

U.S. Open Championship 2023

Monday, June 12, 2023

Los Angeles, California, USA

The Los Angeles Country Club

Berry Henson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the interview area. We're here with Berry Henson. Berry qualified for this championship seven days ago back in New Jersey. Since then your story has gone national. What's this past week been like for you?

BERRY HENSON: Definitely new. It's been a bit of a whirlwind. I was telling my team this week that it's kind of been having the lead for like seven days straight. Haven't been sleeping that good. Obviously the attention has been amazing. I'm very blessed, very humbled and honored to be here at the U.S. Open for my first major championship.

Q. It's a bit of a home game here for you here in LA. Will you have a crew of friends and family coming up from Palm Springs? I think the Hensonator Nation I think you called them.

BERRY HENSON: Yep, the Hensonator Nation is going to be very strong this week. I've got so many friends, so much support in the California/Southern California area, and they're coming out in droves. I've been getting definitely a lot of messages trying to get tickets, and it's going to be an exciting week.

I can't wait to really get it going even though we've a few more days, but I feel like I came here on Saturday, got to play a few practice rounds through the course, feel comfortable with it, and I feel like in a couple more days, I'll be ready to go.

Q. What are your thoughts on the course?

BERRY HENSON: Amazing. I mean, what a test of golf this is going to be. This golf course sitting in the middle of LA, you don't realize how many undulations there are and the riverbeds and how natural it is.

It tests -- every major championship is going to test all aspects of your game, but this week definitely as the course starts to dry up and get firm and fast, which I think the USGA wants to do, then it's going to be very difficult to get the ball close and very difficult to make some birdies out there.

But we'll see. We'll see how it goes. Not knowing what to expect, I'm trying to prepare the best I can, and yeah, let's go.

Q. You told us last Monday you're not coming here just to make the cut, but to compete. What about a U.S. Open setup fits your style?

BERRY HENSON: I'm a grinder. I've been doing this for 20 something years. I feel like I have that type of mentality. I make a lot of pars. I can get up-and-down from the trash can. I don't get down on myself and just enjoy what the course gives me.

And I know it's going to be difficult. I know I'm going to get in some tough situations this week, but if I can handle it good and just stick with what I do best and grind and make those par putts that are going to be key, then I think I should have a pretty good week.

Q. What does it mean for you to be playing pretty much at home? And this is the first time a U.S. Open has been here in 70 years, so the combination of those two things, how do you feel about this being your first U.S. Open? It's kind of like a homecoming for LA, too.

BERRY HENSON: You know, it's a great question. I've had two goals, like lifelong goals in my career in golf, and one was to play a tournament at St Andrews, and I've played the Dunhill Links twice. So I've accomplished that goal.

Another goal was to play a major championship at Pebble Beach. This was never in the rotation, so I never really gave it that much thought. To play a major in California but even closer to where I grew up in Southern California is just a dream come true, and I'm very humbled and I'm very blessed.

This is going to be an amazing experience for me and my team this week.

Q. When you qualified, what clubs were your strengths? What got you there?



BERRY HENSON: My tools, right?

Q. Yes.

BERRY HENSON: My short game. I played Canoe Brook. I thought it's going to be a putting contest, but they got the greens tricky, the wind picks up, and you had to play very strategic shots to not get out of position.

My short game saved me I would say. On the 27th hole I got up-and-down for par, and it really calmed me down and I rolled off a few birdies to kind of give myself to where I felt like I was clear, and I finished my round extremely strong, hitting some great tee shots, fairways and greens.

But I would credit my short game, which I normally do, that qualified me for this U.S. Open.

Q. What has your form been like over the last two months?

BERRY HENSON: Yeah, so I've had six weeks off, so I finished the International Series event on the Asian Tour in Vietnam, and I decided to take a nine-week break with the intent to get ready for U.S. Open qualifying.

I took a week in Cabo with my dad. I hadn't seen my dad in a while, and I spent a week with him, which was very nice.

And then I got back to work with my trainer, Anthony Spain. I got back to the desert. We decided to try to lose a little bit of body fat just as a challenge just to see if I could do it.

I'm 43 and changed my diet and went five weeks really hard, all in preparation to get to the U.S. Open.

Chris Walkey, my swing coach we worked really hard on trying to dial in a few things. Dr. Jay Brunza, my sports psychologist, we worked on a bunch of stuff.

But my man, Z-Man, Ron Dizinno, my short game guy, I can't say enough about him because that's how I got in the U.S. Open.

Q. What are your expectations for this weekend?

BERRY HENSON: You know, I think my number one goal this week is to stay humble. The U.S. Open is definitely going to expose all aspects of your game, and this is a new experience for me. It's a major championship. There's going to be a lot of different things that happen this week.

I'm trying to get myself as prepared as I can. I've asked so

many questions. I got to play with Phil two days in a row, which was amazing. He was amazing. Gave me so many nuggets. I'm just trying to get comfortable.

I think being humble, getting comfortable, enjoying the experience, and letting my game talk, and hopefully it does this week, and I can only take away positives from this week. It's just going to be a win-win all the way around. My team is so excited to be here. I'm excited to be here. The USGA has been amazing to me.

Yeah, I'm going to take it all in.

Q. Last Monday at Canoe Brook, you said to me that you weren't afraid to characterize yourself as a journeyman. Can you describe your journey in golf? Give us a thumbnail sketch of where you've been, both literally and figuratively.

BERRY HENSON: We might be here all day.

Man, everybody that knows me knows I've done everything I possibly can to become a professional golfer, stay a professional golfer, make money at doing this.

I started working at Marriott Shadow Ridge when I was 18 because I needed a place to play. I needed a place to practice. That gave me the avenue to kind of hone my game.

I didn't come from a very wealthy family, so I had to kind of make ends meet that way. John Faulk, who was my boss, is coming here this week and supporting me with my team.

I worked for Marriott for 15 years. A lot of people don't know that. I got this cool pin that says Marriott for 15 years.

But I still kept working on my game. I played mini-tours. I played the Golden State Tour out here in California. I went to Q-school seven times; missed by one. A bunch of misses, just getting close.

But then finally I was down to my last sponsor. I had \$5,000 and Marshall McComb said, hey, should we go to Asia? And I'm like, well, we've got to get a card somewhere. I didn't have full status, and we decided to take the Asian Tour as a step forward for me in my career. We took the money. It was going to cost me five grand to do it. It was sink or swim.

I won first stage, and then finished tied for 11th in finals, and now I had Tour status. Won my fifth event and sixth event. Just kept running on that momentum. Got some European Tour status, and I've been playing now in Asia



for 10 years. It's been an unbelievable Tour for me. I've been well supported over there. So many fun stories that we can share from Asian Tour, so many cool nicknames.

It's led me here to the U.S. Open where -- I mean, that's the short part of it, I guess.

Q. How many tours do you think you have played on, including various mini-tours? Venture a guess?

BERRY HENSON: I'd probably have to name them off.

Q. Go ahead.

BERRY HENSON: I've played Golden State Tour, I've played Pepsi Tour, I played eGolf Tour, I played Hooters Tour, Canadian Tour, I played National Pro Tour, I played European Tour, Challenge Tour, Asian Tour, Japan Tour, Korean Tour, Sunshine Tour.

I think the only Tour I haven't played is the Latin America Tour if I can think off the top of my head right now. Yeah, that's I guess the definition of a journeyman.

Q. How many times do you think you've tried, because I know we tried to go over this? How many times do you think you've tried to qualify for the U.S. Open?

BERRY HENSON: I think I started trying to qualify in 1998, and I probably missed a few local qualifiers along the way because I had to start in locals, and then I definitely did maybe seven of those I want to say.

Then once I got inside the top 500 in the world, I had like a six-year exemption into sectionals I think it was, and that just ran out this year. So I'm going to ballpark and say I've tried 14 times, 15 maybe, somewhere in that range.

Q. How do you describe to friends and people how hard it is to get through the two stages and get into the U.S. Open?

BERRY HENSON: Well, I got the exemption through locals this year. I got back in the top 500 in the world by my finish in Oman. I finished second early in the year, and that got me exempt into sectionals again, because I was out of sectionals.

So I bypassed that first stage, which is always nice. I strategically picked New Jersey this year. Maybe I don't want to share why I strategically picked it because I might have to pick it again in the future, but I always want to do the northwest section.

I've always liked the golf in that part of the world. I felt like

it would suit my short game, and it fit my schedule this year. Japan was another option and Houston was another option.

But I'm glad I picked the right spot because I felt super comfortable at Canoe Brook. The members were amazing. I think I'm going to have some pretty decent fans from the New Jersey site this year because Reed, the head pro, was absolutely amazing. Took great care of me.

Narayan, my caddie. He is coming out this week. I told him, I'm flying you out. You've got to be here. You're part of the team. He's not going to caddie for me, but he's going to be part of the team.

He comes in tomorrow, and I want him to enjoy that experience, because I wouldn't have been able to do it without him.

Q. Now that you've done this, do you consider yourself a success in the game?

BERRY HENSON: No. I would say after doing this, I gained a lot more confidence in my ability to qualify for these setups, U.S. sectionals, British Open qualifiers, maybe Korn Ferry or European Tour.

But I feel like my game is improving every year, and I feel like I have a lot more in store down the road as I continue to stay healthy, which I've done incredibly well with Anthony.

I feel like, yeah, I'm kind of starting my journey. I don't know, it sounds weird, 43, starting your journey, but I've never given up. I've always tried to get 1 percent better. That's kind of been our motto. That's the road I'm on right now, and it just happened a little bit later, and we're just going to keep doing until I can't go anymore.

Q. Why have you not given up?

BERRY HENSON: A lot of people told me that I couldn't make it. They said I'm not good enough, and I've had that a lot as a young kid. I think that put a fire in my belly. That just made me work harder. I've been known to have a pretty strong work ethic, and I think that fire in my belly got me going, and I've seen myself getting better.

I told myself in college, hey, if I'm not seeing improvement in my game, I'm going to do something else. But every year I just seem to get a little bit better, a little bit better, a little bit better, and yeah, we're here at 43, playing my first major championship.

Q. You mentioned Hensonator in the introduction, and

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I've read that's your alterego, correct?

BERRY HENSON: Yes.

Q. Can you describe what that means when you go Hensonator?

BERRY HENSON: Yeah, so John Sheldon, an old coach of mine in probably my first year of college, started calling me the Hensonator. I've had a few nicknames along the way, but this one seems to stick with some of my friends more on the U.S. side. It's fun.

Listen, I'm Berry Henson. That's who I am. But Hensonator is fun. It's part of my character. I like to joke around. When you get to know me I like to needle people. I like to keep things loose. So that kind of keeps me loose. It's my way of not being serious but serious and kind of switching into that mode of really bearing down and focusing on what I need to do.

But it keeps me, I guess, not so uptight. It's fun. This whole game is supposed to be fun. It's a game. I think being the Hensonator is just an alterego that allows me to do that.

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