

The 150th Open

Press Conference

Monday, 11 July 2022

Collin Morikawa



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. It's my pleasure to welcome the defending champion Collin Morikawa to the interview room.

Collin, I know you've had a chance to have a look at St Andrews now and the course. What are your first impressions?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I love it. I can see why guys love it. I can see how special this week can be. I can see how the course can play a million different ways, depending on the weather. Looks like we're going to get some pretty consistent weather and some wind patterns this week.

I think overall you've just got to be ready to play some good golf out here because you're going to get some good bounces and probably some bad ones.

THE MODERATOR: I know you've returned the Claret Jug to Martin Slumbers. I guess it would be nice to get your hands back on it later on this week.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: That's an obvious statement. That's obviously the goal. Now that I know what it's like to have the Claret Jug for a year, there's nothing like it. It's a really special year. Even though you won that tournament a year ago, it's going to be in your history for the rest of your life. And it's pretty cool.

I think trying to defend this week at The 150th at St Andrews would be even more special.

Q. Knowing that you struggled at the Scottish a little bit last year before winning, how do you process last week, and what adjustments need to be made for this week?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Last year a lot was on the irons. I think I figured that out this year. Driver hasn't been great, and just kind of my wedge shot with my 60-degree.

Already made some changes and feeling great now. It was a simple just grind on the wedge, and then driver just had to add a little bit more spin.

I've just been playing all year with kind of too little spin or way too much spin. I haven't found that middle zone to kind of be

able to hit that one shot that I know that I can trust down the line.

Q. What would it mean to you to go on and defend your title here at St Andrews, the home of golf? Particularly this year, The 150th year of The Open.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It's a mouthful, I'll tell you that. It would mean a lot. There's obviously a lot of great players, a lot of guys that are playing really well right now, and I've got to step it up.

This is a week where, look, we only get four majors a year, and we're already at number four. I don't want to look back at this year and kind of not be happy about what I did and how I prepped.

So I'm doing everything I can to be ready for this week, and hopefully we can put together four really good rounds.

Q. Collin, obviously it's very prestigious to come back here as the Claret Jug holder. But there's a lot of expectation and a lot of spotlight on you. Is it quite important for you to be able to manage things, your time, manage how things go, so things don't get on top of you? There are a lot of commitments for you this week.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: There are commitments, but I wouldn't say it's crazy. I think the spotlight is on a lot of other guys this week. I haven't been playing the best golf year to date.

Yeah, I am the defending champ, but we're at a different golf course. We're at a course I've never been to. A lot of guys have had history here. For me, it's like how do I go every other week, figure out this golf course, figure out how to play it.

I think through two days so far I've done a pretty good job of figuring out what I'm going to do.

Q. First of all, how did it feel handing over the Claret Jug?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It sucked. It really did. I woke up this morning and looked at it. The replica is beautiful, but it's not the same. It really isn't. It will never be.



But I don't want to dwell on the past. I think I've talked about that early on in my career. I always look forward to what's next. Maybe hopefully just giving it back kind of frees me up and allows me just to focus on winning this week.

Q. Secondly, what did you think about when you got to the 17th tee? Can you talk about how challenging and unique that hole is?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It's tough any time you have a blind tee shot. When you're teeing over a hotel, or J.J.'s telling me aim over the course part of The Old Course hotel, but don't miss it right of the hotel.

It's really tough because you're trusting -- especially when a hole has a little dogleg to the right, you're trusting these lines are going to be spot on. Your margin of error is going to be even less because you don't have that kind of visual aspect of seeing where you can start it and where you can peel it to. You have to trust to hit a good shot. It's definitely a tee shot I need to keep working on for sure.

Q. Did you hit some shots out of the bunker and from across the road or off the road?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I hit a few shots out of the bunker. We were waiting for a group on 18. I hit one shot over the road, but I'm going to do everything I can to not go in either of those.

Q. You show up to work on your links game at the Scottish last year, then won one at Sandwich. Given the number of PGA TOUR players who were at the Renaissance Club last week, would you expect they have enhanced their chances of winning here?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Sure. I don't know. I mean, it helped me because I have never played links golf. A lot of these guys, they've all played links golf before. They've played out here. They played many Opens. They know what to expect. Every year is going to be a different test. You don't know how firm it's going to be. You don't know what the weather is going to be like.

Just to get over here a week early, it makes it easier, to make your timings and all your schedules just flow a little bit easier. Rather than flying here Saturday night, Sunday morning, trying to adjust the time, trying to figure out your practise rounds. I mean, I guess. I don't know how to answer that.

Q. Just a follow-up to that one. Given the form that Xander Schauffele is in at the moment, he steps on the golf course, he wins the tournament at the moment, how would you fancy his chances here?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Good. I mean, what do you want me

to say?

Q. What do you think of him?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Xander is awesome. He practices at The Summit in Vegas, and we played nearly every day. I've kind of been trying to figure out how he's been playing so well. He's, I'm sure, stealing things off of what I'm doing. It's good to have someone like that to practise off of.

Q. Your thoughts in light of the last two majors, the closing holes at Southern Hills and Brookline which was so strong, what do you make of the finish here?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I love it. I think it's one of the prettiest looking 18th hole, 72nd hole, whatever you call it, holes you can ever see without seeing any ocean. I love courses that you can see the water. But this is spectacular.

And whatever it is, 330 -- 350, something like that. It's drivable depending on the wind and the bounce. It makes it exciting. Guys can birdie. Guys have a chance to make eagle.

Most likely you're not trying to save par, like Southern Hills, where a par for the week was a very good score. I think if you can somehow get away with four birdies on 18, you're going to be doing yourself some good.

Q. Collin, there's been some consternation pre-tournament about how The Old Course will stand up to today's players. Just curious your thoughts on the challenge that you face out there.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Obviously the bunkers are -- you have to stay out of them. With guys hitting it so far and having firm fairways, right? And having not a lot of wind -- a lot of the wind this week is going to be crosswinds. So we'll go out, I through 9, a lot of wind off the left, then coming back, a lot of wind off the right.

With that much crosswind, there's going to be some really short holes. You're not hitting driver and then you're hitting 8-iron. You're hitting driver, 60-degree lob wedges. Today I played nine holes, and I think I hit four 60-degrees. It's playing short.

Pins are definitely going to be tough. They're going to have to, because sometimes when you are 50 yards away, it's not advantageous to be there and you're going to have to play back and almost bring the bunkers into play.

There's going to be a lot of thought processing on what to do. Hopefully I don't overthink it. I think that's something out here you can tend to do is overthink rather than keep the game simple.

Q. Collin, you said earlier that perhaps giving the Claret Jug back could be the spark to sort of free you up, I think was the phrase you used. Are you looking for a spark to get your season to catch light? Is that what you're looking for right now?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I just made that up to make it sound good. Hopefully that was the case.

Yeah, I am looking for something. We're at the end of our season. We're at the fourth major. Playoffs are coming up pretty soon. I want to give it a run. I really haven't been in contention at all this year in any tournament, and it sucks because I love being in those spots. I love coming down the stretch and knowing that you've got to make some great shots, make some birdies, and close it out, and I just haven't put myself in that position.

I've had a couple of second place finishes, and they've kind of been come-from-behind second place finishes where I played really well on the final day. But I need to do a better job Thursday through Saturday to give myself a shot at trying to close out a tournament.

Q. Coming here is The 150th Open, obviously you're the defending champion. What's your assessment of where the game is now particularly with the LIV series having started up? Thank you.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: We don't need to talk about LIV. You're not going to learn anything from me. What you know is what everyone knows.

Look, it's a mouthful. We're at The 150th Open at St Andrews, all the past champions here, all the history, everything to get to this point. You see it on all the boards, right? I'm going to screw this up. Does it say it up here?

THE MODERATOR: Everything has led to this.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Everything has led to this. That's true of everything, but especially for this moment. For a lot of guys who haven't been here like myself, to come here, look out the hotel, walk down 17, 18 on Sunday when you have the public just walking, that's the coolest experience as a fan, as a golfer, anyone could ask for because it's a game for everyone.

I think that's what we're trying to do. Yeah, the stretch of just teeing off on 1, just seeing 17, just seeing 18, you feel the history, and you feel the importance of everything that has come before us at this golf course and golf in general. It's really cool to be here.

Q. As someone who already has their name on the Claret Jug,

what will it mean to be here this week and soak in the celebration and history that is The 150th Open?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I did that all on Sunday when I got here, and I'm over it. I have to. That's the only way I can focus on this tournament. You've got to embrace the history. You have to embrace everything. Everything that has happened before us.

But I'm here to win a tournament. I'm here to play some really good golf. Even though my week is filled with the couple extra media obligations and a couple other appearances doesn't mean by Thursday morning I'll not be ready. I'm going to do everything I can, just like any other event I've played well in or won, to be waking up Thursday morning ready to play 72 holes of really good golf.

Q. So did you -- because you didn't make the weekend, did you get here a little earlier than originally planned and got in a few more holes?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: We drove Saturday afternoon and actually played 18 yesterday on Sunday. I wanted to see the course. I didn't want to kind of piece it together and be like nine holes here, nine holes there, play a little route. I just wanted to see 1 through 18 for what it is, and then from there I can go dissect it and do a little more work like what I did this morning or what I'll do the next two days.

Q. Just two things off that. Have you been able to go up and walk around town yet? What has surprised you most about the golf course?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I did walk around town on Sunday -- or Saturday. My days are lost. One of those days. I walked around town. It's gorgeous. You could see it all in one afternoon, which was pretty nice. I enjoy that.

What surprised me the most about the golf course?

Q. Based on what you've known coming in or not known.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I'm still trying to figure out hole 12. I have no idea what to do. I don't know what I'm going to do. I could tell you 15 different ways to play it, and all could be wrong. I kind of want to sit on 12 and watch guys play and see what they do.

I think what surprised me the most was a lot of golf courses don't -- they don't give me that awe factor too often. I appreciate them. I love them. I think they're great golf courses, but there's only been a few golf courses where I've stepped foot and been like this is a special place. Not just the golf course, but the atmosphere, the clubhouse, everything around it.

This is one of those places. There's only been a few times where it's happened like that in, I think, forever, and I understand why people say this is a very special place.

Q. Tiger skipped the U.S. Open so that he could be here, and it seems like everyone in this room and really on the grounds is sort of appreciative that he is here. You've won two majors. You're both Open champions. Do you share that feeling of appreciation that Tiger is here, and what is your guys' relationship like at the minute?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I think any time I'm able to see him, any time any of us are able to see him, we have to appreciate it because we don't know how many times he's going to play here. He might play one. He might play ten. Who knows?

Any time you're able to be around someone like that where you've idolised him for so long, it's amazing. But it's cool to see that -- I'm going to call it a friendship. He can call it whatever he wants. Whatever this relationship, this friendship that we have, it's gone past the I'm in awe and I'm in shock to now you can joke around and you can talk to him, and you can give him a call if I really needed something. I've never done it. I'm actually scared to (laughter).

Yeah, but it's the coolest thing because it's someone that you never thought -- you maybe thought you'd get to talk to him, play with him once, and now you see him at events and you'll talk to him and say hi, you'll talk to him at the range. At the JP McManus Pro-Am we were talking before we teed off on the first round. It's really cool to see.

All this love that you guys give him, he wants to beat us so bad, and I do too. I tell him that. I'm sure J.T. tells him that every day. He's such a competitor that that's what's awesome about him. Even though he's gone through everything he's gone through.

I know he's fighting it. I talked to him a few months ago about everything he has to do just to walk every day, it's amazing. It just shows you how much grit and determination he wants to have to get back on top and to win another event. I fully understand why.

Q. If you think back to last year seeing St George's for the first time, how long -- how many rounds do you think before you felt like you knew your way around the course? And how is the Old Course different in terms of a learning curve? I know you've only been here two days.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Most courses by the second time I see it, I feel like I have a good grasp. I think this course -- today I was playing the front nine and I was on hole 4, which is a par-4, and immediately pulled out 5-wood like it was the next hole,

the 5th hole, the par-5, and J.J. looked at me like I was crazy.

So, yeah, this course takes a little extra learning and memorisation because there are so many blind shots and you're aiming at so many towers, it just kind of meshes into one. There are so many greens that are double greens and big greens that you forget the little slopes, but that's what you can't do. You can't forget about the slopes here. You can't forget about the slopes on the front of greens where you might roll it up.

Denise when it comes down to it, it's about taking really good notes. If I don't memorise the course as easily as we do sometimes in the states, where some courses are pretty straightforward on knowing hole 3 versus hole 7. I think it's just trusting your notes that say you took good notes, hit it here, trust that, hit a good shot, and go from there.

Q. You talked about talking with Tiger. And I was curious, you talked last week about shaping shots more. J.T. started doing that because of talking to Tiger. Have you sought insight from Tiger on doing that, or did he just inspire you from watching him from afar?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No, it didn't really dawn on me until I couldn't hit my cut and I had to play my draw, my two-yard draw, and I had to keep hitting that. When I think back at some of the best rounds I've seen and actually witnessed -- like I go back to J.T. at PLAYERS. I think it was the second day and one of the best rounds I've ever seen.

It's because he was able to work the ball left and right, right and left, but also up and down, right? That's the biggest thing is having those nine windows, nine different shots, every little shot, just having that window you can hit the ball.

I think after playing the U.S. Open and hitting the draw, and then on Sunday I was hitting a couple more cuts, just play the right shot. Play whatever shot feels comfortable. Play whatever shot you're going to be able to pull off and go from there. Don't fight what you're trying to do. Don't fight anything in front of you. Just kind of go with the flow. That's what I've been struggling with, I think, for the first half of this year. Hopefully we're making strides for the better.

I think we are. Even though I missed the cut last week, I still thought I hit the ball a little better than I have done in the past.

THE MODERATOR: Collin, thank you for joining us and good luck this week.

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