

U.S. Senior Open Championship

Tuesday, June 25, 2024
Newport, Rhode Island, USA
Newport Country Club

Ernie Els

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Please welcome Ernie Els to the interview area. Ernie, you've got a pair of wins in the last month in the PGA TOUR champions. What's working well in your game as you're here preparing for the U.S. Senior Open?

ERNIE ELS: Thank you. I've had a nice little run really since Birmingham. I've been playing decent golf. Just started driving the golf ball better, so giving myself more opportunity out of the short grass to attack some of the flags.

Then obviously making some putts. I made some good putts in the wins, and even when I didn't win, I've been putting quite steadily.

Just things are a little bit more in shape. My overall game is in better shape.

Q. Just wanted to ask you about what you thought about the course today. Your first impressions here at Newport.

ERNIE ELS: It's amazing. Just we played this morning, and I just had lunch, and I walked out, and the wind just switched 180 degrees. Unbelievable. We played the 1st hole this morning into the wind, and that's changed altogether.

I love the place. It's obviously an old, very old golf course, classic type of layout. You can run the ball in. So it's really built for the elements, for the wind that's probably going to be blowing. A lot of slope on the greens, and it's in great shape.

I played with Rocco and Paul Stankowski this morning and Peter, a friend of ours from Chicago, and we all had a ball. It's just that very walkable, playable golf course.

Q. Curious, obviously this tournament is supposed to be here in 2020. Now it's 2024. I know you're friendly with Brad and Billy and Brett and whatnot. How much have they told you about Newport and the experience here, and now you're finally here four years later?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, we've been looking forward to this event now for quite a few years. I was really looking forward to it in 2020, and I'm glad it's come around now.

I actually flew up with Billy from Endicott on Sunday, him and Brett Quigley. Brad was texting me yesterday. He's really excited that we are here. We just talked about the classic nature of the layout. The bunkering, the wispy grass kind of a thing, very linky kind of grass, playability also a little bit like that.

So depending on weather conditions, you're probably going to have to flight the ball down and run the ball into a lot of these greens. I think everybody is really excited to be here. It's a classic clubhouse here, iconic building, a lot of great things happening here this week on this golf course.

Q. Ernie, I know this is your first time here, but do you have any background in Rhode Island at all? Have you ever been here before?

ERNIE ELS: I know that Americas Cup was held here for a million years until they started moving it. I'm staying at the Castle Hill Inn there on the corner, and I've heard people talk about the Americas Cup being held out here and so forth.

It's a big sailing community and obviously a great golfing community up here. So I'm very new to this area, so I'm just taking it all in.

Q. Just how about the fact that there are a couple of local guys like Kevin mentioned Billy, Brett playing in this. When you're in a tournament and you have local guys, do you feel a difference from the fans, anything like that?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, we're definitely going to feel it. We're going to get that Boston, Massachusetts support for the guys. It's a huge sporting community here with the Celtics winning and so forth.

Yeah, Billy, Brett, Brad, they're all very proud New England and Massachusetts people. So we actually flew into Providence, and they were showing me where they were growing up back in the day, the schools they went to and all of that. So they're very proud and very excited of this area to be here this week.

I think the fans are also going to play off that.

Q. Ernie, you played all over the world. Does this course compare to anything you've played before? The second part of that is what's it going to take for someone to win this championship on this particular course?

ERNIE ELS: It's got that look. It's not your absolute -- you know, you don't have the links bunkers like we have at Troon, but the way you're going to have to play the course is very much links style, and the course is designed that way.

Most of the greens, you can run the ball into the green of the fairway, so it's really built, as I say, for the wind in a lot of instances. There's maybe just a couple of holes out there where there's a bit of water that comes into play. There's little berms on the sides that you've got to be careful of, little hazards here and there.

But it's really a golf course where you can play the ball on the ground, unlike last year and normal U.S. Opens, where we play the ball in the area.

It's going to be a different taste this week. The wind is going to play a huge factor. Greens are very up, and there's a lot of slope on them. So that wind, when it comes, it's going to be difficult around the greens.

There's a bit of room for us off the tee, which is nice. You know, as somebody that's played in the wind, somebody that's used to maybe British Open type of golf, but mostly people that are in control of their ball flight. You're going to have to hit those little 4-iron shots at a run 20, 30, 40 yards. Those who are comfortable playing in wind will probably do well this week.

Q. Going off that, your success on links courses, you've won two U.S. Opens. Do you feel like this sets up for you well this week?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, I'm liking it. I played nine holes yesterday with the sea breeze -- I call it the sea breeze, I guess, the southwest wind. And this morning we played the north breeze. So I'm glad that I've seen both of them a little bit.

I'm going to play nine holes again tomorrow for my final preparation. But just from my very first look on the 1st tee, you just get a good feel of a place. I like the soil, what we play off. It's a linksy type feel, and you can flight the ball. You've got to hit the ball left to right and right to left and have a good short game. There's a lot of holes really well bunkered out there.

We'll just see what Mother Nature throws at us. If there's a lot of breeze, I don't really see a lot of low scores winning. If there's not a lot of breeze, there's a lot of holes you can attack. Even the four holes, today we're playing quite short so you can attack. But it all depends on what wind we get.

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