

U.S. Open Championship 2022

Friday, June 17, 2022

Brookline, Massachusetts, USA

The Country Club

MJ Daffue

Flash Interview



THE MODERATOR: MJ Daffue, 2-over 72. Can you talk us through your round a little bit?

MJ DAFFUE: Up an down obviously. Executed really well. There were some moments where I had to scramble. Any part of the U.S. Open.

Back nine was disappointing. Did the simple things really bad. You know, if you'd told me before yesterday I would be 1-under par in the top 15 after finishing my round today, I would have said yes. So taking everything out of the equation, just being happy where I am and still in it with two really good rounds.

Q. Can you talk us through the shot on 14 in the hospitality area? What did you have?

MJ DAFFUE: I had 278 front up the hill. It's 10 uphill, so it's 288, and I had an option to drop it, but it would have been in the thick rough. I don't think from there I would have been able to get it onto the second fairway, and I didn't want to hit a 7-iron to a blind target, but I have a 4-wood in the bag, and the lie on it is so good on the hospitality.

The thing about that is it's got a little bit of spring in it, so even if you hit a little bit behind it, the club will bounce, and it will actually bounce into the ball.

For me I was far enough left to actually miss the tree on the left. I think it was an awesome shot, but a birdie would have been better than a bogey, so ...

Q. Had you watch many U.S. Opens throughout your life along the way?

MJ DAFFUE: Yeah, I have. Pretty much all of them.

Q. Are there any that stand out as special or any of the stories? I know Retief you know pretty closely, but any of the underdog type stories that come to mind from watching them through the years?

MJ DAFFUE: Not really. All of them are special to me. I

remember a friend of mine, Andrew Landry, a few years ago did really well a few years ago.

Underdog stories, I don't know. Am an underdog? But, you know, we'll see this weekend, I guess. (Laughing).

There's not really one specific that stands out. I love it all, and I love this kind of golf. U.S. Open, a little bit not like the other ones. You can hit a good shot out here and still get penalized, but it's fair. If you hit a bad shot, you get penalized. That's how it's supposed to be.

Q. What does it mean to you in general in your career journey to be on this stage at this level and in the mix at this tournament after all you've been through?

MJ DAFFUE: I mean, it's a lot. It means a lot. Once again, it goes by so quick. Contending at a major where a few months ago I was just trying to lock up my card, so I'm, obviously, very happy. I'm hoping in the future to have a lot more and getting more used to this stage.

Being able to do what I want to do is play against the best and lose against the best if I need to, so ...

[Laughing].

Q. You're 6-under at the U.S. Open after 27 holes. As you're looking out at that final nine, what's going through your head at that point?

MJ DAFFUE: Yeah. That's a good question. Nothing really went through my head as far as, like, thinking about where I was on the scoreboard. I mean, I knew I was ahead by a few, but on 10 I executed well, and I had an 8-footer and hit a good putt. Just 10th green is just crazy.

Then 11 made a mistake on what number I wanted to hit it. You know, downwind couldn't fly to the hole, so made a mistake.

The hole 9 was more about -- I would say I think I started losing focus on my clarity on my targets and how I'm envisioning my shots. I got a little quick in my process. I think that's just obviously part of the nerves.



I was calm. You know, if I make par on 18, we're having a different conversation. Even though it was a bad back nine, it was right there, and it's small fixes, so it's not something massive to fix.

Q. I realize you're trying to stay in the moment, but you're leading the U.S. Open, but was there a point out there where you did just for a second maybe think back to some of the things you had to overcome from 2013 to 2016-2017?

MJ DAFFUE: Didn't really think back, but I did tell myself, you know, enjoy it. Not a lot of people get to lead the U.S. Open by three shots. I just told myself, enjoy it. You've done a lot of work. It's finally paying off.

Once again, we'll try our best the next two rounds, but whatever happens this week, you know, I've already done a lot of things here, and in the process I was able to entertain some people today, too. It's been good.

Yeah, thinking about the moment and leading, you think about it, but I saw it as proof of the work I've been putting in.

Q. You mentioned nerves sort of contributing to speeding up your process. Did they only contribute to things such as walking and thinking through the shot, or does it affect your tempo and the swing as well?

MJ DAFFUE: Yeah, it was a little tempo. I didn't drive the ball as good as I usually do. By not driving as good I left myself in tricky spots. You know, it starts off the tee.

Even if you miss the fairway, if you miss in the right spot, you have a chance. So it got quick. The tee shot on 14 ended up in the grandstands. My foot slipped. Yeah, I mean, like I said, it's small things luckily, so I'll be able to fix it coming tomorrow.

I think it's just your thought process, too. You think about your front number and the pin. When you stand over a shot, you've already forgotten your front number. There are so many things going through your head. That's pretty much I would say --

Q. Is there any strategy you can employ to slow things down while you're out there?

MJ DAFFUE: Yeah, there's a few things. I, actually, take maybe two, three sips of water before every shot. Kind of shock the system a little bit and make you realize you're here.

A few extra practice swings, deep breaths, kind of -- all sorts of movement stuff. Just kind of staying loose. Not thinking about the shot until it is your time to hit because then you are wasting so many mental energy before it's time to execute.

Q. What kind of lie did you have for the second shot, and was it good enough to go for it, or was it trying to stay back and you got more than you thought?

MJ DAFFUE: Yeah, I was actually trying to get it in the bunker, so I did what I wanted to. It was a longer bunker shot. I chose to use my sand wedge. It has a little more balance. It has a little less sand than some of the other bunkers, so by doing that it was a mistake on my part. I should have used my lob wedge. Just splash it out and run it.

This is what I'm talking about, the mistakes. There the mistake is short. Even if you duff it out of the bunker, you know you have a 15-footer for par.

Some of the other ones on 14, I could literally just chip it anywhere and have a birdie. Instead I slide right under it and make a bogey. Simple things, they're really that simple. Hitting the green from 20 feet.

Q. Do you feel everything speeds up on you as you are walking?

MJ DAFFUE: A little bit. My thought process and everything was still good, so it wasn't too bad. I've been way more nervous than I was today.

Q. Less about today's round, but more about your overall journey. What are the moments that you feel define you most along the way that have allowed you to have this very good attitude about what you are doing and being in the moment and enjoying? What are the spots when you are telling your story that you look back to?

MJ DAFFUE: Yeah, I think there's a few spots, obviously. The dark times when my mother-in-law passed away. Not playing well and not being able to play often. All that history stuff.

I would say the moment was when I stopped focusing on myself and started focusing on other people, and I'm not just talking about golf. I'm talking about away from golf too. Like serving other people, you know, trying to add value to their life.

For a long time I was feeling sorry for myself just thinking about what I need, what I need to do, how can I get to the

next step. The moment I stepped away and said, okay, I'm going to start being a volunteer assistant coach at the University of Houston, help these guys, I started feeling a little bit of self-worth, and everything changed.

You feel good about yourself. You get out of depression, and you just focus on other people. The world is crazy out there, and I feel like you have to make mistakes to know what it feels like so you know what the great feels like too.

I think that's why I can appreciate things now because I know what it feels like to be at the bottom. I'm not saying I'm at the top, but this is not the bottom, so it's very good.

Q. Was there something that spurred you to do that at any moment? Was there an incident or anything?

MJ DAFFUE: No, I needed a place to practice and play, and Austin University, Houston coach, if I can use the facility after hours. And they said, yeah, why don't you just join and you can learn a little bit from the process and maybe implement some practice strategies and skill training. And he is actually my swing coach now too.

So I would say that was a big moment in the process. Just trying to revamp my game. The first day we started working, we said how do we build something to win on the PGA TOUR, and we've gone from there.

Q. Simply, how has it felt to be leading the U.S. Open? How do you describe that emotion and anything in life that that compares to looking back?

MJ DAFFUE: I mean, a little bit -- it hasn't really sunk in yet, but I would say, I don't know, as a kid, I can't believe it. I can't believe it.

Saying you led the U.S. Open, it's an unbelievable feeling. It's, obviously, not the destination. It's a step towards the goal.

And, once again, I don't think my goal is to win this week. My goal is just to be the best I can be, and if the best I can be and the best I can play is good enough for that, then I've achieved what I wanted to achieve.

Yeah, leading the U.S. Open, not a lot of people can say it. It was awesome. Like I said, glad to entertain some people while I was out there.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, MJ.

MJ DAFFUE: Appreciate it.

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