

U.S Senior Women's Open Championship

Wednesday, July 31, 2024

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Fox Chapel Golf Club

Trish Johnson

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We welcome our defending champion Trish Johnson. What does it feel like to be here as our defending champion?

TRISH JOHNSON: Yeah, it's great, to be honest. Really looking forward to the week. Wasn't quite sure how I was going to feel really, because I've not played a lot of golf. Hit a lot of balls but not played a lot of golf in the last sort of year, in fact. But it feels really good.

The one saving grace with this tournament is the massage people and the fitness -- honestly, it's a huge difference. I've had three or four tournaments already, beyond different. I'm hoping and praying. But I'm hitting the ball well.

Course is magnificent. It's a little bit similar, obviously, to Chicago, because obviously it's the same designer, architect even, but it's not, sort of thing, but you can see the likeness to that.

But obviously with the rain yesterday, it's playing massively different.

Q. I was going to ask about that. You've played a little bit less golf. How does your game feel? What part of your game are you focused on?

TRISH JOHNSON: Short game around here I think is what you -- you've got to drive the ball well, but the greens are enormous, so assuming you hit the fairways, chances are you hit the greens, whether or not that means you've got a birdie putt with any reality is very much open to where you leave it. They are enormous, very similar, obviously, to Chicago.

But same for everybody. Like I say, the bunkers are strategically placed. It's a great layout. It really is. With the three inches of rain yesterday, it's really playing every bit of its yardage.

Myself and Laura were saying today that your iron shots



are a club longer, so one that -- I had a lot of 131s, 132s, which is normally a 9-iron, it's an 8-iron. It's just the air is heavy, I think, just the moisture in the air, it's just not flying as far and obviously ball is not running anywhere. It's going to play all of its length.

There were some different tees out there today, so I assume they might put the tees up a little bit, which hopefully they won't, but the course is beautiful.

Q. It's tradition for the defending champion to say a few words at the players' reception. What was your message to the rest of the field last night?

TRISH JOHNSON: Just really the gratitude, really, of playing in an event like this, I think. I mentioned last year that I'd never played with Martha and Yuko. Sometimes you see your draw and you think, that's a bit strange, and then you play, and you think, what a dream. It was delightful. It was two days of just -- you make new friends. Then when I was giving that speech at the end there, they're watching and congratulating you, and it's just different. It's not the LPGA, obviously. It's competitive, there's no doubt about that. But there's a -- I said to Cecil Lundgren today, we were just playing, and I've known her for years, it's the first time she's played over here, and she didn't know what to expect, but it's nice. People are nice. I said, we've all lived. We've all had issues. We all know what life is about, and you have empathy for people. Yeah, you want to win, but not at all costs kind of thing.

I think that's probably what it is more about. You're desperate to play well, and I'll be gutted if I don't play well. But I've got a life at home and you get back to that and life goes on, and you try again next year.

Q. You've been playing at the highest levels for 40 years now --

TRISH JOHNSON: 37. Easy, that's Laura.

Q. What keeps the competitive fires going in you?

TRISH JOHNSON: Because I love competing. Honestly, I don't love playing golf -- like if you said to me go and play on a regular day with even family, I'd think, hmm, nine holes, I'll do nine holes. Never do 18. Not interested at all.



But I love practicing. I love hitting balls. I love the feel of hitting really good golf shots and getting better.

Yeah, okay, it's weird because obviously I'm not going to get better, I guess, than I was in my 20s, but I feel like I almost hit the ball better now sometimes. I enjoy it more, actually. Yeah, that's actually probably the key. I enjoy hitting good shots more. I get more satisfaction, whereas before it was just, well, that's what you're supposed to do.

Q. Has your style and demeanor on the golf course changed over the years?

TRISH JOHNSON: Yeah, I don't think I'm as -- I wasn't arrogant, but I had a temper. In the early days I used to get really frustrated because we didn't have the technology back then that they do now. If you had TrackMan and all that sort of stuff, you know exactly why you're doing that. I had no idea. I often would have a lesson at home, brilliant lesson, but the brilliant lesson was hitting the ball well with no real feedback other than that. Then I'd fly across the Atlantic, I'd get on the practice ground the next day and it would be like my arms, they didn't exist, and I'd have no idea why, so I got really frustrated. I could get really angry and down on myself.

But I think in the last sort of 10 years, certainly since I've been working with Martin Park, I know exactly why I hit a bad shot, and I also have a little bit more -- my body sometimes doesn't want to move right. I want to get my lower body out of the way. Sometimes it just says, not interested. You just have to accept that.

We've all got -- I doubt there's anybody out here this week that hasn't got dodgy hips, dodgy knees, dodgy back of some sort, and it's just who deals with it the best really. I think if you can accept that, then you've probably got the best chance of at least doing well.

Q. Six years into now this championship existing, how are you feeling about the state of senior women's golf?

TRISH JOHNSON: Well, this championship is obviously -- it's great, but it's a start. I think it's really difficult -- it's a difficult question to answer because realistically if we had 20 tournaments, would all these players be playing 20 tournaments a year? I don't know. You'd have to -- and if they were all a million, yeah, that would be amazing. For me, that would be amazing, for our players. But for the majority, I don't know. So I don't think it's an easy thing to do in any shape or form.

So these sort of tournaments, I was hoping this one might have gone up a little bit maybe. Maybe next year, you never know. But you know what I mean.

You've got to be a little bit realistic, I think, and to play in something like this for us is an amazing opportunity. It's a lot of money. My winning check last year was twice as much as any win I've ever had, and that's going back to -- well, forget the '80s but the '90s on the LPGA. 20 years later you're winning double what you won then, and it's a lot of money.

But it wasn't just that -- it's at this funny story, actually. Shannon said to me after I had finished last year, I had a business class flight back from Portland to London. I never fly business, ever, but it was affordable. So when we finished, it was a 7:30 flight, and I said to Shannon, I can catch that flight, can't I, because I did not want to miss that flight and she sort of looked at me and said, yeah, yeah, and I said, well, it's 5:00; we'll be all done by -- I had no idea of anything that went on afterwards.

She just said, you do realize, don't you, that this is possibly the most important moment in your entire career, and I said, yeah, yeah, thinking, not really. She was right. She was bang on it.

When I went home -- what's the word? Just the sheer -- I didn't realize it was that important. I honestly didn't realize how big -- it doesn't matter that it's a senior major to people. They just see it's a U.S. Open, and it was enormous, and it was lovely. I have to say, she was bang on.

So it taught me -- did teach me a real great lesson. And I have to say on the USGA's behalf, they bought me a new business class flight the next day, so it was win-win, and it was fabulous.

Q. What's the bigger draw for you when it comes to this event? Is it the fact that the paycheck is great and you've got a great field, or is it that camaraderie that you referenced earlier, or is it a combination of both?

TRISH JOHNSON: We're still professional golfers, so you'd be absolutely stupid to say that the money isn't relevant because of course it is because that's why everybody -- that's our job. It's been my job for 37 years. So the fact that I can win that sort of money makes a huge difference to my lifestyle because it doesn't matter how many tournaments I've won, none of them have set me up because back then you just didn't win the same amount of money.

But it has a different feel about it, also. It is a fact of -- not that you would ever wish people to do badly before, but I don't think anybody ever wishes any harm on anybody out here. It's just like, right, let's all get round, let's all survive

and let's have a good day, and whoever wins at the end of that, good on them, and they end up being the champion.

I think it's quite a special atmosphere in comparison to any other tournament, more than anything.

Q. To the golf course, is there a stretch of holes that you think are going to be critical, particularly Sunday when it's tight?

TRISH JOHNSON: Well, I haven't played 16, 17 and 18 yet, so I'm going to go and have a look at those in a minute because I think those are the ones probably that are pretty important. I'm not sure there's a stretch of holes. Maybe it's those. I just think you've got to drive the ball well. You've got to stay out of the bunkers, fairway bunkers, because they are beauties. You can hit a good drive and you'll end up -- I think if you can drive it well, keep out of the bunkers and obviously try and position yourself where you are below the hole -- when I say below the hole, I don't always mean short or I mean the sides because there's some breaks out there that are ludicrous, and you really do have to be very careful. Of course today they haven't cut the greens because of the weather so it was difficult putting today. You knew they were probably a couple feet longer than they will be tomorrow.

But I think just all around, yeah, driving the golf ball is going to be paramount this week, and of course putting. But normally the one that putts best wins anyway.

Q. You've won tournaments on Tour before. What's it like coming in here trying to defend titles compared to what it was like when you played before?

TRISH JOHNSON: Well, I think -- that's a good question. What's it feel like? It's a nice feeling. Let's be honest, it's always a lovely feeling to come back and try and defend. I feel I'm playing well, so I feel like I've got a chance at defending. There's 15 people I could name who could win, but I feel if I play my best, I've got a very good chance.

I probably couldn't always say that defending -- when I went to LPGA events. Christ, go back the next year and think I'm going to defend? I'd have been a bit arrogant, wouldn't I, let's be honest. Probably didn't then.

I want to enjoy this week. I want to not put too much pressure on myself because I'm playing well, but I have played -- since this tournament last year, I have played two rounds of golf in Florida, two 18 holes I've walked in Florida, and three rounds of the LPGA Championship in a cart, and that is it. That's the only times I've played at all on a golf course.

But that doesn't mean I don't think I can win, because I do.

Q. When you have an event like this that's just into its sixth year and trying to establish itself, how do you think it's done establishing itself as a major?

TRISH JOHNSON: Well, I said last night, the difference between the attitude in the players in five years I think is enormous. That first year in Chicago, I honestly don't think I saw anybody on the Monday. It was 95 degrees to be fair, but here I went -- your tee times were fully booked, you could hardly get a spot on the range.

On a Monday when there's no pro-am or anything, so you've got all three days, that shows to me that the players -- you can see there's a slight different atmosphere between this and the Senior LPGA Championship. There's no doubt about it. This is a big event for all of us. Everybody is just that little bit more, yeah, nice to see you, but we're here to try and play and to try and win.

I think it's done exceptionally well. As I said, obviously if the purse were elevated, that would be amazing.

But again, as I'm saying, with the LPGA you get a purse that elevates and the then everybody goes with it. It's not that. You don't expect that at all. It's just it's a big purse as it is for us now, but I guess most of these players, I could name Hall-of-Famers, whatever, they're the reasons that those guys are playing for all the money, so it would be great if this elevated to a place where if you finished 10th you made a lot of money, that kind of thing, because they deserve it.

Q. At one point you were a first-timer in this championship. Now there are 22 players in this field, it's their first time. What advice would you give them?

TRISH JOHNSON: To enjoy every second. Seriously, one of the most -- I thought about this today, actually. Again, it's a funny story. Laura was teeing off and I was supposed to be playing with her but because of all the mess-up I didn't want to play 18 holes, and so I was going to join her after nine, and we were playing with two -- Cecil Lundgren and someone else. I got here early, and she teed off at quarter past 7:00 with Cecil.

Anyway, they were coming down 8, and I thought, that's strange; I'm sure they were in a three-ball. So we get to the next tee, and we're waiting to play the 9th, and I said to Laura, who's that person behind you, and she said, I have no idea, and I don't know who it was, Cecil said, oh, that's the person we're supposed to be playing with, and Laura said, what do you mean? She said, well, we were in a three-ball and Trish was going to join us and be a four-ball.

She said, we were ready at 7:15; why wasn't she on the tee? Well, that's because our tee time was 7:30. Laura said, but I said to the starter, it's 7:15, can we go, and he said, yeah. I said, yeah, he probably thought, well, you're Laura Davies; you want to go, yeah, you can go.

So this poor woman has got there thinking, they've sodded off and left me. So anyway, eventually she joins us, and I just said to Dubbo, my mate that's caddying, that's what this amazing -- I'm not quite sure who it was, but for her, she's played 12 holes with Laura Davies. That's amazing. That's the sort of thing that happens.

I'm sure she'll go back to her club or whatever and say, you're not going to believe this, because I would have, if I'd have played with, in my day, Jenny Lee Smith or whatever when I was a kid, I'd have gone back to my dad and said, you're not going to believe this; I just played a practice round with Jenny Lee Smith.

So those are the sort of things that are just so special, and Laura being Laura, she's not precious at all, she'll play with anybody, and it's fantastic. That's the sort of story.

So if you were playing here for the first time -- actually there was a woman I was practicing next to yesterday, she's from -- it's not Woodhall Spa, but it's a golf club near Woodhall Spa. She won the British Amateur, I think, and she just said hello, and we were just chatting, and I mean, it's her first time. She's come over here. She's playing in a tournament like this. It's incredible, just the opportunity to play with all Hall-of-Famers and great players. It doesn't happen in any other sport, and it couldn't happen in any other sport because of the age. You'd never get that opportunity.

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