

U.S. Open Championship 2022

Monday, June 13, 2022

Brookline, Massachusetts, USA

The Country Club

Phil Mickelson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome to the 2022 U.S. Open. We're thrilled to be here this week at The Country Club, one of the USGA's five founding clubs for the 122nd U.S. Open. Promises to be a special week at a very special place.

We're pleased to welcome this afternoon Phil Mickelson, who is playing in his 30th U.S. Open. His first one was in 1990, just after 1988 here, but obviously has some great history here. 1999 Ryder Cup.

Before we get started with some questions certainly that I have and I know our media friends here have, I know you wanted to make a few comments to start today.

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, I wanted to say that it's nice to be back, nice to see you guys. It's been four months. It's been a necessary time and an opportunity for me to step away a little bit and put a little bit of thought and reflection into going forward and how to best prioritize things.

It's given me an opportunity to spend time with Amy, to spend time with loved ones, and continue some of the work therapy-wise on some of the deficiencies that I have certainly as well as focus on best path forward.

It's been a positive time in that regard. I know that many of you have strong -- well, many people have strong opinions, emotions about my choice to go forward with LIV Golf. I understand, and I respect that.

I'm incredibly grateful for the PGA TOUR and the many opportunities it has provided me through the years, but I am excited about this new opportunity as well.

I'm excited about being here in Boston at The Country Club. It's one of the five founding members of the USGA. It's got incredible rich history going back to Francis Ouimet. It has provided me one of the most memorable moments of my career, in the '99 Ryder Cup and the comeback that we had, and the fans here are some of the best in the world, and they provide an atmosphere that is second to none for all sports.

Golf is fortunate to be back, and I'm excited to be back here and participate in this incredible championship that has eluded me for my whole career.

Any questions?

THE MODERATOR: One quick one from me before we turn it over. I know you played here yesterday. Can you just offer a few quick reactions about the course having seen it yesterday?

PHIL MICKELSON: The course is in pristine shape. It's a remarkable golf course. A number of tees have been lengthened since '99 since I remember, but it seems like it plays the same. It was just very well done, and I think we're all excited for the test that this golf course provides.

It looks to be -- that it's going to be a brutal test of golf, and that's what this championship is all about.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to turn it over to questions.

Q. Phil, after such a long layoff, how do you prepare for a tournament that you have wanted to win for so much of your career, one that's eluded you?

PHIL MICKELSON: So that's going to be a challenge, right. It's the most difficult test in golf.

I think it was important for me to have a little bit of competitive golf last week and identify some of the areas of weakness. It was one of the worst putting tournaments I've had in years.

I spent time yesterday addressing that, which is why I basically putted the whole day on the course. In the offseason I actually made some strides ball-striking-wise, and I'm fairly optimistic there, but it will be a real challenge. These are the best players in the world, and it's the hardest test of the year.

Q. I'm just wondering in your time away, what did you learn about yourself?

PHIL MICKELSON: I think there were a number of things that I've certainly learned, but it's given me more of an opportunity to really prioritize those that I love, those that I care about, and develop a path forward so that I can be more engaged, be more intentional when I'm with the people I care about. Also, have a little bit more balance in my life going forward off the golf course.

Q. As you know, you've been criticized by many people, as you referred to. New York Post, Brian Wacker, reported that the 9/11 families sent you and others a letter alluding, of course, to Osama Bin Laden and the 15 of 19 hijackers that the Saudis, of course, sent and that they say now you are a partner with them and you appear to be pleased in your business with them. Terry Strada is the person, of course, who wrote this letter, and her husband got on the plane in Boston that flew into the World Trade Center. They say the deaths of your fellow Americans --

PHIL MICKELSON: I've read all that. Is there a question in there?

Q. Yes, there is. How do you explain to them -- not to us, but to them what you have decided to do?

PHIL MICKELSON: I would say to the Strada family, I would say to everyone that has lost loved ones, lost friends on 9/11 that I have deep, deep empathy for them. I can't emphasize that enough.

I have the deepest of sympathy and empathy for them.

Q. How did you feel about the PGA of America's decision to move the PGA Championship away from the Trump course in Bedminster to Tulsa in the wake of the January 6th riots and then how do you feel about these two LIV events being played on Trump courses?

PHIL MICKELSON: Let's go back to one at a time. I don't know what to say about the PGA and their decision. That's ultimately their decision.

I thought that it went really well at Southern Hills. I thought it was a fun tournament to watch. I thought it was exciting, came down to the end and was exceptional, but I don't get involved in that matter. That's for the PGA of America.

I haven't been involved in LIV Golf and their decision on where to hold their events, but those discussions should be held privately behind closed doors.

Q. Do you have any personal feeling about yourself going to a course (off microphone)?

PHIL MICKELSON: I care more about the quality of the test of golf, the quality of the golf course, the fan experience and their ability to see and view the golf, and the challenge of what the venue provides for the players. Risk-reward, exciting to see, birdie opportunities, tough pars. I care more about that.

Q. Phil, you mentioned earlier you have strong emotion -- or respect for people who have strong emotions opposing your decision to join LIV Golf. You've obviously been one of the most popular players over the years among fans, but if a segment of your fan base decided to walk away from you and not support you anymore, would you respect and understand that decision, and if so, why, and if not, why not?

PHIL MICKELSON: Okay, you're throwing three questions at me, so let's try to keep it one at a time.

Q. That was actually just one question.

PHIL MICKELSON: In regards to if fans would leave or whatnot, I respect and I understand their opinions, and I understand that they have strong feelings and strong emotions regarding this choice, and I certainly respect them -- respect that -- I respect that.

Q. I appreciate it's still early in the week, but what sort of welcome-back have you had or what sort of welcome-back are you anticipating you'll have from your peers who will feel betrayed by you and have lost an awful lot of respect for you?

PHIL MICKELSON: I have the utmost respect for the players on PGA TOUR. There have been a lot of friendships that have gone on for decades with Amy and myself. There have been a lot of memories that we've shared, experiences that we've shared, and many of the players on PGA TOUR are people that I look up to and respect the most.

I think that I respect if they disagree, but at this time this is the right decision.

Q. Just as a follow-on to that. The Boston crowd can be pretty vociferous at times. You were once adored by the American public. A lot of them are now feeling pretty angry towards you. If you do get booed and heckled this week, will that hurt?

PHIL MICKELSON: I think the Boston crowds are some of the best in sports, and I think that they have given me a lot of support, and I'm very appreciative of that over the years.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I think that their excitement and energy is what creates such a great atmosphere, so whether it's positive or negative towards me directly, I think it's going to provide an incredible atmosphere to hold this championship. I think it's going to be a great event, and the people here have a lot to do with that.

Q. I'm curious, what does legacy mean to you, and do you think your legacy will change now that you're associated with LIV Golf?

PHIL MICKELSON: So I'm going to try to answer. I don't like it when you keep asking multiple questions, but as far as legacy, and I'll just address that, I would say that I've been a part of the PGA TOUR now for 30-plus years, and I have enjoyed my time. I've enjoyed the opportunities it's provided. I've enjoyed the lifestyle it's provided. I've enjoyed the fact that the game of golf through the PGA TOUR has been able to give me and my family so much.

I'm appreciative of that fact. During that time, I've worked really hard behind the scenes as well as on the scenes to try to contribute as a way of showing my appreciation, and I've done the best I can to give back to it as well. So I feel good about that. I feel good about the efforts I put in to try to give back to the game of golf as well as the Tour, and I'm excited about the opportunity that LIV Golf presents for me and the game of golf going forward.

Q. Do you think that legacy may have changed or will change?

PHIL MICKELSON: Like I said, I've done all I can to help contribute to the game, contribute to the PGA TOUR during my time with them, and that's all I can do.

Q. What are your plans playing-wise beyond after this week in terms of anything -- do you hope to do anything beyond the LIV events and the Open Championship, and just as a follow, do you feel like --

PHIL MICKELSON: Let's just stop there. So I think it's been pretty public that I'm suspended along with a bunch of other players, so it would be only speculative going forward. I am going to play the LIV events. I am going to play the British Open, but anything other than that would be pure speculation.

I don't know how this is all going to play out.

Q. Just as a quick follow to that, if it's your preference, would you like to do both? Obviously the suspension notwithstanding at the moment, is that your preference going forward if that comes to pass?

PHIL MICKELSON: My preference is to be able to choose which path I would like, one or the other or both.

I feel that, as I was saying to Ann, I gave as much back to the PGA TOUR and the game of golf that I could throughout my 30 years here, and through my accomplishments on the course I've earned a lifetime membership. I intend to keep that and then choose going forward which events to play and not.

Q. The LIV Tour sort of drove a big wedge through the golf world with people being pretty passionate on both sides. Is that kind of the point of starting this up, and have you had any dealings with guys like Rory and the guys who are more passionate on the other side of the debate?

PHIL MICKELSON: The point of starting it up, I'll have to defer to those at LIV Golf. It was their idea. It was their brain trust or child -- their thoughts and ideas that they brought to fruition.

I certainly respect Rory. I thought what a great finish yesterday and great accomplishment and what a career he has had. I certainly respect him. I respect his ideas. I respect all the players that choose to stay on the PGA TOUR.

I certainly think extremely highly of many of the players on the PGA TOUR and their right to their own decisions.

Q. What's with the facial hair, and is it here to stay?

THE MODERATOR: That's two questions. (Laughter).

PHIL MICKELSON: Amy liked it, so as long as she likes it, it's here. When she says it's gone, it's gone.

Q. Phil, your relationship with the USGA has been a bit tenuous at times, and just curious if you are concerned at all that they will take action in the future to make it harder for you and some of the other guys who are qualified to play in the U.S. Open down the road.

PHIL MICKELSON: I think that's a better question for the USGA, but I would say in regards to issues that I've had, I have had strong opinions and ideas, let's say, regarding most of the governing bodies, and I've done a poor job of conveying that. I've made it public, and that's been a mistake. That's one of the mistakes I've been making, and try to going forward be a lot more thoughtful with my words and actions and try to keep a lot of those things behind closed doors.

Q. Phil, you're not the first professional athlete to deal with Saudi Arabia. Boxing, horse racing, motorsport, the Premier League. U.S. government even deals with Saudi Arabia. Do you feel the criticism of yourself and others has been maybe unfairly harsh?

PHIL MICKELSON: That's not necessarily for me to say. I think the important thing is that everyone is entitled to their opinion. I understand that it brings out a lot of strong emotions for a lot of people, and I respect the way they may or may not feel about it.

Q. Phil, I'm curious about your reaction to the comments that the PGA Commissioner made over the weekend and no one has ever had to apologize for being on the PGA TOUR. Do you feel you need to apologize for being on the LIV Tour?

PHIL MICKELSON: In regards to the PGA TOUR, there's a lot of things throughout the years that the PGA TOUR has done that I agree with, and there's a lot of things that I don't agree with, and yet I've supported them either way.

That's the way I feel going forward for other governing bodies as well, and I'm going to try to keep any issues that I have, again, going forward, behind closed doors because it was one of the biggest mistakes I've made is voicing all of these little things.

Q. Phil, your relationship with Callaway was paused a few months ago. Have you been in contact or spoken recently with Chip Brewer, and has that relationship changed now that you've officially gone on with the LIV Series?

PHIL MICKELSON: My relationship with Callaway and specifically with Chip Brewer transcends just a sponsorship. He is also a very good friend and somebody I look up to and respect. My conversations with my partners that I have had longstanding relationships with as well as a number of potential new partners going forward that we've been in communication with will play out over time. It's not high on my priority list right now, and that stuff will play out in time.

Q. How do you feel about the battering you received from my colleagues last week?

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, like I said earlier multiple times today and last week, I respect that everyone has their opinion, and this is bringing out a lot of strong emotions for and against with a lot of people, and I respect the opinions that everyone has.

Q. Phil, what appeals to you about LIV Golf that you weren't getting from the PGA TOUR?

PHIL MICKELSON: I think that there's an obvious incredible financial commitment, but more than that -- for all the players involved and everyone involved, but more than that, there are other factors that with fewer tournaments, it allows me to have more balance in my life. It allows me to do things that are off the golf course I've always wanted to do.

I find that as I prioritize those that are important to me, people that are important to me going forward, this allows me to have more time with them, be more present, and to share more life experiences outside of golf.

Q. Phil, kind of as a follow to that, I understand you have lifetime status, but if you are so gung-ho on LIV Golf going forward, why do you still want to play on the PGA TOUR?

PHIL MICKELSON: I've worked hard to earn a lifetime membership. I've worked hard to give back to the PGA TOUR and the game of golf throughout my 30 plus years of professional golf, and I've earned that lifetime membership, so I believe that it should be my choice.

Q. Phil, you've talked about growing the game of golf and LIV being good for golf. Are you at all worried that it's actually damaging the PGA TOUR and professional golf in general?

PHIL MICKELSON: I believe there's a lot of things about LIV Golf that are transformative. Two specifically are a unique different format from a format that's been the same for half a century or more.

And I believe moving tournaments throughout the world and bringing that type of championship golf to different parts of the world is going to have a very positive effect globally on the sport, and those are just two instances of areas I think LIV will do a lot of good for the game.

Q. Phil, outside of the golf you played last week, could you be specific on what you did to grow the game last week in London?

PHIL MICKELSON: Alex, every day is not about what did I grow the game. What it is is engaging people, bringing people out to be exposed to the game. I saw a lot of young kids out there under the age of 7 or 8 being exposed to professional golf.

It was an important part of my life going forward to be driven to have golf in my life, play golf, and then ultimately

play professionally. So I think the number of kids that were out there is just one area that could potentially grow the game by having those young ones involved, but there's a lot more areas and ways that last week helped, and I think it should be obvious.

Q. You've mentioned a few times using the past four months to better yourself. What specific areas did you need to address?

PHIL MICKELSON: I mean, there were a lot of ways, but a lot of areas, but as I said earlier, being able to be more present and engaged with those that I love and not being distracted all the time with the game of golf. Being able to step aside and have that time was invaluable.

I also continued to work on some areas that I'm deficient of in my life. I mean, the obvious one is gambling. I've been working on that for years, and I'm very happy with where I'm at with that, but I'll have to continue to work on that the rest of my life.

This time allowed me to kind of sit still and work on these areas. But there are a lot more than that.

Q. Are you at peace with the real possibility of never playing on the PGA TOUR again?

PHIL MICKELSON: I am, again, very appreciative of the many memories, opportunities, experiences, friendships, relationships PGA TOUR has provided, and those are going to last -- those will last a lifetime, but I'm hopeful that I'll have a chance to create more.

Q. Phil, would you like to write to the families personally? It's not easy to address such an issue in public. Would you prefer to speak to them or write to them privately?

PHIL MICKELSON: I think I speak for pretty much every American in that we feel the deepest of sympathy and the deepest of empathy for those that have lost loved ones, friends in 9/11. It affected all of us, and those that have been directly affected I think -- I can't emphasize enough how much empathy I have for them.

Q. What advice would you give to Jay Monahan?

PHIL MICKELSON: Last week I made it clear that all PGA TOUR matters I'm going to -- I won't be discussing at this time, and I believe those areas are areas that should be behind closed doors.

Q. When is the last time you spoke with Jay?

PHIL MICKELSON: October.

THE MODERATOR: Phil, thanks so much for joining us today. We appreciate it. Good luck this week.

PHIL MICKELSON: Thanks, guys. Let's have a good week.

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