

US Open Championship 2016

Tuesday, June 14, 2016

Rickie Fowler

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome to the 2016 U.S. Open Championship at the Oakmont Country Club. It's my pleasure to welcome this afternoon world No. 5 Rickie Fowler to the Media Center at Oakmont. Rickie is playing in his eighth U.S. Open.

Rickie, can you give some impressions about Oakmont? Can you give some initial thoughts on the golf course and the layout?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah. I think I have four full rounds in, so getting to know the golf course a bit better. I don't think you can play enough rounds here to really know it. But some of the craziest greens I've ever played and most penal fairway bunkers I've entered, and trying to stay out of those as much as possible this week.

It's a fair golf course. You've just got to be on the right side of the hole. You've got to drive the ball well. A lot of characteristics of a typical, tough and hard U.S. Open.

Ball striking is going to be key this week, playing well tee to green. I don't see many putts being made, but it will be a bonus if you're able to roll a couple in. Like I said, I think this golf tournament is going to be won from good driving and putting the ball in the proper position into the green.

THE MODERATOR: You'll be playing your first two rounds with Rory and Danny Willett. Rory was here earlier and said that he's been able to practice with you a little bit. Is that a great pairing, and how important is that heading into the first few days of what promises to be a difficult test?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I'm really looking forward to playing alongside Rory and Danny as well. Both of them playing well, Danny coming off the win at the Masters, and Rory has been playing well for quite some time now. We get to spend some time together. We practiced a bit together back home in Jupiter. We played 18 this morning. We played 9 yesterday. So we've seen a lot of each other the past week and more to come.

Q. Rickie, you talked about the ball striking. I was talking with Butch earlier, and he said even though

you've struggled the past couple of weeks, your ball striking has never been better. Does that give you a little confidence going into a week like this?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah. Tee to green, I feel like it's still been very good. The only reason that I've struggled a little bit here and there is just because I've been a little bit frustrated with the putting, and that can sometimes leak over into driving the ball and then hitting a good shot into the green. So I'm looking forward to seeing the ball go back in the hole.

I've been putting well the past few years. I feel like I've always been a strong putter. To not see putts go in the past few tournaments is tough. It's a fine line. To miss a cut by a shot or two, and the difference of doing that versus having a chance to play on the weekend and getting myself in the mix. So, yeah, hopefully we can continue to draw on the strong ball striking.

Like I said, this golf course tee to green is really where you can put yourself in good and safe positions where you're not struggling to make pars.

Q. You mentioned the crazy greens, but as far as the receptivity of the greens, how does that affect how you're going to play from tee all the way to the hole?

RICKIE FOWLER: I think at times, it -- not forces you, but it allows you to play a bit more aggressive off the tee to give yourself an easier approach shot possible. Coming into some of the greens with a short iron or possibly a wedge versus a mid iron is going to be pretty beneficial.

One hole in particular, No. 3, the green kind of slightly falls away from you. And if you're coming in there with a 6 and 7 iron, if you don't hit your spot perfectly, you're going to be off the back, and it's a quick up and down. Whereas, if you're coming in with a wedge or 9 iron, it's pretty easy to stop the ball, and you don't have to be as precise.

Q. So you see taking a risk off the tee as being worthwhile, ultimately?

RICKIE FOWLER: To a certain extent. You can't try and be very aggressive on this golf course. You kind of have to take what it gives you. You can't try and push it too much. There's some holes where it's just as wide with driver as it is with a driving iron or a 3 wood, and I

feel like I hit my driver just about as straight as any of those.

So I'd rather take my chances of having the shorter iron in and having a chance to possibly play aggressive and get a shot close, versus just trying to get one on the green.

Q. We know playing in the Open is a mental grind, and this is your eighth. Through the practice rounds, how do you see this as a much different and probably tougher mental grind than in other Opens?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, I think the greens probably add quite a bit more than some of the other Opens. They're all tough, tee to green. You've got to drive it well. Thick rough. And I feel like these are a lot more penalizing around the greens, especially if you miss it in the wrong spot.

There's situations where you won't be able to get it within 20, 25 feet of the hole so you kind of have to just accept bogey, take double out of the equation. I mean, it's going to happen. I'm going to hit a bad shot and end up in a bad spot. I'm going to make bogeys this week. If someone goes bogey-free this week, they're holding the trophy.

Q. Hi, Rickie. A short while ago, Rory used the word trepidation when assessing going into this week here at the U.S. Open. What word or few words come to mind for you?

RICKIE FOWLER: I mean, patience, I think, is always one of the biggest ones at a U.S. Open just because of how tough it is physically, mentally. You can't lose focus at all at any point out here. There's no easy golf shot. I think, watching on TV, it's going to seem a lot easier than if you're actually out on the grounds and see what this golf course really is.

It's a special piece of property. It's cool, first time coming here a few weeks ago and seeing the layout without the trees. I know they've taken out a lot of trees in the past few years. It's cool, but you don't get the real perspective of what this place is all about until you're actually walking it.

Q. And from all the U.S. Opens you've played over the last few years, is there one hole in particular that stands out for you as the most challenging? If so, which one would it be and why?

RICKIE FOWLER: I'm up to eight now. So a couple more hopefully -- yeah, a couple years, I'll be up to ten. I think I'm exempt for a little bit so that's good.

As far as toughest, I mean, it's kind of hard to pick out one. Like we talked about, there's not really any easy

holes in the U.S. Open, so you can make any hole the hardest one out there with one little mistake.

Q. Rickie, winning two events, two big events last year, what do you think those wins did for the expectations placed on you this year? And then what would constitute maybe a next step in your career, do you think?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, first off, next step would be winning a Major. The last two years have definitely put me in a great position for that with the top fives in 2014 and then coming back in '15 and winning multiple times for the first time in my career. Obviously, a big win at the PLAYERS and to go on after that and get a couple more wins in the following months.

So not the start that I wanted to the Majors this year, but we've got three ahead of us, and I'm really looking forward to this week.

Q. Rickie, is there any particular anxiety to attempting to get your first Major, or are you putting additional pressure on yourself? Just what is your approach in trying to clear that hurdle?

RICKIE FOWLER: I mean, really just trying to go into it just like another event. I mean, the more you think about it or trying to go win a Major, that just makes it harder. I think the more that you can relax and understand the situation and feel comfortable, which I feel like I've proven that in the past couple years with the play and the way I've been able to prepare and get myself some solid finishes. Now I've just got to be the one that has the lowest score.

It's been great, you know, having my mom, dad, and sister out this week with their two little dogs and staying in a house. So set up a little spot that feels like home for the week, and just out playing another tournament, but it happens to be the U.S. Open.

Q. Rickie, how difficult is the par 3 8th hole for you, and how have you been preparing for it leading up to the championship?

RICKIE FOWLER: If you really take a hole as a par 3 and play 250 plus to possibly 300, it's probably one of the best ones to pick. It's a pretty big green. You've got an area to run up. If you put yourself in the right position on missing the green and not short side yourself, it's very playable. So unless you short side yourself, it's not that difficult of a hole, but a bad tee shot is going to make it as hard as you want. Like I said, it's got the run-up area. It's a pretty big green. You won't see many 2s there, but take 3 and walk away.

Q. Rickie, switching gears a bit, what inspires your sense of style with what you wear on the course?

RICKIE FOWLER: I grew up action sports, grew up on a public driving range. So I guess I'm a little different than -- I guess I wouldn't say the normal golfer, but most of the guys that are out here playing professionally and the recreational golfer. I grew up riding and racing dirt bikes and the loud colors and flat bill hats and stuff like that were nothing out of the ordinary.

So I'm kind of in the middle. Golf, action sports, a little combo of everything.

Q. Rickie, you've been using Snapchat a lot during the practice rounds and whatnot. Do you kind of see that social media as maybe a way to get yourself a little loose leading up to such a big tournament?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yes. It's fun. I think it's a great way to involve the fans a bit more. From the feedback that I've gotten, they enjoy it. It's a side that they don't get to see. I've seen some comments as far as they feel like they're there walking around, part of the group type of thing.

Yeah, you don't have to deal with any negative feedback or anything on there. Post it, people get to watch the story, enjoy it, and just keep feeding them good content. So far it's been good.

THE MODERATOR: Do you think that also helps -- I notice often, when you're playing the tournament, the number of kids who come out and dress like you and really support you. How important is that, and is that a great way for you to connect with that audience as well?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah. Social media is definitely a lot more of the younger generation, but I feel like there's been a lot of people, some of my older fans from all generations, I feel like I've heard people say, I listened to your Snapchat story. I mean, 50-, 60-, 70-year-olds. So I think there's a wide range of people that are at least seeing what's going on out there a lot with me and Justin and Smylie on there.

So we have fun with it. It's fun on the golf course. It kind of it easy going out there. It's relaxing, just to kind of make it feel a little more like just a round at home.

Q. Rickie, sticking on the same topic, do you kind of take it upon yourself, and do you feel it's important for the younger players to promote golf, especially now that Tiger hasn't been around as much? Is that something that you think about and talk about with the other guys?

RICKIE FOWLER: I feel like everyone that plays professionally on the PGA Tour, I think it's all part of

our job to help grow the game, to all be great role models. I feel like social media has definitely given us a little bit of that opportunity to reach more of the younger generation and give them a glimpse of what's going on, whether it's day to day, inside the ropes, stuff they don't get to normally see and show that we're having a good time. We enjoy getting to play with buddies. We have a lot of good friendships out here. A lot of the top players are good buddies, and I think people enjoy seeing that.

So, yeah, I think the big thing is showing them that we're having a good time while we're out here playing, and I feel like that kind of draws them in to want to be a part of it.

Q. Do you ever grow tired of getting asked questions about the guys in front of you and the world rankings? They've won Majors, you're still looking for one. And how big of a gap do you think there is between you and the guys in front of you?

RICKIE FOWLER: I think there's a bit of a gap right now. I think Jason's at 13 or so. Average points in the 7s, I've got a little way to go. And, yeah, they've won Majors. So I've got some catching up to do.

The past few years have been great. '14, '15 were great stepping stones to kind of moving forward with where I was and then just getting in the top ten in world rankings, somewhere I really hadn't been, into the top five, my highest point being fourth.

So it's all a process. A Major will come. If I put the last two years together, that would equal a Major this year, but they don't come that easy. So we've got some work to do, and looking forward to chasing those guys down. Like I was just talking about, we're all good buddies. We all feed off each other, and we enjoy getting to play each other and the competition.

THE MODERATOR: Rickie, thank you so much for joining us this afternoon. We thank you for being here. We wish you well throughout the week.