

U.S. Open Championship 2022

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Brookline, Massachusetts, USA

The Country Club

MJ Daffue

Flash Interview



THE MODERATOR: MJ Daffue, 3-under 67. A great day out there. What was working well?

MJ DAFFUE: I think a lot of things worked well. Obviously the putter. Put a lot of work in on the speed on the greens. Not used to U.S. Open speed.

That translated into leaving myself in good spots, making it as easy as I can. Sometimes it meant hitting it in the rough.

We had a good strategy. I drove the ball pretty decent. The times I missed the fairway, I missed it in good spots, and so, yeah, execution of the strategy, and I would say I can't believe how relaxed I was out there. I was able to feel my hands, and that's a big deal.

Q. Did you speak at all with Retief Goosen in the lead-up to this event, and did he give you any advice on how to prepare for a U.S. Open?

MJ DAFFUE: I spoke to him. We never really talked about advice. The one time I asked him, I said, hey, how do you do so well under pressure in U.S. Opens? He said, I've just done it a few times. It makes a lot of sense, actually. The more you do it, the more you get used to it.

But he has just been encouraging. He has been really sending me encouraging messages as far as, listen, the ability is there. It's just how do you put it together and believe in yourself.

Obviously, a big year. But it's been overall. My sports psychologist and my coach, my coach is on the bag. Just to be able to have people there to rein you in. I'm like a wild horse, you know, and they just need to guide me in the right direction, so it's been really good.

Q. MJ, have you felt like you played with more freedom after securing your card?

MJ DAFFUE: Yes, but I've been playing with some freedom, especially starting the year.

I've been just so focused on my process and my goals, and I know that the ability is there. It's just how do I bring it out.

I think now I've finally this week probably started feeling the freedom because I'm, like, I secured my card next year, and maybe I can go for a few more things that I would never have.

Yeah, it's definitely some more freedom.

Q. Where would you say kind of was the biggest jump in your progression kind of through the last years? Like the year, the era, where you elevated your game kind of the most?

MJ DAFFUE: I would say Monday qualifying. What did I do, 12 out of my last 20 Monday qualifiers? And it really taught me to make a lot of birdies.

I've translated that into my game. I would say I've been shooting pretty good scores for a while, and they've been telling me just keep your head down and keep shooting good scores, and eventually it's good enough.

It's not as simple as it sounds, but yeah, I would say this year especially, being able to have a schedule on the Korn Ferry TOUR. Who did I tell the other day? I've seen this weird thing where I play really well my third week in a row. I'm sorry to say, but this is my third week in a row, so every third week in a row I've had a top-five finish.

So I've been able to plan my game around third weeks, and, yeah, so it's something I haven't had in the past. I haven't had three weeks in a row. Monday qualifying, top 15. Oh, sorry, you're Monday qualifying again. I think that's the biggest thing is being able to really plan a season, plan an offseason, plan family time, that kind of stuff.

Q. Then on the flipside, what part of your career would you have said this, being up here at the U.S. Open in the mix, would have been the most unlikely when you would have been told this and you would be, like, no.

MJ DAFFUE: It was actually not long ago. Probably two,



three years ago. Things change quickly. Seven and a half months ago I was Monday qualifying, but I'm never going to complain when things go well because it's always a grind. I'm very grateful for everything that comes my way.

Q. Everybody knows that U.S. Open golf courses are tough. What surprised you most out there today?

MJ DAFFUE: That's a good question. I don't think a lot of things surprised me out there because I expected it. We've been playing some courses with really small greens.

We played Holston Hills. That's slopy like this, on the Korn Ferry TOUR in Nashville, and then my qualifier in Springfield was something similar as far as speed.

I would say the biggest thing was the amount of people out there and for me not feeling nervous or thinking what they're going to think if I hit a bad shot, but maybe able to flip it and say, well, they're going to cheer if I hit a good one.

But I would say the green speeds, the importance of not being above the hole, but I was above the hole a few times. I think it's just the mentality of saying, like, accepting what comes next if you do hit it above the hole.

Q. Presumably today was the easiest day. Can you paint a picture of what the next few days might look like out there?

MJ DAFFUE: Depending on the weather, I think tomorrow may be a little softer. It was a lot softer than I expected out there today. I thought some balls were going to jump up from the front, but I think it's going to be harder hitting fairways. There's some doglegs. With it being firmer, the ball is going to run through.

Then obviously I think the hole locations, they're probably going to throw a few in that we didn't even putt to in the practice rounds. We'll see.

Q. How would you compare the pressure of playing in a U.S. Open with the pressure of being in a Monday qualifier when you don't have any status and you're playing for your livelihood?

MJ DAFFUE: I think it's the amount of pressure you put on yourself, but overall pressure when you don't have any status and you are playing a Monday qualifier, that's a lot more pressure because you know you've got to go shoot 6-under par just to have a chance. You make two bogeys, you are already behind the 8-ball.

But I've really tried to come into this week not putting too

much pressure on myself, just trusting that I have everything right now that I want. My life is really good. I have a great family, and everybody is healthy, and I think just being grateful for things have really given me a step back and looking from the outside in, and eventually this is just a game. We're playing against the best in the world, and it's just a privilege to be here.

Q. Was this always in your plans to try to qualify for the U.S. Open, or did it get added based on your strong KFT results?

MJ DAFFUE: It was added. I actually wasn't going to do it because before Kansas City I hadn't locked up my status, and I didn't want to skip a week, but then I locked it up there, and I said, oh, I'm going to go do it. Sometimes you have to go this way to end up in the right place, and that's kind of what happened. I'm really glad. I'm enjoying everything about it.

Q. You said you kind of momentarily worried about hitting a bad shot in front of a big crowd and what they would think. Has there been a moment in your career where that has happened and it's bothered you what everybody thought?

MJ DAFFUE: Yeah. I mean, a few PGA TOUR events I've played. It's really -- I think it was more of, like, a home game like at the Houston Open. You know a lot of people that know you, so they expect a certain something. When you don't perform or don't deliver, it's kind of disappointing, but obviously, that's just my view of it. I'm sure people that support me, even if I hit a bad shot, understand.

I think out here, too, I've never been to Boston. I know they're crazy fans over here, but I'm loving it. Apparently some guy over there, I made him \$600 making a putt. He was loving it.

THE MODERATOR: Great playing today, MJ. Thanks for your time.

MJ DAFFUE: Thank you. Appreciate it.

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