

Horizon Irish Open

Wednesday, 29 June, 2022

Thomastown, County Kilkenny, Ireland

Mount Juliet Estate

Padraig Harrington

Press Conference

Q. How nice is it to be back in Ireland after your first senior major win?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: It's great to be back after a win. Great to have won on the Champions Tour. I've gone out there for that very reason, to win, rather than play regular events and finish top 10 kind of thing.

It was important that I got across the line. It was definitely an added bonus I got my first win in a major tournament, particularly the USGA, U.S. Senior Open. It is a very nice way to go about my first win and obviously brings a nice bit of buzz out of it, enjoyment and it was very exciting coming down the stretch with the crowds. The whole golf course last week, it was a big test of golf. Definitely suited my game for sure, if I knew I would be competitive on it, but obviously that's not enough to win a tournament. You've got to go and do it. Yeah, to get across the line was very nice, very exciting. Coming here, the crowds, it was a nice atmosphere with people congratulating me. I'm sure it will be like that for the rest of the week. It can be tough being at your home open, especially if you don't play well or you're in the middle of the pack and things aren't going so well, you feel like you're letting down the fans. My own case, I'm obviously tired coming in here. I hope I get a good start, feeling so flat after last week, but I'm going to enjoy it and wave to the crowds because I won last week. Good enough.

Q. And this week starts a new era for The Irish Open with Horizon on board. How exciting is the event and golf in Ireland?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, I'm with Horizon about 15 months now, and after that, they come on to the Irish Open. They are really keen to get involved, really get involved in Ireland in a lot of charitable stuff and they seem like they are a great sponsor. They look like they are enjoying this week, which is very important that we gave a new sponsor or any respond or a great week or great welcome. Yeah, it's all working very well. The players are especially happy. To come to a National Open, the European players really like coming to National Open.



HORIZON Irish Open

Especially in Ireland they tend to be on great venues and this is a great venue and now with the sponsor, this is everything a player could hope for in Europe and from what I hear from the players, who I see, yeah, they are pretty chuffed.

Q. Well done, terrific, wonderful to watch. Commentators made a big thing of the fact that when you were coming down the stretch, that you had not won in six years. Were they right?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I didn't know. If you asked me the question, I'd have to have thought about it down and work it out. Six years to me, at that stage of your career, six years is not that long. It's like, it's pretty tough when you're 48, 49 years of age to win on the regular tour, so where else was I going to win?

That's one of those stats that they kind of come up with. It's correct, it's factual, but you know, it's pretty good win in 2016. I didn't see anything in it myself, no. It was true but yeah, I wouldn't have had very many chances would I, a couple of years at The Ryder Cup and that. It's not hard to see how it was six years for sure, out for half a year or more. They were factually correct, but when you really look into it, there's not many people who are winning from the age of 45 to 50 on the main tour. Just doesn't happen too often.

Q. Coming back from Pennsylvania, do you spot different challenges that you must face this week?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Look, the challenge this week is all about me and how I can -- I mean this with greatest respect for the Irish, how I can get myself up for last week. As I said I don't want to have a flat start to the week. I want to make sure, we see with anybody who wins the following week, if they start well they can keep the excitement and buzz going and the focus will stay there. I need a certain level of tension to keep myself in the game this week. Hopefully that happens. It will be tough if it's flat but if it is I'll still enjoy the week. The fans are out and it's a great week, great venue, Mount Juliet, so I'm going to enjoy myself no matter what, wave to the crowds.

My display of golf today wouldn't give you any great confidence about how the rest of the four days, but 24



hours is a long time in golf so I'm hoping that I'll be well rested by tomorrow.

Q. Obviously Make-A-Wish is the charity this week. It's on your shirt?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Just for the week. I'm obviously an ambassador for Make-A-Wish Ireland. That's one of the reasons why they are the charity here week and working with Horizon. I thought just added a little bit extra. I played today with Peter McHenry, who I played with at Killarney 12 years ago. So when he had cystic fibrosis, it's an amazing story, I played, as I often do with Make-A-Wish, you do these things and it's tough because the children have life changing illnesses for sure, some of them terrible and then I mean, playing here again this week, 12 years later and he's a solid young man living his life like anybody else. What a great story that is.

When you meet them and they are young and they have an illness, it's tough. It's tough to know how to deal with that. You know, their futures are so uncertain. Coming back this time around now, Horizon brought Make-A-Wish out, and seeing him, he's just like any young fella. He's just going about his business, living his life. It's fabulous to see how he himself with his own fortitude and attitude has got to this stage but how medicine has advanced and he can live a really high-quality life at this stage.

Q. Any shot you would pick out?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: He shot 8-under par in the team format. So five gross birdies and three net birdies. Yeah, he really had a good day, I've got to say. He hit the ball really well off the tee and at end of round, I didn't have any lessons to give him which is a very strong sign in, I'm not interfering in your game, you're doing okay.

Q. It was great to win The Irish Open in 2007, a big box to tick in your career. What are your thoughts again of that time and how big a deal was it for you and how big a part did it play in what unfolded in the following 16 or 17 months?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I'm not going to say it was a steppingstone but the reality, when you look back, it probably was. You've got to win the events. You've got to start winning events, first and foremost but then once you start winning, you have to win bigger events and Irish Open may be even bigger than a major in terms of stress.

Just so much you have to manage in an Irish Open week. That's kind of the same with the majors. As you guys know when you go to a major, the amount of players who just don't bring their games because of what's going on, how

they get distracted and the stress of it. I found that a big problem with The Irish Open for years. So around 2006, 2007, I started to get a handle on that and no doubt that handle was what helped me win the majors.

Q. In your first Zoom call yesterday, you sounded a little concerned by The European Tour. By the time you got to Zoom call two or three with Keith Pelley were you more relaxed about the future of The European Tour?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, absolutely. Very positive, the Zoom call last night, the announcement.

I think up to now, all the folks on the LIV Tour have been on where the money comes from and the moral side of it. The announcement last night, I wouldn't say it was the first, but I would say it was the biggest and most concrete effort to go, don't worry about them, we are going to look after ourselves and make our tour as strong as we can. It was definitely a different tact in the sense of, I think people have to come to the reality that LIV Tour seems like it's going to be here to stay and it will be normalised.

There is plenty of room in golf for two big tours and that's why I was worried about The European Tour getting squeezed out. But with the announcement last night, Europe looks like it has a very strong future, a strong future for its players, younger players, and a strong pathway to growing our games and build from there. It's positive that they are thinking about themselves now and looking after themselves and working on themselves rather than necessarily the initial stuff where they go all the way back to the PGL and Saudi thing, was always about trying to, if anything, you go back down the moral line of the money and this, that and the other. Remember, everybody, depends where you come from in the world, has a completely different idea. Your idea what's right and wrong is not my idea. We are all different and hugely depends on where you're brought up and your cultures and things like that.

The fact that they are going ahead, they are going to be there, with their commitment, looks like they are, looks like the LIV Tour will go ahead and keep going for a number of years. It's up to the PGA TOUR and The European Tour to have a very strong, viable alternative. Like the PGA TOUR is always going to be there, but Europe, as I said, looks like this will strengthen its ability to attract players and keep players going forward, which is so important.

Q. Just an added question. Keith has said that the Irish Open won't be co-sanctioned, and we were talking among ourselves, might be a blessing in disguise, might lose its identity if it was a



semi-American event.

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: The Irish Open will always be here to stay and a big event in its own right. I think the future of The European Tour and what kind of seems like they are angling on is obviously legacy tournaments. So you know, if you wasn't to the rank-and-file and that was part of the announcement last night, that they are going to do a survey of the players, like the European players want to play the National Opens of Europe. They want to play the National Opens of Europe in great venues.

I know myself, I remember going back to Europe, 2016, 2017, I did a run of tournaments, Crans, Hamburg, Amsterdam, London. I said, wow, geez, like four great events, venues. It was fantastic. In terms of enjoying events and enjoying golf, it was an eye-opener; there is a lot more to golf, especially you get older and on with it, you want to enjoy it. Believe it or not, guys, you actually want to stay in a nice hotel.

I think the idea of the PGA TOUR and The European Tour are kind of looking at that as their -- as their road to go down with this idea that there is more to golf. The legacy of golf is there, and you know, let's play great events, great opens.

What's been frustrating for the European players, and COVID obviously has not helped us, the travel around the world to smaller venues, smaller prize funds. Players will put up with smaller prize funds in nicer venues but it's tough when you are having to do a lot of crisscrossing the world for smaller prize funds. The golf courses can be great but they can be average, and like we know with The Irish Open is a perfect example. It built its reputation by being a great event to come to and enjoy the event no matter how we played. That was the secret to our success. Yes, you come and play a great golf course. Yes, if you play well it's a great event but you're going to enjoy yourself no matter what.

I think it seemed to me, as with last night, there's going to be a pathway for young players. There's going to be support. It looks like Europe is going to be somewhere that players will want to come and play and build their games, just like I did from -- like from '96 to 2004, I played in Europe exclusively. For probably about five of those years, I would have been eligible to go to the U.S.

But I only went over and played the big events, being in the Top-50 the in world, I would have gone over and played in the big events because I wasn't ready. But I still wanted to go and play in the majors and test myself out.

I see in this announcement that young players, if you don't

want to go to the college system, because it's quite different. If you're a European going to a U.S. college, it's a significant change in your life. They can come to The European Tour and in some ways, see a future, a pathway, being minded, be protected in a comfortable environment and they are not getting thrown in in the deep end too quickly, and grow and develop their games.

I was very worried about that in terms of the World Rankings and in terms of, as I said, LIV Golf, in what was Europe, the one that was going to lose out -- PGA TOUR wasn't going to lose out. They are always going to be there. So this looks like, no, that it would be three good places, three tours and other tours, as well; Asia is threatening. Certainly plenty of competition in the game of golf at the moment.

Q. Second year in a row the event has taken place last year. After such limited capacity last year, how nice to have a big crowd?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: It was a fair crowd today at the Pro-Am and I hear it sold out for the week. Yeah, I think Mount Juliet lends itself to a great event. It's got a great atmosphere. All the players are on site. So the players enjoy themselves, and with the crowds coming in, there should be a great buzz.

Yeah, whoever wins here or gets themselves in contention this week will know all about it. Looking forward to it. You're possibly right, probably right, just like all the concerts going on, music festivals at the moment, up and around the country, they seem to be -- just add a bit more because -- not that we're through COVID or ended with COVID but that we certainly are kind of back at this stage, and The Irish Open, hopefully, will get that balance as well.

Q. Only four players in the Top-50 this week --

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I thought you were going to ask me to stay on the subject of COVID.

Q. Keith Pelley said that the venue, the date is probably not going to switch, no foreseeable change in this date. Does it work? Do you see a \$6 million prize fund, should there be more of the top players here? How are your thoughts on the date and implications for going forward if we stay?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I like this a lot, and it suits me, and I think it suits the Irish players. Every date in the year is a huge competition and I don't want to go back words on our conversation but like one of the issues in golf over the last number of years has been the idea that you have to play more and more events just to be competitive where

you are.

You know, if you play one more event in the fall season on the PGA TOUR, that's one less event on The European Tour the following year. That's really what happens in the game of golf.

When I started on the PGA TOUR in 2005, I played 15 events to be competitive. 15 was what you were required to play and of those 15 events, probably only five of them, they weren't even regular events, maybe five or six regular events. Like to be competitive at this stage you want to be playing 25 events, 26 events. If a European player ends up playing that many events, it squeezes his time from playing in Europe.

This is the problem, there's a lot of good events and there's a lot of pressure to play more and more to be competitive and get over the top in the area you're playing. We see them with plenty of European players who go across there, just isn't, with my game, you definitely could play both tournaments.

Now, it's hard. If you look at the top players, if you look at their schedules, you will see these tournaments thrown in there, every now and again, extra tournaments, whether it's the fall season -- I know where they are going and it's a positive thing. If you want the top players to come and play in Ireland, you have to reduce their total number of events elsewhere and that's why the fall season was a bit of -- getting players playing more was not good for us in terms of if you played one more event in September, you'll probably take one or two -- you'll take events out in your -- the Irish Open has lost out on that over the years. Hopefully going forward, there won't be as much pressure on players to be against the top in the sense of you can get there by playing your 20 events a year or 22 events and you don't feel like you have to play 30 events, and then that opens the possibility of players coming and playing here.

Q. Did you find the combination like for the Wee Man trophy?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I have the lock, I have the combination. I do have the lock and I do have the combination but I'm going to send better people than me at it just to make sure.

Q. Going back to Carnoustie, is it fair to ask you that the feelings coming down the stretch and ultimately winning, were there experiences of your major wins in how you felt, or did you actually experience anything similar at all?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Winning any tournament is the

same experiences. In some sense that was a different one. I can't remember in my career having a six-shot lead with nine holes to play. So it's really tough, I always found it hard to play with a lead, but I find it a lot easier to be in that position where you've got to hit the shots, whereas when you have got a lead, you kind of get a little bit defensive.

Obviously things got tight and there's nothing worse in golf that two players can be a shot apart and score -- the guy behind might have momentum and the guy in front no momentum. It's tough. It goes back to what Bob Torrance used to say about golf shots. It's easy to hit a great shot when you're feeling good. It's really difficult to hit a great shot when you're feeling bad.

I had to finish that tournament out not feeling my best those last three, four holes. You've just got to get the job done and thankfully from experience, I kind of said it going into the last round, when you get a big lead, it just gives you options. So I knew that there was a possibility that I would get caught and there would be a possibility that I would be feeling pretty crappy about my game but if I kept my head on my shoulders, I would have a chance of winning. To be honest, I had two chances of winning in the sense of, with those last three holes, I had parred them to win.

So you know, I just had to keep myself going. But even if I dropped a shot behind, I still would have had a chance at birdie to win or catch up. I knew those options were on the table and I just had to keep my head in position. I wouldn't know if it -- I wouldn't say it was similar to winning any tournament. I would say the experiences I've gained by winning in the majors helped.

But each individual tournament, it's a new experience on that actual day. It's amazing how there's always something, something different, you feel good about something or feel bad about something or the condition suit you. It's something different all the time and you just have to adapt.

Q. Hugely impressive --

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I didn't feel great on the greens. The three two-putts on the last three holes, yeah, knuckle down. You've just got to go -- I've always been excellent in my career when my back's to the wall. When I have to do something, and it's very clear what I have to do, I'm at my best. When there's no alternative, I'm good. When I have options is when I struggle. I had no option on those last three holes. I had to get it done.

You know, I'd even look at to a certain extent, the putt on

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

17 and 18, you know, it's just get the ball in the hole and we don't care. I'm trying to explain this to somebody, having a group chat there a while ago about a player that messed up on the 18th hole and a few people threw in into the group chat, he made to make a par on the last, he needed to make a bogey, should have done this, should have done that, whatever. You can second guess whatever you want. He needed to make a par. All you had to do was figure out -- it doesn't matter. There comes to a point just have to get it done. Doesn't matter how you do it. Just get it done. There's no point second getting the club he hit or the shot he hit, I don't care, and get the job done. There is no excuses and I'm a better player when I get to this stage that I have no excuse, I just have to do it.

Q. How long was the second on 17?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: It was six feet. And I couldn't have gotten it any closer. The good thing about it was it was obvious there was going to be a pin in that section of the green. In my preparation, I got down and hit putts there and looked like it was a left-half putt but because I practised there, I knew there was no left-to-right in that section of the green. So I went, even though it looked like half, I went straight, and thankfully it came out straight and when I looked up, it was rolling straight in, I was very pleased with that.

It wasn't going very fast, I had a long time to walk to the ball. It just dribbled in over the front lip.

Q. Did it help your playing partner was playing well?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I can't say it would do you any harm -- a rising tide lifts all ships, and you always want your playing partner to play well. I had a good partner that day, was very good and very comfortable to play with. It certainly did no harm.

Q. Six-shot leads have been a theme in your career. Sergio had one in Carnoustie in 2007.

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I wouldn't have known. Look, it's hard to lead. The Open, what was phenomenal about it was he led all the way the whole week. I know he led for most of the day Thursday. I think J.B. Holmes, was he ahead of him, one shot or something? Briefly. So Shane had it all week and went Sunday and played okay bar the first hole and that could have been the case for me, too, I think if I birdied the hole on Sunday, who knows, but Shane did an unbelievable job on the front which is easily the hardest -- for me the hardest thing to do in golf is to lead from the front.

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