it and obviously shot a high number. But it was a shift in a good way, because now I'm able to hit the ball like I am this week.

Q. What was it that made you feel like you needed to take time off previously and here you are this week?

TIGER WOODS: Because it's not really anything major. But still trying to make a shift under game-time situations is tough, and trying not to revert back into old patterns. But like I said, the shift isn't very much. We've implemented a lot of the big stuff already, so now it's just fine tuning.

Q. You're obviously here to win, but what makes you believe that you can get it done this week on this course?

TIGER WOODS: I've got three of these.

Q. As you mentioned the 85 at the Memorial, a new experience for you for a competitive round. How did you work through that and what steps did you need to take in the aftermath that was different from some of the other rounds you've played in your career?

TIGER WOODS: I just had to deal with it. As I said I've made two shifts. I made a shift there after Friday and we were committed to it. And, hey, you've got to go ahead and go through it. It is what it is, you know. As I said there at Memorial, the manager is not going to come out to the mound and bring in the righty or lefty. You've got to stick out there and go through all nine innings. And whether you get shelled or not, you've got to stay out there. And it's hard. But that's the nature of our support. There's nobody to pull you up. There's no way one to bail you out. Sometimes when you're running hot, there's no one to hold you back, either. That's the beauty of an individual sport and also sometimes the tough part of an individual sport.

Q. Two things. One, it's one thing to try to play when you're reconfiguring your swing in a regular TOUR event. What is it like playing and reconfiguring your swing while trying to play a major? And is there a way in layman's terms you can explain to us what you're trying to do with your swing?

TIGER WOODS: I'm not going to try to explain it because it's a lot, so we'll leave it at that. As far as

going to a major championship, I just did it this year. You saw what I did at Torrey and Phoenix. And the fact that I came back and did what I did at Augusta, as I said, I was very proud of that, to be able to go back to the grindstone and work my butt off to get back to a level in which I could compete at a high level, and I had a chance going into Sunday. Where if you look at how I played at Phoenix and Torrey, I'm sure most people have thought I was probably crazy to think I could probably win the Masters. But I really felt like I could. I had a chance, I just didn't get it done.

Q. How do you define a fair course? Are you concerned based on what you said about Mike's changes that this might be an unfair course?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I think it's -- the only reason why it would get unfair is if it dried out too much. The green speeds are going to be probably what they're going to be right now. But if it dries out too much, then you'll see some weird bounces and some awkward putts. If they can keep it receptive at this speed then it's going to be a great championship. The only time I've ever seen them ever lose a golf course and most of us were there at Shinnecock, when we lost No. 7, I've never been held back on a tee box before, having a guy hand water right in front of you. That was a new experience. So I'm sorry, you can't hit yet. I said, why? They're watering the greens right there. That's the only time they've ever lost it. But I don't think that's going to happen here. The only thing I think that's going to be interesting to see is the various options that Mike has, and what is he going to throw at us. He's going to try to keep us, I'm sure, off balance. As I said, old school U.S. Opens where back of the tee, narrow fairways, high rough, firm greens and all four days, good luck, boys, go get them. This is going to be a very different one.

Q. For years, when your game was in full song, you always told us that you got far more enjoyment out of grinding out a par than you did making a birdie. You told us that you hated making bogeys. That philosophy seems like what would work here because par is obviously going to be a great number.

TIGER WOODS: Par is always a good number in major championships. We're going to have opportunities to be aggressive here. We're going to have opportunities to hit shots and go after certain holes, drive holes. We're going to have that opportunity. But also we're going to have the flip side, too, where it's going to play brutally long, it's going to play tough. And you're going to have to make some serious lag putts out there and get them close. You're going to have up over mounds and sometimes 70, 80 footers. And you're going to have to try to lag it up there and you're going to have to try to make short ones from probably eight foot and in.

The guys that I have -- two guys that I know that I've talked to who played here in the Amateur, Patrick Reed and obviously Jordan, both said the same thing, it's unlike any other golf course they've played where you're firing away from flags to get the ball close or you hit a terrible golf shot and you've got a kick-in birdie. Patrick was telling me the funny part was playing No. 1, first hole of match play, he made a solid 9 and won the hole (laughter). I think we're going to see some higher numbers here. But then again we may not. It depends what Mike gives us. We don't know. Let's say he plays it hard every day and plays it all the way back, close to 7,900 yards. If he makes it 73, 74, 75, somewhere in that neighborhood, but what configuration is he going to do it in, we don't know.

Q. You've been doing some work as a designer and you're playing a golf course that requires a lot of assimilation of detail. Could you talk about how your work in design has maybe helped you see this course and what you take away from it that you really like that you'd like to incorporate elsewhere?

TIGER WOODS: My design work, I've always -- my favorite golf is links golf. And I love being able to use the ground to run the ball up. I love that option. Not having force carries. Most amateurs can't hit a 3-iron, 4-iron, 5-iron straight up in the air and have it spin. And it's hard. I like having run-up areas so amateurs can run the ball up. This golf course allows us to do that. I've always been against force carries unless the topography absolutely forces you to do it. I've never been asked so far in my early design work to design a championship golf course to be specifically held for a tournament of some level. That's not what the landowners have wanted from me, and hence my designs are certainly much easier than our championship venues that we play. If I'm ever asked to design a golf course that ultimately will host a big event going down the road, then, yeah, I'll make some different choices of how I design the golf course. But the courses I've designed have been on the softer side and try to make sure that the guys and women find their golf balls when they play, and not having force carries. The most frustrating thing is when you lose golf balls. I think that it's nice to have a round where you don't lose golf balls. And on top of that, it speeds up play. We're talking about how can we speed up play. Well, design golf courses that are a little more friendly, not so hard and not so forced to hit the ball straight up in the air with spin.

BETH MAJOR: Tiger, thank you so much for joining us today. We wish you well throughout the week.

TIGER WOODS: Thank you.