

U.S. Senior Open Championship

Wednesday, June 26, 2024
Newport, Rhode Island, USA
Newport Country Club

Padraig Harrington

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Please welcome the 2022 U.S. Open champion Padraig Harrington here at Newport Country Club.

Padraig, what did you do well last week in your route to victory that you feel will translate this week?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I don't know. It's a different style of golf course for sure this week. I think you're going to have a certain amount of wind this week. You've got to try to keep the ball as low as you can most of the week.

Yeah, you really couldn't compare the two golf courses at all. Different style. This week is, like every tournament, you're trying to get your routines and your mental game right, get it going into the event, so that you're sharp from Thursday morning.

Hopefully during the tournament everything builds and gets better all the way to Sunday afternoon. You just want to give yourself a chance with nine holes to go.

Q. What's working well with your game that you feel will translate at this course?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Like a lot of times you want to be a bit better at the things maybe. I really putted well on Sunday afternoon. There's been a bit of an uptick in that so far this year. The rest of the game has been pretty similar.

Q. Padraig, you've been very visible online, doing instruction videos and things like that. What has been the inspiration behind putting yourself out there like that?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I've always liked coaching, whether it's coaching myself or other people. I'm kind of fascinated with golf in the sense that every person I come across playing golf -- and this is from a reasonably young age -- I wonder where they're at that point in their golf,



golfing career.

And I don't mean pros. I mean amateurs. Why is an athletic person playing golf and playing off a 22 handicap? And why is there an unathletic person who doesn't like they do very, very much right, and all of a sudden they're at a 3 handicap.

It just fascinates me how people get to a certain point in golf.

Yeah, so whenever we play Pro-Ams, that's what I'm doing. I'm looking at the three guys I'm playing with or girls, and I'm just figuring out why they are where they are and what would change and what would make them better.

In professional golf, it's very hard to find anybody who's ever changed their golfing personality. That's going to be a tough thing. Where amateur golf, you know, a lot of people play off a set handicap not because of their physical ability, but more because that's kind of what they believe they should be.

It's kind of interesting. I like -- with everybody, I like the idea that maybe I can -- maybe the youngest of five boys I'm a little bit contrarian, and I'm always trying to argue the other side of things.

So if I see something, I want to tell somebody really radically different and try and get a big change and maybe just try and moderate what they're doing.

So I have fun doing it. Every week now, because of Paddy's Golf Tips, I try to build up -- I write them in my notes when I see something. I had a guy in the Pro-Am last week, and he had the most beautiful practice swing and he had a terrible golf swing.

Like I was trying to get to grips with him, and eventually we discovered in his practice swing he turned his head in his backswing. So he followed the club a little bit, made a perfect backswing. And then his real swing, he stuck his head down, and the club went all over the place.

I've got that as a little note now, and I'll do something on that later in the year when I record more Paddy's Golf Tips. It's learning from people.



Even my language, when I go to coach somebody, I might say a word, and when I'm teaching them and I say the word, they're just not getting it. It's me using the wrong word.

One of my favorite drills is a step drill. It really isn't a step. Most people, when I say step, they lift up their foot, and they put it down like this. It's actually a little shuffle. So I have to change my terminology. I'm always learning. I like it, I really do, as I said.

I know I said it, I want everybody to get to play off scratch -- not scratch, single figures. If you're a single figure golfer, you can travel the world and feel comfortable playing anywhere.

Q. You talked about growing the game. Is this your little way of trying to grow the game? I shouldn't say little, but your way?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I think that's my way of helping people enjoy the game. I think initiatives like my foundation with the R&A and Golf Ireland, we built a free-to-use putting green in Ireland. That's been really popular. It's in a park. You can just walk up, and the putter, the ball, everything's free. You go and play.

That's the sort of thing that gets people interested. There's no dress code. There's nothing. You just go out and play, and if they like that -- and putting is reasonably easy, and it's based off the Himalayas type green.

So people will advance from there. Certainly in Ireland there's an availability of par-3 courses. You can go play on those. Then if you like that, there's plenty of access to golf at a reasonable level.

It's a little tougher in Dublin city, but outside of Dublin city, there's plenty of access, and you can just keep progressing up the ranks. It really is -- if you want to grow the game, it's giving access to everybody to have a go, and don't worry about the people who don't like it.

I've had many an argument with sports people who might come out and hate the game of golf. They've all tried it and don't like it. Some sports people are obsessed with it.

If you just don't like it, well, I don't mind as long as you've tried it. My idea is let's give everybody a go, and there will be plenty of people that will just love it. As I said, the interesting thing with golf, because it mirrors life.

In Ireland a lot of people who play golf, you get a lot of shift workers, people who have got a lot of spare time in the day, and golf is a big savior for their life because they have

a lot of time on their hands so they can spend it playing golf during the day.

That's what you see in Ireland, a huge amount of people. The one thing with golf -- we always have to fight against this. There's that stereotype that you need to be rich to play golf. Well, you definitely need to be rich in time to play golf. That's really what you need. You need daylight time. That's why we struggle to get people from 30 to 45 years of age to play golf, because they've got young families and they don't have daylight time.

People on shift work and things like that, they have time. You need to be time rich, there's no doubt about it. Definitely in Ireland, it's not about money, it's much more about the availability of time to get out and play.

Q. What's the best swing advice you've ever gotten?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I actually don't know what the best one I've got because there's all sorts of things at different points in your life that really are important. It's easier maybe to pick up on the worst piece of advice.

Staying still is probably the worst thing. Keeping your feet still on the ground. Keeping your head still. Keeping your head down. Swinging slowly. These are all terrible things.

Golf is quite counterintuitive. You've got to hit down on the ball to get it to go up. You can't hit up on the ball. You can't help it. There's a lot of things.

I was told this from a very, very early age. I mentioned my first coach, Howard Bennett, if you did the opposite -- people who don't play golf, if they came to golf and did the absolute opposite of what they think, they'd be better off.

I had a guy last week who really, really struggles. It was a very unathletic golf swing. He would struggle to hit it 150 yards, and he was a big man. I asked him, I said, did you play any sports? He said, yeah, I was a good baseball player in high school. I looked at him and says, but you're swinging a stick now, and you used to swing a stick well back in the day, and now you look terrible swinging a stick.

He had no concept that all he's doing is swinging a stick at a ball. It's the same as baseball on a different plane.

It freed him up a lot now. Every time he goes to hit the ball, he has a few baseball swings to get the feel of it. He's going to start moving a bit more, just like baseball. It will take him a bit of time because he's got some bad habits, but in a year or two, he'll be well able to hit the golf ball and enjoy the game.

Q. Have you always been fascinated with the swing, or did that happen later?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: See, I grew up at a golf course we had no practice grounds. I never practiced. I just practiced my chipping and putting all day, and I played all day. I never saw my swing on video until I was 15 years of age. Didn't have formal coaching until that age. It just wasn't there for me as a kid.

I knew nothing about the golf swing. Nothing at all. So it was only when I went on TOUR and you're presented with all these facilities that you start getting -- I don't know, maybe it might have started before that, but certainly you become quite obsessed about -- and the problem on TOUR is we only have a practice range on the golf course.

You're not allowed to practice on the golf course per se. So you spend more time on a range. Anybody who spends time on a range will start finding things to work on because that's the nature of it. You get bored very quickly, and then you start tinkering.

I think I am a kid in a candy shop when it comes to the driving range -- brand new golf balls, beautiful turf. It's just a fun place. Or the people there. There's always a bit of talk if you want to, what's happening in the game. I think it's because I didn't have it and then I'm presented with it. Yeah, it's just something of interest.

I think a kid nowadays, you could be living in the middle of nowhere and you still have the best tools on YouTube or anywhere like that that you can learn how to swing a golf club.

It's actually come full circle in the game of golf. We're seeing an influx in the game now of swingers, real good hitters of the golf ball, great ball strikers; whereas when I started playing, it was players. Not necessarily -- there would be some good swingers of the golf club, but necessarily. They were players who knew how to get it done. They're getting squeezed out at the moment by the good ball strikers.

Obviously the next generation will be a combination of the two, like Tiger was. He was a player and a great swinger of the golf club. So the next generation had better learn quickly how to play the game because everybody will know how to hit the ball.

Q. You're 14 years younger, I think, than Bernhard.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Bernhard's win here last year has got to be one of the greatest achievements in the game of golf. That golf course last year was so long, such

a big golf course. I didn't see Bernhard play at all last year. I was in a different grouping. I didn't see much of it.

Then I finished up four or five holes before he finished. I sat in the clubhouse and watched him coming in. I didn't have a concept of how he played -- like he mustn't have missed a single shot all week. Like the length of the golf course, he couldn't afford to miss a fairway if he was in the rough.

Every single shot he hit, if he misses, he's in trouble. There was no hitting it in the rough, I'm okay, I can gouge it out onto the green.

I remember -- I've got to get this right. 15, I used to hit driver there over the top. It was run down. You'd have a 120-yard sand wedge in and the green was really narrow. I'd be really under pressure, don't miss this green because it fell off 30 yards away and it's a tiny narrow green.

I tuned into the golf, and Bernhard is hitting a hybrid into the same green because he's laid up into the bunker that I could carry.

It was a phenomenal win. And I played with him last week again, and my two kids said to me after the round they just couldn't believe how good he was, how he played first round last week. At 67 years of age, it's incredible how good he is. It's astounding. He still gets it out there. He's a good ball striker. He's efficient. But by God, does he know how to play golf.

He is the exact example of what I was saying. He is a real player.

Q. So my question, which I didn't get all the way out, when you get to that age, do you see yourself playing out here, or would you rather be teaching?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I love playing. I love playing. I think I went through that phase five, six years ago, where I was burnt out on golf. I did some teaching. I did some coaching. I did some commentary. I enjoy doing both of those things, commentary and the coaching.

Then I realized I actually still like playing. If I can play when I'm 67 years of age, I see myself trying to play. I don't think I'd make a great coach when it comes to elite players. I don't think, if you turned around and gave me pros -- it's funny because I get a significant number of pros now who come to me, younger pros, and even some of the guys, look, what do you think?

I'm like, I'm not great with elite swings because I kind of go -- I'm very old school with that. Well, you can hit that shot,

so that's not what's wrong. Your mental game is wrong.

So whenever I get a good player, I actually go back to focusing on the mental game and the short game and don't really interfere too much with golf swings. I don't think -- I know you might think I work on my golf swing a lot, but I don't think the answer is in the golf swing for professionals.

We've already met the minimum standard, the minimum threshold standard to be a good pro. For us, it's all about our confidence, our mental game, how we see ourselves on the golf course, how we see ourselves on the field. Just generally the comfort level.

One of the things that fascinates me about my own career, I see it in other people, and I see it when they have it wrong. I'm more likely to hole -- if you give me a 10-footer this week, I'm more likely to hole it this week than I would be if I was playing in a PGA TOUR event.

That's bizarrely stupid, but that's the case, because here, that 10-footer on Thursday or Friday, hopefully I'm not really looking over my shoulder at the cut line at that stage, whereas if I'm up at the U.S. PGA a couple weeks ago, every 10-footer is like do or die because, if I miss it, I'm going to miss the cut.

It's amazing how aptitude and comfort zone and where you believe you stand in a field can help you perform, and it has nothing to do with physical side. It's just your beliefs. The Champions Tour has really shown that up to me. I kind of knew that all along, but it's shown it even more.

Like I can think of several players. I remember when -- name of players. But I remember when D.J. was on his great run. He was holing those 10- and 12-foot putts all the time for birdies, and the reason being, if he missed one, he knew he'd have a 12-footer coming up on the next for birdie. So it's not very hard to hole the first hole, and if he bogeyed this hole he knew he was making another birdie.

It's amazing how we have this 18-month, two-year period where we just get into a zone. Good things are happening, and because they're happening, it actually keeps happening. So the psychology of the game is more of an interest. If I went into coaching, I would become a psychologist, not a golf course. Is that a simple answer? I drifted off the answer here. I'm absolutely rambling.

Q. You just mentioned Tiger a second ago. The TOUR announced last week or the week before that he's exempt from signature events. So like next year he can play in all the signature events. Just kind of your reaction.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: He's earned it. He's earned it ten times over. He's earned it with every part -- yeah, his play, even his current standing, everything. He's well good enough. Yeah, 100 percent behind that. Everybody should -- the TOUR has to operate and have enough leeway to make sure that they could make decisions like that, and it was definitely the correct decision.

There's plenty of other people at other times, I'm sure, but he has definitely earned it at this particular time, no doubt about it. Delighted to see that.

Q. We haven't talked about the course at all.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Do you want to know about my design theories and stuff like that? I could ramble about that as well.

Q. No, this is a pretty good design. I just wonder what your thoughts are on this week and playing what is as close to a links golf course as you're going to find in the U.S.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, and it does -- for me, going into the event, the unknown is the weather conditions. How windy is it going to get? What way is that wind going to change on particular holes?

I played 15 holes yesterday, and I'm going to play 9, 12 holes today, something like that. But I surely won't know the golf course until I've played in the tournament.

I'm interested to see -- you know, there will be holes that look pretty easy in practice, and all of a sudden, you turn around in the tournament and with a change in wind or weather conditions, it could be savagely difficult, which is good for a golf course. You're going to have to go out there and expect to be thrown off guard a little bit, expect a few holes to really bite you and come up and be surprised.

That's the sign of a good golf course, when you go out there and it doesn't go exactly as you would sort of plan it out.

I suppose that's links golf. We're famous at links golf, you'd be walking down a fairway and looking at a bunker and go, why is that bunker there? It's never in play. Next day you're not reaching the bunker.

So, yeah, I think this golf course is like that. It has a real links feel to it. It should play like a links golf course. I'm not sure what the rain situation is tonight. I'm told there is a forecast of rain. I'm sure by Sunday it's going to be hard and fast.

Just like links golf courses, yesterday we were running into bunkers at times at 350. The ball was running out, and you're kind of going, well, do we have to be weary of a bunker at 350? It seems mad, but that could happen. Other times, you're not reaching a bunker at 270 or 280 or whatever. It is a real links-style golf course, and because of that, there's going to be some drama, some excitement.

It does look like with the greens that there will be -- it depends on the pin positions, but with the way the bowl greens, good iron shots, someone who plays to the middle of the green this week will play very nicely.

Q. People like to talk about luck. It seems like in every tournament, there's some amount of luck. In a situation like this where there's to be more going on -- I'm not questioning your skill -- but how much luck do you think is involved in what will happen this week?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I hate superstition. So you saying people don't like to talk about luck, that's great. Tell me. I'll make sure I go talk to them about luck.

It's never a burden to carry an amount of luck. Every tournament I've ever won, every tournament anyone has ever won, luck has been on their side. In many ways. It's not just you getting a good break, it could be you not getting a bad break, and you don't even notice it.

We've seen it over the years. You could have a terribly difficult pin, say a crazy pin setup -- it doesn't happen often, but crazy pin. Guys are coming in afterwards and complaining. You just happened to hit it underneath the hole and didn't even notice it was a crazy pin and walked off, and that's luck.

Luck is avoiding a divot at the right time.

Luck could be hitting it in a divot on the 1st hole when it doesn't really matter.

It might be very unlucky to hit it in a divot on -- you know, what's the island green out there? It's the one with water in front of the green. Like that being lucky to hit it in a divot there because you're going over water.

So you might be getting lucky to hit it in a divot on another hole where it doesn't matter.

There's a million ways. The most important thing when it comes to luck is every situation you should feel like you got lucky. That's the biggest key. Whereas most golfers would do it the opposite way, they'll try and find how unlucky am I for this situation?

Whereas pretty much every hole you should try and say -- you should feel lucky. Even if it doesn't have to match reality. You should always try and feel like things are going your way. You feel like you're lucky.

As I said at the start, it's never a load to carry a bit of good luck.

Q. You've played all over the world. When you stepped on this property, what are one or two courses that you've seen or played before that this reminded you of it?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: There's not many with the clubhouse. I think that's unique. I think I'd like to come here with nothing here and just go up and sit outside on the balcony, the clubhouse, and go out and look at the golf course. I think that would be a very nice, enjoyable afternoon.

As regard to the golf course, I think we said Muirfield a little bit, when you're out on the golf course. That would be the one that comes to mind. Pretty decent wide spaces, but with the fairways and bunkers inside it.

Yeah, something like that, a few hedge rows out there. Maybe that would be the one.

Outside of that, as I said, the thing that struck me is really the stature of the clubhouse and how it looks out over the course. My playing partner yesterday, Todd. He won the U.S. Senior Amateur.

Q. Todd White?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yes. He put it right. Like I said, just like everything with Paddy's Golf Tips, I plagiarize it. He's come here to play at the Newport Country Club, not the U.S. Open, which is a great way of looking at it because who wouldn't want to come here and play Newport Country Club? It's just a beautiful spot.

With the clubhouse and the whole facilities, it's just somewhere where -- yeah, if you came here and played a four ball with your friends, you'd be very happy.

Q. When the champion has the trophy on Sunday, what do you think that person would have done well over four days to get that trophy in his hands?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I clearly, number one, think that any tournament you've got to putt well. It will be interesting -- there are a lot of bowl greens. So we're assuming the pins are going to be pushed out to the

bottom of those slopes.

If they're on the slopes, it means all the short putts are going to have a lot of break. You might be putting uphill to the hole a lot, but when you get to three or four or five feet, they're going to have a bit of a break and if it's windy.

I think, if you ask me, what I'd like to do most this week is I'd like to putt my short putts great. I'd like to have a really good week with the short ones, just little sort of five foot and in, take a lot of stress off you. If they look like they'll break.

Outside of that, I think strength this week would be, because of the shape of those greens, would just be a good iron player. You're not going to have to take on a lot.

Some of those -- as I said, with the slope, some of those pins, even going at the pin, the ball is going to come back down to the middle of the green, 20 feet, 15 feet left. Players who were -- I'm not very good at aiming at the middle of the greens. Maybe this is why I pick it up.

Players that could not short-side themselves this week, play to the middle of the green, leave themselves with those 25 footers uphill all week, they'll do very nicely.

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