

U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Tuesday August 9, 2016

Rocco Mediate



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Rocco Mediate, playing in his fourth Senior Open. He finished tied for third in his first appearance back in 2013.

Rocco, you said earlier, talking to Brian, don't cut the rough. These USGA championships are supposed to be tough. What do you like about having a more challenging setup? Do you feel like it suits your game?

ROCCO MEDIATE: Well, hopefully sometimes it does, but it's the United States Open. I don't know what else to say about it. I don't know that you have to say more about it. It's the U.S. Open.

All the stuff that happened at Oakmont, so what? I mean, I looked at that. Rulings are rulings. The way you guys deal with them is the way you guys deal with them. Who cares? Deal with it. Dustin dealt with it and won the golf tournament.

I think the harder the better. It separates people, and the best guy wins that week. You can't really fake it around these places. I've played Scioto a few times. I was up here a month -- Arnie Cutrell and I came up I don't know when. It was, five, six weeks ago. My dad came up and drove around with us.

I've played it before, but it's fun to play a golf course that the USGA touches. Simple as that. I love it because you know what's going on that week. You don't hit good shots, you don't get to play again. It's real simple. I've always loved that about U.S. Opens and Majors, for that matter.

U.S. Open, I think, is the hardest. I'd probably get some backup on that, but it should be the hardest. It's our National Open. I don't know what else to say about that.

THE MODERATOR: You talk about Rocco Mediate and USGA championships, the one that comes to mind first is 2008 at Torrey Pines. How much do you still get asked about that when you're playing?

ROCCO MEDIATE: Every single day, and I don't mind it at all. It was a great week. It was a lot of fun. It was just the best -- the only thing I didn't get was the trophy. I got everything else I wanted; see how good I was and see how good I could hang in there with the man.

The only sad thing about that entire week was he hasn't been back since, and that's sad to me. Golf misses him. I miss him. Most of the players miss him, I would guess. Definitely the sport misses him. I hope he figures it out, though I've been waiting for seven, eight years. That's just me, though.

THE MODERATOR: Earlier this year, you got a Senior Major. You won at Harbor Shores.

ROCCO MEDIATE: I did. It was fun.

Q. Wire to wire. And you talked about, after that, you made everything.

ROCCO MEDIATE: I drove good and I putted good. In big events like that, that's a good situation to have. I've never won a tournament like that. It felt the same. I mean, obviously, it was in '08, but it still felt the same. It was uncomfortable but comfortable. I don't know how to explain it.

And I was playing against some of the best players ever. Colin is just a class player. He doesn't mess up a lot. Obviously, Bernhard was behind us -- or in front of us, excuse me. You know he's always going to be around somewhere doing something crazy like he always does, which is cool.

So the fact that those guys were in the mix made it better. If I'd have beat Tiger in '08 instead of anybody else, it would have been better. I don't know to explain it. No disrespect, but if you beat the best player pretty much of all time back then, it's a better situation than if you beat whoever else. It's still the U.S. Open, but competition-wise.

I remember Martin, my caddie, said to me Saturday night at Harbor Shores, after the third round, he goes, it couldn't be better, our pairing. Colin is an exceptional player. Bernhard is right behind us. A bunch of other guys are right behind us that are good too, but those two are really, really good. And if you make mistakes, you're going to lose.

I liken playing against Colin to throwing a tennis ball up against the wall and expecting it not to come back. It's coming back just every single time. He didn't make any mistakes. He's a class player. I'm more scrappy, I guess you would say. I don't know what that means,

but it's not as clean. He's cleaner than most. Bernhard's cleaner than most. I mean that by not a whole lot of mistakes. I make mistakes. It's just my nature.

That was a huge -- that was definitely my biggest win as far as a big event and a Senior major which, to me, it kind of made -- it felt the same. I don't know how to explain it. I was probably supposed to lose against Colin, I mean, kind of like I was supposed to against Tiger; and, unfortunately, I did lose, but not the way that everybody thought I would.

But Colin's just -- and Bernhard, they're just really, really good. That's why they were who they were before they'd come to the Champions Tour. It's like it's not an accident that this is happening, these guys, right? They were always really, really good and a lot better than most players.

So going up against those guys -- I remember the first two rounds, I was with Colin and Kenny Perry. And all I want to do, I told my wife, all I want to do is compete with these guys. See what I can do. Whether or not I beat them or not is a different story, but can I compete with them? Can I stay around them?

Then funny things happened, and I stayed around them for the whole week. But you look at it like that as, yeah, if I'd have lost, if I'd have double bogeyed the last hole and lost, yeah, that would have really been awful. But if I'd have got beat the last day, which I did a lot of crazy things the last day to win the golf tournament because Colin, like I said, didn't really make a mistake. He didn't make a lot of putts, but he didn't really make a mistake. That means more to me than anything else.

And I didn't realize the magnitude of the event until after I won. I really didn't. Obviously, we're at a USGA event, but the PGA obviously is unbelievable too, and their tournaments are run like these. They're perfect. You look at all the stands, the people, the way the golf course is set up, you guys don't miss anything.

USGA events have always, always been my favorites because it's the U.S. Open or the U.S. Amateur. I've only played in two of those. I never played in the junior or anything else.

But the PGA and the USGA, those are huge events for us. Whether it's the regular Tour or our Tour, huge. They're our biggest event. Gave me a lot of confidence. Whether I do anything with it or not is a whole different story, but it still gave me a lot of confidence.

THE MODERATOR: Fast forward to this week. What do you need to do to get your second Major

championship?

ROCCO MEDIATE: Scioto, obviously, is pretty much where Jack learned to play. You can see why he is who he is. The shot qualities here are second to none. If you don't drive good here, you can go home, take your stuff and leave, because it's not going to work. Then you take your second shot. But from the fairway, it's a lot easier than if you're not in the fairway, obviously. And in an Open, it should be.

I've been pitching a little bit -- I just got in today. Pitching a little bit on the greens, and they're like this, which I love, because it's just hard. I want it to be impossible to play the golf course. That's what I'd like to see. Not unfair, but there's really not been a lot of Major events that are unfair. Some of us will say it's unfair because we're hitting it all over the golf course. Then it becomes really hard, and that's how it should be.

But if you hit a lot of fairways here, you can play this golf course quite well. The greens are tough. Bunkers are great. It's just a good place. I played a few U.S. Open qualifiers here over the years, and then I played a couple weeks ago. Like I said, I brought Arnie Cutrell out with me and a couple buddies from home. It's just exactly what I thought it would be. You drive it good, maybe you can do damage.

But I don't know. I don't know what's going to win, but I always like these tournaments right around par somewhere. Don't know what's going to happen with the weather. I have no idea. But I like when par matters again. I think it's kind of fun.

This golf course, the fence is the golf course. This is a great driving course, great putting, great greens, great rough, evil bunkers. And if you miss in the wrong place, you're toast. That's what Opens are.

Q. Rocco, go back to when you joined this Tour. Coming into it, did you think, oh, it's gravy. This is the second act of your career. Where was your competitive level? Was it easier, harder? Just take me through the mindset of when you came on here and what it's really been like.

ROCCO MEDIATE: I was really nervous because I felt like it's another Tour. What we did -- not all of us, but a lot of us, I played 27 straight years on the PGA Tour. I played right up to 50. I was exempt to 50. Cool.

So I was ready to go. I didn't have five or six or ten years off, which is hard to do. Some of the guys who have been off for four or five years, it takes them a while. They get it, but it takes them some time because they've always been good players.

I got to come right out and get ready to go. But nervous as hell because it's another Tour. You've got to prove yourself yet again, and that's how it should be.

Gravy? A hundred percent gravy because we played all those years on the regular Tour, and then we get to come here. Are you kidding me? It's the greatest thing of all time.

I don't know what would make you mad out here except for getting beat all the time. Because a great story is I came out the first week and won. Don't know how that happened. I obviously shot the low score, but no idea. I mean, I wasn't coming out to -- I was just coming to see what the hell was going on. Won the tournament.

Get to Naples next week. I didn't play Hualalai the first year. I get to Naples, and I went into the press room, and they said, What do you think? I said, Cookie won a couple weeks ago at Hualalai for three rounds at 17 under. I won last week for three rounds at 17 under. Come on. Come on. Three rounds, 17 under. I said, if you're around par the first day, just go home.

Fast forward to Friday afternoon. I'm pretty happy with it. I played -- I'm ecstatic. I had a great first week, blah, blah, blah, and I'm playing okay, and I'm 1 under par going to 18. Davie Marr comes out, and he was talking -- I love that part, when you're talking. He goes, so what do you think? I said, what did I say in the press room on Tuesday? I said, if you're around even par the first day, you're done. Bernhard was 9 under through 12 in Naples, and it is not easy.

I mean, our golf courses are 7,000 yards, give or take, up above or a little bit below, so it's not like we're playing driver-wedge all day. I said, there you go. I'm eight back. He's got six holes to play. I'm done. I'm eight back the first day. Can't make it up. Well, almost impossible.

So you look at the competition out here, it's ridiculous how good it is. It's ridiculous. I think it's as good as any other -- as the PGA Tour. It's just the guys are bigger, stronger, and faster. You go out there and come over here, good luck. I think we should open this tournament up three or four times a year to whoever wants to come. Come on, see what happens. You'd be shocked.

Q. The window is smaller, though, right? Did you put any pressure on yourself coming in?

ROCCO MEDIATE: It can be. It can be smaller if you let it be smaller. Bernhard is 58, and he's won 3,000 tournaments, and he keeps winning every year. He's awesome, right? So it can be smaller, but the way things are going, if you stay semi-fit -- semi-fit -- you

can go -- you know, I remember saying with the tour, it's changed on the regular tour.

I played Reno a month or so ago, played pretty good, finished like 20th. I was like the best player in the world, right? I'm like, oh, my God. I made the cut. I was so happy.

Went to the PGA, didn't play as good as I could have. Would I have done damage? Probably not. I would have made the cut, let's put it that way.

But these kids are -- the story I was telling everybody last week, and my buddies are with me, so I'm missing the cut. I get to the 9th hole at Baltusrol, 204 yards that day. Hit a beautiful, high, soft draw 4 iron. That's a 4 iron for me, 195 to 205, somewhere in that area. It's been that way since college. Hasn't changed. Haven't gotten shorter, definitely haven't gotten longer.

Get up, hit it up there 15 feet, miss the putt. Doesn't matter. I shot a 72 or 73 the second day, and I finished seven or eight over. Anyway, I'm watching the highlights. I'm staying at a buddy's with my wife, staying at the house, and I say, let's watch it.

So we're watching highlights. I see Jason on the TV. You know, mate, I made a double on 7 out of nowhere. So I figure if I get to 8 and 9, get to even par, you know, I go to the back nine. And he shot under 12 on the back nine that day. He birdies 8. He goes, yeah, I get up on 9, I'm looking at 205, and I felt like it was a smooth 7.

I'm standing back with a running start with this 4 iron and hit it hard as I can, and it just carries like 200 and rolls another few yards, but he's going to go at this with a 7 iron. That's the beauty of what's happened. The strong survive.

I mean, I'm 30 years -- I don't know how old he is, but I'm at least 25 years older than he is. I don't expect to be doing that, but you look at that and go, who's going to beat that guy? If you put him and I in the middle of every fairway and I make every putt I look at, but I hit with a 4 and he's using a 7 iron, it ain't happening. It's not going to happen.

I look back on all the years I played on Tour, we never thought about -- people say, how far do you hit it? I'd say, I hit it plenty far. We never had an issue with playing holes or playing shots.

Now you put me out there now with a free pass for the year, maybe there's a small chance I might keep my card. Small, depending on where I play and how I play. But, oh, my God, it's hard.

I mean, Jerry Kelly is doing things that are remarkable. You look at Jerry. I look at Jerry at 49, and I won when I was just about 48 at wherever the hell it was, Fry's. I was almost 48. That was in 2010. It was different then. I could survive then. Not now. Too strong, too fast, and better. Just period. Better.

It's all Tiger's fault. It's all his fault. He made everybody better and faster and stronger and all that stuff, which is a good thing. Just kind of kidding about that.

Q. Rocco, you've had a long career and played a lot of different places throughout the years. Do you still have an appreciation as a golfer to come to a place like this where Nicklaus learned the game, Bobby Jones won? Can you just talk about your appreciation maybe as a golf fan and a golfer to come to a place like this?

ROCCO MEDIATE: Yeah. Fan, number one. Player, number two. Playing where guys played -- I think the Champions Tour, you guys do a good job with it. Actually, all the Majors do when you think about it.

But we should be playing these places. Old school, where everybody learned. But being that Mr. Nicklaus was here and learned here and all the history that's here, it's kind of insanely cool that we get to come play here. I guess he's going to be here this week too. He's honorary, right? Of course he is. I mean, he'd better be.

Just being around these guys, you know, Jack doesn't play anymore really. But being around Watson and Irwin and all these guys, I'm still nervous. I mean, Tom, I don't play with -- he's not out as much as Hale, but when you play with Hale, you're minding everything. You want to make sure you don't mess -- there's so much respect there for these guys. They don't see it, probably, but I that's the way they like it, and they should. They earned their respect.

I mean, Watson was my guy throughout my entire career as far as my idol. I mean, I know I come from Pittsburgh, and Arnold was the guy too, but I didn't really know him when I was a kid. Tom was the guy then in the '80s and '90s. So he was my guy, and I still love watching him play and hit balls.

But we have the best deal in the world. We get to play with the greatest players, myself excluded, that ever played, and they're out there all the time just hitting shots. If you go up and ask them a question, they'll probably answer you. More than likely. So it's a pretty cool deal. It's a pretty cool deal.

But I've been on this Tour -- I qualified at 21; so 22, I

started at Pebble -- forever and a day. I couldn't think of anything else, first of all, I could do to make a living and then have this much fun because I get questions every day. In the airport today, I was talking forever, and then on the plane and stuff like that. That's the coolest thing ever.

Arnold taught me one thing. Not one thing, but one really cool thing. This is the coolest thing. He said, the only time you worry about autographs, son, is when they stop asking. The only time you worry about someone saying, hey, can I get a picture is when they stop asking for pictures.

He taught me that when I was 20 years old so I always try to listen to what he says because, if not, he'd beat you up back then. But I've had a good guy to help me out as far as the deal with -- because I was a shy person when I was a kid. Really shy. I mean, like this. But now I'm not shy anymore. Took a while.

But having him tell you things, who basically almost invented the way to be. And then Trevino came along, who was unbelievable. It's not that hard to figure out eventually.

Q. A couple things. You mentioned Bernhard a couple times. I'm just wondering, I'm sure fitness is an aspect of it, but what else makes Bernhard what he is at this point?

ROCCO MEDIATE: He's just always been good, though. Martin, in fact, now that I see him sitting there, he always says one thing. Why is everybody so surprised that this guy beats this guy all the time? He did his entire career. Think he's going to change now? You know, he's not going to change. He's always been an amazing player since I ever heard of him, in '85, when he won the Masters. '85, right? Yeah, right before Jack. I was just kind of getting into golf in '82, '83. I mean, '81 or '82.

But you think about how good he's played throughout his career, why wouldn't he continue to do that unless he doesn't want to play anymore? All these guys, same thing. I mean, look what Hale did throughout his Champions Tour career. He won forty -- how many -- six, five? Something stupid with a 4 in front of it. So it's not a surprise.

Watson, same way. Do you think he's not going to win tournaments? Unless he doesn't want to. Unless he's tired. If Jack would have played more, he'd have won more. Didn't play any. I mean, I'm sure Jack's going, well, I've already beat these guys. I'm kind of tired. I don't know if he said that, but he did. He beat the guys most of the time, and those guys don't change.

Some guys come out and light it up, but it's not like the

old school guys that have always won tournaments.

Q. You'd also talked about how good the young players are today, the Jason Days and such.

However, a 46-year-old guy just shot 58.

ROCCO MEDIATE: Yeah, it's -- was he 46?

Q. 46.

ROCCO MEDIATE: He should have shot 56. Come on.

Q. Correct.

ROCCO MEDIATE: Got to make a couple more birdies. No, it just goes to show you, certain courses, we should be still good, right? Furyk's obviously really good. He's won 13 or 14, 15 events and an Open. He's not going to forget how to do those things. Under the gun in that type of golf course, you're not hitting 3 irons to every par 4. Yeah, you can do something.

Once he got in that situation, I'm sure he wasn't surprised. He already did it once. If he's the first guy ever to shoot under 60 in two competitive rounds, I mean, that's ridiculous. Not surprising though, not from him. Nothing he does is surprising. It really isn't. It's just remarkable.

We were on the range on Sunday, right, and I remember Rick Smith texting me, because Ricky's coming out. He worked here with Walker Inman forever. And then Martin goes, holy crap, Furyk's 11 under through 12. I went, yeah, I already heard that. Rick called me earlier. And you're looking, thinking he's going to shoot like 48. He birdied one of the harder holes, 16, and then got it.

But still, if he'd have bogeyed one hole and shot 59, that's ridiculous those numbers. You're right, though. He doesn't hit it any further than most of us. But he's just a really good -- I mean, they don't forget, these guys. He's won twice the amount of events I won on the Tour. More than that. I won six. He won 12 or 13 and an Open.

Those guys don't -- of course he's going to be able to keep doing that. Jerry Kelly, same thing. Didn't win a lot, but finished second last week. He was on the edge of -- not that he'd want to stay out on the Tour. He might want to come here at 49 or 50 next year, but he's exempt now. That's amazing to me. He's got to be so happy with himself now, going up against those guys with only a couple events left for the FedEx Cup, right? And he finished second, I think, alone. He's exempt now if he wants to go do whatever he wants. I think it's cool as hell.

He can do it on certain courses. Certain courses. But the reason Jimmy Walker won and Jason Day and the other guys is because they hit it 77 miles and can find

most of them. That's the thing. You can't beat those guys. You just can't. I mean, for a year. You might beat them a week or two here or there, but not for the year. There's no mistakes going on out there. Jordan is the most impressive because he does it normal. Not that he's short, but he's not even in the same sport as Jason is length-wise or Rory.

Q. Or Dustin.

ROCCO MEDIATE: Yeah, those guys. I don't even mention those names. You don't even know what the hell they're doing. It's just ridiculous what they do. That's what's impressive about Jordan. He's not even close to where they're hitting it, but he's still doing serious damage. We'll see.

Q. Rocco, you said early on that every day you hear about the Open battle with Tiger. How surprised are you that he just hasn't won a Major since, and what do you think his absence has meant for the game?

ROCCO MEDIATE: The absence is -- it's astronomical, the absence, in my opinion. The only other guy that moved the needle like Tiger is Arnold. I call him Mr. Palmer, but I'll say Arnold now. Arnold invented the needle, I guess you could say. Tiger moved it as well. But the second he comes back to any event, you can't get in the tournament. No one else does that.

And that's not even being disrespectful. That's just Tiger. The fact that he hasn't won -- and I'll say it again like I said the last eight years -- doesn't surprise me in the least because the golf swing has been going bad since 2005. I watched it happen right in front of my eyes. No matter who you are or how good you are, when the club isn't in the right place, the ball doesn't go the right place. It's just that simple. I don't know what else to say about that because it doesn't make any sense what's happened to him. None.

And his body's a wreck. This is the most in shape person you could probably ever meet over the last 15 years, and he keeps breaking. Why does he keep breaking? What does he do besides golf? Not a lot, right? So it's caused by the golf swing. Repetition messes up the body. And all of a sudden, the body goes, I'm done. Snap.

Been there. I did it pulling the things out of a trunk in '93. That's what stopped me for a few years. There's a way to get around it. I've been there. I know how to fix it. It's a simple, simple fix, but it will never happen because he'll never, never, never ask me about it. I've been trying for eight years.

Could you imagine the story? It's a movie. But it's not going to happen. I hope he does. What he's done

throughout his career, what he's done for this Tour and what he's done for our players. Look at Jason, who talks to him all the time. He's helping the kid, telling him things. Whoever else is calling him, who knows? He doesn't have to do that. He does it because he cares, and it's making people better.

He made us all better. He made me better in my world. I was never anybody in that world. But in my world, he made me a much better player than I ever would have been just because how do you compete with him every once in a while?

THE MODERATOR: Rocco Mediate, 8:01 off the 10th tee on Thursday. Best of luck.

ROCCO MEDIATE: Hopefully, I'll be back again.