

The 150th Open

Media Day Press Conference

Tuesday, 26 April 2022

Collin Morikawa



STUART MOFFATT: We'll just make a start now. I'll introduce you to the media and then we'll get started.

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to this afternoon's preview interview for the 150th Open. My name is Stuart Moffatt. I'm the head of communications at the R&A, and I'm delighted to see that we are joined by the reigning Open Champion Collin Morikawa via Zoom.

With that in mind, we can make a start. Just want to say good morning, Collin, and thank you for joining us today.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Good morning, everyone, or good afternoon where you guys are. Thank you guys for having me.

STUART MOFFATT: Starting on last year, I know you've been able to reflect on winning The Open at Royal St George's. What were the real highlights for you in that week?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Winning. (Laughs).

Coming over for the first time to play my first Open, it was to learn how to play golf out there and learning how to experience what links golf was like. Royal St George's being a little different than some other links style rotations in the Open Championship, you just have to figure it out, and that's what we do best, we figure out how we're going to play these golf courses and what we're going to do, and I think I did a pretty good job figuring it out for my first try around.

STUART MOFFATT: Just looking forward to this year at St Andrews. There's going to be a fantastic atmosphere. Today we announced that 290,000 fans will be at the championship. How much are you looking forward to defending the trophy in front of those fans here?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: You know, the fans make everything. We go back a couple years ago when COVID had come by, it was kind of getting a little bland and it was getting a little boring in the sense of just -- we love what we do, we love playing golf, but the energy the fans bring out, it kind of brings out the best of us and it brings out the best competitors in ourselves.

When I was out there last year at the Open, seeing the fans,

seeing how much they truly love the game and have the passion for the game, those are the people you want to play in front of. Every time I think I'm going to be able to come over to the Open and play in front of numerous fans just like we're going to have this coming year, it's very exciting because it brings out -- it really does bring out the best in us.

To have the most respectful fans, to have some of the fans that I think truly understand the game more than other fans around the world makes things even better to just get a couple claps when you hit it to maybe 30 feet rather than wanting to hit it to three feet sometimes.

Q. Collin, you've spoken before about you've not played at St Andrews before, but have you actually pictured in your head what that feeling is going to be like?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No, it's a great question. People ask me if I'm going to go over there early or take a couple trips. I really have never done that for any majors. When it comes to St Andrews, obviously there's the history, there's everything that St Andrews represents, right, the home of golf and everything about that.

But for me at the end of the day I need to go out there Monday through Wednesday and do my normal prep on how I'm going to picture out St Andrews. I can't play it like people have played it in the past. We don't know what the weather is going to be like. We don't know what the little changes might be or might be in front of us as time comes through.

In the long run, I just have to be prepared and know how I'm going to prepare now for links golf. I think having an experience of a year ago, I'm going to be able to kind of adjust a little quicker than I did last year. Last year I took a lot of risks, changing some irons, changing a little bit in the putter setup. But I think I'll be a little more prepared this year to just be out there and ready to figure out how to dissect this golf course to the best of my abilities.

Q. Just a follow-up, memories of the open at St Andrews, watching it on the television, is there anything that sticks out in your mind?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Not really. I can picture the 18th hole, I can picture the 17th hole pretty well. I've never been to a golf



course or a golf club like that where I think really just the entire town is encompassed around St Andrews, right? The love for the game, the love for the sport, I think kind of breathes and lives through the town.

I've never been in a place like that, and that's what I think I'm going to look forward to experiencing is just being a part of that town, being there for The Open when everything is about The Open. Places we go and play normally, they're kind of -- golf is the highlight of that week, but there's also other things going on in some cities that we go to. I really look forward to going there in St Andrews and just really embracing and enjoying everything that it has to give for me.

Q. Just given everything you've said there about St Andrews and the town and everything, how much pride will it give you to walk in here as the Champion Golfer, and how much additional incentive does it give you to walk back out as the Champion Golfer still with the trophy in your hands?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, I think anytime you're defending a tournament, it's always special, right? You're coming back as the previous champion. You just know that you've done it before.

But when we narrow that down to a major championship, especially being an Open, and you have a rotation of courses and you're moving around, which is also kind of weird in a sense of its own because it's not like I have previous history at St Andrews. There's a million other guys before me that probably have played there, played well, and you can look at them as more experienced, more as a favourite because they have played there.

But that's the thing is that I've done this now for three years, and I keep showing up to new golf courses and I try and figure them out, and I just have to go out and play.

When it comes down to it, it's just more about am I going to be ready to go out there and play golf and play my game and just do what I do. That's kind of dissect the golf course from tee to green and hopefully make some putts for the week.

Q. Last year when you came across you spoke about the importance of having played in the Scottish Open the previous week and how that allowed you to get your head right for links golf. Is that the plan again this year? And just a follow-up to Martin's question, St Andrews is already buzzing and we're three months away from The Open Championship, so are you quite confident that when there are 50,000, 60,000 here per day walking up 18, you look around you, that you're able to stay focused on your game?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, so the plan is absolutely to come back and play the Scottish Open. I owe a lot to that

tournament for getting me ready and actually making me realise that I needed to change some irons. Those two weeks last year my game was in some of the best shape I could have had.

I come over, I come play the Scottish and I start hitting iron shots, 9-irons to 45 feet, missing greens, and it was just frustrating. I wanted to blame it on my clubs, and rarely that's the case, but I really did. I stuck with it. I made some changes, and there we were at Royal St George's making a few changes on the Monday and ended up winning.

As it relates to the fans, the more the better to be honest for me. I'm going to compare it to how this year's Masters -- this year's Masters was the first time I had full fans, and I think when I have more people around, it almost makes me focus a little bit more on what I'm doing rather than almost enjoying the scenery around. When you have little gaps in the fans and you kind of get a little distracted, you pay attention to other things rather than actually focusing on golf. So when there's more people, for me, I enjoy it even more, so I look forward to seeing all those people out there.

Q. That change you alluded to that you made between the Scottish Open and The Open and you called it a risk in some way, the fact that you were able to do that, just be yourself, I think it was just yourself and your caddie who made the change, wasn't it, when we're so used to the top pros now having such massive entourages and technicians and psychologists and people advising. The fact that you were able to make that change, just you and your caddie, does that give you confidence that you can adapt to any situation?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, that's what I've been doing for the past three years is trying to figure out what I need to adapt with, how do I need to change. I'm learning so much about different grinds on wedges, how that's going to affect different types of turf, going out to play links golf. Yeah, it was absolutely a risk. It was a risk for me just to tell my caddie, like I want to change irons. He looked at me like I was crazy last year. Even the TaylorMade reps were just kind of going with the flow of saying, yeah, maybe that's the case.

But it really was. I knew something was off in just how I was making contact with the golf ball that I had to make a change. When it comes down to risk, you have to take risks. Sometimes you're going to get a reward like last year, sometimes it's going to be a failure, but you're going to learn from it.

That's the biggest thing is I'm just learning so much so when I play on team events or when we play and -- in just talking to a lot of professional golfers, you see how much knowledge they have over the past say decade of playing out here on the PGA Tour, DP World Tour, and just all around the world. They just

gather so much information that they can kind of weed out and figure out what's best for them. I think that's what I'm kind of slowly figuring out.

Last year was a risk I had to take, and thankfully I figured something out for what I need to do when I go over there.

Q. You were talking about experience and tapping into the knowledge of other more experienced players and yourself. Is there any player you're going to ask about the Old Course and things that are required there?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Not really. I don't really go out and ask too many people. That's kind of just my thing. I go out there and try and figure it out myself.

You know, from what I've heard, you kind of hope for the weather to be up, you hope for the wind to be up. That'll put a good test to St Andrews.

For me I think if I listen to too many people, I start going away from playing my game, right, and that's what I did, and that's what I've done at other courses, at other venues where I've kind of listened to people and it hasn't really turned out the way I wanted. I'll just go out and do what I do best.

I think my caddie, my coach, everyone that I've kind of put together, this small team, we do a good job figuring out what we need to do Monday through Wednesday to be as prepared by Thursday.

Q. Collin, the final day of the Masters you and Rory spurring each other on, culminating in that amazing thing at the 18th hole. Could that be a launch pad for both of you do you think in this period coming up, a hectic period leading up to the Open?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: You know, I call it probably the best finish and best experience I'll have at the Masters unless I win it. There's no other way to walk off the 18th green in a final round other than doing what we did and hearing those fans.

Is it a launch pad for me to play better? I don't know. I think it was more of just a lifelong memory of finishing at the 18th at Augusta like that, holing out back-to-back bunker shots, Rory giving himself kind of a longshot of a chance towards the end. You never know what's going to happen. But to hole out on top of him, that was one of the coolest experiences I've had as a professional so far.

As it relates to momentum, I think finishing that -- T5 or fifth place there and kind of having these good finishes so recently in the majors, it just gets me more prepared for the next three coming up, especially to finish up The Open at St Andrews. We only get four a year, and you kind of take that for granted

think, okay, you have four a year but you have them every year and you're going to keep playing them hopefully, but you want to win them. You want to win them every year and you want to be in contention and you want to come down the stretch on a Sunday having a chance to win.

So yeah, I think in a sense of maybe not playing great golf, I don't think it's golf related, I think it's more mental related and just being like, okay, we got a little taste of that excitement, like let's get back in that zone and let's get back in that state to do what it takes to be in the winner's circle come Sunday.

Q. Can I ask you about the journey of the Claret Jug and how much fun you've had with it this year and where you've taken it. Give us one or two experiences of where you've been with the jug in the last year.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, it actually hasn't made its way too far. The miles it's travelled are very few. It'll make it to a few friends' houses, made it to a couple sponsor outings; where I practice in Vegas, I'll leave it out there a couple days here and there.

But I think the best experience I get is just people seeing myself take it out of the case and them seeing it front hand with themselves holding it and just seeing the history that they can witness right in front of them. I think that's one of the coolest experiences that people don't under -- they kind of underestimate.

When they actually take it out and they hold it and they realise what they're holding, it's kind of a cool memory for me just to see what they're kind of living through because they've got it in their hands and they're seeing all the previous history before me.

That's the coolest thing is just seeing the reaction on people's faces, picking up the Claret Jug. I think it'll never get old. I think when you see someone pick it up and you see them witness it for the first time, it really is a special place in the game of golf, and it always will be.

Q. You're obviously already a major champion when you turned up at Royal St George's, but did winning The Open at the first attempt elevate you and your standing in the game, first of all, in your own eyes and also in the eyes of people that you know?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I mean, as it relates to myself, I think I've always had that belief that I can do it. Like I said, you only get four a year, and it's tough, and you have to be able to close them out. I'm not saying they're easy. I've just been fortunate the way things have gone my way, and sometimes you need a little luck on your side. We've gotten those for two of my majors so far early on.

As it relates to how other people view me, to be honest, I really don't care. If they think I'm a better golfer and they want to watch out for me, good for them. If they think something else, good on them, as well. It really is not going to affect how I play.

(Indiscernible) how I believe I'm going to perform for the Scottish Open and The Open. If you just look at the scorecard and you look at how I played at the Scottish Open, no one would ever play so bad, no one would ever look at me to even contend at the Open. First time being out here, first time links golf, but in my mind I felt like my game was there, I just needed to make a couple tweaks to make sure I wasn't hitting 9-irons to 45 feet.

In my eyes, yeah, being able to close another major, close it at a place and a location where I've really not had a lot of experience gave me a lot of confidence.

I looked forward to just seeing what's out there, experiencing new places and figuring out what I need to do.

Q. When you look back on the 72 holes, are there one or two particular memories that make you smile and you think were the pivotal moments of the week?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, so I'd say the first pivotal moment was on Saturday on the fifth hole. I rarely kind of -- I don't argue with my caddie, and I don't get mad at him. But I had hit a 5-wood up in the air, looked pretty good, but it was falling with the wind. Caddie said, great shot. Landed in the fairway, took one hop out, landed on the top lip of the bunker, almost hit that out of bounds and I think I was 2-over through five holes and I felt like I should have been even or 1-under. I just had to get it off my chest.

On the next hole, on the sixth hole after we made par, I just said, look, no more calling out any shots before they actually stop moving. But then he said, he's like, look, I'm doing my best, you're doing your best, that's all we can do. Just to get over that little hurdle of just having that little awkward tension between us, which we've really never had, and just to get it off our chest and off our shoulders cleared the way for the weekend, just to kind of go out and play golf and just to finish up that Saturday on a good note and be kind of within the lead. That was one of the most pivotal moments that will just be underappreciated by anyone because they don't know that kind of stress you get going into a weekend kind of near the lead.

I would say the next ones were just those up-and-downs. I made up-and-down on 4, made up-and-down on 10, made up-and-down on 15. Those up-and-downs were just -- that kind of kept the momentum going. Anytime you don't make up-and-down, anytime you're making bogeys, it kind of takes

away from that and you have to go make another couple birdies to get back into it or keep that lead. But I kept that lead by making though pars, and those were the best things that could have happened that day.

Q. Among numerous other top players, you've already pledged your loyalty to the PGA Tour. However, the Greg Norman series isn't going away. Are you either interested or intrigued about how this is going to pan out as a golfer?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No. Look, I said at Riviera earlier this year in I believe February that my alliance is to the PGA Tour. Will I still watch what's going on? I mean, yeah. You're curious to what's going on. But do I care who's going to be playing or do I care who's going to be making money? No, not at all.

At the end of the day I'm here to win majors. I'm here to win PGA Tour tournaments. Hopefully return and defend my Race to Dubai title. There's a lot of other things that are on my mind and a lot of goals that I set at the beginning of the year that I look forward to. So far through about five months or four months, I haven't really won, or I haven't won. It's not I haven't really won. I haven't won at all.

So I want to get back out there. I want to go back out and win another couple majors somehow and finish off this kind of year on a good note. I look forward to the rest of the year for sure.

Q. Just to build on Martin's question, I wondered what you made of the number of players who requested player releases from the PGA Tour to compete in the first event at Centurion in June.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: To be honest, I mean, we don't know who they are, and we don't know if they're actually going to compete. At the end of the day nothing has been concrete, and that's what I've said since day one is that nothing has been factual. Yes, people have signed up but that doesn't mean they're going to play. It just means that they wanted that option. There's nothing against that, but at the end of the day we don't know who's going to be playing, and there's nothing to talk about if we don't know who's going to be playing. It's all speculation.

At the end of the day you guys are doing media and you guys want the facts. There's nothing to speculate on things that we don't know who's going to be playing. I mean, we know who's going to be playing at the Open, we know who's going to be playing in the next couple events, in the majors, so that's kind of my stance on what I view of what's going on. Since day one nothing has been clear, and why even talk about something that is kind of up in the air and I'm going to be making just as much of a guess as you are.

Q. May I also ask what kind of interaction you have with Jay

Monahan if you were to be at a tournament like The Open, potential bans on the line, what kind of conversations do you have with him?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, it's crazy. I'm three years in, and we have these other tours coming in. As a kid all I dreamt about was winning majors and winning tournaments and getting to No. 1 in the world. I never thought you'd have all these other things.

Look, I've been fortunate enough to play some really good golf and be in a position to talk to Jay, and Jay has been amazing, being able to reach out to him and not just him but also Keith Pelley on the DP World Tour. These two guys have been phenomenal and just asking what I need and what other players need and what we feel comfortable with.

So at the end of the day I haven't had many talks. I've reached out to him, he's reached right back out to me and we've had a couple talks about how we think the game is going to keep improving. But I'm learning so much in three years that I never thought and you would never think about the Tour. Growing up you never have heard of like players' advisory boards. It's not a thing you think about when you're growing up. All you think is you show up to a golf tournament and you play golf and you hopefully walk home with the trophy.

But there is a lot behind the scenes, and we owe a lot to them and we owe a lot to the people and the players that are really pushing and that are a little more involved than say what I would be right now, but that doesn't mean that I don't want to be involved in the future. I think where I'm at right now, I'm still trying to learn the ropes of how things work.

Guys have been out here for decades now, 10, 20 years, and they have seen the same kind of process going through and see what works and what doesn't. I'm three years in. It's still very, very new for me.

Q. Collin, obviously this whole other Tour is all about the money; clearly that's what it's all about. When you see that there's going to be 290,000 spectators over a week at St Andrews and you can probably pretty much run the numbers on how much revenue they're talking about, do you see that players should be asking for more from major venues, as well, because it seems like the money is the only thing that really will make the players happier is if they get more money in the purses?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I mean, I think you're speaking to a select few when you say -- I'm not just playing for the money. I think there's a lot of guys out there that aren't just playing for the money. If we were, then I might as well just start playing every week. You don't see anyone playing every week if they're just trying to make a quick penny.

I think at the end of the day when you have to look at revenues and you look at the splits, that comes back to the last question. I haven't dove into the kind of financials of what the major championships are making and what we make and the percentage we're making.

Sure, I'm guessing that the majors do make a lot of money and there's never anything bad about making more money, but when you say something like that and you put us in the boat of the only other thing that could keep us here is the money, then that's just not true. Because if that were the case, then you would have had 100 out of 100 sign up for this other Tour that's happening, but you don't, right? You have the 15, the unknown 15.

When it comes down to it, it's just the love for the game. I think what the PGA Tour and the DP World Tour have aligned themselves to do and what we're going to be growing into is great. I'm not complaining about where I'm at right now, and I love the position where I'm at, and I want to keep winning more. Obviously money is a great second part of it, but at the end of the day I didn't finish The Open last year asking what I made.

I could not tell you what I made last year at all. At the end of the day, I'm telling you about the memories of holding the Claret Jug and showing it to people and bringing it around town and showing it to family. Those are the memories you're going to make, not hey, I made X amount of dollars; I'm good because of that.

Q. Looking forward again to St Andrews, have you imagined what it will be like to hit that opening tee shot as the reigning champion, and if so, what's your thought process on that shot and what club you might use?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: You know, being a defending champion at the 150th Open at St Andrews, you can't script it any better, other than being the defending champion at the 151st Open.

I think at the end of the day I'm going to go out and give it everything I have, and I do that every week. But hopefully I can dig a little bit more out of myself and pull it out of the fans, pull it out of that energy I'm getting around the crowd, knowing that, all right, at the beginning of Thursday, it's all a clean slate. That's what it is in professional golf. Is always is. It's always a clean slate. It's always starting new.

But just to know that I've done it in the past, have that confidence, it's just going to be an extra little boost to kind of start off the week. I know guys have played St Andrews many times and a lot of players know the course probably like the back of their hand, but I'm going to go out there and do

everything it takes to be ready by Thursday, like I said, hopefully come out on top. It would be very, very special to defend at the 150th Open.

STUART MOFFATT: Thank you, Collin, and thank you to everybody in the room. We're going to bring things to a close here. We really appreciate you giving us the time for today's call and you gave us some really great answers, and we look forward to seeing you here in St. Andrews for the 150th Open in July. Thank you.

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