

2015 US Senior Open Championship

Wednesday, June 24
Press Conference

Matt Sawicki

Jeff Hall

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the 36th United States Senior Open Championship at the Del Paso Country Club here in Sacramento, California. This is the first time that Del Paso has hosted the U.S. Senior Open and the fifth USGA Championship to be staged here. Among the field of 156 players, we're pleased to announce we have 27 amateurs in the field and 84 sectional qualifiers, in tune with our Open tradition. Representing 15 countries, the field also includes defending champion Colin Montgomerie and 28 past USGA champions. With that, I'll turn it over to Matt Sawicki, our USGA Director of Rules and Championships, and our staff in charge here at the 2015 U.S. Senior Open. Matt?

MATT SAWICKI: Thanks, Mike. It's been a tremendous week here in Sacramento. From the club, the volunteers, people in the community. I can't tell you how many times I've been stopped at an intersection or at a mall, and somebody said, gosh, we're glad to have you here. That's the hallmark of a truly great community. So we're excited to be here. This Championship is a big deal to the players, to the fans, to the people in this community. We have 2,600 volunteers on the ground this week, had strong ticket sales, and we expect upwards of 20,000 people each day on the weekend. Of course, kids get in free, and it's been fun to see the kids in the grandstands throughout the golf course this week. A few people of note here at Del Paso I want to recognize. Bob Kunz, the general manager. Bob has been with us since day one. He's been entirely flexible. He's been a great representative of his membership. He's been wonderful. Mark McKinney, the superintendent, who Jeff will talk about in a minute. I know Jeff will say it, but Mark's put out one heck of a product this week. Mike Green, the head professional, has welcomed his colleagues with open arms. And, of course, Dan Spector, our general chairman, who's been an ambassador for the city, the state, and the club at the



highest level. So to all those people, thank you. Of course, we couldn't do this without community partners as well. The State of California from the top down, California Highway Patrol, Sacramento County, the police, sheriff, fire departments have all been wonderful in our planning and execution of this Championship. Today's Military Appreciation Day. We have great respect for all active and retired service members at the USGA. In that vein, I'd like to recognize my grandmother, a coast guard service member, who's celebrating her 92nd birthday today. And hopefully, she forgives me and takes this as credence for the card I forgot to send. Hopefully, we get that on the record. A few items for spectators to keep in mind before they come out to the Championship. At our website, www.us senioropen.com, we've got a know before you go section that has all the information about parking, spectator tips, our prohibited items, what you may or may not bring into the Championship. One note, bags must be smaller than 6 by 6 by 6 or, if they're clear and transparent, 12 by 12 by 6. You're allowed to bring mobile devices into the Championship. However, you may not use them as cameras during the Championship itself. We recognize that the weather forecast calls for warmer temperatures Thursday through the weekend. We ask spectators to stay hydrated, to bring sunscreen, to wear comfortable shoes. In that vein, we are going to allow all spectators, tomorrow through the remainder of the Championship, to bring two clear sealed water bottles into the Championship. Additionally, water at our concession stands is reasonably priced at \$2.50 a bottle. We have air conditioned first-aid stations at the 1st tee and the main entrance, air conditioned tents open for public access at the merchandise pavilion, Lexus Performance Drive. Finally, I'm excited to say this is the first U.S. Senior Open that will be broadcast live on our website with live streaming coverage beginning tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. Pacific, Friday at 8:00 a.m. Pacific, and then the weekend at 11:00 a.m. Pacific time Saturday and Sunday. We're truly excited to be here in Sacramento. Del Paso has been a wonderful partner in this endeavor, as has everybody in the City of Sacramento. Thank you very much. I'll turn it over to Jeff Hall.

JEFF HALL: Thanks, Matt. Good morning, everyone. Again, to echo what Matt has said, very excited to be on the eve of the 36th playing of the United States

Senior Open here at Del Paso. It's been a great three, four, five years here with various individuals that we've been interacting with at the club, but none more enjoyable than Mark McKinney, the superintendent. He and his crew have done just a fabulous job in getting us to where we are and ready for the conduct of this Championship tomorrow. We are well positioned for a successful Championship and look forward to getting it started tomorrow. We have a great history, as Mike mentioned, here at Del Paso with four previous championships, and we're certainly looking forward to advancing that story, our Championship story here at Del Paso with the 36th United States Senior Open. From a golf course standpoint, many of you perhaps know that while the golf club has been here for many years, the golf course is quite different and was reworked by Kyle Phillips in 2006; new routing, really a new design concept where, when we came to look at the golf course in the first instance, there was no rough in play anywhere on the golf course, and that was a bit of a departure from what we typically see from our Open championships. Tom O'Toole, Jr., our current president, was chairman of the Championship Committee at the time, and he made the visit here with me, and we looked at the presentation, considered it, and came to a decision that we thought, to test these players at this level, that we did have to introduce rough. We presented that case to the leadership here at the club, and they warmly embraced it, and we've now got some grass growing out there with respect to the rough. We're very pleased at the test of golf that's going to be presented to these players this week. We have a golf course that on the scorecard measures just under 7,000 yards, 6,994 yards, par 70. But I think it's very unlikely that we will ever play the golf course at that yardage. There is some flexibility here with some teeing grounds, various teeing grounds, and some of the putting greens are quite deep. So when you go to a front hole location versus a back hole location, it will change the yardage significantly on a number of holes. I would also suggest that the par and yardages are slightly deceiving. There are five par 3s on the golf course, which brings that yardage number down a little bit. But add a basic tee shot of 250 yards, and all of a sudden, you're looking at a 7,200-yard golf course. I think the comments I've heard thus far from the players have all been very positive, and a number of them have been using some clubs that they might not use regularly week to week. So I think they're finding it a bit long. But the golf course offers a very solid variety of holes. We've got a 636-yard par 5 in the 15th hole and a 312-yard par 4 at the 9th hole. Par 3s will play in the 150 range up to 230 yards. So I think players will have an opportunity to play a number of different types of shots this week. It's a pretty straightforward golf course. It's really right there in front of you, and the players in their comments have reflected that thus far. I'd like to talk just for a moment about our philosophy

with setup. It's not our intent to have the hardest test of golf. That's not what we're after. But we want it to be a comprehensive test of golf. Shot-making, mental skills, keeping one's patience, recovery shots. We think our setup brings in all of those elements into golf, and we believe it's the best way to define our national champion. Firm and fast, you'll hear us talk about that throughout all of our championships. That's a philosophy that is presented at all of our championships, whether it's the Junior Amateur, the Senior Women's Amateur, the U.S. Senior Open. At different levels of firmness, but it's our philosophy throughout all of our Championship setups. We believe, when the golf course is firm, it places increased value on shot-making and course management. Again, kudos to the commitment from the club to, when they went through the renovation work with Kyle Phillips, to do what was necessary when it was built to give us the opportunity to be as firm and as fast as we can, given the weather that we're going to be encountering, and the work, again, that Mark McKinney and his staff have done to execute over the course of the last five years to get us in this position that we are today. We evaluate each hole on its own merits. We really aren't wrapped up in a total yardage, per se. We try to evaluate each hole, and is this an appropriate test of golf for this group of players? I think we've, again, got a nice mix of holes out on the golf course this week. The average fairway width is in the 32- to 36-yard width, and I would say that's pretty typical for one of our Open championships. Obviously, the shorter holes are going to be a bit more narrow than that. And we have, because of the rye grass, which really presents us great flexibility in our presentation, we will be utilizing the graduated rough concept that we have had in place over the last several years. Our intermediate rough, which is the rough that's nearest to the fairway, will be 1 1/2 inches in height, approximately 6 feet wide along the fairways, and we'll have a band of about 24 inches of that same grass around the putting greens, and that will be cut on a daily basis. Our primary rough is at 3 inches in height, approximately 30 inches around the putting greens, and then we've got varying widths of that 3-inch primary rough on different holes. The longer holes, we have approximately 12 feet of width on either side of the intermediate cut. On the mid-length holes, it's 8 feet. There are a few holes that have no 3-inch rough, holes like 9, 10, where they're very short and we went right to our secondary rough, which is 4 inches in height, and that 4 inches is also going to be found on the balance of the other holes I mentioned after the 3-inch ends. By and large, what we're looking for, when a ball comes to rest in that primary rough, is an opportunity, if we threw ten golf balls in there, in maybe six or seven out of ten, the players would have an opportunity to advance the golf ball on up to the green, and three or four times perhaps it's going to be something less than that. But we believe that, again,

brings in shot-making, brings in some decision making for the player, and can turn some numbers from simply a chop out and wedge on bogey, to maybe, hey, I can do this, chase it up to the green. And with some of the closely mown areas that we have around some of these greens, the ball will perhaps get up to the green complex, move away from the green complex, and who knows? We might see a miraculous birdie or maybe a stumbling double bogey. Over the course of advance week and through the early portion here of our practice rounds, we have been incrementally drying down the golf course to achieve our firm and fast playing conditions, and we are seeing daily improvement and are very pleased with the progress we're making and are confident we will present the type of test we're after for this Championship from a firmness standpoint. Green speeds, these greens are perfect. We're looking for speeds in the 12 1/2 to 13-foot range on the USGA Stimpmeter. We are at those numbers. Our average is probably pretty close to 12.6 right now. Some are a little quicker. Some are a little bit slower. But we're very, very pleased with the presentation of the putting green surfaces and their health. That's the one thing that I think is really important to mention. While we're after firm and fast conditions and we're shooting for these green speeds, at no point do we want to put the health of the turf at risk. We're guests. We're here for a period of time, but the members want to be able to play their golf course when we leave. So that's a prime concern to us. We want to present the best test that we can, but be mindful of the health of the turf. Our pace of play this week, we've communicated to the players that our maximum allotted time for groups of three is 4 hours, 26 minutes. On the weekend, when we hope to be able to play in twos, it will be 3 hours, 53 minutes. And that's by and large for those first two, three groups on each wave because there will be some waiting just in playing of the game. We expect that. But we have seven folks with us from the Champions Tour and European Tour combined that will assist us in the administration of pace of play, and we're very confident that it will be monitored and applied in a very uniform and consistent manner. Our focus right now remains inside the ropes in our preparation. That's where we're going to play the game. Yeah, there will be a few shots outside the ropes, but we're focused on what we're doing inside the ropes, and we think we're very well positioned for a great week this week. Mike, I'll turn it back to you.

THE MODERATOR: Jeff, Matt, thank you very much. Matt, happy birthday to your grandmother.

Q. Jeff, the No. 15, the longest hole at 636, the longest hole in Senior Open history, talk a little bit about that hole. Was that designed that way ten years ago when they redesigned, almost ten years ago when they redesigned the course, or did you

have them add an extra level of a tee box to make it the longest?

JEFF HALL: That tee and that hole was as it -- we made no request to add any tees here. So that was here when we got here, and we have some flexibility there with a couple of different teeing grounds. I think you'll see us use the 636 tee and the one forward of that at 590 to give us some variety there. But certainly a very big par 5. I don't know, Michael, would that rate as one of the longest?

THE MODERATOR: That is the longest par 5 in Senior Open history by about 30 yards almost.

JEFF HALL: About 30 yards. But it does play with the prevailing wind. The southwest wind will be slightly on your right on the tee shot but straight downwind on your second and third shot. I've chatted with a couple of players, and I've heard anything from 6 irons to 8 irons when they've played the 636 tee, but I think you'll see us move the tee markers around there to -- especially when you go to that 590 tee, all of a sudden, it shifts the drive zone further left, and there are angles. They need to pay attention to their angles because it will change significantly. In that regard, where we try to let them know, we've put two sets of tee markers out for practice on Tuesday and Wednesday. We're trying to communicate to them. Hopefully, they've noticed that.

Q. What about pin placement, say, on a Sunday? I would imagine you're going to use the 636 on Sunday, Championship day. You don't want to reveal, obviously, where you're going to put it on Sunday.

JEFF HALL: It will be on the green. I can confirm that.

Q. Thank you. I didn't think it would be in the rough. In terms of distance, do you try to take it easy on them after four days of a 636?

JEFF HALL: Well, we're here to identify the best player and crown a national champion. We try to find, on all the putting greens, four championship hole locations that's are going to test the players. Each hole location, we think, will have a different element in that test. Obviously, if you place at the 636 tee and go to a back hole location, you're going to be in the 645 range for the hole. Pretty big hole. But if you do go to a back hole location there, you've got 30 yards of green to work with in front of it to get the ball back to it. So we try to be thoughtful but challenging with our hole locations. And obviously, what we might do on a par 5 is going to be slightly different than, say, the 3rd hole at 490 yards as a par 4. We try to be very mindful of that.

Q. Could you elaborate a little bit more? I know that the USGA doesn't allow water bottles, but you're making the exception. I mean, I would

imagine that for people that are coming tomorrow, it may take a little bit more time to get through the security, and some of the obvious reasons as to why you decided to lift that ban.

MATT SAWICKI: Actually, it even dates back to when we were looking at the dates of this Championship. Typically, the Senior Open is played in July, even August at times. Knowing we were going to be faced with challenging weather in this community during those months, we actually moved up our dates in June partially for the golf course and turf health, but partially to make it a more enjoyable experience for spectators. We want people to come out and to have a good time and to stay healthy while doing it. I think, when we face weather challenges, whether it be inside the ropes or outside the ropes with warmer temperatures, we look to be flexible with our policies. We've met with our community partners. We've been meeting with the sheriff's department, the California Highway Patrol for over two years. And the thing we've probably focused on the most was the one thing we knew we would get eventually, which is warm weather. It's pleasant in the mornings. It's warm in the afternoons. And as a result, we've got very reasonably priced water at the concession stands. We'll allow those two bottles of water in for each spectator. Again, we've got cooling stations throughout the golf course, where if a fan feels overheated or is just a little bit too warm, they can go inside and get cooled off. So we think we've got a very good, comprehensive plan in place that we've agreed to with our partners. And hopefully, the spectators welcome that.

Q. Along those same lines, I mean, obviously, with California being in a drought, can one of you two elaborate on what is being done this weekend in light of that?

JEFF HALL: Well, my focus is simply on the inside the ropes part of what we're doing in our preparations, and we are, to get to firm and fast, we are incrementally applying less water to the golf course to get to that firm and fast position. But as far as specifics around that, I would defer to our agronomy team on site. Darin Bevard, our Director of Championship Agronomy, would be the one to speak to that as far as what we're doing. Again, he's my right hand on the agronomy. I know, when you put sod in, it's green side up, and that's about it.

THE MODERATOR: Darin will be available after the press conference if you'd like to speak one-on-one. Thank you very much. Enjoy the 2015 U.S. Senior Open.