

# US Open Championship 2016

Tuesday, June 14, 2016

## Branden Grace

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome to the 2016 U.S. Open Championship at Oakmont Country Club. Very pleased to introduce this afternoon Branden Grace of South Africa, who is joining us, playing in his fourth U.S. Open. Last year, he was in contention, a co-leader after three rounds and finished fourth at Chambers Bay. Also went on to finish third at the PGA Championship last summer at Whistling Straits.

Branden, can you talk about those experiences, being in contention at a Major, and coming back to The Open this year?

BRANDEN GRACE: I think the past two years have been pretty exciting, hitting into those Majors, playing some good golf, and then getting to Chambers Bay and really feeling good about your game and kind of things going your way.

I enjoyed that week. It's probably one of the best weeks I've had in my entire life in my golfing career, just ball striking was there, putting was there, handled the nerves superbly. It was just a pity it came down to one bad tee shot.

I learned a lot and took all that experience into the PGA and then, you know, had a great week there as well. I think any other week, I would have probably finished first or close to the top. Jason was just -- he was just a different machine that week. So it was one of those where he had a Tiger moment where nobody -- you couldn't do anything to catch him.

That's good, and it gives me a lot of experience and a lot of hope coming into these big weeks. Obviously, Augusta wasn't the best week for me, but, again, made the most out of the next week, getting my first win. So that's been great. I'm excited to get this started.

THE MODERATOR: Before we turn it over to questions, you've been around Oakmont a few times now. Some first impressions of the golf course?

BRANDEN GRACE: Yeah, it's tough. I think everybody says the same thing. But it's fun. I think it's a great golf course. I think it's not everybody's golf course. You can't say ball striker. You can't say the best putter's going to win. I think the guy with the best head is going to win at the end of the week. The guy who



can stay most patient, and I think the guy that's really going to just accept that things are not going to go your way sooner or later. The guy that's going to win is going to be the guy that gets over that the quickest.

If you can just stay patient and play your game and expect those mistakes, but then again, you're going to get some bounces that you're not going to expect as well. So just making the most of when they come your way.

**Q. Which, Branden, do you think is the most penal aspect of Oakmont and why? And no multiple choice here. You only get to pick one.**

BRANDEN GRACE: I think the greens. There's a couple of greens where it's almost better being aggressive and going for them. That's not the case that we always get. A lot of times, you play these big events, these tough events where you have to go for the safer sides and things like that. On a lot of these holes, you can't do that. If you lay up or you just go for the safer side to the right side and the pin's tucked in the left, you might be dead.

I had a putt on the 13th hole on my first practice day on Sunday. I hit a 6 iron to 15 feet, pin was middle front right, and I hit it 12 feet, 15 feet past left, and I was dead. I couldn't keep it inside 20, 25 feet. So a lot of times, it's better going straight for the pin. Sometimes, you might actually even hit it into a bunker to give yourself the best chance if you're in trouble.

So I would say the greens. Like I said, the guys who are going to be the most patient on the greens are going to be the guys that might be successful at the end of the week and just not going to lose it out there.

**Q. Branden, just obviously it seems like all the time you get asked about Ernie. But this week in particular, with his win at Oakmont, did you watch that? How much did you draw from that with Ernie and what he's done here?**

BRANDEN GRACE: I've watched it a bit. He's changed a bit since then. He's put on the pounds a bit. But it's great to be able to be -- to learn from a guy like Ernie. Fortunately, I'm going out there with Ernie later today to pick his brain a little bit, see what I can learn. He's been a big inspiration, a big help. He's been a big part of my career. He told me the golf course is one of

those I'm going to like.

It is. It's one of those where, if you've got a couple of shots in the bank that you know you can hit and you can get around this place, you know you have to use them this week. I'm excited to actually learn the type of golf that he's going to play around this place.

Obviously, if you play the first -- I played with Charl yesterday, where when we play, the golf is completely different. I'm more the guy that I take it on a little bit more. He hits a lot more irons off the tees, where I hit a lot more drivers off the tees. This golf course, you can play a whole different kind of golf if you want to, but it's just a matter of which one you prefer.

**Q. As a follow, for you personally, coming here into America, playing PGA golf, what has the adjustment been? And something since Chambers which has been maybe more comfortable for you?**

BRANDEN GRACE: It's been tough. I've had, I feel, a short career, but it's been long. I think it's been nine years as a pro already. You kind of go through all these steps. You get the guys that go to the college, they get straight on to the Tour, and if they're lucky to get straight on to the PGA Tour.

I've had a totally different route. Started with the Sunshine Tour began for me, and you kind of feel like you're a rookie all over again. You start the Sunshine Tour, you get a little bit better. Get to Europe, get a little bit better. You get to the PGA, and it feels like you really have to start all over.

It's taken me a while, but I think last year was a big hurdle for me to get over. I started playing a little bit better, and then coming into those big Majors, the U.S. Open, the PGA, really got me over that line and the confidence to get out here full-time and make the choice to be out here and try to give myself a good chance of getting some W's under the belt.

I'm fortunate it's paid off. The U.S. Open definitely last year was a big key for me in my career.

**Q. We've heard some good drivers of the golf ball today, Day and Willett, say they're going to value fairways, maybe not hit the driver as much. What gives you the confidence -- sounds like you may be a little more aggressive than they are. What gives you the confidence to think you can succeed in having that attack?**

BRANDEN GRACE: I think it's a different way of looking at the golf course. You can miss a fairway with an iron as well. I find, if I put my mindset where, if you miss a fairway with an iron, you're going to struggle to get to the green. I might hit a driver and miss the

fairway, but then I'm going to have a wedge that I can still hack it to somewhere there or thereabout.

Don't take me wrong. I'm still going to hit irons off the tees. There are some holes where you can't hit it. It also depends on the day, what the weather holds. I heard Thursday it's supposed to not be so good out there, the rain and stuff. Then I think with a little bit of wet is not going to help this rough at all. It's going to make it tough. Then I might be a little bit more aggressive.

**Q. Quick follow-up off the tee. Jordan Spieth said yesterday he said it was similar visually to Chambers Bay because there are no trees here basically. You played well there. Do you see that as a positive for you?**

BRANDEN GRACE: Definitely. You really have to pick targets. You can't pick targets on bunkers and things like that. You have to pick spots out on the golf course, whether it's the clubhouse or whether it's some trees out in the distance. Again, the fairways are not -- it's not very straightforward. A lot of times, they pick slopes right to left or left to right. So you really have to plan your way around this golf course.

The type of shots that I hit at Chambers, I'm definitely going to hit those shots again. Those are the type of shots I hit at RBC. One of the shots I like, a little low stinger, and I think hitting around this place, it might come in handy.

**Q. Danny Willett was in here a minute ago, surprising us, using the word fun to describe this course. Is there something enjoyable about the U.S. Open and this course in particular?**

BRANDEN GRACE: I think he's trying to be positive already. We'll see if he says it's fun come Saturday or Sunday. I think, if that's the frame of mind he comes in with, all good for him.

It's tough. I think everybody says it's going to be a grind. It's just what you make out of each round. I wanted to come in here and say, I'm fantastic. I feel great, not to say after the round I'm going to be great, but you just have to enjoy it and make the most out of each round.

**Q. If you could choose one word to describe what that atmosphere, what that feeling is like late on a Sunday at the U.S. Open, what would that word be?**

BRANDEN GRACE: If one word is tough. But it's a phenomenal feeling. It's just -- I can't describe it in one word. You get out there and you're in the run, especially in a Major, there's no feeling like it, honestly.

**Q. Branden, U.S. Opens are typically the ultimate**

**test in golf. What's the most challenging hole you've ever played at a U.S. Open and why?**

BRANDEN GRACE: I think at Marion, I think it was the second hole, a par 5, if I remember correctly, going up the hill, that's a brutal golf hole. Like you said, a U.S. Open is all about how tough they can get it, how hard it can be for us to make birdies, how hard you have to concentrate not to make any bogeys.

When I played Marion, I think it was the out of bounds was, I think, ten paces off the fairway on the right. The right-hand side was just one of those spots where there actually wasn't any rough. You hit out of bounds right, and you have the thick, brutal rough on the left-hand side. Going to the par 5, you hit it in the rough left, that's the obvious bail-out. I remember you hit it in there, you hack out, you're still going to a 3 wood for your third.

So that was definitely one of the toughest par 5s I think I've ever played in a U.S. Open.

**Q. Where did you hit it?**

BRANDEN GRACE: I think the first time I hit it in the fairway. Thanks for asking, obviously, by the way. The second day, it was out of bounds. I got a little bit too ahead of myself and wanted to sneak it down the middle. Actually got unlucky. It clipped a tree and went out of bounds. It wasn't that bad of a shot, but it happens.

**Q. Speaking of Oakmont and looking at tough holes, have you decided what holes are going to be the toughest out here to get through?**

BRANDEN GRACE: I think a golf course like this, you have to come out of the blocks pretty well. The 1st hole is just a horrible golf hole. It is. If you stand on that tee and the wind's playing left to right, I mean, that fairway is so thin, so narrow that you kind of almost only see bunker.

So you kind of just have to find the shot to hit down the 1st and try to give yourself a chance to make a par or even a birdie. That 1st hole, I think, can really get into somebody's head. If you get out there and you make a double or a triple, standing on the 1st hole, which is very easy to do, you know, then your day is just going to be even longer than what it was going to be before that hole.

**Q. You mentioned being able to handle your nerves at Chambers Bay last year. Were you surprised you were able to handle them that well? What do you think allowed you to do that?**

BRANDEN GRACE: I actually was. I thought I was going to be a lot more nervous. I found a couple of things that worked for me that week. Most of it was on

the 1st tee before I teed off. I kind of looked at the way Jordan handled himself. I played with him the final day. I played with Dustin on the Saturday. I kind of looked at what they did before they teed off.

It's not that I'd say they were nervous, but I found something that I thought, you know, they might be a little bit more nervous than I was. And I used that to my advantage. I think if you're in these tournaments and you're in that position, you need to find those small things that can give you a little bit of up about the rest.

That's something I found, and I think the way that Chambers Bay played, it wasn't one of those golf courses where you can go out there -- it's pretty similar. You can't go out and force birdies. The guys are not going to come towards you. If people make mistakes, they're going to go towards the guys behind them. It's a freak, like Louie was last year, finishing in third, you know, you don't hear about those things. It doesn't happen. If that happens, great for them. It's nice to not make those mistakes. Sometimes you have to play a little bit more the course, but it's not always easy around a place like this. This is going to be a total different test.

THE MODERATOR: Branden, thank you so much for joining us today. We wish you well throughout the week.

BRANDEN GRACE: Thanks very much.