

U.S. Senior Open Championship

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Omaha Country Club

Rocco Mediate

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us, six-time winner on the PGA TOUR, four-time winner on the PGA TOUR Champions. You played your first Senior Open right here at Omaha Country Club in 2013. What are some of your memories from that week?

ROCCO MEDIATE: Well, I'm a Perry Maxwell fan. I know he had something to do with the place. There's a few guys that did it, but you can see his touch to the place. I'm a fan of any USGA setup golf course, as you probably know. But this is cool. It's very hilly, greens -- but it's good. I don't know how to explain it.

It's a hard course to drive in, but there's plenty of room to drive. Doesn't make a lot of sense. It's just a good golf course, and the green sides are tough. Rough is evil. But that's what you want at these tournaments, right? That's what I want. I want to pay a price if I miss, and I will. So will the rest of the field.

That's what you want to have. It's like the old saying way back when: We're not trying to embarrass the best players, we're trying to identify them. And it does.

Let's just say you would make a golf course that was completely unfair, ridiculous, the best player is going to win, right? So let's just go play and see what happens. Ours is a little different, but on the regular Tour, we'll call it the regular U.S. Open, the best player is going to win no matter what you do to the golf course, and I guarantee you, when he has the trophy, he's not going to be bitching at all. So I enjoy the penalizing part of a USGA Open.

We're supposed to drive the ball in the fairways. If we do, we can play really good.

THE MODERATOR: In 2013 you finished tied for third --

ROCCO MEDIATE: Yeah, I played really good.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about that week, the fans out



here and the energy.

ROCCO MEDIATE: Oh, the fans were -- there were a couple hundred thousand, I think, for the week. I'm pretty sure that's the number. It was our most attended event to this day, I think.

But yeah, the weather was way better, it was like 110 heat index. It was nasty. I remember it being a harder walk back then because I was 70 pounds heavier, but today we played and I didn't even feel it, so that's good. But it was just a good test.

And the scores were low that week, I'm pretty sure because it was so firm. Ball was going a mile. It's not going a mile this week. I remember hitting 6- and 7-irons to 18, and today a good drive and a good 4-iron. I like 4-irons.

8 was long then, but we played the back tee. We had 230 to the hole. Of course we played at 7:30 in the morning but still. It's fine to have those holes. That green will accept that shot. I think we had the tee up one time last year, or whenever that was, in '13, and we were hitting 4 and 5-irons. Either way.

THE MODERATOR: Two top 10s in your first three starts. What seems to be clicking in your game more recently?

ROCCO MEDIATE: Ricky Smith, who I've worked with for, good Lord, since '85, a long time -- I just wanted to go back to old school stuff, the old days, and I did. I saw some things that I didn't like, and then I went back to some old video from the early '90s, and I went why in the hell did I stop doing that? Because I could still move like I did then, I'm in way better shape than I was then.

So I left for about a month. I said I'm out of here, and I went and figured some things out and came back at the PGA and played really good -- really even the third round, I didn't play a good third round, but I kinda almost did, one of those 78s that was real close to not a bad score because these golf courses bring that out of you. Then I played good Sunday, and then I played really good the next three weeks after that.

Just putting is better, everything is better. But still driving straight and all that stuff.



But I said, I was telling the guys, I played with Mark O'Meara this morning and I kind of looked up and I said, you know, I -- and Mark is in the same boat, we're all in the same boat. I played a lot more curve in my career than most guys did, but I'm still a master of the off-speed curve ball. I'm a master of it because it's an off speed slow -- it doesn't go fast. It never did go fast.

It's funny, I was telling my wife that the other day, I'm a master of the off-speed curve ball. I still like to curve it, and the equipment doesn't like you to curve it, so I've got to build it funny to make it curve.

It's fun playing when you can move balls around into certain pins out here especially. There's some really cool areas that you can use the green and slope of the green, and then you've got to carry a lot of slopes. From the par-3s there's some pins up high that you've got to put it up in the air. So it's a test of all. It's fun. It's, what, 7,000 yards, plays longer.

Q. I was curious what you thought about Phil Mickelson winning the PGA and how that might impact seniors as they push 50 coming on the Senior Tour or maybe trying to do what he did.

ROCCO MEDIATE: What Phil did is not surprising at all to me. I don't know why people would be shocked. He hits it plenty far enough, and he's won a million golf tournaments. So when they were talking on the TV about, well, tomorrow is going to be -- you think he forgot? He's won 40-some tournaments and now six majors. He didn't forget. And he didn't get there for three days because he was lucky. He got there because he's really good.

And then Sunday he did exactly what he was supposed to do, played good, beat them. Beat them all. No, it didn't surprise me at all. He's different -- he's in better shape than he's ever been, still limber, and he hits it a mile. Big deal. He's always hit it further than most, but now he's keeping up with some of these 25-year-olds. It's unbelievable.

But you've got to have a lot of strength and a lot of work, and he does it. He does it. Nothing he does surprises me, zero. He's like Tiger. What they do, you're like, yeah, I get it. That's why they are who they are.

Q. Do you think it'll impact guys as they turn 50, wanting to stay out there and maybe grind more like he did?

ROCCO MEDIATE: You can, but you have to have a certain -- if you lose your distance out there now, you've

got nothing. You just don't.

There's certain courses like from -- if I talk about me for a second, there's a couple of places I can play good at, but if I'm driving perfect and Phil is driving perfect, I'm 50 yards behind him. Who's going to win? I don't care how I am with my 6-iron. He's going to kill me with his wedge. Kill me. So that's what you look at playing with some of these guys who hit it 14 miles and some of the kids you play with at home.

It's just a matter of time before you wear down, and that's where the game has changed. O'Meara and I were talking about it this morning. I played 27 years on the regular Tour. He played at least that much also. We never once talked about how far we hit it, ever. I'd go home, my buddies, how far you hitting it? I said, far enough. I didn't care how far I was hitting it. I was hitting it in the fairway. That's all you needed to do.

My thought, if you hit it 280 yards in the middle of every fairway at a PGA TOUR event, you can compete maybe in a few places, but for the year you'll get destroyed. But if they grow rough like that, that's a whole different ball game. This is what separates -- if you drive good here this week, you'll play good. If you don't, simple, which is what this should be.

Q. Your preparation for this may have been a little different than the rest of the field. You used a past U.S. Open course to get ready. Can you talk about that?

ROCCO MEDIATE: Yeah, Hazeltine. I belong up at Hazeltine in Chaska. I live right down the street, ten minutes, five minutes away. Yeah, playing and practicing there, it's a U.S. Open golf course. It's had two Opens, two PGAs, Ryder Cup, a U.S. Amateur. One U.S. Amateur, that's right. But every day, that place is ready to host an Open. Tomorrow, if we had to go there tomorrow, it's ready, and the rough is only that high, but good luck. So we can go from 7,800 yards to wherever you want to make it at that place.

Being able to play and practice there, it's ridiculous. It just makes me better, especially on an Open golf course.

Q. Also a different track, a couple weeks ago obviously the U.S. Open was at Torrey Pines. I don't know how much you watched --

ROCCO MEDIATE: Oh, I watched some of it. It was cool to see it.

Q. Did that bring back any memories as you were

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watching? Are you thinking, what's this guy going to hit in there, what would I have done?

ROCCO MEDIATE: Yeah, I looked at a lot of the stuff that's going on, and I still saw a lot of guys -- like back in '08 we didn't talk about like what Bryson was doing and some of the guys hit it 14 miles, saying I'm not really trying to hit this fairway -- I kept going, what? I'm not trying -- I don't get it. But they played it, and they found certain spots where they could carry the ball 330 yards. Can't do that. And play -- have a reasonable shot. But as you saw in the end, it didn't quite work out well because eventually it will destroy you. Eventually -- you can't beat it. You can't beat it.

But seeing the clubs the guys are hitting now, the golf course was a little longer this year than it was then, right, a few -- I think Rees did something to 10. It wasn't a lot longer, though, was it.

Q. 7,600.

ROCCO MEDIATE: So maybe a hundred, whatever. But the clubs they're hitting into those holes were silly.

But when you got to 17, if you -- all of a sudden it became this, and now you had to hit the ball -- John hit it in the right bunker on 17, wasn't that far off line and then Louis took it off and lost the battle. He hit a beautiful -- just missed it by that much. If you look at what can stop the best, that kind of stuff can, where a lot of bad things can happen if you do miss.

But looking back over that, it was fun to see -- like 1 always plays hard. They didn't change that at all. So it was cool, too -- all the holes, they set 3 up the same way, had it short the one day on the front left. They're hitting wedges. Hard to hit that green with a wedge on that front left pin. It was fun to see it again and talk about it.

I've been talking about it for years, but it was fun to see it. Jon, what he did was silly, unbelievable, after what happened to him at -- it was amazing. It was kind of like predestined, I think. All he had to do apparently was show up. What a finish. How many guys birdied the last two to win? Anybody? Probably not.

Q. Just one, Tom Watson.

ROCCO MEDIATE: That's right, at Pebble. 18, he didn't need it, though. After 17 he just needed to get in.

But no, it was good. Torrey is a cool spot. Open setup, I like that course because it's firm, ball moves. I always say Tiger was one of the longest drivers that week and I was

way below middle, and we tied. That's a good setup. If I didn't hit the fairways, we wouldn't be talking about anything about that. That would never happen.

It's changed. It's changed. But these events, USGA stuff brings out the best guys pretty much every single time, and the way the golf courses are set up, it tests everything, and that's what it's supposed to do. That's what we're all brought up on.

I remember getting to U.S. Open practice, I'm going, how am I going to finish this golf course? I remember going to Bethpage in '02 going, what? It was so much fun playing it, though. It's all -- it may beat you, but you don't want it to beat you before we start playing on Thursday. That's the challenge. I'm looking forward to starting. I love these events. They're my favorites.

Q. You got into how you love USGA setups. Maybe go into a little deeper exactly why you love the U.S. Open, U.S. Senior Open so much, maybe what it brings out in you compared to some other tournaments on the schedule?

ROCCO MEDIATE: Well, it's our national Open, and being American and loving it, it's what I would covet if I could have -- if I could only have one event to win it would be this one or the regular U.S. Open when I played when I was younger. But like I said, it brings out -- fairways and greens on the PGA TOUR, when I played all those years, were very important. That's changed. Great drivers of the ball got rewarded. That's changed.

Now long drivers of the ball -- I'm not saying it's wrong, but that's changed. And here at Omaha Country Club at our age, 50 and over right now, our Senior Open, fairways and greens will bring home the silverware, I assure you, because if you miss these fairways -- guys are already talking about, oh, my God, the rough is so high. That's what it's supposed to be.

They're not complaining. They're just like what are you going to do? Well, hopefully we're going to hit more fairways because if you don't -- and pitching to these greens, if you miss and you have to lay up, is not easy, either. It's hard. That's the test. That's the test.

The guy who plays the best all around this week will have that trophy. It's not going to be a hit it in the rough eight times today and shot 70. It's not going to happen. Well, it could, but I doubt it. I say there's no chance. I'm always betting.

Q. Virtually no flat areas off the tee at Omaha, fairways can be pretty steep. In 2013 you were aggressive with

the driver most of the championship. Is that a strategy you plan to use again this week, or did you learn something about this course last time that might change how you approach things this week?

ROCCO MEDIATE: Yeah, most of the holes, like 1 this year, this morning I hit a 3-wood and I had 125 yards to the hole. I don't really need it to be -- now, if it's straight downwind and it firms up, we'll maybe hit driver. But it's going to probably go through the fairway. But that fairway slopes so far left that if you do happen to hit it left center, it can get -- now it goes further away in the left rough.

So there's definitely strategy. But most of the holes -- I'm trying to think. Most of the holes it's a driver. There's plenty of room, and it gives you an advantage -- I hate giving the hole the advantage because I'm not comfortable with a driver.

Now, sometimes you can't -- but like 1 there's no reason -- like in other words, if I was Darren Clarke or Vijay or Ernie, downwind they might could get in the front bunker, believe it or not, because it's cutting straight across, which is a good play. I can't, so if I hit it 30 yards, 40, 50 yards short of the greens to certain pins, I've got no shot. So I've got to play back a little bit on that one more than likely.

Plus I like to draw anyway. Doesn't fit a draw, and there's no reason for me to try to slide it -- because a 9-iron or a sand wedge -- a 9-iron or a wedge, either one is fine. But there's really not many lay-up holes as far as off the tee.

What's that, they changed the routing a little bit so I got screwed up. 13? The short -- I don't know if they're going to make it drivable one day. They might. It's cool, they did last time. But it's cool off the tee, a 3-iron or a wedge or something because there's no reason -- so there's only a couple holes that I will be hitting -- but I like to hit drivers. If it fits, I'll try to hit it in there somehow.

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