

The 149th Open

Press Conference

Wednesday, 14 July 2021

Lee Westwood



STUART MOFFATT: Good morning, everyone. I'm delighted to welcome Lee Westwood to the interview room. Lee, it's been a really strong season so far for you, some good results. How are you feeling going into the championship starting tomorrow?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. I think everybody missed The Open Championship last year, watching it on TV or playing it.

Yeah, it's good to be back. It's a massive championship, my favourite of the year, and I'm delighted to be back and playing well and hopefully having a chance to contend this week.

Q. How would you assess your form heading in? And also, what have you made of the course so far, and how do you think it might suit you?

LEE WESTWOOD: Well, the form one is the tough one. I feel like I'm playing well, and obviously I've played well this year. I played well last week. I was in the lead with 26 holes to go, and then a couple of pulls and a double bogey, par, double bogey and couldn't get any momentum going after that. When you think 14-under, 26 holes to go, and 18-under is winning it, you should fancy your chances then. But obviously didn't manage to finish that one off.

I kind of look back on last week and take the positives out of it, that the form is there and I'm playing well and I'm making birdies.

Coming into this week, I've played here twice in the Open Championship, missed the cut both times. Kind of had it in my head a bit of a mental block that I didn't like the golf course, but played it yesterday and really enjoyed it. Loved the way it was set up. I couldn't really remember the golf course too much, probably because I didn't have that much experience of playing on it, only having played two rounds each Open.

I really enjoyed it. Enjoyed the conditions and had good company to play with, Dustin, Rory and Danny, and yeah, sort of turned my head around and made me look forward to the week even more really.

Yeah, I'm positive and hoping I can find some form and get into

contention. Like all links tournaments, you need a little bit of luck with the weather, and like golf, you need a little bit of luck, you need some good breaks.

I think the hardest part about this week could be adjusting to the greens. They seemed quite slow yesterday. I don't know how fast they're planning on getting them, but I left a lot of putts short and in the middle. That would be kind of frustrating as the week goes on if I don't start to get it to the hole.

But I think it's a pretty straightforward golf course. It kind of tells you where to hit it. Yeah, there's a couple of fairways that it barrels off. The first, I hit a good tee shot, what I thought was a good tee shot and it was right-hand semi. The 17th tends to be a little bit like that and 12 does, as well. But other than that, it's a pretty fair golf course. How you play is pretty much what you're going to get, I think.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to it.

Q. The opening tee shot at an Open will be nerve-racking. Can you talk through that particular challenge and where it ranks as far as tough opening tee shots in an Open?

LEE WESTWOOD: It's not as nerve-racking as it used to be. The more you play, the easier it gets.

It'll all depend on the breeze, won't it. I think it's to play down out of the left most of the week, so stay down the left, belt it, hopefully find it, knock it on, give myself a birdie chance. I really don't overanalyse it and overthink it and think too much about it anymore. Hit it, find it and hit it again.

Q. Do you have any particular memories of those two previous Open appearances here, any particular areas in which you struggled?

LEE WESTWOOD: Well, being home on Friday night and watching most of the weekend on TV, that I could stomach. But no, I don't really remember too much of it.

I did win around here as an amateur, at least a 36-hole tournament. St. Ports did, as well. One year the English amateur was at St. Ports and they played it around here, so it was 36 holes on Saturday and Sunday and I won both of them,



so I've had some kind of form around here in the past.

Just trying to look at it more positively than I've missed two cuts. There will be underlying facts there; might not have been playing well or my head might not have been in the right place. I don't really have too many memories of The Open Championship here.

Q. I know you say you don't overanalyse, but if you had to pick out one thing that playing so well in America so often now, what's it done for your game?

LEE WESTWOOD: I just think any time you play well anywhere in the world, it gives you confidence. Especially Bay Hill and THE PLAYERS Championship where I finished second and had chances to win had two of the strongest fields of the year, around two very different golf courses, as we could say, as well.

Yeah, I feel like if I get my game where it needs to be and it's good for that week I can contend. I don't know when it's going to be in the right place or when I'm going to hole enough putts. But you just kind of load the dice to give you the best opportunities as possible. You can't do any more than that, and then you give them a roll and what happens happens.

Q. With all your knowledge of Open courses and things, would you mind putting this one, not just as a course but as the whole place, into perspective among all the other Open venues?

LEE WESTWOOD: Well, it's the warmest because it's the furthest south. It's always thrown up interesting winners, hasn't it. As far back as I can remember watching golf, Sandy, Greg, Darren and Ben Curtis. A great variety. You'd say it doesn't favour one player or another.

Obviously nowadays if you hit the ball a long way, that's an advantage, but it's only an advantage around here if you hit it straight, as well. I don't think this is one of those golf courses that you can overpower. You can overpower it with a straight shot, but you can't hit it in the rough and play it I don't think, especially the way they've set it up.

I'd say it's pretty fair to all.

You bring up Muirfield. I missed the cut when it was played there previously in 2002 I think it was when Ernie won, and then I go back in 2013 and nearly win it. It's a lottery. Links golf is even more of a lottery than your week-in, week-out golf where the conditions are even more predictable. You can't kind of overanalyse it I don't think.

Q. It's been a much wetter summer down here than normal, and that's meant the fairways are much softer. It's going to

mean you're not going to get some of those horrible bounces. Do you think that'll make it a bit fairer?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, you've summed it up there. The fairways are softer than they were last time. I spoke to Martin Slumbers on Monday evening, and he said they're probably going to water some of the fairways to stop that happening, as well. You can't have really bouncy fairways carrying it off into rough that's this high that you're hacking out of, undulating fairways.

This course was laid down with the fairways like that and undulating, designed to go into the rough where you'd have a shot but it would be a flying lie and you'd have to judge that. It wasn't designed to land in the fairways and go into rough where you're hacking out with lob wedge. I think they're probably trying to get more into that.

Obviously if you don't have the thick rough and you have the flying distance with the distance players are hitting nowadays, they're so far down the hole that they're going in with a sand wedge or a lob wedge and playing for that because they've got control with that, whereas 60, 70 years ago you'd have been 80 yards back hitting a 7-iron or a 6-iron and the flying lie was coming in.

So they're having to combat the development in equipment with the long rough, but at the same time it doesn't make the golf course -- having the long rough doesn't make the golf course play its true way, so you've got to soften the fairways.

Q. This will be your 88th major start, and should you not win, you'll apparently pass Jay Haas as the longest run in a major without a win. Judging by the way I've heard you talk about golf recently and where your game is, I assume you don't care about that, that's not a --

LEE WESTWOOD: I do care about that. That's nice, that record. It shows I've been a good player for a long, long time. There's not many people who have played in as many major championships as me.

Q. People put you up there as the best player never to win a major, you have the longest run --

LEE WESTWOOD: Another accolade, yeah. I love it. Thank you.

Q. A distinction about something you mentioned. You said Martin Slumbers said they'd water the fairways. Do you know if he meant that would be what he'd do later in the week should the conditions be dry to maintain the softness that they currently are?

LEE WESTWOOD: I think that's probably what he meant. We

were standing on the range and it was lashing it down at the time, so I don't think he had water in plan at 7:00 on Monday evening, but I think as the weather forecast suggests with it drying out they may need to keep them a little bit softer as the week goes on.

Q. 32,000 fans a day versus the 40,000 that could and should have been there. I'm interested, when you're out on the course, does it make a significant difference to the players whether there are going to be pure fans around Royal St. George's over the next four days?

LEE WESTWOOD: No, we've been playing with no fans, so 32,000 fans is going to seem like a bit claustrophobic. The difference between 32 and 40,000 players is irrelevant. We don't really -- when it gets to a certain number, fans all just kind of blend in, and over a huge area such as a golf course you're not going to notice whether there's 8,000 more or 8,000 less. If you asked me to put a number on how many people came in last week I probably couldn't get within 5,000, so that'll make no difference.

Q. I think 10 years ago, must have been around world No. 1 time, wasn't it.

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah.

Q. How do you judge your golf now, because over the last two years you've been in decent nick. How do you judge your golf now to then? Are you a better player now perhaps?

LEE WESTWOOD: I'm not as consistent. Sometimes it turns up, sometimes it doesn't. About as specific as I can be, really.

Q. You've won in the last couple years and you're contending regularly --

LEE WESTWOOD: Not really, when you look at it.

Q. Well, you gave your example last week; you were doing all right --

LEE WESTWOOD: Previous to that, probably PLAYERS, Bay Hill. Previous to that, probably Dubai end of last year. That's five times in about 20 tournaments, so one in four. Probably more consistent than that in 2011 to get to world No. 1.

I would say I'm not as consistent now over longer periods of time. It might be down to my age. I think that. And the fact that I've been playing out here for 28 years, and sometimes I go to a tournament and the intensity is just not there. But when the intensity is there and my game is there, mentally I think I'm stronger. Probably putt a little bit better now than I did 10 years ago. Short game is definitely better. Tee to green, probably not quite as good, but good enough.

Q. You'd be a very popular winner here --

LEE WESTWOOD: I would have been in my house, yeah.

Q. Phil has done it at 50; what is it that's making it possible?

LEE WESTWOOD: I think we're from a generation that's maybe had the benefit of sports medicine and things like that, maybe a little bit more analytical and knowing what's going on. Tiger came on the scene and everybody sort of took that a little bit more seriously mid to late '90s, and I think all the other players that wanted to get ahead of the game sort of looked to him and focused on that more 20 years ago and put some effort in then and worked on that, and you're seeing the benefits of that now, rather than this is not just a, I've been working out for six months thing and this is a quick-fix thing.

This is a long-term thing with the likes of myself and Phil, Stewart Cink, people like that playing -- look at Bernhard Langer. He's playing well into his 60s because he's looked after himself 30 years ago, not because he started going in the gym three weeks ago.

My generation, mine and Phil's generation, are now reaping the benefits of the hard work for the last 20 years, analysing movements in the swing and working on injury prevention to those parts of the body that get injured.

I think when you get to our age, we maybe don't treat it as seriously as we once did, and it's easy to play golf when you're a little bit more flippant about it and see it for what it is, getting a small ball in a small hole.

STUART MOFFATT: We do have presentation to Lee from the Association of Golf Writers and I'd like to invite the chairman Martin Dempster to make the presentation to Lee.

MARTIN DEMPSTER: It's unfortunate that this moment isn't happening in its normal surroundings due to the dinner having to be cancelled again this year because of COVID. I think it would have been fitting if it was in front of 300 or 400 people.

However, it's a great honour to present this AGW golf trophy to Lee. The fourth time, Lee, a very worldly winner. You continue to be very gracious with your time to our members, and we're delighted to present this trophy to you. Well done.

LEE WESTWOOD: Thank you.

STUART MOFFATT: Lee, thanks for your time today and good luck for the championship. Thanks, everybody, for coming.

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