

U.S. Open Championship 2023

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The Los Angeles Country Club

Johnny Miller

Press Conference



JOHNNY MILLER: Good morning, everybody. Nice to see you.

THE MODERATOR: It's my pleasure to welcome Johnny Miller into the media center, two time USGA champion and the recipient of the 2023 Bob Jones Award, the USGA's highest honor given in recognition of distinguished sportsmanship in golf, an award based on character and integrity, qualities that Mr. Miller certainly has in kind.

Johnny, last night you said your dad was a big admirer of Bob Jones, and you put Bob Jones up there among the greats of the game, Nicklaus, Palmer, Tiger, as one of the best golfers of all time.

Can you describe what it was like to receive an award named in his honor in front of your family and friends, some of which are here right now?

JOHNNY MILLER: You know, I've been sort of not available for press things since I retired, and just wanted to sort of walk away like "Dandy" Don Meredith. Remember how he walked away? I was like, that's cool.

But when I found out I was getting that award I was thinking -- I even said it on several of my broadcasts, telecasts, that I thought Bobby Jones might have been the greatest golfer ever.

A lot of people go to other players like Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus, but when you think of what he was able to accomplish in his 20s, it was crazy. He was amazing.

The last tournament that I won was in '94 after being retired at the AT&T, and I used Bobby Jones' -- not his irons, but the Bobby Jones irons. That's what I used when I won. I was sort of always a fan of Bobby Jones. I thought he was a gentleman's champion. Really just an amazing person.

I was glad to get that award and sort of honor him a little bit by saying yes, I'll be happy to do it, even though I was sort of not into getting more accolades or do interviews and stuff.

I'm glad I did it, and it was really good. There was a lot of good feelings last night, a lot of emotion, a lot of tears. We brought tears to a lot of people's eyes, and mine.

I was sleeping like a rock this morning. Normally I wake up at 6:00 a.m. every morning. I think I could have slept until 9:00. It was emotional.

THE MODERATOR: This week also gives us a chance to celebrate the 50th anniversary of your U.S. Open win, 1973 at Oakmont, especially that magical final day.

As you think back now half a century later, I'm sure it's hard to believe that much time has passed. What stands out most from that week at Oakmont?

JOHNNY MILLER: Well, when I grew up as a young boy, I mean, the U.S. Open in value was here, and everything else was way down here. There wasn't anything even close to the importance of the U.S. Open.

The Masters was sort of a fun semi-spring party and it was starting to get bigger, but Arnold Palmer sort of made it, so to speak, when he won in '58, '60 and '64. After that it was a whole new thing.

But when I was a kid, the U.S. Open was the one you wanted to win.

Of course I grew up at Olympic Club, and it had held the '55 U.S. Open, and the tales of Ben Hogan hitting it left in the long junk and losing to Jack Fleck, who was using Ben Hogan irons that week. Ended up beating his idol, I guess.

I heard all the stories. And Ken Venturi, I used to watch him hit balls at Harding Park. Of course he won in '64, wasn't it? Congressional was it?

THE MODERATOR: Yes.

JOHNNY MILLER: That was a big one. '64 was a great year for San Francisco. We had won the U.S. Senior Amateur, the U.S. Junior Amateur and the U.S. Open, and it was all out of the guys living in San Francisco, so it was



sort of cool.

THE MODERATOR: Then 1973 came along and obviously that was certainly one of the high points of your career.

Any big memories that you have from Oakmont and that week?

JOHNNY MILLER: It sort of made -- it was one of those finishes that you just almost don't forget. Every guy that was any good at all from Palmer, Nicklaus, Player, Trevino, all the guys who was in front of me. It wasn't like it was a bunch of guys you didn't know who they were. It was just all the who's who in golf were vying for that U.S. Open at Oakmont. Nicklaus and -- I had to go through all those guys to win it outright.

I knew after four holes -- I was six strokes back and I birdied the first four holes and I knew that I was in the running. The hair on the back of my neck sort of stood up when I said that to myself: You've got a chance to win. That made the adrenaline just start pumping.

In my career I didn't let pressure affect me tee to green. Tee to green was sort of bulletproof. But it affected my putting and I left a couple of short putts short of the hole.

Then on No. 8 I three-putted from straight uphill. Only had one iron shot where I had a downhill putt. Every hole, I hit every green in regulation. I had put the ball in a perfect spot the whole round. It was like a magical ball-striking round.

I three-putted No. 8 after a 4-wood shot into the green, that long par-3, and after I three-putted I went from sort of choking to getting a little bit mad.

Not mad where I'd throw a club, but mad like what the heck are you doing, man? It was like, you've got a chance to win the U.S. Open and now you're missing these short putts, shorter type putts.

I settled down from there and birdied 8 and birdied 11 and 12 and 14.

14 I hit a great 4-iron in there and I was trying to shoot -- I still didn't know if what I was doing was going to be good enough to win, so I still had the gas pedal down, even though I was 8-under par with two holes to go for the day. I was trying to get to 9-under or 10-under.

I played aggressively, lipped it out on the high side on 17.

Then I swung as hard as I could on 18. I guess I hit the longest drive of the day on 18 and then hit an iron shot that

was -- I mean, you couldn't see the flag from the ball when it landed.

It hit the top of this little ridge instead of hopping up on -- which we would have put me like within five feet of the hole. It stopped and then rolled back down the hill, and I hit this putt and it went down in the hole on the high side, down in the hole and kind of came out.

So, you know, it wasn't like I shot 63 by holing out a bunker shot or chipping it in from off the green or by making a 60-footer or even a 40-footer or even a 30-footer. It was just a great round of golf.

But that's the way I played. In those days I would be on or off. I was like a light switch. If I had it going, I wasn't afraid to keep it going. I knew that I was like a light switch. If it's going, I'd better keep going and get all those putts that I could get on that day because the next day I might not make a putt.

But to do it at Oakmont on Sunday -- I always heard Oakmont was the hardest course in America. To come back and win it the way I did was -- I guess you'd call it memorable. It was voted the greatest round of golf when they did the 100-year celebration of golf, and people still argue whether that was the greatest round ever.

It's a lot of good memories. I got that U.S. Open win. That's all I can tell you. I had come fairly close. I was right within a shot of the lead at Pebble the year before and I hit this iron dead at the pin at No. 5. I guess it hit a gust the wind or something and buried underneath the lip of the bunker. The pin was just over the bunker. If it would have been this much farther it would have been a gimme birdie.

So I made double bogey there and finished seventh, and then the year before at Merion I finished fifth. Even as a kid I finished eighth at Olympic Club in '66.

I was sort of groomed to be playing Olympic Club all the time. Sort of groomed to be -- because of my father telling me all the great stories about the U.S. Open and how important it was.

That was the one I wanted to win for my dad.

THE MODERATOR: You did it. He called you champ, and you were a champ in 1973. A 63 final round. It has been matched, but not surpassed in terms of U.S. Open rounds.

Questions?

Q. Johnny, curious, four years after you hung up the microphone, do you miss it? And if you do, what do



you miss about commentary?

JOHNNY MILLER: I always work off the adage that there's a time and a season for everything. After I got on TOUR for 20 years, had six kids, I thought maybe it was a good time to stop putting myself under the gun with my putter.

My putting was tough on me because I sort of had the yips a little bit. That's why when I won in '94 with the yips, it was a great win.

Q. Do you miss commentary? Do you miss being in the booth?

JOHNNY MILLER: I sort of do, but that was pressure. The way I announced was -- it's not like I just lollygagged around and see how wonderful everything is. It was always like I put myself out there.

I was the first one to really focus in -- which I thought the greatness of golf is the choke factor. I don't care if you're playing for a milkshake or \$5 Nassau or whatever. The greatness of golf is whether you can make that putt to win, and to ignore that is sort of missing the greatest part of golf, no doubt. Nobody wanted to talk about it.

My very first telecast when I said Peter Jacobsen on the last hole and I said, this is the perfect opportunity to choke on it right here. He had to go over the lake on a downslope and people went, oh, my gosh, he's going to talk about choking.

But I talked about it even when I was playing. I knew it affected my putting. I would have won the Masters a couple times probably if I could have handled the pressure of putting. I had three seconds and got a green vest, but that was it.

Q. Would you enjoy commentating today in the climate of professional golf right now?

JOHNNY MILLER: I think so. The whole atmosphere is changing. I'm not thrilled about the gambling part now in golf. That's an understatement. There's just been a lot of changes.

In a way golf used to be a little more pure. I don't miss that part of it. But I still would have liked to have announced if I would have been the age I was when I started with NBC.

I miss the team we had. We had such a -- Maltbie and Koch and Dan Hicks and the other guys that were on the team. They were great to work with.

It was the first time I was ever involved in a team anything,

so to have that team spirit and working with each other and the pressure of announcing, we don't have like take two or take three. When you're live -- I had a live mic. My mic was on all the time.

Most of the guys their mics flicked off and flicked on according to if you go to a different announcer, but I was the first guy ever to have an open mic the whole day. That's pressure.

I honored the game of golf, but I knew that the growth of golf needed to have a little more pizzazz with the announcing. I guess that's okay to say.

Q. You're so connected with that 63 at Oakmont, and considering the scores have been coming down in golf for 100 years, there's bound to be a 62 at a U.S. Open one of these years. How do you think you'll feel about that when it happens?

JOHNNY MILLER: Well, like I said, I shot 63 on the final day. The secret of a 63 is the fact that I shot it on Sunday and it was enough to win the U.S. Open. There will be guys that will shoot 61 or 62, but can they do it on Sunday to win? That's what makes the round what it is.

It wouldn't have done any good if I finished second. It would have been a nice round, but the fact that to win it and to beat Arnold Palmer in his backyard -- I played with him on Thursday and Friday. I don't know if you guys know that. I look at that, the fact that we both ended up I think it was 140.

For me to play in front of Arnold Palmer's gallery in 1973 at Oakmont in his backyard was not easy to do. It's not like they stuck around to watch my putt after Arnie made a 15-foot birdie putt and I had a 10-footer. The whole gallery is gone. It was hard playing in front of his gallery. His gallery was nuts. That was not a normal gallery.

I don't even know what you'd say, but they were rabid. That part of it, the fact that I got through the Arnold Palmer part was a big relief to get through that and still in contention.

That was an amazing week as far as -- I had a lady that came up to me on Monday after the round. She was on 18th green, and she says, you're going to win the U.S. Open; I'm never wrong. You don't have to worry; you're going to win.

She was there on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and then Saturday when I shot 76. I never saw her again after that. (Laughter.)

I was a little bit down on the fact that -- not because she wasn't there, but I was starting to believe her, that I was going to win. I went to the practice tee on Sunday, and I was not very hopeful at all. I wasn't even a little bit hopeful that I had a chance because I saw the guys that were in front of me on the leaderboard.

To be able to get off to the start I did, birdieing the first four holes and keeping it going, it was a fun round. It was almost a perfect ball-striking round. People don't believe it, but that day my average iron shot from where I was aiming was probably this far off line on average. I mean, I was like knocking the flag out of the green with my irons and keeping it under the hole, too.

It was like somebody was helping me up there. It was not a normal round.

There will be guys that will shoot lower scores, but can they do it on Sunday to win the U.S. Open and pass up the kind of guys that I passed up? That's what makes the story or the round honorable. Makes it cool.

Q. Can you recount the story about the yardage book? That was a big part of that final day.

JOHNNY MILLER: Yeah. You know, in those days when you play the U.S. Open, for years before that and even years after that, the caddies would just put the name in a hat or in a drawing, and I had my name in the drawing, too.

I was going to caddie if I didn't qualify. I had a couple guys that I knew that I played golf with on the BYU team that were going to caddie, too.

My caddie that week, I got a guy who had never caddied for anybody that broke 90 before. (Laughter.) There was no yardage markers at Oakmont. There was no sprinkler heads with anything on them.

My little chart would say TSLFB, and that would be tee side left fairway bunker, 6-iron to the front left, 5-iron to the middle and 4-iron to the back pins. That's the way we did it.

When you got on a par-3 and you were listening to the guy, the caddie talk. What do you think it is, talking about another player. They'd be saying -- they didn't ever say the yardage, they would just say I think it's a 4-iron or a 5-iron. There was no yardage. Every guy had a different step.

Not having that yardage book at Oakmont, which there's nothing more precise that's needed than playing Oakmont. Oakmont is a crazy golf course. That is one tough golf course. That's one tough golf course.

Q. One other thing about that round and maybe bringing it to this place a little bit, I think it was cloudy that day, correct, or kind of overcast when you shot 63? At least that's the way it looks on YouTube. We're going to have a marine layer every morning, and I think you and Ken Venturi would talk on broadcasts about how much easier it is to score when the weather is kind of like this, especially up in northern California. Did you ever have a theory on why that is, why overcast is better?

JOHNNY MILLER: I don't know if it's better because the ball doesn't go as far in the heavier air in San Francisco. But it's always nice to not have -- I don't even remember Oakmont even other times I played it where was -- it was not a windy area. I don't remember Oakmont in any of the tournaments after that, championships after that, that wind was a factor.

It's like, there's something about where that course is that it's just not a windy area. It's not really something you factor in, a prevailing wind or something.

It doesn't need wind to be tough because it's got those greens. Those greens are really hard to putt and put the ball in position.

But, yeah, after I shot 63 every possible kind of excuse they would use to downplay the 63. The members used to throw darts at pictures of me. The thing is only three guys shot in the 60s that day. It's not like everybody was shooting 65s and 66s and 67s. It was sort of a lone Wolf round.

John Schlee told me afterwards, Arnold Palmer, when he got to No. 12 tee, there was a leaderboard that you could see from the 12th tee, and he stood by Schlee and he said, where the F did he come from? He thought he was leading. He was not leading anymore. He was one behind me after thinking he had the championship in his backyard in his back pocket.

Actually when I finished on 18 something told me I had won, and I never really worried about whether those guys were going to catch me. I could feel that I had won the U.S. Open.

Even though I had to wait about an hour and I don't know how many minutes, you probably know, someone told me I had won. It's pretty cool.

Q. I was curious to get your impressions on the evolution of U.S. Open setups. I think in your day, guys took a lot of pride in winning on rough choked

narrow fairways, grassy greens. I certainly wouldn't describe like the setup we have this week as forgiving or easy, but I think maybe it rewards different styles of play, which was not the case 30, 40 years ago. Do you think that's a good thing in terms of the way the USGA has taken U.S. Open setups?

JOHNNY MILLER: I'm a big believer, growing up, the U.S. Open was all about the rough. It wasn't like the greens were crazy fast. They were just -- Olympic Club in '66 was really -- it was just strong rough, a little bit like the Memorial Tournament this year. Did you guys watch that? That was tough rough.

That's what I always thought about when I thought about setup for the U.S. Open, was not this graduated rough, but is about if you miss the fairway you're going to pay a price.

I still think that's the way -- if I was president of the USGA, growing the rough would be a high priority. I just think that that proves the kind of strategy you have, whether you hit a 1-iron off the tee or a 3-wood just to keep it in the fairway.

Guys are like, well, hit it in the right rough. It won't be any problem over there. I just think that that's -- and Oakmont that week was strong rough. We had had some rain that week; the rough was even tougher when it's wet. You're hitting out of like a bucket of water. It's tougher to hit out of that wet grass. It was about that tall.

I only missed one fairway that day. I hit it in the long rough, higher rough, about that far, and I had to lay up on No. 12, the par-5, with a 7-iron as hard as I could hit it, and it only went about 140 yards.

I kept it out of the rough. That's why Trevino won a couple U.S. Opens. He could hit the fairway. Guys that could hit the fairway -- Jack Nicklaus would use his 1-iron and 3-wood all the time because you had to hit the -- there's been some different ways of setting up the U.S. Open, but I like the U.S. Open rough. I like it to be tough. That's just my own personal opinion.

The Open pressure is another factor. Whether guys can -- going for the national championship, whether they can not sort of gag or melt on Sunday, Saturday and Sunday.

Q. You mentioned playing with Arnold in 1973. I think in '66 you played with Jack maybe in the third round and you may have even played a practice round with him. Wondering what you remember about that, and just Jack's influence on you in your career, maybe what you learned from him or what you learned in eventually winning a U.S. Open.

JOHNNY MILLER: I'm getting a new set of hearing aids. You're going to have to say that again.

Q. In '73 you played with Arnold. I think in '66 it was your first U.S. Open; you played with Jack in the third round --

JOHNNY MILLER: Played with Lee Trevino in the first two rounds. First tournament he ever played as a pro, first U.S. Open. So that was cool.

Q. Then Jack I think in the third round, and you may have played a practice round with Jack.

JOHNNY MILLER: Two of them.

Q. My question is, Jack's influence on you in your career, what you may have learned from him and how that may have impacted you in learning to play U.S. Opens.

JOHNNY MILLER: Some of my best friendships came out of that -- when I was an amateur at the '66 U.S. Open because I played with Trevino and he was like scared to death. He didn't say 10 words for two days. That's changed a lot. (Laughter.)

Of course I played with Jack on Saturday, and if I hadn't played those two practice rounds I probably would have shot 80.

Yeah, those were turning points in my life was playing with those guys that I had dreamed of playing against and doing it in the U.S. Open. Anything else I'm missing?

Q. Just Jack's influence on you.

JOHNNY MILLER: What I was going to say is that Jack and I have had a special friendship ever since those two practice rounds, and then my progress on TOUR and Billy Casper became sort of my mentor.

He won a couple Opens, U.S. Opens. Trevino and I were always close after both of us, our first sort of shot at the U.S. Open. That was an important week for me just having those new friendships, those great players, Billy Casper, Jack Nicklaus, Lee Trevino. I played a lot of practice rounds with Trevino.

He was the one that taught me, if you're choking, buddy, just hit it low. It doesn't have time to get off line. You guys laugh at that, but that's one of the greatest pieces of advice you can imagine.

If you get on a tight hole that's dangerous, you just sort of

tee it down low and lean into it and hit a little squirry fade out there like Trevino. That won me a lot of tournaments.

Then Jack Nicklaus was the first guy to start hitting 1-irons off the tees and 3-woods. Billy Casper, I learned a lot from him, just the way -- he would do a pre-shot routine. He was a fast player, but if somebody bothered him he would put the club back in the bag, put the head cover on or whatever, his caddie, Dell Taylor, he'd ask him the yardage. He already knew what it was.

But he would ask Dell Taylor how far it is to the front and what club do you think we should hit and then he would get up and hit. He was the first guy to have a total consistent pre-shot routine. I thought he was nuts, saying what the heck is he doing; his caddie just told him all this.

But that was part of his setup to hit. I was like a super fast player. It was like, just let me hit the dang thing. I didn't worry about hardly anything. I had really good eyesight, 20/15 eyesight. I used to do a game with my caddie, Andy Martinez, and I'd guess how far it is.

He would ask me, how far do you think it is, and I could get within one yard on average. I would say, I think it's about 161 yards and he would say, no, it's 162. But I think that was one of the gifts that I had is my eyesight.

Of course growing up we only played by eyesight. That's the way we played golf at Olympic Club or whatever. The game has changed now the way you get yardage. Used to get on the par-3s with different caddies and one of them would say it's 161 and another guy would say 165 and the other guy 168.

I mean, everybody walked different. These guys nowadays, they've got it so easy.

Q. You said last night's ceremony was emotional. What was the most emotional part for you?

JOHNNY MILLER: It's making me -- just the whole night was full of good emotion, and then when Todd, my son Todd spoke, we're really tight, the two of us, and he made me sort of break down, in a nice way.

Having the family there was really nice, emotional. If I was there just by myself it wouldn't have been -- if my son Todd didn't speak I would have probably held it together pretty good.

I don't mind breaking down if it's from the heart. It was a great evening last night.

Q. When did you really feel like you fell in love with

the game? Can you pinpoint a moment?

JOHNNY MILLER: I fell in love with it right from the get-go. We started hitting balls in the basement in San Francisco against -- my dad got a bunch of Army surplus World War II canvas, hung them on the back of the garage and got a little mat to hit off of and a big mirror so I could see what I was doing. Try to copy Ben Hogan and Sam Snead and Byron Nelson and whatever. I just fell in love with my father talking about it.

He had won the Sportsman Flight in San Francisco, City Championship, which was next to the championship flight. I mean, this trophy is about that big. I would see that trophy all the time.

Yeah, I knew when I was eight years old that I was going to be a champion golfer. He called me "champ." I was progressing really good with my golf and doing all the squeeze grips and exercises and weighted clubs and all the things my dad wanted me to do.

I was on track. I kept getting better and better and winning the junior tournaments in my age group. I had sort of checked off all the boxes to become an All-American at BYU and a U.S. Junior champ and all those different things, San Francisco city champ, northern Cal junior champ.

I was doing the things you needed to do to have the confidence to keep getting better.

I was a good little young player when I was young. My iron game was really good ever since I was a little kid. That was my forte was my iron game.

Q. You spoke there about the fact that the game has changed a lot since your day. I just wonder, looks like the game is going to change a lot more with the agreement that was announced last week. I just wonder if we could get your take on that and how you think you might have dealt with that situation as a player yourself.

JOHNNY MILLER: I hope it doesn't change one iota. I think we've gone far enough with the golf ball. I guess the golf ball is the main thing. We might be doing something about that, right? Maybe.

Everything goes so much farther. It's like the guys are -- used to be if you had 220 to the green, that was a 4-wood. Now these guys can hit a 5-iron 220. It's like, hitting the ball so far. It's sort of forcing championships to have to lengthen, which bottom line is you say -- talk about my 63. I said, is 63 a good round? It's a good round today. Yeah,



it's a dang good round. It's not like the guys are shooting 58.

There's only so many chances if you hit every green, like I said, to get 8-under. Can you make eight out of 18 putts? Are you hitting it close enough to the hole to get 18 putts? Golf itself is pretty strong. They know how to set up the courses, but they shouldn't be -- USGA or any of the tournaments shouldn't be afraid of setting -- maybe not every hole really hard, but the bottom line is you want it to be a challenge for the pros.

They need to know that par on some holes is really what you're trying to get, not a birdie.

Q. Just curious, what do you think it was about your golf swing or the way you practiced that made you so good from tee to green and with your irons?

JOHNNY MILLER: Well, you know, some people, like a Jordan Spieth or Phil Mickelson, Tom Watson, just magical putters. Billy Casper. These guys were always just fantastic putters. That's a great gift.

If you get in the Hall of Fame, you have to have some part of you that is unusually good. You're not going to get in the Hall of Fame without having something about your -- like Trevino, the guy, he could land it on the cart path if he wanted most of the time.

For me, I was really good at knowing where impact was. I would practice stopping the blade, like bam. Not like this, not like that. I would practice right there over and over.

I was talking about impact long before teachers even talked about impact. Jack Nicklaus asked me one time in '75 after my big year in '74 at Tournament of Champions at La Costa. He said, you're playing pretty good now. He didn't say really good, or "really" good. He said, you're playing pretty good. What are you working on?

I was like, what's Jack Nicklaus asking me what I'm working on. I was like, you tell me what you work on and then I'll tell you. He says, every week I'm trying something different.

Then he said, well, what are you working on? I said, I'm working on impact. There was this long pause and he said, no, you're not. Nobody can think about impact. But I had worked on it so long that I could feel where my club face was at impact.

When you can do that you can start -- then you just need to swing at the target. The other one is if I was hitting an iron I tried to put the club right here, right through your face.

Right there. Not over here. Not over there. I tried to blur through the target right there. Do you see that?

I figured if I could get the face square and blur the target I've got a pretty good chance of hitting a good shot. Then I worked on this little brush drill. I tried to make sure I could brush the grass.

So those three things were sort of the secret for me in my iron game. I played hilly courses in San Francisco, so I'd be able to handle all those hilly guys. You had to be able to brush that grass, brush that grass.

Those were things that I had come up with on my own. Nobody taught me those three things. Just something told me those were pretty important things. Wouldn't you think so?

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