

U.S. Senior Open Championship

Wednesday, June 26, 2024

Newport, Rhode Island, USA

Newport Country Club

Gary Koch

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Please welcome Gary Koch to the interview room here at the 44th U.S. Senior Open hosted by Newport Country Club. Gary, it's been over 50 years of competing in USGA Championships. How do you put that in perspective as you get ready to tee it up as the oldest qualifier here in the U.S. Open?

GARY KOCH: Certainly, as I look back over my life of golf, the USGA and their competitions have been a huge part of that, no doubt about it.

The very first one was 1968, USGA Junior at The Country Club, Brookline, Mass. I was 15 years old. So here we are 56 years later getting to compete in another USGA Championship.

I can't think of any other sport where something like that could happen. Long history. Played in 17 U.S. Opens. Part of a broadcast of 22 U.S. Opens. Played on two Walker Cup teams, a World Amateur team.

Just a lot of great memories provided me by the game of golf and also the USGA.

Q. As a broadcaster, do you look at this a little differently, from a different perspective? How do you prepare? It's a lot different as a broadcaster to prepare for a championship; now you're playing one. Are there any similarities?

GARY KOCH: There's certainly similarities. You're hoping as a broadcaster to be able to communicate to the viewer hopefully what the player is thinking or maybe the game plan they've put together, or we read comments they make about how they're trying to play the golf course.

We spend a lot of time on the golf course, even as a broadcaster, checking out the conditions and so forth and so on. So I would say there are some similarities, no doubt. But talking about it is a lot easier than doing it.



One of the reasons why I got into television in my 40s is because I figured out it's a lot easier to talk about some guy making a six-foot putt than it was me doing it. So that certainly comes into play.

There are similarities, but the pressure of actually playing in competition is certainly different than being on the air and talking about it.

Q. As a guy who's played a lot of places, what makes Newport so special? You mentioned you played your first USGA tournament just up the road at The Country Club, a member club, as is Newport. What makes this place so special?

GARY KOCH: I think, if you're into golf at all, and hopefully most of the guys who play in championships like this are, you know the history of this place.

The very first U.S. Amateur played back 1895 and one of the founding clubs. And just the design of the golf course, it's just so natural.

You can tell it was at a time where they just kind of laid the golf course on the existing line. It's designed beautifully for the potential conditions that you are going to play under.

If we have wind like we do today, the golf course is infinitely playable. There are a lot of holes where you can run the ball up on the green, you can bring a shot in low and play in the wind.

A lot of, it seems like, the newer golf courses don't allow that as much as they should, whereas this one does. The condition is immaculate. It's fantastic. It's just a privilege to be here and play on a course with the history that this place has.

Q. Just curious, your fellow NBC guy, used to be colleagues, Notah Begay, do you guys have a little friendly bet?

GARY KOCH: We talked about that a little bit at the U.S. Open when we were both paired together in the 18th tower for some of the early coverage. I'm sure there will be a little wager on who's low announcer.

But he's also a lot younger than I am. He probably should



give me a few strokes.

Q. I was going to ask you if he'll give you a few shots.

GARY KOCH: I have a feeling he won't.

Q. Just what would define a successful week for you?

GARY KOCH: I've been asked that a couple times, and the reality is I just don't play a lot of competitive golf anymore. I feel like on my good days I should be able to go around this place and post a respectable score.

Now, I'm not sure what a respectable score would be based on the conditions. I would say realistically, if I can make the cut and play all four days, then I've probably accomplished something that I'd be very proud of.

Q. How many times in your life have you shot your age?

GARY KOCH: That's a good question. Fortunately, quite a few. The very first time I did it, I was 62 years old. I shot a 62 at the course I grew up on as a kid when I was 20, and then I shot it again on the same course when I was 62 years old.

If I had to guess, I would say 100-plus times. The good news about getting older, it gets a little easier (laughter).

Q. And whoever wins this championship on Sunday evening, what will they have done well?

GARY KOCH: Obviously managed the conditions. I think it sounds as though we're going to have some wind. It sounds as though the wind is going to change direction several times during the course of the four rounds.

I can't imagine that anybody has a tremendous amount of experience playing this golf course, so whoever can figure out the conditions, what shots to play when.

The fairways are relatively forgiving. They're not tight on very many holes. I'm not sure that driving the ball straight is going to be of big concern. Certainly controlling the trajectory of your shots, if it's windy like this; especially playing in the crosswinds or into the wind will be huge.

Whoever wins is going to putt really well because these greens have a lot of slope to them, they really do. I had forgotten, in 18 years since I was here the last time, just how much slope are in these greens. A lot of side slope. A lot of back-to-front slope.

You get above the hole or to the side of the hole, you can

make yourself look pretty foolish on the greens if you're not careful. Somebody's going to have to putt extremely well.

Q. As someone who doesn't play the TOUR regularly, when you come to an event like this, there's a lot of reminiscing, a little bit of a reunion because you don't see them on a regular basis.

GARY KOCH: Correct. Very much so. I've had an incredible time these first three days just catching up with guys I haven't seen in several years and congratulating some of them.

I ran into Ernie Els a few minutes ago down on the practice tee, and I've known Ernie for 25 years at least and don't get to see him very often. Usually at the Seminole pro member once a year. He's been on a great run on the Champions Tour, and congratulated him and caught up with how his family is doing.

There's been several of those conversations over the last few days. It's been a privilege to actually get to hang out with these guys again. Yeah, it's been fun.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports