

2015 US Senior Open Championship

Wednesday, June 24
Press Conference



Tom Watson

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome eight-time major champion Tom Watson in. Tom is playing in his 14th U.S. Senior Open, three runner-up finishes --

TOM WATSON: 14th?

THE MODERATOR: 14th.

TOM WATSON: That makes me feel old, but not as old as Hale.

THE MODERATOR: Hale was 20. Dave Eichelberger 22.

TOM WATSON: Berger has 22?

THE MODERATOR: 22 straight. You've had three runner-up finishes and six top five finishes over that time, and you've never missed the cut at the U.S. Senior Open. You do have ties to Northern California. Attended Stanford and won the 1982 U.S. Open, of course, at Pebble Beach, about 175 miles from here.

TOM WATSON: Centuries ago.

MODERATOR: What do you remember specifically that championship more than three decades ago?

TOM WATSON: I remember a lucky chip. I remember my dad, on Father's Day, said, son, why the hell did you hit it so hard on the last hole? I said, I made it, dad. I remember that was a special day, just like Sunday was for Jordan Spieth, playing in front of his dad and his mom and dad, especially his dad there at Chambers Bay. It's a special time. Most of the players on the tour, their fathers have taught them to play the game. That's the way we were taught. My father taught me, and there was a survey by Golf Digest a number of years ago asking, who first taught you the game? 95 percent of the players said it was my father. So it was a special time when I won the U.S. Open. But more than that, my dad had a special affinity for the U.S. Open. He always said, if you win the U.S. Open, you've won the toughest setup tournament in golf. So I always wanted to win it. I played in the U.S. Amateur,

trying to win that, never did. I had a couple of shots at winning the U.S. Open early, and finally I got it done in '82. At least I have one under my belt there, a USGA Championship. I haven't won the U.S. Senior Open. I had one pretty nice playoff there with Don Pooley back in 2002, but it was I've had my opportunities and just haven't come through and win it.

THE MODERATOR: Then coming up this July, you mentioned Jordan. Jordan will have a chance to win his third consecutive major at St. Andrews, and that will be your 38th and final start in the British Open. What are your emotions going into that championship that you've already won five times?

TOM WATSON: Well, as I said, it's a little bit like death. It's the finality of it. It's over. You know it's going to be over. You just hope you go out screaming and kicking and doing everything you possibly can to do it well and make a good last showing. That's how I'm looking at it.

MODERATOR: And we just had Hale in here talking about him just turning 70 and how he has played well into his later years, and you certainly have had a great career beyond 50. What is it that continues to keep you motivated and keep you playing well as you've passed 60?

TOM WATSON: Illusions. The illusion that I can still do it and still hit the shots. And every now and then, I can. I kind of surprise myself that I can get into a good stretch of golf where I'm hitting a lot of good quality shots. I've been able to do that throughout my career, and I'm still under the illusion that I can still get it done now at age 65, and I can have that stretch of golf where I'm playing well enough to have some satisfaction that I'm doing it the right way and doing it well, and that would allow me to compete. I love to compete. When you don't play well, you get frustrated and angry with yourself. I still do, and so that tells me that I'm still fighting and scratching and kicking a little bit, trying to get it done here at my age.

Q. Having just said all that, Tom, what are your prospects for this week? Do you feel like you can put enough of a game together to at least get yourself in contention and then sort of see what happens?

TOM WATSON: Well, yeah, that's kind of where I am.

I'm hitting enough good shots really well, but I'm not hitting it very consistently, not often enough. And if I can get into that stretch where I'm hitting -- where I get in a good stretch where I consistently am hitting the shots that I'm hitting occasionally or more than occasionally on the practice range, it's good. It's just not quite there yet. I feel like I'm pretty close, but it's just not quite there. Maybe it will all fall in place sometime during this week, and then it will be off to the races.

Q. You just touched on it earlier about the longevity of your career. What are the factors that have enabled you to play well, almost winning an Open Championship at 59, et cetera? Are there a couple of things that really lend themselves to that?

TOM WATSON: Good genes.

Q. There you go.

TOM WATSON: Good genes. Mom and dad gave me a good, pretty much injury-free body. Yeah, I've had a hip replacement, but that's just a mechanical thing in there. It's not like a shoulder or a knee, and I needed it. My golf swing, I have a pretty long golf swing. If you have a pretty long golf swing, you can still generate some power. It's been good for me over my years and into my later years in my career. Again, it's the -- I hope it's not just an illusion. I hope there's a reality factor this week in my game. There is a bit of uncertainty about how I'm going to play in my own mind, but I feel it's there if it shows. Somehow I've got to get it to show.

Q. Mr. Watson, I know that pro golfers are some of the most superstitious of all professional athletes.

TOM WATSON: Baseball players are. Golf is much less. Baseball players are the most superstitious.

Q. Two questions. Are you superstitious?

TOM WATSON: No.

Q. But do you have a certain -- once a tournament starts, for instance, do you do certain things a certain way every time? Maybe what might not be seen as a superstition, but you are a creature of habit since you've been playing so long?

TOM WATSON: Creature of habit, I keep three coins in my pocket because I don't want to go searching for one coin and a bunch of tees in my pocket. That's my superstition, three coins, three different sizes; a quarter, a nickel, and a penny, or a quarter, a dime, and a penny. Doesn't really matter, but three different sizes so I can feel them in my pocket.

Q. (Inaudible).

TOM WATSON: Yeah, I have. More of convenience than a superstition. If there's a superstition or a habit

that I have, yeah, three coins in my pocket.

Q. Tom, you still have a few more days to go, but I don't know if you played here or not, if you could answer to that. And what do you like about the Del Paso Country Club setup thus far?

TOM WATSON: What I like about this golf course is, first of all, the condition. The condition is superb. The greens are in 100 percent perfect shape. The fairways, the same. The tees. What makes it, I guess, unique compared to all the other U.S. Senior Open Championships that I've played in is that the rough here around the greens is the most difficult rough that I've ever played in the U.S. Senior Open.

Q. Mr. Watson, you've obviously played in all different types of conditions, and we're going to hit the triple digits here for the next couple of days. When you're playing in extreme heat, how does that affect your game or the game of others?

TOM WATSON: Well, I think I'm in pretty good shape. I can deal with it. You deal with it with electrolytes and hydration. That's the biggest thing. There is some shade out there. Take advantage of the shade and hope it's not off your tee ball because, if it's on the tee ball, that means you're in the rough. Physically, this is not a difficult golf course to walk at all. It's very flat, so you're not going to put yourself out. The heat itself, I'm kind of used to it. The last week, it was very hot in Kansas City where I was practicing. It's not that big a deal. We old guys like heat. We don't like cold. We like it hot. Keeps our bones and everything loose. You get it below 80 degrees, and we start putting our cashmeres on. (Laughter).

Q. I was just curious if you had an opinion about this. Last week there was quite a bit of controversy about taking the U.S. Open to a golf course like Chambers Bay, very unusual. I mean, you've got great history in both the U.S. Open and the British Open, and this golf course seems to be much more of a traditional type of U.S. Open course. Just philosophically, I mean, I wondered if you had an opinion about the Open last week and about bringing the Opens to what is a traditional kind of U.S. Open.

TOM WATSON: U.S. Open to me means heavy rough right off the fairway, around the greens, putting the premium on your accuracy, putting the ball on the fairway, hitting the greens. If you're off the fairways and off the greens, you have a real problem, and that's the U.S. Open to me. Last week's golf course was a links style golf course. Listen, every year we play a links golf course at the Open championship in the UK. I think the USGA, going to Chambers Bay, they went out of the box and went to a course that was just they wanted to make it play like a links, but I think, if you

look at the way the greens were, I think the USGA didn't really come forth and say that the greens are bad and kind of take the brunt of the criticism away from the players, who had to kind of tiptoe the line and say, well, the greens aren't very good or everybody has to play the same greens and things like that. USGA should have come out and said, you know, our greens aren't very good. We take responsibility for it. We're sorry, and we're going to try to make them the best possible greens we possibly can, but they're not very good, and we're sorry. They had two greens that looked like they were in good shape, the 7th and the 13th greens. My question to them is why were those greens in good shape versus the other 16 greens? I don't know. It put the brunt on the players to not tell the truth because we don't want -- players don't want to go out and say bad things about the golf course we're playing. We really don't want to do that. But last week, you saw the greens. You know the greens are bad. USGA should have been very up front right from the beginning with that.

Q. Staying with Chambers Bay but on a more positive note, the victory by Jordan Spieth. We're talking back to earlier about a great time for golf, great champion, has won the first two majors of the year, and also Rory. You were part of a great rivalry with Jack. Is this the start of another great rivalry? How excited are you to see what Jordan does?

TOM WATSON: It seems like it. I liked what Jordan said last week about him being a rival to Rory. He says, no, I'm not a rival. He's a much better, accomplished player than I am right now. I haven't had the time out there. That's a level-headed, honest statement from Jordan. He hasn't played as much or won major championships, as many major championships. But the prognosis is, and the golf world is looking now at him and saying, yeah, you may be the guy that takes on Rory in the game of golf, and there might be that rivalry that we love in the game of golf. The Arnold versus Jack and the Snead versus Hogan versus Nelson type of stuff. That's what the public wants to see. There's indications that it's probably going to happen.

Q. Can I just follow up, Tom, and just ask about Jordan. I'm sure you've seen him a little bit on TV, and you said you watched Sunday. How will he do at the old course with the game that he has? Does it fit the old course pretty well?

TOM WATSON: The way he plays the game, yeah. I think his ability to score is the most important thing. You play the old course, you have to have the ability to score. That means you're not going to -- one of the things about the old course, it's the course on which, over the years, I have the longest putts ever

consistently on the old course. I have 60- and 70- and 80-foot putts a lot on the old course. You just don't get the ball that close to the hole. Even when you're playing your best, you're going to have that 80-foot putt, that 90-foot putt, and maybe three or four of them during a round, and you've got to be right on with your putting. When Tiger won there a few years ago, his speed on his putts were the best I've ever seen anybody ever in the history of the game. Wherever he was, the ball went by the hole that far. It wasn't ever short, but it always went by the hole that far. I mean, it was the most incredible -- nobody noticed that or nobody really talked about it, but that was incredible. That's what you have to do to win there. You have to have great touch with your long putting and get the ball up and down and, oh, by the way, stay out of those pot bunkers. That's the most important thing.

Q. Mr. Watson, you remember when this area was kind of a regular stop on the Senior Tour. I'm just curious what your reaction was, knowing when this tournament came back here, at least to have the U.S. Open here. And also, is there a fond memory that sticks out from those tournaments when it was a regular stop?

TOM WATSON: I remember playing in the Swing for Cancer here at Del Paso Country Club. Bob Hurst used to run it, used to come over to the Silverado and gather up all the pros there to come and play here. They had some great celebrities that came in here and played. Clint Eastwood, I think Bob Hope played one year. They really did it well and made a lot of money for cancer. It was always a real fun event to come here and play at Del Paso. I don't remember the golf course being this hard back in those days, maybe because I hit the ball a little bit longer back in those days. But it brings some really good memories, yes, it does.

THE MODERATOR: Thursday at 7:52 off the 10th tee. Best of luck.