

# US Open Championship 2016

Tuesday, June 14, 2016

## Danny Willett

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning. Welcome to the 2016 U.S. Open Championship at Oakmont Country Club. It's my pleasure to welcome this morning Danny Willett of England, who earlier this year claimed his first Major title, when he won the Masters tournament in April.

Danny, can you talk a little bit about life since then, about that victory, and the months that have ensued?

DANNY WILLETT: It's been great. Everything is settling down a little bit like we presumed it would. Obviously, I'm to the second Major of the year now, where everyone's trying to work up, people are trying to peak their games, and to try and take home the trophy on Sunday here. We're trying our best to do the same.

THE MODERATOR: I know you've just come in and have only played nine holes, but can you give your first impressions on Oakmont?

DANNY WILLETT: It's a great golf course, great fun. There's a lot of different shots you can play. I actually remember watching Cabrera a little bit back in '07, and he obviously took it relatively aggressive off the tee. We played it slightly different yesterday.

I think it gives you a lot of options off the tee depending upon how aggressive you want to play, but then you have to be really careful on where you place your ball around the green. I think the onus is on fairways and greens this week, definitely, to try to give yourself the easiest way of making par.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it to questions.

### **Q. Just curious, Danny, your definition of great fun?**

DANNY WILLETT: It gives you a lot of options. A lot of golf courses you pitch up to, and everybody is hitting a driver here, a 2 iron down this hole. This course gives you a lot of options depending upon how aggressive you want to be, depending upon how comfortable you are of either laying back off the tee or trying to get a wedge in your hands and trying to spin out with these firm greens.

I think you're going to see a lot of different plays around this golf course, which I think is great.

### **Q. Danny, obviously you're the only man here who can win the calendar Grand Slam this year. Given how close Jordan Spieth got to it, how well he played, does that give you a bit more belief to even dream thinking about it?**

DANNY WILLETT: I mean, what Jordan did last year was awesome. We've not seen that for a while, obviously since Tiger's days. I think you look at the standard of golf through the field, and I think if Rosie's fit and well, it's projected that all top 50 are going to play this week, which hasn't happened that much over the last ten years. I think it's only happened twice in all the Majors for all the top 50 to play.

You look at the strength of the field and it would be fantastic to even be somewhere thereabouts come Sunday. We're just going to have to play golf and see what happens. Hopefully, we can be somewhere there and get a little bit of a feeling for it.

### **Q. Just to follow up, does this kind of test where 5 over par won it, as you say, when Cabrera won, is this kind of test something you look forward to, or do you just say I've got to get on with it this week?**

DANNY WILLETT: I think it's good test. U.S. Opens are always tough. Obviously, the last two years, Pinehurst and Chambers Bay, you've seen the score a little bit different than what you would have seen in previous years. And usually, these places, they are just brutal. You know you've just got to hit good shot after good shot after good shot, hopefully make a few putts.

Like I say, yeah, 5 over par on this golf course, after playing a few hours yesterday, for four rounds is a pretty good score. So, yeah, again, conditions-wise, depends on what they want to do with the golf course, how firm they want to get it to play. They've kind of said to us that the greens aren't going to get quicker than they were yesterday, which is somewhere between 13 and 14, which is pretty quick, especially on the slopes they've got around this golf course.

I think, hopefully, weather depending, we're set for a great week.

### **Q. Hi, Danny. Jordan was saying yesterday, when he was closing it out at Chambers Bay last year, he kind of kept saying, remember, you've got one of**

**these already. It made it slightly easier for him. Can you imagine you'd feel the same in the same situation Sunday?**

DANNY WILLETT: I guess it's easier a little bit, in the sense that, yeah, you've already won a Major so you're not trying to push massively hard. But we've all got our own different goals, I'm sure, inside. He was listening to himself saying that, but he was wanting it more and more because he'd obviously had it earlier that year.

So, yeah, it's just the things we try to tell ourselves, I guess, to distract from how big these occasions are, when you're at Major Championships and you compete and you've got chances to win. I guess, in your own head, you're trying to play it down as well as try to make it easier to let yourself play the golf that you know you can play and free it up a little bit. That's kind of my take on how people would go about doing it and why you'd say something like that.

Obviously, yeah, it's nice that you've already got one, but because you've already got one, you want another one and another one and another one. I think you put the pressure on yourself inside anyway.

**Q. Ask about your preparation. Very different from the Masters, having the family over. Do you feel that much more relaxed going in?**

DANNY WILLETT: Yeah, we had a good couple weeks at home, flying out Sunday with the family. So yeah, a little bit different. Obviously, we've not played this place before, so we played nine holes today. We're going to play 9 or 18 today and see how we feel and what we want to do, if there's any tee shots or any holes particularly we want to play.

And just kind of mill around for the next two days and really make sure we feel comfortable on every shot, or as comfortable as you can feel on every shot around this golf course.

So that's what the next 48 hours entails, really, is just to make sure that come Thursday morning, when we peg it up, there's a game plan in place there that hopefully is as good a one as we can come up with.

**Q. At what point, Danny, did the euphoria of that Masters win for you kind of start to wear off a little bit as you kind of tried to start to move forward again and refocus?**

DANNY WILLETT: I don't think it will for a while. It's still a great achievement. It doesn't mean you don't get home and you don't work hard, you don't practice, you don't train. We had a few weeks celebrating and stuff. But then, obviously, when we made the decision to play the PLAYERS, it was back to business and try to get some work done.

Now we've had an extra month since the PLAYERS, played a couple tournaments back home, played okay, showed signs of good golf in there, still a little bit of rust and some bad shots in there. Yeah, had a couple of weeks home practicing. Not that it's going to wear off ever, but there is now another job at hand, and that's trying to get as well prepared as we can for this week.

**Q. Danny, after following up the Major with that rusty shot, those breakfast ball plays, how do you make what you did with the BMW, with that third place finish, and being able to translate that into a course such as this?**

DANNY WILLETT: Wentworth is a pretty tough golf course. Same kind of thing around that place is fairways and greens. The misses around there, again, are pretty brutal, and you can rack up some numbers, as we did a few times. The only thing I say around this place is you're probably not going to see a ton of birdies. It's going to be a lot of pars, as I said, and trying to limit your mistakes to when you do get out of position.

So hopefully, we can keep it in the fairways and keep it on the greens and make life as stress-free as possible. I'm just looking forward to, I guess, my first U.S. Open on a golf course that I've notoriously watched growing up -- tight fairways, thick rough and back to kind of how people see U.S. Open golf. It's good fun to be back here and to be part of it and playing.

**Q. Danny, I know you alluded to it earlier, but in your wildest dreams, can you allow yourself to think about, well, I've got the first one already. I can do it this week and only two more, and almost rationalize it to the point where it doesn't sound that hard.**

DANNY WILLETT: Sounds easy, huh? I guess it is one of them things, you know. You have got to keep breaking it down. You can't look at it as a whole. It is quite funny, because, yeah, running up to this week, you are the only guy that can do it in the same year. But, again, that's not to say you're not going to win the Masters again and have another chance to do it a few more times in your career.

It's just nice that we have got that chance. What comes of that, you know, you don't really know. But yeah, we're going to try to get prepped, and like I said before, hopefully come Sunday we're somewhere there or thereabouts to give you that little bit of a feeling that, yeah, this is actually possible.

**Q. Are you a golf history guy? Do you kind of know the chances the players have had and the fact that no one's done it as far as four**

**professional Majors in one year? Are you kind of aware of all that?**

DANNY WILLETT: Yeah, yeah. You realize -- yeah, I mean, I know no one's done it. Obviously, they've done the slam, holding four at the same time, obviously. But to do it in the same year, I am relatively surprised that no one has done it, but saying that, from now on, for the rest of the time that I'm going to be playing golf, I don't think -- I honestly can't see it happening too much, just purely because of the strength and depth of the field.

You'd have had more chance back in the day, I guess. But even then, you had Palmer, Player, Nicklaus, Watson. It's not like none of them wanted to do it at any time. Then you had Tiger, Mickelson, and Sergio. Obviously, now you have Spieth, Day, Rory that have all obviously got Majors to their name. It just shows you how difficult it actually is to do.

**Q. Danny, 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?**

DANNY WILLETT: I haven't actually played -- this is only my third U.S. Open. So, again, the U.S. Opens I've played have been slightly different, Pinehurst and Chambers Bay. I think around here you'll see probably some of the tougher holes that you'll play in the U.S. Open.

I haven't played 18 yet, but, again, no doubt that 18 around here is brutal. I think it was only 35 percent of the field hit the green in regulation in 2007 through all four rounds. Around this golf course, there's a lot of tough golf holes. I was looking at the stats and stuff, and I think in 2007, the easiest hole still played over par. So, you know, looking at that, I think you'll be able to have a good handful of tough holes around this golf course.

**Q. Danny, have you played with Rory in a Major before? Obviously, over the last nine months, you've been seeing a lot of one another since the Race to Dubai. Can you talk a little bit about how your relationship has developed over the past nine months?**

DANNY WILLETT: Obviously, I played with Rory a little bit when we were amateurs, and (indiscernible) on the same tee, (indiscernible) and stuff. That will be good fun Thursday and Friday. We played a little bit more recently, and you get to know, obviously -- I guess, you know, you get to play with the best player in the world and see how they go about their business and what they do.

I think Rory's a fantastic example of how athletic golf is these days and what he's done and how he's changed

his body and the performances that he keeps putting on the board. Every week he plays, he plays great golf. So I've played a good bit more with him. I played a few hours with him yesterday in practice.

Again, it's nice to be in and around it, again, to kind of feel more comfortable in and around playing with them guys and being in that environment. It's going to happen a lot more from now for the rest of my career. So it's something we're going to have to get used to, playing with him, and like I say, putting your golf game up against his.

**Q. (No audio).**

DANNY WILLETT: Like I say, we played a good bit in Europe being 1 and 2 for a long, long time last year and again this year. So it will be good fun in a Major to see how -- obviously, with Rickie in there as well -- how the crowds take it. I think it's going to be a really good first two days.

**Q. Danny, have you noticed a big change in the way that you're regarded and the way that people are reacting to you over here now, or do you still think you're kind of flying under the radar in terms of autographs, et cetera?**

DANNY WILLETT: You're obviously there a good bit more these days. The Masters is a massive event globally, in terms of getting yourself on the map within worldwide golf, it's probably the best one you can win, obviously, for a European.

So there's a little bit more to do at golf tournaments these days. I still feel like it's quite nice because you have got Jordan, Jason, and Rory obviously playing such good golf, and Rickie as well. Yeah, you do get under the radar a little bit more, which is quite nice.

**Q. (No microphone).**

DANNY WILLETT: Doesn't really bother me, to be honest. We're here playing our golf and trying to get ready to compete in a Major Championship. If people want your autograph, that's great. If they don't, means you've got a little bit more time to get on with your business. So I'm not really that fussed.

**Q. Danny, the finish in the U.S. Open last year with Dustin and Jordan, and then Ernie and Adam come to mind at Lytham, the way that thing flipped. Masters, a little bit different, stretched over a little bit longer period of time. But I'd be curious is it awkward at all, when you are at the height of your elation, receiving the trophy and speaking next to a guy who is probably not as happy as you are at the moment. What was that like?**

DANNY WILLETT: It was tough. Like I say, I think obviously because I had got finished probably 30, 40

minutes before Jordan, and he literally just got finished, signed his scorecard and whisked straight out. It's a tricky one. It's a tricky one for him to kind of take, but he handled it fantastic. He handled it as good as what you can expect anyone to do in that situation, which just goes to show the classy guy he is and the maturity he's got in and around it.

**Q. (No microphone).**

DANNY WILLETT: You try to be relatively humble and realizing what just happened in the hope that, if it was a role reverse, you get the same thing back. And we're all trying to win at the end of the day, and unfortunately, it's a game where only one person can win at the end of the week.

That week was my week to do it, and so, yeah, you know, you're not screaming and shouting in the face and fist pumping and everything. You shake his hand and you say thanks and stuff.

He had some really kind words. They waited around. Yeah, you try not to be too, I guess, overjoyed by the situation, like I said, with him standing right there next to you.

**Q. Danny, can you talk about would you rather be in a situation where you're hitting driver and you're maybe 150 or inside that with a wedge in your hand out of the rough, versus 200 yards in the middle of the fairway, what you would rather have coming into these greens?**

DANNY WILLETT: 200 in the fairway. This golf course, again, if you've got a 6 iron, it's pretty tricky, but you're still in the middle of the fairway. Even if you've got a wedge out there, you haven't got a clue how it's going to come out of some of these lies. That's kind of what we saw yesterday when we played, and, again, Cabrera saw that very differently, and different player, different angle of attack, all that kind of stuff, depends how you are out of the rough.

Yeah, I think there are some holes around here have you have to hit driver and take the risk on. There are quite a few where, because of the elevation change, because of how firm the golf course is playing, even if you've got a 9 iron in your hands, you're still not going to be able to get it massively close to a few of the flag positions they can potentially put out. Yeah, I'd take fairway all day long around this place.

**Q. Just to follow up, Cabrera won at 5 over. Considering the conditions you've seen the last couple days, what do you see the score at?**

DANNY WILLETT: Again, I wasn't here in '07, so I don't know how firm it was playing and what the rough was like. Apparently the rough is a little bit thicker this year.

Again, green firmness, that can change massively as the week goes on. Come Sunday at U.S. Opens, you've seen it get really firm and fast. It all depends on how they control the golf course.

But I've said in an interview earlier that I could see it somewhere similar. I think, if you're any better than that, then I think you've got a very good chance.

**Q. Danny, just following on from the question about Rory, now you've got a Major, do you feel you're Rory's equal?**

DANNY WILLETT: No. What Rory's done in the game is pretty massive. I think he's helped the younger generation within European golf strive for a little bit more. Just as Tiger did for worldwide golf, I think Rory's done similar for the young lads on the European Tour to really put their foot down and try to get up there and try and chase him down and try and achieve a little bit of what he's been able to do.

It's certainly helped me. Like I said, I played a bit of golf as an amateur with him and a little bit through the professional ranks and stuff. You've seen where he's taken his game now. Like I say, it makes you strive to want to get there and be right there with him. This is a position you want to be in. You want to be playing in Majors with Rory, Rickie, Jordan, Jason and playing against them.

**Q. Some people have been talking, Danny, about how your life has changed after the Masters win. For you, was there a particular moment in these past couple of months where you kind of realized, like, hey, I'm a little more famous, I'm a little more well-known now just based off of that win?**

DANNY WILLETT: Yeah, obviously, you get recognized a little bit more and things like that. You start to realize how difficult the guys have had it who have been up there in the limelight for a lot of years and how much they've got to take control of their own time and have time to themselves behind locked doors, do their own things.

It's tricky when you're in the public eye. The last couple months, I can't remember a practice session, a golf tournament that's not being filmed or a microphone nearby. It's tricky to be yourself and to do things and to talk openly about how you're swinging it, what you're trying to work on, just because there's always someone there watching and being around it. So that's one of the main things that's kind of been different.

**Q. Danny, what are your thoughts about having a 300-yard par 3?**

DANNY WILLETT: It's different. We played yesterday down out the right, so it's obviously not too bad. Rory

hit a 4 iron into it, we hit a 3 iron into it. It's not as bad as it can play, but if the wind switches, all of a sudden, that all becomes very different. I was speaking to G. Mac, and he said that in '07 there were two par 4s on Sunday that were on hole No. 8.

Yeah, it's a different one, but, again, obviously, they've been relatively sensible. It's a flat screen on the golf course, pretty big green. If that's how they want to play it, at 288, I think it played yesterday or something like that, then that's what it is.

Again, I think the USGA are very clever how they set up the golf course, and I think unless it's forecast to be quiet, calm, or downwind, I wouldn't have thought you'd see it that far back anyway.

**Q. Also, what do you do with the green jacket? Do you take it out? Do you leave it home? Do you traveling with it at all?**

DANNY WILLETT: It's at home this week. It's at home. I didn't need to bring it here. There's obviously different times when you go to events and you've obviously got to take it for certain things. That's when it gets packed. At the minute, it's still hung up at home.

**Q. Danny, big summer for golf returns to the Olympics. You're scheduled to qualify. Where are you at right now in your thought process with regards to Rio and the Olympics?**

DANNY WILLETT: I'd love to go. It's still up in the air, obviously. Little man's just under 12 weeks old, and if me and Nic were ever thinking about having more kids, we wouldn't leave it too long. There's obviously a little bit of a worry right now with everything that's going on. You've seen from a few guys that have obviously pulled out.

We're down to qualify at the minute, and we're down to play at the moment. Hopefully, by the time it comes around, obviously, with the time down in Brazil, hopefully the threat is a little bit less, and it will be fun to go there. I think it would be fantastic to be able to be in and around Olympians. They wait four years to be able to compete for their country, and fortunately, golf's in it this year, and I think it would be a fantastic honor to go play.

But I'd never put my family or myself in any threats to go play a golf tournament, regardless of what it is. And hopefully, by then, the threat's settled down by then, and we can go.

**Q. Danny, whether it's yourself at the Masters or Chris Wood and Matthew Fitzpatrick recently, what do you attribute the success of English golfers all of a sudden to?**

DANNY WILLETT: I think English golf's always been very strong. You just see -- again, I've said it before, you get your little waves of different generations. Got Paul Casey, Westy, Luke, Rosie come through, and then I don't know, you know, give it another ten years, and all of a sudden you've got myself, Woody, Fitz, Sully, and I think it's great for the game.

Again, a lot of it's spurred on by seeing what Rory's been able to achieve worldwide in golf at the age he's at. I think that's helped everyone in Europe, not just English lads. But I think, yeah, there's a handful of fantastic coaches in England golf, and obviously different players see different coaches and helping their games along. You're just seeing a nice rich vein to form through the English lads.

**Q. Danny, just to follow up on the Olympic question, do you feel like you've been given enough information to make a good decision on this?**

DANNY WILLETT: We've been given as much information as what I think can be given. Obviously, it's a relatively new -- Zika is a relatively new thing. Nobody actually knows 100 percent. They can't guarantee us, you know, obviously, how long it stays in your system, you know, what the risks are, this, that and the other. We've had a lot of information and from different organizations around the world to try and help make our decision easier.

But, again, like I said, obviously, in August, when the Olympics is, it's obviously wintertime down in Brazil. So the threat becomes a little bit less in itself, and I know they're making a few changes to the golf course. They're putting fountains in, no standing water. They're going to spray the golf course a few times a day. So they're taking all the correct precautions to try to get as good a field as they can down there.

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

DANNY WILLETT: Thank you.