

USGA Media Conference

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USA

Padraig Harrington

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: It's my pleasure to welcome the champion of the 42nd U.S. Senior Open. Padraig, talk a little bit about what the last 36 hours have been like.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, well, I had a very enjoyable night Sunday evening, and then obviously it was travel home. A lot of text messages to be answered, a lot of emails. Yeah, a lot going on in that 24 hours.

Got a flight home last night, Aer Lingus from New York. I was meant to be on a 9:00 flight out of Philly on Sunday night, so that was definitely missed, and got in early this morning and kind of been a bit of a mess today in terms of I have to get ready and play the Irish Open here this week, the Horizon Irish Open. Have to pack for that so I have to clean out the suitcase, pack the suitcase and get things ready, and yeah, trying to talk to people, meet people and do all the little things, but I'm a little stressed, put it like that.

THE MODERATOR: After you spoke with media on Sunday night, I know you had the chance to watch the trophy be engraved and you saw some of the other names on there. Talk about what that experience was like.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, that is pretty special. We all want to go out there and win golf tournaments, win the trophies, put yourself in positions like that, but when you do win them and you see who's gone before you, and obviously the Senior Open really does have some of the biggest names in the game have wanted to win it, so yeah, it does make it all the more special when you see that up there. You know you have a legacy. Nobody can ever take it away from you. My name is going to be there forever. Hopefully I can add to it, but even if it's only once, it's there.

Q. What were you most proud of in terms of your game? There were a lot of great players in the field who gave you a run there, but you played some exceptional golf.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I drove it really well for the week. Hit it really straight. That just set up the rest of the golf. My greens in regulation was obviously very high, probably much higher than would be normal for me, but

that was off the back of really driving it well.

I had gone in with a great expectation of my putting. The three weeks I was at home I had never putted better. But after I -- I three-putted twice in the first seven holes the first day and missed a reasonably short putt, as well, on the third hole, and I never was comfortable for the rest of the week.

So it really was a lot of greens in regulation. Gave myself a lot of chances, obviously made some easy birdies on the par-5s, threw in the one eagle, and that just set me up.

It was definitely a golf course -- if there ever was a golf course I was going to win on, that was it.

Q. How did that feeling of victory compare to what it was like to win some of the majors you have in your career?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, it's always hard to get it done in any tournament. It's particularly uncomfortable when you're leading from the front and obviously you come back to the field as I did. Well, Steve came to me a bit, and I helped him out a little bit, as well. That's difficult.

So there is a sense of relief to win from the front. But I've got to say, I think I enjoyed it more than a lot of victories over the years. When it comes to the actual, let's call them, the "real majors," there's an awful lot of tension involved. Your whole career is defined by those majors. So yeah, winning those can be -- yeah, it takes a huge amount out of you.

I think I enjoyed the U.S. Open more. Maybe I enjoyed it more at this stage of my career. I enjoyed the whole experience there at the Seniors. You could see, as people will point out, I had those eyes again, not quite as intense maybe as some of my other major victories, but I was into it. There was a sense of relief at the end and a sense of joy.

But overall, I think it was -- yeah, I was in a good place all week, and I certainly got more enjoyment out of that event than maybe some other wins I've had in my career.

Q. It was a special double really with Matthew

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Fitzpatrick winning the U.S. Open the week before, his first ever major. Do you sense it's the first of many?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, I've been texting Matt and he texted me back after I won there. We've had a little text conversation, and as I did point out, his is a major, mine is a minor, even though he's the young lad and I'm the old guy, it feels like reverse roles.

But yeah, he was fabulous. He's done well. Matt has nothing to do with me, but I kind of feel proud of the fact that he went on to win because I've been backing Matt for a long time, backing him in the sense of I've been telling everybody he's got the bottle to do this. I really felt he could go and win a major championship.

His style of game just lends itself to getting the job done. He's overcome -- he always seems to -- people kind of underrate him so it gives him that nice little chip on the shoulder to get it done. So yeah, I was delighted to see him get across the line, as I knew he would. It'll be interesting to see now how he pushes on.

Q. That's a couple of really nice feel-good stories in what is a really difficult time for golf at the moment. How do you feel about where the game is with this civil war going on it seems?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, there's a lot of -- as I said in my press conference, it's interesting times, which I think is a curse, isn't it, when may your life be interesting. There's a lot happening, no doubt about it, a lot of drama in the game.

I feel for the European Tour because there's definitely room for two tours, there's no doubt about it, but is there room for more? It looks like the European Tour is the one who could come under the pressure and be squeezed.

LIV looks like it's going to be here to stay. In three, four, five years' time, all of this could be very normalized, and there could be the U.S. Tour and the LIV Tour sort of thing, contending for the hearts and minds of the players.

Yeah, it's certainly -- competition definitely pushes things on as we've seen with the PGA TOUR. Let's hope that the European Tour can keep up. The pathway I would have had to where I was in golf was very dependent on the European Tour. I really built my game from '96 to 2004 on the European Tour, getting high enough up in the World Rankings that I could play the big events around the world, and then being able to dip my toe in the water sort of thing and experience those events before I then took my card in 2005 on the PGA TOUR, which is a big step for any young guy going over there. You're thrown into a -- out of your

comfort zone. It's new. The lifestyle is new, the environment is new. You really want to be on top form.

Europe has a great ability for players who stay there. We've seen greats who play in Europe over the years. It really does help develop a player in a protected environment in the sense of you're a top player in Europe, you're getting the right TV draws, you're getting treated like a star, which means when you go -- oftentimes as you remember when Monty went to the States, he was getting first or last tee times. He was taking the flags, putting the flags out or taking them in when he was No. 1 in the world, and that can be soul destroying for a player.

So we do need a very strong European Tour, and it is interesting. The European Tour is the one that could get squeezed out in this battle between -- obviously the U.S. PGA TOUR is a giant in this whole thing, and LIV are coming in there to do battle with them, and certainly is there only enough room in golf for two big players and everybody else has to take a backseat.

Q. Are you concerned by the effect this may have on the Ryder Cup if this continues?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, you know, obviously if there's two big tours, it seems to be good for the majors, that the only time the best players would play is in the majors. That served the Ryder Cup really well over the years in the sense of if there was a rivalry between Europe and the U.S., like if I go back to when I played in '99, I didn't know the U.S. players. I had to be introduced. There was all sorts of conspiracy theories during the matches and things like that, whereas now we all play the same tournaments, so we're all quite friendly.

Yeah, look, it could add spice to the Ryder Cup, but I don't know how that's going to end up in terms of whether the players can play or certainly with the captains and vice captains. It really is hard to know what is going to be the future of it.

As I said, time will normalize things. There's no doubt about that. But it is very much up in the air at the moment, and we'll have to wait and see what certainly the LIV Tour seem to have. They seem to have -- how will I put this? A point to prove that they can go and do it.

I think the fact that maybe when they were with PGL they were kind of turned away, now whether it's Greg who's always wanted this world tour or the LIV Tour itself, if they have commitment to do it, it looks like they will get it done in some shape or form.

Q. Down at Mount Juliet here today; how are your



energy levels coming into this week, and how much excitement do you have given that you're coming here as a winner last week and coming into the home crowds?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: My energy levels will be fine as long as I'm in it and competing. I think that's always the case when it comes to the golf tournaments.

Once you're in the heat of the hunt, you can find something. I'm stressed; there's no doubt I'm stressed. I've got a lot going on as you would at an Irish Open and obviously a short time frame to get that all done. It's a busy -- I'm playing six tournaments in a five weeks, so it's a very busy run for me.

The good news for that is I literally don't have any time to practice, which isn't a bad thing at times. It means I just play, and that can tend to help my mental game when I don't go to the range too much.

So yeah, it's a mixed bag. I just can't say this is perfect preparation, but in some sense that doesn't always matter. I just have to be wary not to let myself caught up in trying to get everything done and understand that, yeah -- I'm just not going to get everything done this week. This is my first Zoom call of three in a row for the next three hours, and then I've got a mandatory Tour Zoom meeting tonight. There's a lot going on.

But I just have to manage the stress levels.

The thing is, which I think with experience, you don't win as often as you would think you would or you would believe you would. It doesn't happen that often. So when you do win, you've got to enjoy it. You've got to make the effort to -- I'd love to play well in the Horizon Irish Open this week, but in the back of my head is I won last week and I am going to enjoy myself.

I'm going to walk around like I won last week. It just doesn't happen as often as people would -- I know back in the day, I know myself, I've won tournaments and the next day you're thinking about what you're doing with your swing and what you're working on, where you're going. Now I just enjoy the wins. They don't come around often enough.

Hopefully, no matter what happens this week at the Irish Open, I hopefully will just walk around and wave at the crowds even if it's not going well and try and embrace that energy rather than look to be -- I hope I'm super competitive, but I don't have to be to enjoy this week.

Q. Has it done something for your confidence to win

for the first time since Portugal?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, yes, a hundred percent. I'd seen the good side of my game now for a while. I struggled in areas to take it to the golf course. I've been playing tee to green well. I've been swinging it well, struggled a bit on the greens.

As I said, I've certainly been getting better, and I know the answer is if I can put it into play, I'm going to be very competitive everywhere I play.

I do have the answers. It doesn't mean I can actually do it.

So I am confident at the moment. It doesn't mean I -- as I say, it's not like I'm turning up and saying, well, it's easy, I know what to do and it's going to be good, but I've certainly got a very clear picture of what I'm doing in my game at the moment and what needs to be worked on, and yeah, any week that it comes right, and I'm hoping it does come right, I'll be good enough to beat the young fellas.

Q. Good omens for St Andrews?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, St Andrews -- looking at my schedule, St Andrews, I'm pretty busy up to that in terms of what's going on. St Andrews is the first week that I might get a little bit of time to relax.

Q. Just looking ahead to St Andrews, it's the 150th Open, and it's back at the home of golf. How special a tournament do you think it's going to be? How big a week will it be for you?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: It's an amazing week for the public, there's no doubt about it. Everybody is talking about it. Everybody is going to it. Players-wise, it's an incredible week. It's really exciting. But in some ways we've got to manage that. This is an Open Championship. You've got to be -- yes, enjoy it, but try and not make it any more special than it is.

It's one of those things, you've got to just turn up and do your stuff, play your game. Yes, if things go right at the end of it, there's nothing probably -- it's one of the things in life -- I've won two majors, but wow, if you could win -- two majors, two Opens. If I could win an Open at the home of golf, I won't say I'd retire because I wouldn't, but it is that sort of feeling that you've accomplished everything that you could in the sense of Open golf to win at the home of golf.

It will be interesting that week. They're going to protect that golf course, so it will be a very trying week mentally. Very, very trying. Those pin positions are going to be, yeah, difficult.



We call them difficult at best, but they're going to protect the course, so any player going there is going to have to have a serious amount of patience and discipline and a great mental strategy, a great physical strategy, I suppose, as well, to handle the golf course. I'm not sure what the winning score will be, but I think players will need a good head on their shoulders more so than at any of the majors.

Q. As someone who's won back-to-back majors and kind of coped with the whirlwind that accompanies that, what's it going to be like for Matt at the moment, and do you think he can go there and do you think he can thrive at St Andrews?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, it is -- like when I won my back-to-back majors, I had a huge issue starting the second one. I went into it, and I played my best golf ever for nine holes the first morning, and like virtually crawled to the clubhouse. I collapsed on the back nine. I had no idea why.

The second round I did the same thing. I bogeyed my last two holes to make the cut on the mark. If I had to play another hole, I would have missed the cut.

My last hole of 36 was the 9th, par-3, and I hit it pin high with a 4-iron off the tee and I had 60 yards for my second shot. That's how out of sync I was. I celebrated for the full two weeks, but I was disciplined. Just the toll it takes on you mentally is incredible, and it's out of your control. There is a huge mental drain because of it.

Luckily I don't feel as though -- I got a rain delay, and it gave me an extra -- only played nine holes on Saturday. Gave me an extra day's recovery.

If I was giving Matt advice, I would say don't worry about his golf over the next couple of weeks, just spend as much time recovering as he can, literally don't hit any shots really, just rest, rest, rest, because the mental stress, he won't even know it's going on, but that's why he's got to manage.

Q. Something you said there about how tough the setup will be at St Andrews, have you had a little bit of an inkling that the R&A are going to make sure none of the big hitters tear it apart?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, it's the home of golf, and obviously we're talking about the game has changed so much, and everybody is worried about what if the weather is really nice and the big hitters can go after it.

I don't think it's actually a big hitters' golf course. If you're

efficient at this golf course, you will hit it as far as any of the big hitters on a links course. It doesn't mean you need to be the real speedsters going down 9 and 10. It's actually if you can -- reasonable speed with a decent flight, you're going to drive those greens if they're firm.

There's a huge amount of the field that can be long hitters that week; put it like that. It is protecting the course from long hitting, and the pin positions will be difficult based on that, because it is the home of golf, and nobody wants to see the home of golf with low scores, particularly low scores.

If the greens are firm, clearly they're not going to be fast because it's an Open Championship, but if the greens are firm and they use the pin positions that I can't imagine -- I chose my words wisely there, as in I don't think we can imagine the pin positions that they're going to use, as in the greens are so big, we're going to see -- the problem for somebody like me, I play the Dunhill there every year, and the pin positions they use in the Dunhill are very traditional and we kind of know them. Obviously there's only two for the week.

I've played a few Opens, but they're going to use some pin positions because there are literally acres of greens there. They're going to pick some pin positions that look like, wow, I didn't even realize there was a green over there. They're going to mix and match them. They're going to really put it up to us and use the imagination of the golf course.

I think most guys -- you'll see a lot of guys out there trying to measure the greens, roll putts. Good luck trying to figure out where the pins are going to be because par maybe on 1 and 17 -- you'll pick out a few of them, but there will be a few during the week that will amaze the regular guys going there because we're so used to the normal pin positions that we will be throwing out -- as I said, that will mean you've got to be -- I'd say you've got to really -- you can't prepare as much as people think. You're going to have to think on your feet as you're going along and make sure that you react to what you see.

There will be a certain amount of preparation the night before looking at the pin positions and strategy, but definitely you're going to have to be very -- strategy is going to be super important. It won't be just a case of firing away at every pin.

Q. You talked obviously about the Ryder Cup earlier. The qualification process hasn't been confirmed for the next team. Do you have an opinion how we can accommodate some of these LIV players or how they can be accommodated?

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PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, I'm sure I would have an opinion. I haven't talked to the powers that be. I'm sure because I haven't been there, I'm sure the next couple of weeks, Irish Open, Scottish Open, that they will come to me and get a feeling for what I think.

Hopefully between us all we'll come up with the right solution. There does seem to be two sides to it, doesn't there. The players who have gone, especially the players who have an option to go who haven't gone, certainly the fear of missing out means that they want very strong sanctions. Somebody who could go doesn't go, you can understand that they, God, should I have gone, should I not have gone, what was on the table. We're hearing players turning down huge sums of money.

It is very interesting. As much as the media talks about the players who have gone, some of the players who haven't gone don't get enough credit -- we're not talking the very, very top, we're talking about sort of the type of Ryder Cup player who's turned down the \$30 million plus figures. It's very impressive that at the moment it seems like the players who are staying are the ones who are feeling like their careers are going on an upward spiral, that they're protecting their fear of wanting -- not protecting, they want to win the majors, and they think that's their future.

So that seems to be the way it is, that the guys who are staying -- and fair play to them for turning it down and backing their careers. The other guys, it's big money on the table. Got to see -- when you've got skin in the game like that, I personally have not had an offer, good, bad or indifferent on either side of this, so I don't have skin in the game to make a judgment on how you would feel about it, but I'm certainly impressed with some of the players who have turned down large sums of money.

It does kind of say something about how they think about their own games. That's for sure.

Q. How important were those three two-putts on the last three greens? Obviously in the tournament they were big, but in terms of your game going forward and what you've got coming up this season.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: As I said, it was an interesting week. I went into it thinking I was going to putt the best I've ever putted in my life. I lost the pace of the greens very quickly, and the fear returned. I struggled on the Sunday. I hit a lot of really weak putts, mis-hits, and then obviously my putting saved me over the last three holes. I made three great two-putts, which does bring confidence. It brings a lot of confidence that when I have to get it done, I always seem to be better. When it comes down to, that's

it, your back's to the wall, you've just got to get the job done, I tend to deliver. I hit two beautiful putts, three good pace putts, but the second putt on 17 -- when you win things, there is always a little bit of circumstance to winning, and my second putt on 17, obviously we knew the pin was going to be in that back corner at some stage, so I had actually gone in and done my practice there during the practice rounds, and I'd written a few notes.

When I went to read the putt, it looked like it was left half, but I knew every putt I'd hit on that green, there was no left to right at that section of the green. If anything if I was a tiny bit more over it was right half, so I went straight. Even though it looked left half, it went straight. But the confidence of just having done my preparation really helped holing that putt.

Yeah, going forward, you're right that I will take a certain amount of confidence from the fact that I got it done when I needed to, that I holed that putt on 17, even the putt on 18. It was three feet but you're still trying to get it in the hole. I think they're big things.

But I would take more -- I've taken more sort of -- how will I put this? Interest, confidence from the fact that I have a solution to my putting even though it didn't quite work the way I thought it would, and if I can put that into play, I can be back putting as good as I've ever putted in my career.

Q. A lot of people next week will be sort of going, how on earth can a guy in Limerick get a field that would be worthy of a major championship. Can you explain the JP McManus phenomenon, how a guy like Tiger Woods will be there whenever he needs and turn up?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, it is very impressive. No appearance fees, no fees to go and play in the JP McManus Pro-Am. But JP asks nicely, and he supports -- he will support every player who comes to his pro-am. JP will support them for the rest of their life and their charitable endeavors. That really is it.

Whenever they're running a charity event, JP will be first on that list to support them, right around the world. He will become -- anybody who helps JP out will become a friend to JP, and JP will always remember that and work with those players whatever they're doing, help them out.

It is a bit of a bonus that you are going to Adair and you're going to enjoy yourself. It's going to be -- it's one of the highlights of the year in Ireland, and certainly in golfing terms it's a huge highlight with the people that will be there.

All the pros will have the time of their life, will have a great experience, but even though there's no appearance fees,

the fact that JP will support these players, they have a friend for life in the fact that they've come and played in JP McManus's pro-am. And the family. The whole family are there, as well. I know JP is the name out front, but they will support whatever charitable endeavors these players have going forward.

THE MODERATOR: Padraig, thank you so much for your time. I know it's a busy one for you, but we are excited and honored to forever be able to call you a USGA champion.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I'm quite thrilled with that. Thank you very much.

By the way, I will give you one little story. I would have had the USGA Senior Open trophy sitting in the background, and I planned to put it in between the Open trophies and the PGA trophy, but I can't figure out how to open the combination lock on the trophy box.

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