

# John Deere Classic

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TPC Deere Run

Silvis, Illinois, USA

## Zach Johnson

### Press Conference

AMANDA HERRINGTON: We'd like to welcome Zach Johnson to the virtual interview room here at the John Deere Classic. Zach, another guy who does not need an introduction around these parts. After nearly two years, we've waited to get back to the John Deere Classic. Talk about your feelings being back here finally.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, it's another home for me, if you will. I don't say that lightly, nor do I take that for granted. Coming back here is special. It doesn't feel like it's been two years, but clearly it has.

I love it. I love everything about this tournament. I love what it stands for. I love the people surrounding it and who's associated. Certainly it starts with John Deere and their pursuits and frankly their priority in helping this community. And second I would say it's the community and how they rally behind it and make it their own.

I'm encouraged not only for this year, but I'm really, really encouraged for the future, for the event. We're at 50 years, which is mindboggling, but very special. It doesn't surprise me; that's Midwest people just doing the right thing.

I'm pumped. I'm excited to be here.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Let's talk about the golf course. Since 2000 no player is more under par than you, so talk about the feels on the golf course this week.

ZACH JOHNSON: I didn't know that. I wish that translated to more W's.

The golf course, this is one of those where I think my peers would probably say the same thing, it's fairly predictable, and I mean that in the most positive of manners. This is a place that the turf, this area is just pure. The grass, the soil is really good for golf, for bentgrass, for Kentucky blue rough. It's pure.

Now, it's all based on temperature and humidity and rain, but I played nine holes yesterday and the ball was running, which was fun to see. And we've had that. It's not that we



haven't had that. But more times than not it seems like it's kind of a hit-and-stop just because of the rain and the humidity.

This place is special. I mean, if I had a dollar for every time one of my guys said, man, I love that place, I hope I can get back, it would be a pretty substantial piggy bank.

Hats off to the superintendent and certainly to John Deere and what they do and how they do it.

**Q. We talked last year at this time via Zoom, and it didn't seem right to not be here and doing this. With it being 50 years and the fact that you grew up here, your sponsor exemption started here, what is 50 years like for you celebrating this milestone here? Can you talk about the 50 years and what you've seen kind of grow up, I guess, the second half of this tournament, the last 20-some years?**

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, sure. You know, I could get long-winded on that kind of -- I guess that was a question. Like I said in the beginning, this is like a quasi-home for me. Last year you and I were talking obviously with our buddy Tom, and I've talked a number of times about this event in the last year, and it's one of those situations I remember last late June, early July, it's like my body was ready to come -- it's hard to explain.

I was actually talking to Tiger about it. When Augusta hit last April and it was postponed, we were both saying, it's like our bodies are ready to get ready for that event. It's like our mind -- our brain and our body wants to prepare for Augusta. Well, for me this is like -- I think I've probably coined it my fifth major, but irrelevant to that, it's like my body is wanting to -- and my mind is ready to get here to the Quad Cities. It's almost like they took something away from me.

Frankly, COVID sucks, and I get it, the decisions that were made here were certainly for the betterment of the community and certainly for the betterment of John Deere as a whole, being such a worldly -- everybody recognizes that deer. Those decisions were obviously very strategic and thoughtful and the right decision at the right moment.

But for me selfishly, it stunk because I wanted to come back. I always enjoy coming back. I wish it was two times



a year, three times a year.

But going back to it, 50 years, there hasn't been many events on the PGA TOUR that can really say that. I know it started with kind of Deane Beman's vision here back in the day. I actually heard some fun facts about him and how he won a satellite event here and then he got grandfathered and it became an official event, an official win, that kind of thing, which is pretty special. You're talking outside of Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer, I would say the pioneers of the PGA it goes without saying, but he's kind of like a patriarch of the PGA TOUR.

He saw something here. He saw that this community loved golf, loved what the game could provide, the platform that can be used here in the Quad Cities and for the betterment of the community.

Very special. I mean, as a kid for me, it was the Hardees, but I actually remember my roommate in college who shockingly enough was our best player, he was really good, Monday qualified at Emeis, and that was our senior year, so the early summer just after we graduated in '98, and I remember driving him -- at that point we were in one car. We were just traveling together. I drove him -- was it Coal Valley Country Club, Golf Club? I drove him up there and his dad caddied for him, but I remember driving in, and I'm like, man, this is a big deal. It was just really cool seeing all the people out there and so close to home, just to witness that. I'm like, man, I've got to get in this event.

I tried to Monday a couple times and didn't make it, and then obviously John Deere stepped in and took this tournament to new heights. Clair Peterson and Kym Hougham before him saw something in a short little kid from Cedar Rapids and wanted to help him chase his dream. It's the tournament I played the most on the PGA TOUR, even with last year.

I owe a lot to just the trajectory of my game to this place, to this event and certainly to John Deere. Every single week can be a positive regardless of what you shoot, and I missed the cuts in both those sponsor exemptions. But the knowledge and the wisdom that I gained just Monday through Sunday certainly and on the golf course, I mean, the specifics of putting and just getting the golf course down, I'm probably in debt.

This place has just given me so much personally, and that pales in comparison to what it's given so many charities, so many organizations and just how they every year exceed probably expectations as far as the dollar amount they provide for this community.

It has everything to do with the people. It has everything to

do with Clair and his staff here, certainly everything to do with John Deere and how they go about their business, both locally and globally. It's just a unique event.

I feel like there's maybe two or three events that you can kind of put in this echelon where it's their own. It's almost -- it's the fabric of John Deere. It's the fabric of this community. I'm just pumped to be back, man.

**Q. Can you take yourself out of the equation; when you think of the John Deere Classic, what moment do you think of? What do you think of? Is there another moment here that doesn't involve Zach Johnson that you're like, that's the John Deere Classic?**

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh, yeah, I mean, multiple. Obviously my good buddy and our captain Steve Stricker, his three-peat stands out. I think it was his last one with that putt on 18 -- I think it was his third one that he was back right barely on the fringe, but he made it 20 to 25 feet and he slid it in there. Clutch, clutch shot making on 18 stands out. That would be number one.

If I continue to remove myself -- I remember how lucky Jordan Spieth got on 18 with his sand shot that was going in the water --

**Q. He said it wasn't going in the water.**

ZACH JOHNSON: He can say whatever he wants. The way I see it, that was his first win, and I feel like I'm kind of the wind behind his sail. No, I'm just kidding. It was inevitable. It was going to happen.

I remember something that was -- still gives me the heebie-geebies, gets my heart pumping on 16 with a nice little pipe bomb. I don't need to expand on that one anymore because I don't want to think about it. But that certainly stands out.

You know, one of the things I remember vividly is when I got a phone call from Clair Peterson, this would have been 2021, so it would have been late 2007, early 2008. I'd really have to think about it. But I remember the phone conversation, and that was hey, we'd love for you to be a part of our executive board, and I'm like, excuse me? I was humbled. It gives me chills just thinking about it.

I remember that specifically, and then you go five or six years prior to that, I got a sponsor exemption here. Just in that time period, certainly what this tournament meant to me, and obviously they felt like I could be somewhat of an asset, and I look forward to those phone calls seems like six, seven, eight times a year.

Very special, and I don't know what I've added, if anything, but they've picked my brain and asked me questions and prompted me to think outside the box and for the betterment of the tournament, so I love that. That's special. And I got a shirt, nice little John Deere Classic shirt.

What else? I think was it David Gossett that won the first one here; is that right?

**Q. Yeah.**

ZACH JOHNSON: So I remember that. David is not a whole lot younger than me, but he was a stud, a college player out of Texas, and I remember he came here and was it '99, 2000? I'd have to think about it. And won for the first time. That was cool.

D.A. Weibring, another Midwest guy that obviously the PGA TOUR saw a great piece of land with John Deere, and what he's done here and continued to do here -- it's kind of evolved, I think to a great property and a great place, not only for the championship but the other 51 weeks a year -- well, not 51 weeks, but you know what I mean.

So yeah. If I remove myself, those are kind of the things I think about.

**Q. Obviously as we've been slowly emerging from the pandemic, things have gotten more open, and we're almost back to normal it seems on the PGA TOUR. It's going to be a lot different next week, almost like kind of going back in time here. I'm just sort of wondering what you think of that. Obviously you're aware now of what you're going to have to go through over there, and how you're dealing with it.**

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, I'm going to -- you're talking about an event that I don't have a difficult time getting motivated or amped up to play. Regardless of the difficulty in getting there.

Now, I say that, there's one thing I've tried to -- I've tried from the very beginning to do with this John Deere Classic was to alleviate the stress of getting from A to B, and John Deere has done that. I've got a pretty -- considering I play the week before six time zones away, I've got a pretty good routine in getting prepared and getting ready over there.

They're throwing a little more kinks in the logistics of that. I'm not knowledgeable on the situation in Great Britain as far as the pandemic and specifically COVID and all that. I haven't really researched it, so there is some ignorance in

that regard.

I'm of the notion that you've got to conservatively look at things and plot the best way to have a championship. If this is the best way for us to get there and perform, so be it. I don't know all the specifics. I've seen some of my peers make some statements, most of which I probably do actually agree with, 30 to 30-some-odd-thousand fans there each and every day and then we're in a very, very, very tight bubble, each of us individually, I don't want to say it's hypocrisy because that's too much of a stretch, but to me it doesn't really mesh as a whole, especially when you're taking -- we've got our own little bubble with our caddie and one or two other individuals.

You're making the week just more difficult. We can't go out and about. From a food standpoint, from a logistics standpoint, it just makes it difficult. It's one week, though. I say all that in context. It's one week. And it's the Open. It's still going to be a great championship.

I think we're all ready to get back to what we remember, but I'm a golfer, I'm not a scientist, I'm certainly not an expert when it comes to this kind of stuff. I don't know if anybody is.

Let's just look at whatever we need to look at, the data we have, whatever is pertinent and make proper decisions. My guess is the R&A and the experts there in GB&I have done that, and I'll completely abide by it, and I can't wait to go.

**Q. I know you talked about your affinity for the Open Championship. With those restrictions, did you ever think about not going?**

ZACH JOHNSON: No. No, I did not.

Now, there was a point there where it was extremely difficult in processing the travel side of things, but again, John Deere has alleviated a lot of that stress. The R&A has alleviated a lot of that stress. The way I see it, quite honestly, it's like the current situation here with the exception of the six time zones, is that I'm going to take a test here before I go, God willing it's negative, and when I go over there, I guess I'll be tested again.

I think that's regardless if you're vaccinated or not. I'll immediately take a test when I get there. You know what, that's their prerogative.

Again, my guess is, and I think it's a pretty fair guess, that they're looking out for the betterment of the whole and not just us players.

It's kind of what I do each and every week anyway, and that's fine.

**Q. You've been around these parts for quite a while; what are you seeing out on the golf course? Has it changed this year? Is it playing differently?**

ZACH JOHNSON: Great question. Two or three observations. One, we're getting a little bit of roll in the fairway early on in the week. Now, there is some possible rain in the forecast, so that could change, but the fairways are running, which is great. It makes it more difficult. It shrinks the golf course, more precise off the tee, and there's actually some substantial healthy rough, both around the greens and in some fairway areas.

I think this has always been a place when it's wet and kind of humid and hot and no wind, you just swing for the fences and the ball doesn't release much, both off the tee and into the greens.

Right now, you've got to really hit fairways. There's certain courses where it becomes very evident that it's a first-shot golf course or a second-shot golf course. I think currently right now it's going to be kind of both. But getting the ball in the fairway right off the bat is going to be a priority.

**Q. Both you and Strick have had tremendous success here, both veterans on the TOUR. How tough is it to win out here against the kids these days?**

ZACH JOHNSON: It's very, very difficult to win out here. I was just talking to another buddy of mine who is quite a bit younger. The TOUR ain't getting any older, first of all, it's getting younger, I think. I don't know, I could be making that up. The average age, I feel like it's dropped, but again, I don't know that.

It's hard to make cuts out here. I mean, I was talking to a buddy who actually missed the cut in Hartford two weeks ago by one shot, missed the cut last week by one shot, and he would have been -- in both weeks he would have been like six or seven shots off the lead. I think it was seven.

In an 18-hole stretch, even call it a 25- or 30-hole stretch, that's nothing.

It's really bunched. It's really kind of congested there with 65 and ties now, and it's hard.

All that being said, the game of golf hasn't really changed. You've still got to go about your work and plot it around the golf course, game plan and implement that. But it's difficult to win. It's difficult to -- in all facets.

But I love that. I don't want to say that's motivating. I just pursue that. I love when things aren't easy.

**Q. Following up on that last question, where do you feel you're at right now with your game? It's kind of been a mixed bag when you just look at results from this year. Where is the strength right now and where are some areas where you need to fine tune some things?**

ZACH JOHNSON: I'd say the number one strength is probably my wisdom because of my age. You know, my game is good. I can wholeheartedly -- I've probably said that every time I've come to this event, but I mean it. It's really good.

There's been periods where my ball-striking wasn't good and my putting was great and vice versa. It's just really a matter of kind of meshing those aspects together. I know what my stats say. My putting has been fantastic -- well, it's been the best it's ever been from a statistical standpoint. So it's really about getting the ball-striking more consistent.

I didn't play last week, but two weeks ago in Hartford, it was one of the best weeks I've had in ball-striking. I was, whatever it was, top 10 in most important statistical categories in my opinion, and I just didn't make that many putts.

I like the trajectory of my game. I love the fact that it's always a work in progress, and I feel like I'm always preparing for the next week. That's kind of how I go about it. If it happens this week, great. That doesn't mean it's going to be a W, but I just want to get those feelings of being in contention again on Sunday, and I don't feel like that's far off.

If there's been any negatives this year -- I've made a ton of cuts, but the negatives have been my performance in the majors. I can elaborate more on that, but I don't need to. It's just been poor golf, overthinking, overanalyzing, and expectations. Outside of those really three events, I think I've performed at a pretty high level, given myself an opportunity to climb the board on the weekend, which is really all you can ask for as a competitor.

**Q. With that said, you've had such good results here; how much can that trigger --**

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, well, I don't take it for granted. Obviously I've got a comfort level here, but that doesn't mean it's going to happen. I've still got to go out there and hit shots and make putts. This is a place where I'm fairly confident I've probably birdied every hole, but I've probably

had opportunities to bogey every hole.

I just know it really well. I'm going to go out and wait for my stretch because there's plenty of opportunity here to make birdies. There's plenty of opportunity to kind of get the accelerator down on the floor and go. But I know in this game and even on a golf course like this, especially if it stays somewhat firm, you've really got to -- you've really just got to stay right in front of you. This course has teeth if you take it for granted.

**Q. You're going to have DJ Gregory from the Walking For Kids foundation alongside you this week. What does it mean to have him walk with you?**

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh, man, that's an awesome question. You know what, he's an amazing individual, clearly. He is a dear friend of mine, and he walks with me every year here and every year at Augusta.

He's a competitor. If I'm going to try to take anything away from him, it's his grit, it's his heart, it's certainly his endurance.

I think more than anything, it's just the way he prioritizes his life and how he goes about just regardless of the situation, regardless of what people tell you, regardless of what you might be up against, you can still overcome that.

It's inspiring, obviously, but I just appreciate the fact that he lives a life that's very selfless and pursues to help others in the utmost, specifically kids.

We can go on and on about that, but he just makes his life almost -- it kind of demands an explanation, and I love that.

I love the fact that when you look at somebody like that, you're like, if you don't really know him, why. Why, how, and that kind of thing. And then from there, you can kind of reflect on yourself, right, and say, you know what, obviously I'm blessed; am I doing everything I can do in this game of golf. Because he's doing more than anyone else out here as far as I'm concerned. And it's every week.

I take weeks off. DJ does not. That's extremely impressive.

I love just -- he's just a friend. Like we go out to eat. We have a beer together. He couldn't be more normal of a dude, but his mental capacity and his mental strength is the furthest thing from normal.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Zach, thank you so much for your time today. We appreciate it.

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