

U.S. Open Championship 2020

Tuesday, September 15, 2020

Mamaroneck, New York, USA

Winged Foot Golf Club

Tiger Woods

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to welcome three-time U.S. Open champion Tiger Woods to the interview area. Tiger, who has won nine USGA championships, is making his 22nd U.S. Open appearance.

Q. You haven't played a ton of golf this year, but for your last victory at ZOZO, you were coming off a bit of a break then. How were you able to peak that week in particular, and what has been missing maybe since then?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I was kind of hopeful that I'd be able to play ZOZO because I had just had knee surgery, and everything was kind of rounding into form. I felt pretty good. My knee felt a hell of a lot better and all of a sudden I putted well that week and was able to go on to win.

This year I really haven't putted as well as I wanted to, and the times I did make a few swing mistakes, I missed it in the wrong spots. Consequently, I just didn't have the right looks at it. I've compounded mistakes here and there that ended up not making me able to make pars or a birdie run, and consequently I haven't put myself in contention to win events.

Q. In the list of courses that maybe have been the most difficult, where would you rank Winged Foot?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I think it's right up there next to Oakmont and I think Carnoustie as far as just sheer difficulty without even doing anything to it. I think those three golf courses, they can host major championships without ever doing anything to them.

This one or Oakmont here is either one or two.

Q. Can you talk about your preparation for this golf course based on your previous performances here and the highest winning scores here in the past?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I was able to come up here right before I played in Boston, take a look at the golf course,

and I was able to get my sight lines. This golf course is going to be one of the more difficult ones. The winning scores here have never traditionally been very low. I don't see that changing this week.

The golf course is going to be hard. It depends on how difficult they want to set up these pins, give us a chance at it. But with the forecast, it's going to be difficult no matter what.

Q. How much did a difficult venue like Olympia Fields in your last start help you prepare for Winged Foot?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, Olympia Fields was hard. It was fast, dry, which is unlike this golf course right now. It's going to obviously dry out, but the rough is very sticky here and very thick and lush. Olympia Fields, the rough was high, but generally most of the lies we had in the rough were downgrain, and guys were able to get the ball up near the greens, but obviously the greens were difficult.

Most of the lies we've had so far this week, they're not really downgrain, so it'll be interesting to see how much the USGA will cut the rough down and allow us to try and be a little bit more aggressive and get the ball up around the greens.

Q. How will the experience be different for you at a U.S. Open without fans?

TIGER WOODS: It's going to be -- you know, it's something that unfortunately this is our new reality. This is something we're getting used to. It's not something we like. We want the fans and we want the atmosphere out there, but safety is first.

Q. What is your health preparation like each week as you play in a tournament compared to your practice prep? Which takes more? Which is harder to get feeling good and feeling like you're ready for a tournament compared to your health prep and feeling good with your body?

TIGER WOODS: Well, the health comes first. Whether or not I feel physically good enough where I can put in the practice, that's my unfortunate reality. I've had four back



surgeries. Trying to be healthy enough so that I can practice and I'm able to spend the time that I want, that I need to.

Q. Which takes more time?

TIGER WOODS: What's that?

Q. Practice or just getting loose?

TIGER WOODS: Well, I have to train in order to practice, and I have to get my back loose enough to where I'm able to practice. That's just the way it is.

Q. Gary Woodland was just in here telling us a funny story about you guys being at Liberty National and you had to get him straight on how many U.S. Opens you had won, but then you guys concluded that among your four, you don't have one on a private course. Do you distinguish at all U.S. Opens on private courses versus public courses?

TIGER WOODS: You know, I think that USGA events -- how can I put this? This year is unique. We don't have a lot of qualifiers, and we don't have access into the event like we've had in years past. Whether we play on a public course or private course is irrelevant. I think that the qualification is what makes this event so unique, is that we're able to qualify for this event and have unique opportunities.

Unfortunately this year it's not one of those.

Q. You grew up playing public courses; do you regard the Old Course as a muni?

TIGER WOODS: The Old Course?

Q. Yeah.

TIGER WOODS: I think the Old Course is unique in whatever you want to call it. I think that -- it's where the home of golf is, and the fact that everyone has a chance to play it, I think that's what makes it so special.

Q. Coming off the tennis U.S. Open, Serena and Rafa are both in positions to tie some big records coming up, and you're one of the few people who qualify to answer this. Does it get harder to win a major the closer you get to the all-time mark and why?

TIGER WOODS: You know, I think it gets harder to win as we all age. I think that when you're in your prime, in your peak years, you have to take advantage of those opportunities so that when you get to the all-time marks,

you have the opportunity.

I think that whether it's Rafa or Fed or Serena, they've been so consistent and so dominant for such a long period of time, that's how you get to -- you can have those all-time marks. Consistency over a long period of time is the hallmark of those records.

Q. You've talked in the past about when you practice your putting, you go back a lot of times to what you and your dad used to work on. Is that still the case, or have you mixed up the routine over the years?

TIGER WOODS: I have changed the routine and some of the things that I've done over the years, but I still go back to what my dad always taught me, which is obviously putt to the picture. Whatever I'm working on at that particular time, once I get out there and I putt, just putt.

Q. I think '06 here was the first tournament you played after your dad passed. How difficult was it for you that week, and then in the month that followed? Just talk about your mindset and getting ready to win one for him at Royal Liverpool.

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, when I didn't win the Masters that year, that was really tough to take because that was the last event my dad was ever going to watch me play. He passed not too long after that, and quite frankly, when I got ready for this event, I didn't really put in the time. I didn't really put in the practice, and consequently missed the cut pretty easily.

But after that I was able to do some practicing, did some -- probably some pretty good grieving after this championship, played well at the Western and then went on to really play well at the British. I think it was just -- I was not prepared to play and still dealing with the death of my dad.

Q. Only 15 players in the field played in the 2006 U.S. Open. Do you see that as an advantage?

TIGER WOODS: Well, the golf course has changed a lot since then. Obviously the greens, they've all been redone, and most of the holes are a lot longer than when we played in '06. But technology has changed, and the golf ball is going further. Guys are hitting it further. So we're playing from about the same spots. It's just whatever -- it seems like every green you have to walk back a little bit further.

Q. Can you describe what it meant to you after all the surgeries and the years of not winning majors to come back and win the Masters, and was there anything special that you felt that week that you can relate to

this week? How do you rate your chances here?

TIGER WOODS: Well, when I won the Masters last year, it was -- I was not feeling particularly well prior to that. My neck was bothering me. I didn't play in Bay Hill. For some reason I felt physically better and my training sessions felt good. I changed shafts in my driver right before the event, and I was able to start turning the ball over.

Then all of a sudden I put myself in contention and I wasn't really -- I wasn't leading but I was near the lead, and each day I progressively got a little bit better, and come Sunday, I put all the pieces together.

Q. Several players here have said that of all the people out on Tour, you feed off the fans more than anything. In that regard, I know you said you miss them, but in that regard, how much do you miss the fans?

TIGER WOODS: Well, for me in particular, I miss the energy and just the positiveness that the fans bring and just that electricity. But that's something that I've been playing in front of for over two decades. That's something I've been a part of, and I've been lucky enough to be a part of that.

What we're dealing with right now is not what we all want, but it's our reality, and it's the energy that's just not quite the same without the fans.

Q. Even without the fans, is there something special about coming back to the New York metropolitan area and playing?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, I think that this area has some of the best golf courses on the planet, but also what makes coming up here and being a part of these events are the fans and the energy that this entire area brings. They love sports. It's a shame that we're not going to have that atmosphere out here this particular week, but obviously everyone will be watching and be supporting at home or wherever is the safest.

Q. Still meaningful to you that a lot of these fans will be rooting for you even if they're home?

TIGER WOODS: Absolutely it is. It's not the same without the fan experience, but as I said, this is our reality for right now.

Q. Are you using your standard Scotty Cameron?

TIGER WOODS: Yes, I am.

Q. A strategy question: With fairways this hard to hit

and rough this penal, it seems like everyone is going to be missing a lot of fairways. Do you anticipate hitting a lot of drivers so you aren't too far back, or do you anticipate laying back to keep it in the fairway?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah, you know, I think a lot of that is dependent on which way the wind is blowing. The forecast three of the four days will be blowing out of the north, and I think that that will make a difference. Some of the tee shots that we hit today, slightly different wind than what we played on Sunday, and so I think that strategy-wise it's ebb and flow.

For me in particular I'm trying to play to certain areas. Whatever club that is, could be 5-wood, could be driver or a 3-wood. I'm trying to play to a specific spot and then move on from there.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Tiger. Good luck this week.

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