

U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Wednesday August 10, 2016

Jeff Maggert



THE MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, it's my pleasure to welcome the defending champion Jeff Maggert into the Media Center. Last year Jeff shot rounds of 70, 65, 70, and 65 to win at Del Paso Country Club. The victory was Jeff's second senior Major championship and first USGA championship.

Jeff, I think more than just winning, what I was impressed with last year is who you were able to hold off, with Colin Montgomerie and Bernhard Langer kind of breathing down your neck the past few days and the weekend. You've won before, but talk about your emotions as you were coming down the stretch last year in Del Paso.

JEFF MAGGERT: I was obviously having a good week, playing the ball very well, ball striking. But I think one of the things that I didn't realize when I turned 50 and started playing the Champions Tour is the talent that's out there, and we see guys like Bernhard and Colin and Tom Watson on a weekly basis. Even though those guys are a little older than they used to be, they still play very, very well.

So the fact that I'd had a year and a half under my belt playing against those guys week in and week out certainly helped my confidence level coming down the stretch.

Again, sometimes when you play well and you get in certain situations in a tournament, you just feel like there's no way that you're going to let this tournament get away from you. And I did have that feeling most of the week, especially on Sunday after the good start. I just felt like it was kind of my week to take it away.

So a lot of good memories, but this is a new week obviously. And with the later date, I've enjoyed an extra month of being defending champion, but I need to get back to work this week.

This golf course is going to be a real, real good test for all of us. I feel like maybe a shot to a shot and a half harder per round this course than last year's course. So just going to really have to have good ball striking off the tee, keep it out of the rough, and be smart on where I'm hitting the ball on the putting surfaces.

THE MODERATOR: A lot of the players we've had in here said it is very challenging. The rough is very lush

and can cause some problems if you're not in the fairway. For you, you've played the Memorial about a dozen times in Columbus. How much have you seen Scioto before this week, and what do you think about the course?

JEFF MAGGERT: The first time I saw it was on media day about a month and a half ago. I drove the course with Bill Stines, the head pro here. That was a good day, actually. We drove every hole and every fairway and walked on all the greens. So I got a good feel for the course before I got here.

Yesterday, I played a full 18 on the course. The golf course played very difficult. I didn't think the ball -- the tee shots, the ball was traveling really far yesterday. I don't know if it was the heat. The fairways might have been a little bit firmer than they were a month and a half ago, but this morning it was kind of the opposite. The course played a lot longer. So I don't know if it was the humidity this morning or maybe a little moisture from the rain yesterday.

But it's a challenging golf course driving the ball. Normally, you're just worried about hitting the ball very straight, but here I feel like I almost have to control the distance with my driver. And when I say that, you know, maybe hit a driver 95 percent of what I would normally hit it just because the way the bunkers are. I feel like if I step back with a 3 wood, I'm leaving myself some very long irons into some of the par 4s.

So there just seems to be a lot of holes where not only I'm looking at hitting the ball straight, I'm also kind of trying to control my distance and not really just going up there and trying to hit it as far as I can and as straight as I can.

THE MODERATOR: In addition to your win last year, you've had a lot of success in USGA championships. You had seven top tens at the U.S. Open. So what is it about your game that seems to translate really well at difficult courses?

JEFF MAGGERT: Well, number one is I feel very in control of my driving the golf ball. I don't really fear tight golf courses, and I feel comfortable playing those types of courses because I know I drive the ball reasonably well almost every week that I play. I'm not

necessarily a power hitter, but my length is decent, and I hit the ball pretty straight with my driver. So that sets you up on a tough golf course to be able to play from the fairway.

Even though you've got long irons to some of the greens -- 6 irons, 5 irons, 4 irons -- I feel like I can manage my game well enough to put it on the green and have some opportunities to make birdies.

But normally, U.S. Open setups, a lot of pars are good. Take a few birdies if you can get them and eliminate all the mistakes. If you can escape with just one bogey a day, you feel like you've made a pretty good effort.

THE MODERATOR: Before we open it up to everybody else, this year no victories, but already six top ten finishes. How do you feel about your game coming into this week here at Scioto?

JEFF MAGGERT: To be honest, I've been a little disappointed with my year so far. I've played well. I just haven't really kind of got everything in sync. I was playing really, really well last week. I was a little disappointed that I wasn't able to finish that off. But on the other side of it, it really put a good taste in my mouth coming into this week. Just all parts of my game were really, really solid this week, and it carried over into my practice rounds here.

So definitely, the confidence is right there where it was last year. Just looking to maybe tighten it up a little bit mentally and eliminate some of the -- just the little mistakes that I think are going to be easy to overcome.

Q. You were speaking about your driving, and that's obviously your reputation, what an accurate driver you are. Where did that trait come from? How did you develop that ability to hit the ball so solidly in the fairway all the time?

JEFF MAGGERT: I think it's growing up in a different era. When I learned to play golf, we were taught to hit the ball straight and be in control of the golf ball. Today's game for the younger players is, I think, taught a little bit different, and they teach you to hit it as far as you can, and then we'll try to figure out the straight part somewhere down the road.

I have a 12-year-old son who played a lot of golf. So I'm trying to teach him a different way than I learned, and I'm trying to teach him just hit it as far as you can because the game has changed for that younger generation. It's a very athletic game.

I mean, you see guys like Dustin Johnson hitting the ball 310 yards in the air on a regular basis. It's not like one or two drives. They do it all day long. And not only him, but there's 40 or 50 guys there doing the same

thing.

So in that regard, I learned a different style of golf. I played with Persimmon clubs and wound balls, and they curved offline pretty far if you didn't hit the ball on the club face and hit the ball solid. So you learn different shots. You learn to hook the ball, to fade the ball, to hit a low driver, a high driver.

Today's game is more of a straight ball. It's played pretty much in the air as far as you can hit it and as straight as you can hit it.

But learning to control my ball when I was younger and then moving into the new equipment, to me, the new drivers just seem so easy to hit for me because I remember hitting a little Persimmon club. So to me, the big-headed drivers are almost like cheating for me because I hit the ball 20 yards further than I did when I was 25 years old, and that's all ball technology and driver technology.

Q. Jeff, you said that you're not real happy with the way the year's gone. Can you get a little bounce in your step coming to an event where you're defending champion? And how do you balance that with the pressure of sort of being the defending champion?

JEFF MAGGERT: The difference here is we're at a new course. I think when you're defending at a course where you play every year, year after year, it's a little bit different. This is like, even though I am defending, I'm in the same boat as everyone else trying to learn a new venue, a new course. So it's a different mindset for me definitely, and it will be tomorrow.

I won't have those memories from last year that I did. I did this on this hole and I did that on that hole. So everything's going to be different.

So I'm looking forward to the challenge. I love playing tough golf courses. I think the USGA did an awesome job selecting Scioto, just a great golf course. It's going to be very difficult.

Q. Unrelated, you've got some guys playing golf down in Rio. What are your thoughts on that? Is that something that you would have really been passionate about doing or not? And do you understand the guys who are not playing that? What were your thoughts on that?

JEFF MAGGERT: Well, it's hard to say. I mean, we live in a day of everything happens in the media in a short period of time. I think, as a young person, I might have jumped to conclusions a little bit too early.

But I was thinking the other day, when these guys are

75 and 80 years old that did not go and they realize that some of these younger kids went and won a gold medal, I think when they look back, they're going to say, you know what, maybe that's a tournament that I should have went and played.

You know, it is what it is. You have to make a decision based on what you feel is right for you and your family or whatever it is. But, I mean, winning a gold medal, I don't care if it's table tennis or badminton or whatever your sport is, to win a gold medal in the Olympics, to me, that's like you're the best at that sport in the world. I mean, that's kind of the standard that the Olympics set.

So I was a little surprised that some of the guys pulled out, but we've got some great players there. So whoever wins it is going to be deserving.

Q. You mentioned the big-headed driver and you almost feel like you're cheating. You got the Ping hat on. I putt with the same putter I bought when I was 13, it's a Ping Echo 2. Henrik Stenson hits that 3 wood that he's had for how long. How important is equipment to you right now? Are you still playing clubs that you played back in the day?

JEFF MAGGERT: Well, I'm fortunate. I feel like Ping has a very good technology system in place so when they come out with new stuff, I know that it's good. So I pretty much shift right into their new generation of clubs pretty quickly.

As far as putter goes, I mean, you can say Karsten Solheim revolutionized the putter with his Anser, because that was 50 years ago. And you can go out on that putting green, and almost every putter that a guy uses almost looks like an identical replica of the original Anser. I know they're different materials and they're milled and all of that, but you look at that basic design that's stood the test of time for 50 years, it's pretty amazing to me.

Q. Nicklaus has said before that this course, playing here was why he became a fader. I know the course has undergone some changes. Do you think the course today favors a particular shape or a particular player?

JEFF MAGGERT: The course here at Scioto? I think it's what the U.S. Open requires -- I use the term U.S. Open, U.S. Senior Open together because I feel like the courses are very similar. They test you. You have to hit the ball on the fairway and you have to put the ball on the green. And if you don't do either one of those things throughout the course of a round, you're going to really get penalized.

You don't get penalized by making doubles and triples. It's just that bogey, another bogey, another bogey, and all of a sudden you're 4, 5, 6 over par, and it's frustrating.

To me, it would be almost easier to take the pain to go out and make a triple or quadruple bogey and get it all over with at once and then you can enjoy the rest of your round. But it's a struggle. It's a challenge. And that's the way the golf courses are set up and the ones they choose.

So it tests you all day long. It never lets up, and you've got to be on the top of your game from the first tee shot to the last putt.

THE MODERATOR: Our defending champion Jeff Maggert, 8:12 at the 10th tee on Thursday.