

US Open Championship 2016

Tuesday, June 14, 2016

Justin Rose

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome again to Oakmont Country Club, site of the 2016 U.S. Open Championship. Very happy to have with us this afternoon 2013 U.S. Open champion, Justin Rose.

Justin, welcome. Welcome to Oakmont. Can you give me a few thoughts. You've won at an iconic course like Marion. Coming to a place like Oakmont, how does that feel coming to a place like this as well?

JUSTIN ROSE: Obviously, it's the U.S. Open, so every time you get to a tournament of this magnitude, it's special. It feels different than the regular tournaments. But a few of the venues offer something extra. Obviously, Marion had its own unique history, and obviously the golf course is famed for that with the baskets. And Pebble Beach, for example, and Oakmont is right up there as well as being one of the more historic courses.

I think it adds a little bit extra, especially when the U.S. Open is often about the toughest test in golf. And I think Oakmont, sort of having that reputation of potentially being the toughest course in America week in and week out, I think it kind of suits the U.S. Open really well and gives this tournament and this week something special.

THE MODERATOR: You played here in 2007, finished tied for tenth. Does any of that come back, some thoughts about being back at Oakmont compared to, as we said, nine years ago?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, I think it's just nice to know. I think I was in and around the lead for the most part from Thursday through Sunday. I think I was in the top ten all week. Yeah, knowing I've done it, knowing I've played the course to a decent level obviously helps.

Can I really remember exactly how the course played and what my game plan was? Not really. I think that my game has changed and evolved over the years. So it's good to sort of see it through a fresh pair of eyes this week.

Obviously, just having that confidence that I know that I've obviously been there and done it around here to a certain extent and was in the hunt is obviously something to build upon this week.



Q. Justin, toughest test in golf. Are these the toughest greens in golf? What makes these greens so different and more challenging than a lot of the other places you go to?

JUSTIN ROSE: I mean, yeah, they are incredibly -- they probably are the toughest greens in golf based upon the fact that just off the green you have very, very thick rough. And when you're pitching to the green out of very, very thick rough, it's very unpredictable how the ball is going to come out exactly.

Augusta National, I would say the greens are just as severe, but you have a little bit more control on the ball at all times. You're playing out of out of the short grass and it's more predictable. So the combination of both of those makes it incredibly tough.

I think that there was talk of the greens rolling 16 or something on Monday, Sunday or Monday, which was probably a test. The greenskeepers and whatever trying to figure out how far they can push them and where they're at. Obviously, those sorts of numbers are unheard of really. It's obviously fun to play. You've got to relish that sort of attitude anyway at this golf course.

What I like about it is it makes strategy so much more important. Missing on the correct side of the hole, giving yourself half a chance to get the ball up and down, I think that that's where, having the greens being as severe as they are, yes, it's a putting test, but it's also a strategic test for your iron play to keep hitting it in the right spot below the hole. So I like the way it sets up from that point of view.

Q. Justin, could you just tell me how much practice you've gotten in the last days and weeks, how you found the course playing? I have heard the word brutal many times in the last two days. I'm just wondering your thoughts on it.

JUSTIN ROSE: So, yeah, it's been a race against the clock really for me to be fit and ready to play here. Since the PLAYERS Championship, I've sort of been recovering from a bad back, flared up disk, and just really been working around the clock. I've done everything humanly possible to be here from a recovery point of view, from a fitness point of view, from a practice point of view, but there's no doubt my practice schedule has certainly been on the light side,

limiting the number of balls I've been hitting. I only started hitting the driver two or three days ago.

So it's definitely been a tight timetable, but I'm confident I've done a lot of the really hard work, especially in the gym, especially re-engaging all the strength around the core and all that stuff is going to support me this week.

So it's been interesting. I'm coming in fresh, which is the great news. I think, obviously, this golf course is going to require a huge amount of patience, and I think that having that quiet time to sit back and assess my game and assess the challenge this week and coming in with a freshness, I think, could be an advantage come the end of the week.

Q. So considering the lack of practice and coming back from injury, you mentioned you're taking the positive, you're fresh. But, also, are there concerns there isn't enough work done or that the condition isn't fully healed and that that could impede you from your goals this week?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah. Obviously, I've been a pro 20 years. I know how to swing a golf club. It came back really quickly. I love the way it looks on camera. All my trackman numbers were spot on, 100 percent perfect, where I left off. All the myelin is there in place in my system in my body.

In my game, I think it's been a great learning curve that I actually don't have to hit many balls going forward. So I feel good about where my swing is at.

Competitive edge, that's obviously certainly a factor, and that's where I'm going to hope that the freshness outweighs the competitive rust. I've been in this situation before. 2007, I had a little bit of a stop/start year due to a bad back, and it was one of the best years of my career, won the European money list that year, played really well in all the Major championships, was able to prepare and mentally prepare for them and take on the challenge through sort of mental freshness, I suppose. So hoping it's a similar run to that.

Q. On a similar theme, just going forward with that, have you been told that you have to make changes? Is it something that's going to be ongoing?

JUSTIN ROSE: No, I don't think it's going to be ongoing. It's just been a little reminder. It's certainly nothing new to me. 2001, when I was a young pro, I suffered some back injuries. And in 2007, they flared up. But I've always done a really good job of keeping it at bay. It just reminds me to stay disciplined, keep doing all the right things in the gym, keep moving the right way, keep putting the time in on the recovery side.

I've obviously been a pro a long time now. There's a lot of miles on the vehicle. But going forward, I feel that lightening the practice sessions, yes, that could be a good thing. Working a bit smarter, that could be a good thing too. Just being away from the game for four weeks gives you a lot of time to think. And actually, it's really re-energized me. It's made me much more positive coming back.

I'm really excited about the prospects of the summer, and I feel like this mini forced time away is actually going to work in my favor through the summer. So I'm really positive. I'm feeling, as I said, much better. It's just a reminder of staying disciplined and keeping doing all the right things.

Q. Justin, you have a reputation for playing difficult courses very well. Why? I don't mean why the reputation. I mean, why do you think you do play difficult well?

JUSTIN ROSE: Hopefully, the reputation is obvious. It's sort of based through fact. Yeah, I've always enjoyed playing the tough golf courses. I've always relished that challenge. I don't know if it goes back to the fact of me missing 21 cuts and everything. Just tough starts in my pro career potentially toughened me up a bit from that point of view.

Adversity, you face a lot this week. Whether I can shrug that off better than some others, I don't know, but I just enjoy this test.

It's obviously a physical test on your game, but it's also a cerebral test. You've got to go out there and put a game plan in place. That's what me and my team pride ourselves in; the fact that we can dissect a golf course, put a plan in place that suits us, and then go ahead and stick to it. I think those are the type of qualities that, over 72 holes, pay off in this type of championship.

Q. Justin, Rory a short while ago used the word trepidation when looking ahead to the start of this tournament. A short while ago, you used the word fun. Overall, how would you best describe the whole approach to this week at the U.S. Open?

JUSTIN ROSE: I'm just really grateful to be here playing. I've worked really hard to be here. Obviously, I want to take the whole week in my stride, but just really grateful to be on the grounds at Oakmont and relish the challenge that it represents. I feel like it's in my wheelhouse of courses that I like to play, and this championship, I think I've done very well in for the most part for the past four or five years.

I did manage to win it in 2013, but I feel like there's

been a couple of more looks at it that I feel like, had one or two things gone my way during that week, I think I'd have had a chance to win it. It's a type of golf that I really enjoy. That's my mindset.

Q. You've played a few U.S. Opens over the years. Putting you on the spot now, the U.S. Open notorious for being notoriously difficult. If there's one hole in particular you had to name, in terms of it being the most challenging for you personally, what would it be and why?

JUSTIN ROSE: Well, specifically to this course, the opener on both nines, they play very similar, the 1st and the 10th. You have to hit the fairway off the tee, and then basically there's a little bit of luck involved with getting the right bounce off the front edge of the green. So it's a little bit of both nines are uneasy openers.

But that's the great thing about this golf course is you don't have too long a stretch of brutal holes. You'll have a couple tough holes, and then there will be a little bit of a reprieve if you can put the ball in play. If you miss any fairway this week, it's going to be a struggle for par. We know that. But if you do get the ball in play, especially on short holes, there are some birdie opportunities.

I haven't really had the opportunity to really sit back and play the course and see how each hole is playing individually. I walked it a couple of times last week. I was in the area last week and scouted the golf course with a wedge and a putter and really got to learn the greens. I felt like that was the real key to this place. The fact that the rough's thick, sure, I'm not going to learn anything there. You need to hit the fairway. That's pretty straightforward.

But then the learning part is which pins you can attack, which pins you have to be respectful to, and which side of green to miss on. So I'm still learning. It's a tough question to answer. But after that, any opening hole around here because it can set the tone for the day.

Q. Any other holes, any other venues over the years at the U.S. Open?

JUSTIN ROSE: Many. I mean, the list is probably even too long to think about. But the 5th hole at Marion, that's probably one of the toughest ones, severely sloping green right to left. That played incredibly difficult all week long.

Q. Justin, obviously, you've had a lot of success since 2013. What did you gain out of 2013 winning at Marion that helped your confidence when things got tough? And my second question is have you been back there recently? I know you went back

there after you won, but have you been back there any other times?

JUSTIN ROSE: I think winning a Major championship is just a fantastic, I guess, gift or opportunity to use to free yourself up in future Major championships. That's what I think it's given me. It's the monkey off the back, so to speak. A lot of great players haven't had the opportunity to win one yet. When they find themselves in contention, they have to face that line of questioning and obviously face those own thoughts themselves. So the fact that that's now off the table is an opportunity to go ahead and put the foot down and try to win as many as you can.

So that's the way I view the victory at Marion. It's fantastic. As a boy, as a young child, I dreamed of winning Major championships. So now, being an old man, I can at least say -- well, when I'm an old man, projecting forward, I can at least look back and say I managed to do it. I think there's many more to come. But the fact of having won, it's nice to have that monkey off the back.

But, yes, getting back to Marion is always very special. I try to do it every single year. I was actually up there last Monday. And then off the back of that trip, that's when I came to see Oakmont Tuesday, Wednesday. I've managed to take back some special friends and walk down memory lane a couple times with a few people. So it's been great.

Q. Justin, 17 has doled out over the years everything from a 2 to an 8. Have you put out your game plan for 17? Do you have any thoughts as to whether you're going to pull out the driver? What other places might you try to attack the shorter par 4s, if any?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, I think the 17, like I say, it's such a great 71st hole because it can offer you the opportunity to play catch-up, but it's certainly no guaranteed birdie or even par. If you get in trouble off the tee, like any hole out here, you're going to struggle.

But it's such a precise wedge shot from the center of the fairway. The way the green is angled, how tight they're going to tuck the pins, you have to hit such a precise wedge shot to make birdie in there.

But depending on the wind direction, I think -- I don't love forcing it up there. If it's into the wind, I'd take my chances with a wedge. But if it's down breeze, I feel like you can hit 3 wood to the front of the green. Obviously, a down wind wedge shot is a lot trickier to control, provided the greens are firm, than an into-the-wind wedge shot.

So, for me, it's a little bit wind dependent on how I

challenge it. And obviously, it's situational come Sunday. There's a lot of other par 4s on this golf course that, you know, it's not so much the short holes, it's sometimes -- even a couple of the par 3s, if they put the pins on the left on No. 13, for example, that becomes a birdie hole. So it's not so much the short holes. It's the pin placements, where I feel you need to be aggressive versus defensive.

Q. Justin, you mentioned it was a race against time to get fit for this week. Were there moments during the four weeks where you thought it was a race you were going to lose? And is there anything of a gamble in coming back on a course that's so demanding with such ferocious rough?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah. There were a couple of courses where maybe ten days, two weeks ago, where I wasn't progressing as fast as I would have liked. I've got a great team of people around me. Justin Buckthorpe at 360 Health and Performance in the UK, he really reassured me. He flew over a couple of times to work with me. He was always confident in the fact that I would be ready. So that was reassuring.

So, yeah, I've already leaned a lot on my team to help me through this and thank them a lot for sort of allowing me to be here at this point.

Yeah, the rough is the unknown quantity for sure. I think if I'm going to get greedy out of the rough, then I'm probably risking something. I think it's probably a good -- it might play into my hands to essentially take your medicine out of the rough a little bit and make 4 another way or make par another way.

But there's going to be those situations this week where I'm going to have to make a smart decision, and that could well be a variable that I have to assess in game time because it's not something that I've practiced. I haven't been at home slashing the ball out of the rough. I haven't sort of wanted to add that dimension yet to the system.

But, yeah, I'm fully ready to play. In all the other parameters that I've been able to test, I'm passing and feeling good. So I'm sure this is the last little hurdle. I'm sure it will be no problem.

THE MODERATOR: Justin, you're paired with Phil Mickelson and Henrik Stenson the first two rounds, gentlemen I'm sure you know pretty well. How important is that to have a good pairing, particularly on what promises to be a difficult test this week?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, it's a great pairing. Henrik is obviously a friend of mine. We were Ryder Cup partners. Looking forward to getting out there and

being on the golf course with him. A great sense of humor. Not sure we'll see it this week with this golf course. We'll be pretty busy grinding as hard as we can.

Both of our caddies, Henrik's caddie and my caddie, get along very well. So it's a very comfortable pairing out there. I'm excited about that as well.

THE MODERATOR: Justin, thank you so much for joining us today. We appreciate it. We wish you well during the week. Thank you.