

The Senior Open Presented by Rolex

Wednesday, July 21, 2021
Sunningdale, Berkshire, England
Sunningdale Golf Club

Colin Montgomerie

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Colin Montgomerie to The Senior Open Presented by Rolex here at Sunningdale, your home course. How are the course conditions and what have the players said about it?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: I talked to Tim Petrovic and a few of the Americans and Jerry Kelly and guys that haven't been to Sunningdale before and a few of them have played Pine Valley which was ranked No. 1 in the world and they have for 20 years and they compare it to that.

So you ask how everyone is feeling about the course, that's the biggest compliment that anyone can make to a course is to compare it to No. 1. It's superb. It's in better condition than it was for The Open qualifying or European Open we've played here in the past. It's beginning to get a little bit fiery now which is perfect. I think that's what they want and it's all set for a fantastic weekend.

Yeah, it's superb. Everyone loves it, yeah. And, hey, they should. This is -- this is as good as it gets for inland courses, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Been a while since you competed in the U.K., how much do you look forward to competing over here in this event?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Fantastic. Having not won an R&A event, as such, second in The Open to Woods in 2005 and runner-up at the British Amateur to Olazábal, I picked real beauties there, didn't I, to come up against but it would be great to win, obviously. We are all here to do that and we all know that if you do happen to win, you know, you get an invite to St Andrews next year, which would be a real celebration of golf, being the 150th Open. So that's on the radar as well for us all.

So yeah, we're just looking forward to the whole thing, having moved here from -- we were in Windsor for a while and now I live in Sunningdale here now. So it's a definite home, a home tie, yeah.



Q. You know Sunningdale probably better than anyone this week. How has the course changed or indeed has it changed over the years, and developed into what it will be this weekend?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Sure. I think it's to its credit that it has not actually changed. It has not changed. I remember playing in '87 here in the Walker Cup, you know, I mean, Christ, we're talking, hate to say, 34 years ago. Hasn't changed much at all. Yes, the trees have grown a wee bit but it's still Sunningdale. There's no difference. The holes haven't changed. The bunkers haven't changed. Nothing changed, really, at all.

I think they have taken out a middle bunker at 16 and that's all they have done. That's a real credit and compliment to what it was before. It's an excellent golf course. There's three very short par 4s, the 3rd, 9th and 11th but they are also very dangerous. If you get on the wrong side of them, you can make a bogey in a hurry and you feel like an idiot doing that on these holes, birdie chances on the tee. But you can make 5 in a hurry. And there some great par 4s: 2, 5, 6, 10, 12, 16, 17, 18 coming in, good, solid par 4s.

Hate to use the word "senior" golf, we like to call ourselves champions or legends or whatever it might be; for a Senior Open, I think there's no better course to play. It's very playable for everybody here, yeah.

Q. You're certainly a legend in Scottish golf, and for many years whenever anyone was speaking about Scottish golf, your name was mentioned.

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Yes.

Q. Now it's yourself and Robert MacIntyre.

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Robert come on now, Bob, fantastic. Tell you what, tell you what, I was very, very impressed with the whole -- his attitude, I don't mean to say that. His way of not feeling happy with -- where was he on the 14th tee. I think he just birdied 13 and he got to certainly fifth, sixth place, yes?

Q. Three off the lead, I think he was.

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Three off the lead. Now, as a youngster, as a very youngster, only in his seventh major, I believe, to attack, attack, attack, to try and get to two behind, one behind, I like that. I love that. I love that in him. And I think that's why he's going to do extremely well. He's not satisfied with, as a number of them are, satisfied with fifth, sixth place, I'll take the money and run.

No, no, Bob was not going for that. He was going for an eagle on 14. He knew he could get there in two. Okay, he pulled it. But at the same time I was very impressed with the whole way of trying to win that golf tournament, and that's what will stand him in good stead. I think actually it's his seventh major and he's made the cut in very you one of them, and that's very good, very good, and he's right on the cusp of the Ryder Cup team now, and the attitude, that never-say-die attitude would be brilliant in a Ryder Cup format.

Q. You were a Ryder Cup Captain. What exactly is Pádraig looking for between now and when he has to make these decisions?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Well, he's looking for winners. He's looking for winners. He's looking for people that will go for it. He's looking for the Robert MacIntyres of this world. Hey, Ian Poulter, you know, that type of guy that's not going to back away, not going to back away from the fight. Because I tell you, without the European support, because I don't think America is going to Open up for us to go there in time, it's going to be 99 per cent American support and it's going to be difficult.

So you want somebody like a Robert MacIntyre who has a never-say-die attitude, to go out there and say, right, I don't care who I'm playing, Pádraig, give me anybody to play, I'll give them the best game they ever had had, you know, that's the sort of guy you're looking for, yeah.

Q. If the picking were tomorrow, can do you think he would be in?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: If the picks tomorrow, do you think he would be in? It's a very good question. And obviously picking a rookie in America is a difficult choice because usually pick experience. I picked a rookie in Edoardo Molinari. I said I never would pick a rookie. One, it was at home, so we had that European support. Two, his brother needed support. Francesco needed support, and it worked out great and he happened to win the last tournament. There was a perfect storm appeared for Edoardo Molinari.

Difficult to pick a rookie in America, but if you are picking a rookie, he'd be the one you'd pick.

Q. I'm just wondering, what would you class as the greatest moment of your career, and where would a win this week rank?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Okay. This week would be right up there. The biggest achievement I've ever had was winning just down the road at Wentworth three times in a row. That was my biggest achievement, to win the BMW PGA as it is now, '98, '99, 2000, that was my biggest achievement, I'll always say that, to win at Wentworth three times in a row.

To win here at 58 against a lot of good 50-year-olds would be right up there, I tell you, right up there. The three Wentworth trophy take prided place in the trophy cabinet and this one would be right beside you, I assure you. It certainly is on our radar that the winner here gets to St Andrews next year, which everybody wants to play there. I think it will be the biggest entry that we've ever had for an Open Championship. We look forward to everything that comes with a win, if you do, yeah.

I know it's a reduced field this year with a number of top Americans haven't made it over, but at the same time, you know, when you think of else and Langer and Jiménez and all the carry-on and all the good Americans that come over, it's going to be very tough. But it's a home tie for me, as you say, so we look forward to it.

Q. And The Seniors Tour is sort of like kind of like a young man's game almost.

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: It is now.

Q. The 50-year-olds come over and make a big impact. Obviously Mickelson kind of shocked the world with his PGA win, so you were someone who when you turned 50 you went almost immediately over to the Champions Tour.

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Yes, true, true.

Q. What advice would you have for like Mickelson in relation to playing the main tour?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: I think you have to make a choice. He came out here and won the first two Champions Tour events that he played in and then had a disappointing event in Tucson in Arizona, finished about 30th, and that stopped him playing and he felt he should go back to the main tour which is fine. Send him off; he's too good for us, send his back.

I don't like this wording, Senior Tour, you expect old Tom Morris to come out with a walking stick, I don't like that wording but at the same time proves that Mickelson is able to compete here and he's a major winner this year. So it proves that 50 is no longer a stigma when you are winning golf tournaments.

There's Louis at 40-odd competing there. It's getting younger and younger, and 50 is younger. 50 is the new 35 almost, you know, so it's good in that way. I don't like the words Senior Tour, Senior Open, I wish they would change it to some other term because the guys are younger and better than that.

Q. It's been a while since we've had a British major winner on the regular men's circuit. Just wondering who you think could be next to achieve that?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Crumbs. I know when you think about British winners, you look at the World Rankings and there's four or five in the Top-20 and there's your lot.

But no one is pushing for that top five position in the world, you know. And we didn't have, yes, Robert MacIntyre did very well. I think he won -- is it Tooting Bec Cup again, the low Brit at The Open. But with all -- was he going to win? Possibly second, third, he could have, if he finished very well.

The standard now, you look at that top four that finished at St George's there, they were the top four in the major finishes, if you look at under-par round in the majors, No. 1 I think was Louis, No. 2 was Rahm and No. 3 was Spieth and No. 4 was Morikawa.

Now, any Brit to beat that lot is a hell of an effort in the next five years, because Rahm is going to be there. Rahm is going to be there every week. So a Brit to beat him in the majors is going some. It's going to be difficult. Going to be very difficult. I can't pinpoint any particular name. I just wish it would happen a lot quicker than it has because it's been a while since a Brit won a major championship, yeah.

Q. Coming back to Ryder Cup, could you give me your impressions of not only the situation that you just described as far as Robert, but what are some of the other key things that Pádraig has to really look at to be able to win in the States this year?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Okay, very good, very good question. Pádraig is a huge statistician, okay, Pádraig Harrington. He's got stats, he's got volumes of them. He's got a library of stats and that's how he's going to pick his team.

So without going into his library and breaking into his home, I don't know how he's thinking. He also has a fantastic statistician in Robert Karlsson who is one of his vice captains that lives by stats. This is how they are going to pick their team. They are going to go by driving ability, irons, scrambling, putting, overall whatever, and they are going to pick the team from there.

To be honest with you, without going into the stats and not knowing them fully myself as I stand here, it's difficult to say. But as I said earlier on, got to pick someone who is not frightened, not scared, okay. You can say what you want about stats, but you've got to be able to handle it in America. It's going to be very difficult in America.

With the European situation not being able to fly over there as easy as normal, there's going to be, instead of 90 per cent American fans, there's going to be 99 per cent American fans and they all come from down from Green Bay and they are the cheese heads and they are going to be quite loud and it's going to be very difficult, very difficult, because America wants it back. Any team that wants it back is really up for it, and the American Team look awfully strong, as well. He's got a job on his hands. It will be close, we know that, and he will do his utmost to get that team ready to perform.

Q. What do you think about the changes that were made to the selection process?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Well, yes, the American Team, especially, to go six, and then six picks. I always felt as captain if The European Tour would have allowed me, I would have had 12 picks. I think 12 picks is your strongest team. You just pick your team, the team that you think are going to win, and not six guys that one or two of them, might not have made that Top-12.

So we are limiting ourselves in a way, 9 and 3, Pádraig has 9 automatic selections and only three picks, so he's limiting it that way but it's working out okay for him. It's working out okay. He's got the nine that he would want I think at this stage almost in that setup with Shane Lowry now coming into the top nine after a good Open performance. He'd want him as a past Open Champion, someone that could win, as I was saying earlier on.

But Steve Stricker having six automatics and six picks I think stole a March on us on that one, yeah.

Q. I've heard from several other people that that's really high-risk, too, having the six picks?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Yes, it's high-risk, but that's

what a captain has to do. There's no point in backing away, as captain of The Ryder Cup Team, you have to make these decisions. Yes, it comes and stands by you, but I'm sure he's going to be talking to others within that team setup. I know it's his decision at the end of the day, but the more picks you have, the stronger the team is going to be.

Q. Sorry to harp on this Ryder Cup angle, but you know Pádraig Harrington for a long time and you've played alongside him and competed alongside him, but what do you like in him as a captain now in the lead-up to The Ryder Cup?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: I think I found when I was captain 11 years ago now, is it's all about preparation, right. The captain of a Ryder Cup Team has to be -- that's what it is, preparation. You have to be prepared. You have to be flexible and you have to be prepared. You are to get your team on that first tee prepared to play and that's his job and he will do that very well being the statistician that he is. He will have it all prepared out. He's had an extra year, as well, so he's had three years to prepare, as opposed to two. That's his advantage, and Steve Stricker, as well, they are in the same boat, but he will be prepared and that's all you can do.

You send your guys out there off and on the first tee and you lose control, you lose control of team and you just hope to hell in four hours or so they bring back something, a point or a half a point or something.

But preparation, that's all he can do. I could have left Celtic Manor with my head held high, say we lost The Ryder Cup there, but I prepared my team 100 per cent, but you can walk away with your head held high, as opposed to otherwise.

Q. Your comes about young Robert, does he need to win before The Ryder Cup and if he does become the last person before the automatic picks or does hearing son go with him or someone like a Casey or a Poulter?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: That's a difficult decision, do you pick a rookie in America, where I'm not saying -- it's going to be loud, okay, and that's nothing against the American crowd but seems to be a louder than we are which is, hey, great, for The Ryder Cup and great for the atmosphere but we've missed it in many ways, right.

They have to get together and discuss the vice captains and Pádraig and also, you know, talk to Robert MacIntyre, as well, and say, you know, is he able to handle that particular different type of pressure. Right now, he seems to be able to, if it was picked tomorrow, you'd damn close

have -- put it this way: If it was in Europe, you'd have him in the team tomorrow. Being America, it brings a different dynamic to it being away from home.

I always said, as I said, I was never going to pick a rookie. I did, mainly because it was at home to be honest. I don't think I'd have picked a rookie if it was away. Difficult to pick a rookie away from home, very difficult. You're just not sure. It's too much of a risk, almost, to that degree but the way Robert plays the game, the way he plays the game as a Ryder Cup-type game, a never-say-die game, go for it, and that's what you want in a Ryder Cup. 18 holes is a very quick match and you want someone that wants to go for it, and that's him.

Q. And talking to Robert, he's been great to deal with as you were when you were on The European Tour itself, watching him on Sunday, I've been living in Scotland for 21 years and consider myself half-Scottish, it's a bit disconcerting that there was only one Scot in the field last week.

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Very. Very. 156 players and there's one Scot in the field, Home of Golf, and we've got one Scot in the field. It is disconcerting. I totally agree with you. I don't know why it should be that way. People look into it. But we've got to get that up. You'd have thought there would be ten Scots, really, five to ten you would think were in that field of 156, and there's one. He happened to be very good.

But at the same time, that's not enough Scots, is it, so Scottish golf, we have to get on queue and get going here. I can't put my finger on why it should be. We're going through a phase. England went through a phase where there were only four English in the top hundred in the world. Now, God, there's 20.

So we go through phases. I think we are in one, unfortunately, which is a negative phase for Scottish golf but at the same time, hey, I don't know, there could be 16-, 17-, 18-year-olds just about to push through that are going to make it. Let's hope they do and hope we get a lot more Scots playing at St Andrews. Hope we get one more and I hope I win here.

Q. A lot of golfers reach 50 and say they possibly won't play seniors golf. Eight years on, do you have any idea how you would have filled that void of that competitive buzz?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Well, that was what it was. I was looking at my own family and my only father, who you hate to say, 50, you felt was older than we are now. Every generation goes ten years younger in many ways and

when I turned 50, I just wasn't ready. I thought I would be but I just wasn't ready to stop competing, and that ambition was still there. The drive was still there. The will to win was still there, and I didn't want to lose it.

So I went out on the Champions Tour, and yeah, we had success. 51 I won two majors and here we are. I've still got that fire and I've still got that ambition to win. If that goes, yes, I'll buy a couple Labradors and move to St Andrews and walk the dogs on West Sands Beach. But at the same time, until that happens, until I realise when that happens, I'll be playing out here. I love it. I love the competition. I love the whole scene of competitive golf, and so here we are at 58 and we're still going strong, yeah.

Q. I'm just wondering about the current situation as you are within the bubble at Sunningdale, it strikes me the Senior Tour is a much more social and friendly tour than the big tours. I wonder if a little of the gloss is taken off this year by the situation we're in, or are the guys just making the very best of it?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: We understand, playing in America as I do now 90 per cent of the time, it is more relaxed over there. It's more up to the individual than it is here.

But at the same time, the guys that have come over here understand the stricter rules that we have in Europe and in Britain in place, and all in all, I don't know the situation, but I hear everyone's abiding to the particular bubble rules, not being able to go out to supermarkets or whatever when you do check in and you have registered.

So everyone is abiding by it, and we are just thankful that we are here in the first place. We missed this last year because we couldn't, and we're so glad that we're here at a fabulous venue, and especially with the 90-degree heat we've had, it's superb. I think everyone is putting up with it and they adhere to it and respect it, as I do myself. I'm not allowed to go into the clubhouse. I can't go into the -- I'm standing here in an open tent in the media centre. I'm not allowed into a room on the grounds.

So, yeah, you abide by the ground rules. I go straight home from here and don't leave, and you abide by it and everyone is doing because they are thrilled to be here and thrilled to be competing.

Q. No sausage sandwiches at the halfway then?

COLIN MONTGOMERIE: Well, there was yesterday, we were both tired. Cameron, my son is caddying for me this year, we are both very tired and very hungry. I wish Tom Lehman wasn't behind us very quickly because we'd have

let him through otherwise, we'd have more sausage sandwiches because it's a lovely spot there, isn't it.

THE MODERATOR: Best of luck this week.

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