

The 149th Open

Press Conference

Thursday, 15 July 2021

Jordan Spieth



MIKE WOODCOCK: We're joined by our clubhouse leader on 5-under par after 65, former Open champion, Jordan Spieth. Good round today. You looked like you relished the return to links golf in the Open.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I mean, I've really loved this tournament. Played well here, whether I've come in in form or not, and so last year missing being able to play this tournament was certainly something that I didn't want to do.

Now we're back, and it feels -- actually inside the ropes when we teed off on the first tee forward, it feels the most normal of any tournament I think that we've played thus far relative to that same tournament in previous years pre-COVID.

The fans are fantastic here. They're just the best in golf. Very knowledgeable, and you always know where your ball is even if it's a blind shot. It was really great to have them back and have what feels like normalcy when we teed off on the first hole.

Q. You just mentioned that you feel like you've been able to summon form even when you haven't been playing well coming into Open Championships. Why do you think that is?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think it brings a lot of the feel aspect into the game. I think I shorten swings up over here and hit more punch shots and just stuff that I probably should be doing at home when I'm trying to -- you get less swing-focused and more shot-focused over here because the second you take your brain off of what you're hitting, you may not find your ball.

There's a -- instead of just a driving range shot in Palm Springs, there's always some shot you have to play that gives you a little bit of an advantage or certain club selections based on you hit a fade or a draw; they go 15 to 20 yards different distances than between which shot you play.

I guess to sum that up, there's a lot of external factors over here, and I think that external is where I need to be living.

Q. Have you allowed yourself to think what it will feel like to win a major championship again versus at a time it looked like the path you were going to continue on forevermore?

JORDAN SPIETH: I haven't. To be honest, the path that I'm on and where I've been before in the game, I feel really good about my chances going forward, as good as they have been historically.

As far as surprised or not, I guess I feel like I've been trending the right way and certainly had a chance this year already at Augusta. Made some mistakes in the first round and second round that I shouldn't have made that I very well could have won that golf tournament this year.

I like where I'm at. Again, I feel like I was progressing nicely. Took a couple steps back really on the weekend at Colonial through the U.S. Open, and I know what it was now and tried to put in some good work over the last few weeks to get back on the same and even forward it from where I was already progressing.

Q. Do you think success will feel different than it was then?

JORDAN SPIETH: I'm not sure. I would hope to answer that question for you in a few days.

Q. It doesn't really look easy out there, but there's a lot of good scores. What would you attribute it to, lack of wind? Is it some softness, anything?

JORDAN SPIETH: I would say if anything just a little bit of softness. I kind of got away with a couple tee shots in the first cut that maybe if it was firmer may have worked their way just into the fescue. I'm sure a lot of people it's the same way. It's a course where you have so much undulation in the fairways that if it gets firmer it gets very bounce dependent.

That's what I had heard coming in, and then after playing it you can see that. But certainly the greens just being a little bit softer. The wind is up, and the pins are on knobs and crowns and they've done -- they put a few pins in some really fun spots for us today where you could get at them in some bowls. If you hit some wedges you could feed it in. You might see some shots holed today, actually.

But that's only a few of the holes. The rest of them, they're on some of the more difficult locations, I think, to kind of separate the field out. If you're really striking it well or you're not, you end up in better positions versus not.



Q. Was your attitude about the course different than what you had heard or read?

JORDAN SPIETH: I actually -- for the most part historically I've come into venues I've never seen before in any tournament, not just an Open, and I've always just tried to find something I love about it.

There's been times recently where I've said, Man, I just really don't like this place. I came in here and I've been in a really good mood about it. My first walk around it I played 12 holes, played a loop on Sunday, and it was the opposite wind and I still -- I thought, Man, this could be a really fun kind of cool, tricky track. It's certainly odd compared to some of the other ones and some of the shots -- it's also the opposite wind, so that's maybe not fair, not giving it enough credit, because they typically have that southern wind, I think.

But certain holes, like 6 and 16, those short par-3s become easier downwind off the right, but other holes are really challenging.

I liked it.

Q. It's slightly strange but trivial that Brandon Grace played the first two rounds in the eventual winner's group the last two Opens. Was there any talk about that with him, and also are you a superstitious guy in do you read anything into it?

JORDAN SPIETH: I mean, I think I have to be -- how many people at the event? I have to beat 150-something players to win this tournament. I think that's coincidence. If it happens four or five times in a row, maybe people start paying off to see who can get paired with him the first two rounds, but at two I think --

Q. What if it happened three times in a row?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I think maybe. I would certainly like that. It would be a 50/50 shot then, so that would make my chances go way up versus 1 in 150.

I think that that's maybe not extremely uncommon. I think that when you have a top 50, top 25 player in the world that Brandon Grace has been, he's going to be in some pairings with guys who are certainly capable of winning major championships, and it just so happened it was two years in a row.

I did hear that ahead of time, though, which just made me laugh. I didn't think much of it.

Q. I'm curious, if I'm not mistaken, you haven't played for a few weeks leading into this week, and you did the same thing

in '17 if I'm not mistaken. I'm wondering if there was a conscious effort to redo what you did there when you had success, and as a second question there, what were your expectations coming in, getting into the round, when you hadn't played competitively in a few weeks.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, that was kind of my one concern I think coming in here. I felt pretty good about the work that I had done over the last say week and a half or so, but when you haven't played for a little while, you come into a difficult track, you can have a bit of rust early, and I was a little bit concerned about that. I think midway through the front nine today kind of turning under par was just big to feel like hey, we're in the thick of things. There's just a little extra nerves when you're not coming off the week before just getting started, and hit some really good shots early in the round today, which I think was important.

No, I don't -- I've played the week before in '15 and then I think I was off at least two or three weeks every year since, won at Birkdale, had a chance to win playing the week before in '15 and had a chance at Carnoustie.

It just so happens in the schedule that I end up playing a lot in the spring with Dallas and Fort Worth and now with the schedule shifted around with the PGA Championship in there. By the time the U.S. Open is done I'm pretty gassed and looking for a little break.

So I think it's more the break before it versus the preparation for here, but I'll certainly look into, I think, playing into The Open Championship going forward, thinking that it could be really good prep.

Q. I'm just wondering how you would compare the challenge this week with what you faced at Birkdale in 2017, and coming into the first round like before playing, was it a course that you thought suited your game?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think that -- I actually talked, Cameron brought this up. Birkdale was a course that you played a lot from the air versus other Open venues. You couldn't really bounce it up a ton there, and you really can't bounce it up a ton here. So it has similarities on that front, where it's more of an aerial links. You've got to flight the ball but you can't really get away with kind of punching five clubs extra up the entire green. You can on some holes, but there's bunkers that guard the fronts and there's a lot of false fronts here.

In that sense I think there's similarities, but I think if I had played any venue in 2017, I would have won that week. I mean, I was hitting it, at that time, the best I had maybe ever hit it in my life, and it certainly became a two-way match where there was a couple shots I hit that weren't the best I've ever hit but was able to, for the week, just continue on the trends I was

there.

Here I feel for the first time since then I'm at least coming in with a bit of form, a bit of confidence, and really my start lines off the tee, and I felt like I drove the ball good enough today to be able to shoot a really good score, and I'd like to improve.

Q. In the period between winning The Open and winning in Texas, your record in the majors was far from shabby. It was quite impressive in many cases. Was there ever a period where you lost a bit of faith in your golf or your self-belief?

JORDAN SPIETH: Absolutely. It's funny you mention that, though, because I look back and I had a chance to win at least one of the majors each year when I felt like I had no idea where the ball was going, which is, I guess, could be bad and good.

But sure, yeah. Golf is a game played between the ears, right. When it's not going great, you can certainly lose quite a bit of confidence in it, and it takes -- that was the first time I've had to really try and build confidence back up, and it takes time. It's a combination of obviously getting things figured out mechanically but also then putting it to the test and mentally stepping up with enough oomph to go ahead and pull off some shots, and that's how you build the confidence is using that improvement I think physically on the course under pressure. By no means do I feel like I'm where I want to be mechanically yet, but this year has been a really, really good progression for me, and that's all I'm trying to do is just get a little bit better each day.

Q. Do you have any recollection of 2011, Darren Clarke winning?

JORDAN SPIETH: I don't. I don't really have -- I remember vaguely. I always watched major Sundays, but I don't remember the golf course from that, other than a little bit of the 16th hole. But it was playing the opposite wind.

Q. A lefty/righty question. If you're talking to a young player who's left-handed or right-handed, do you tell them to go with that hand when they start to play golf?

JORDAN SPIETH: You know, I throw and shoot left-handed. I do a lot of things -- my dad is left-handed, my brother plays golf left-handed, and I somehow hit right-handed in baseball, and golf righty. You probably have more club options right-handed, but if you like the Masters, Augusta is a nice left-handed golf course, left-hander's golf course.

No, I think whichever one you feel like you've got more power with I guess is the better way to go right now, and then you build in as you get older, you build in a lot of kind of control.

Q. You were very enthusiastic about the fans. You were

saying they were "fantastic." What is the ideal fan?

JORDAN SPIETH: Well, I just think over here they're very knowledgeable, so like I may have a 5-iron into a hole and 20 feet is a fantastic shot, and they just know that because they've seen it all day and they're aware of how difficult shots are versus if you hit a wedge and you really had an opportunity to get one close.

I feel like the fans here are very knowledgeable about the sport, and they're also having a great time. Really the grandstands, the amphitheater settings at this tournament is a lot of what I'm talking about. It's just like at Augusta, it's just a beautiful setting a lot of times, shaping a lot of the holes with people.

I think that's kind of fun.

Q. So what's different from America -- surely they're having fun there and they know what they're seeing. What is the difference?

JORDAN SPIETH: Well, I think over here you have a lot of blind shots, and I think -- and also, scores are a little higher over here. In America a lot of times if it's not within 10 or 15 feet, everyone wants every shot to be really, really close, and so do we, but I think over here times a really good shot is one that's just punched out of the gorse.

It's just a different style of golf, and it's crazy how well informed I think people are of already the style it must be because they're playing it every day.

Yeah, our fans are great everywhere, but over here I just feel that the giant grandstands, they're very knowledgeable of when a shot we would feel is really good and when we would be frustrated about it, I guess.

Q. Could you see out there some of the places where it could -- people could come undone? It is a very tricky course, isn't it.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I think first thing I noticed when I got here was how high the rough was on the first hole, and I thought, wow, if it place starts to firm up, which it can if they want it to as the weekend approaches us, it reminded me of kind of the way Muirfield looked to start, where it was totally brown by Sunday. I thought they have that option here.

I just think with the rough up, if you're not controlling the golf ball in this wind, keeping it maybe lower to the ground and avoiding these bunkers, you're -- when I wasn't in the fairway -- there was only one hole where I was in the fescue today. The rest I was in first cuts, and you can do just fine out of first cuts here. If you're not in between the beacons, it's very, very hard, and that's not easy to do when the wind is a solid 15 to 20 and

it's a heavy wind.

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