

The 150th Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 12 July 2022

Tiger Woods



MIKE WOODCOCK: Very pleased to welcome to the interview room the 15-time major champion and three-time Champion Golfer of the Year Tiger Woods.

Tiger, after all you've achieved at St Andrews in The Open and playing here, how much does it mean to you to be here competing in The 150th Open this week?

TIGER WOODS: It means a lot. This is where it all began for me as an amateur. My first chance to play in The Open Championship was here. I'll never forget I played with Ernie Els and Peter Jacobsen the first two days.

We had a chance to play with some greats in practise rounds -- Freddie, Raymond, Ollie, Langer. I had a great time as a young little kid, and they showed me the ropes of how to play this golf course and how many different options there were.

It was eye opening how this golf course can play as easily as it can be played and also as difficult it can play just by the wind changing. Obviously when the tide changes as well.

Just being here, I think this is my sixth Open Championship here, I think. Just to have that experience and have the ability to play here at the home of golf is always quite special. Then to have won it twice makes it that much more special.

Q. How are you feeling in terms of your body? And how close are you to this being kind of as good as it gets?

TIGER WOODS: Well, my body certainly can get better, but realistically, not a whole lot. It's been through a lot, and at 46 you don't quite heal as well as you do at 26.

So it is what it is. Just lucky enough to, in our sport, to be able to play as long as we are able to play late into the 40s, especially on links golf courses like this, you can continue into your 50s. We saw Tom have it on his putter to win late in his 50s.

So it can be done. It just takes a lot of knowledge and understanding of how to play this type of golf. And with the fairways being fast and firm, it allows players who are older to run the ball out there and have a chance.

Q. Tiger, just how different does it feel this time around, it

being The 150th Open and with so much emphasis on history this week?

TIGER WOODS: It really does. It feels more historic than it normally has. And it's hard to believe that because we are coming back to the home of golf. It is history every time we get a chance to play here.

But there's so much that's going on this week that to be able to play yesterday with Lee Buck and to hear him chatting the entire time over every shot as he's hitting the shot, and just to be able to have that type of experience. And tonight we're going to have our Champion's Dinner, because we only do it here.

It's hard to believe, it's been 150 years we've played this tournament. And it's incredible, the history behind it, the champions that have won here. As I said, it's hard to believe it's more historic, but it really is. It does feel like that. This does feel like it's the biggest Open Championship we've ever had.

Q. Just to follow up on that, obviously as a two-time Open winner, Greg Norman wasn't invited to all that is going on at the moment. I just wonder what your reaction to that decision was, Tiger.

TIGER WOODS: The R&A obviously have their opinions and their rulings and their decision. Greg has done some things that I don't think is in the best interest of our game, and we're coming back to probably the most historic and traditional place in our sport. I believe it's the right thing.

Q. Tiger, you've always said that this golf course is probably one of your most favourite golf courses.

TIGER WOODS: It is my favourite, yeah.

Q. It is?

TIGER WOODS: Yeah.

Q. Over the years and now, when you're playing, does that still give you that kind of challenge given all the advances with the ball, the equipment, or is it posing some new challenges?



TIGER WOODS: They've lengthened a few holes since I first played here in '95. And obviously they lengthened 8 this year. Yeah, I think every pot bunker has gotten a little bit deeper.

I remember, it's kind of funny when I look back at some of the historic videos of the guys playing out of the Road Hole bunker, and it really wasn't that deep. Now you can't see the grandstands when you get in there. All you see is clear, blue sky.

Yes, even with the advancements in technology, this golf course still stands the test of time. It's still very difficult, and it's obviously weather dependent. You get the winds like we did today, it's a helluva test.

On 10, I hit a 6-iron from 120 yards. It was blowing so hard. So you just don't get -- you just don't have opportunities to hit shots like that anywhere else. Then again, if you get a calm day on this golf course, you can see some players probably have four to five eagle putts.

It is weather dependent. The fairways, I think right now, are faster than the greens. So it's funny, when you hit some of the chip shots and some of the bump-and-runs, you have to allow more speed early, then play for breaks when they hit the green.

Again, with the amount of slope that's on these greens, if they get them too fast, it's unplayable when the wind gets up. We saw that when Louis won. We had a wind-out. We don't want that to happen. And it's understandable why they're a little bit on the slower side.

Q. After your accident, did you ever think that it would ever be possible that you'd be back here playing in The Open Championship at the home of golf? And because of that, does it make this the most special one yet?

TIGER WOODS: For the most part of my rehab I was just I was hoping that I could walk again, you know, walk normal and have a normal life and maybe play a little hit-and-giggle golf with my son or my friends at home.

But lo and behold, I've played championship golf this year. And once I realised that I could possibly play at a high level, my focus was to get back here at St Andrews to play in this championship being, as I said, it's the most historic one we've ever had. I just didn't want to miss this Open here at the home of golf.

This has meant so much to me. This is where I completed the career grand slam. At the time I had the record in scoring in all four major championships. So it meant a lot to me. This venue has meant a lot.

I remember coming around here, my very first practise round, I

couldn't believe how stupidly hard this place is because I played every hole into the wind. I happened to have the tide change, and I played every hole into the wind. Where do you drive some of these par-4s? This is not what people say it is. All of a sudden it changes, and I see, no, these bunkers are now in play.

It's amazing the ingenuity that they had then that this golf course has stood the test of time to the best players. And as long as we've gotten collectively as a field, this golf course is still a challenge.

Q. Tiger, you've played a lot of practise this week. Have you learned anything new about the golf course? And is there anything in particular you're trying to get dialled in out there?

TIGER WOODS: I'm just trying to get used to the speed of the fairways and getting used to hitting the ball down and also giving more wide berth on shots, allowing for more drift on the wind. The ball just gets eaten up here when you play on links courses and seaside courses. The air is heavier, and you've just got to give it more room.

And sometimes it's just hard to see that and hard to understand. You've got to give it a little more 30 yards because obviously it's going to bounce, it's going to roll and then it's going to roll out another 40 yards once it lands. And that's just with a 7-iron in your hand.

So trying to get my mind right for that, I've been trying to do that, but the only way you can truly do it actually is to get out here and experience it. Today was good. It was good to play in this much wind because I know the forecast isn't for this much wind for the rest of the week, but it was good to get my mind opened up for these type of golf shots that potentially I'm going to have to play.

Q. Tiger, there's been a lot of photos on the bridge yesterday with the gang and today with Erica and whatnot. Has it felt at all different because of where you've come from and because of the fact that we may not be here for another however many years when you go over that bridge? Secondly, what do you think your anticipation is of how you'll feel when you do walk over it for the last time on Sunday, for the week?

TIGER WOODS: I have a photo in my office when I first played my first practise round, and I have that in my office, me sitting there, and it means a lot. I mean, the history and the people that have walked over that bridge.

I tell you what, honestly, now I've got to be a little more careful with spikes on on that bridge. I don't quite have the agility that I used to. I almost ate it today.

Yesterday, to have Lee and Rory and Jack, and just stand there with them, that's history right there. Those guys are -- I watched them play this Open Championship, waking up, the telecast would come on at 5:00 a.m. on the West Coast to get a chance to watch them play and to see them hit the shots, and listen to Lee Buck talking about the small ball playing over here and what he used to do with it.

These are things -- and tonight, we're going to have these opportunities to talk about things like that, and that's what makes it so special.

Everyone has seemed to have made their farewell there. I got a chance to watch Arnold do it. Sorry. I watched Arnold hit his first tee shot on the second day in '95, and that was quite special. I was going on the range and just right down to time it up. Next thing you hear, I hear on the tee Ivor, I think he was announcing at the time -- "from USA, Arnold Palmer."

He gets up there and gives it the big ol' wobble and hits it up the middle of the fairway and his head is bobbing all over the place.

And seeing that, and I played probably about four or five holes behind Jack and Tom when Jack retired in '05. And hearing the roars get louder and louder and louder as we came towards the finish. You could hear the fans and the ovations that Jack got coming up 18 for the last time. And then the roar because obviously he made the putt. I mean, he wasn't going to miss that putt. We were talking about that yesterday. He claims he's never missed a putt. And I said, well -- that he can recall.

So it's great to be a part of this Open Championship. As I said, it feels more historic. And I'm looking forward to the challenge.

Q. Do you think you'll feel any different on Sunday? It could be seven years, six years until we're back here.

TIGER WOODS: Who knows? I don't know, if it is that long, whether I will be able to physically compete at this level by then. It's also one of the reasons why I wanted to play in this championship. I don't know what my career is going to be like.

As I told you, I'm not going to play a full schedule ever again. My body just won't allow me to do that. I don't know how many Open Championships I have left here at St Andrews, but I wanted this one. It started here for me in '95, and if it ends here in '22, it does. If it doesn't, it doesn't. If I get the chance to play one more, it would be great, but there's no guarantee.

Q. Tiger, if I may just come back to what you said about Greg. You said in your belief he has done things that are not in the best interest of the game. Can I ask what you mean by that? What falls under that criteria to you?

TIGER WOODS: I know what the PGA TOUR stands for and what we have done and what the TOUR has given us, the ability to chase after our careers and to earn what we get and the trophies we have been able to play for and the history that has been a part of this game.

I know Greg tried to do this back in the early '90s. It didn't work then, and he's trying to make it work now. I still don't see how that's in the best interests of the game. What the European Tour and what the PGA TOUR stands for and what they've done, and also all the professional -- all the governing bodies of the game of golf and all the major championships, how they run it. I think they see it differently than what Greg sees it.

Q. Tiger, it's been such a weird time in professional golf. I'm wondering if you're optimistic about the future of the game.

TIGER WOODS: I am. I'm very optimistic. We're in the greatest golf boom ever right now because of COVID. It's allowed us as a sport to get outside and be outside and to participate and do some physical activity and get out of the house and still not worry about COVID.

And so because of that, golf has been on an incline and on a boost that we've never seen before, and I hope it continues that way.

There's so many new, young golfers that are coming up. Just look at the TOUR, the average age is getting younger and younger, and they're just getting better earlier and faster and they're winning at earlier ages. I was always told that you don't peak until your late 20s, early 30s, but you're seeing guys win championships in early 20s now and doing it consistently.

So the game has gotten better, and it's only going to continue to get that way. I hope that we all understand that and continue the growth of the game in a positive way.

Q. Tiger, your run-up here this week has been pretty ambitious, certainly compared to the first two majors. What was your strategy coming in, and also what's the balance you have to maintain in terms of overdoing it or not preparing enough?

TIGER WOODS: Well, the difference is that I came here Saturday, and I didn't hit any balls. I just chipped and putted and walked. So really was no stress there. It was just try to get a feel, and J.T. and I went out there after dinner.

It's one of the neat things about coming out here. I stay at the Old Course Hotel, and I've gone out and putted a lot at 9:00 at night. I just go out to one of the greens, and I just putt.

It's neat to experience that, and to go out there with J.T., he's like my little brother. We just went out there and just had a great time.

Then Sunday I played 18. Yesterday I played nine. Today I played nine. So that was going to be it for me. I'll take tomorrow off. I'll practise, keep my feels. But I wanted to get a good sense of how the golf course is going to be playing but also conserve my energy, so that's why I'm taking tomorrow off.

Q. A two-parter for me, if I may. Firstly, on a personal level, I remember writing a story about you some years ago on The Open where you'd moved into your accommodation, and I think the only demand you'd made was for a plank of wood to go in your bed to help your back. I'm wondering with everything that's gone on since then whether there's anything else you're having to do these days because obviously the rest times to get you up and ready to get out on the course must be quite sophisticated now, perhaps. Secondly, just following on from the LIV and the Greg story, what's your perception of the guys who are being tempted to go over and play for the LIV? What is your message for them, or what do you think of those guys who are being tempted?

TIGER WOODS: Okay. That's a lot of questions.

(Laughter).

First one, right? Plank of wood, right? Yes, I prefer sleeping on firm mattresses for my back. Only difference is I just ask for a lot more ice now.

As far as the second part of your question about the players who have chosen to go to LIV and to play on -- to play there, I disagree with it. I think that what they've done is they've turned their back on what has allowed them to get to this position.

Some players have never got a chance to even experience it. They've gone right from the amateur ranks right into that organisation and never really got a chance to play out here and what it feels like to play a TOUR schedule or to play in some big events.

And who knows what's going to happen in the near future with world-ranking points, the criteria for entering major championships. The governing body is going to have to figure that out.

Some of these players may not ever get a chance to play in major championships. That is a possibility. We don't know that for sure yet. It's up to all the major championship bodies to make that determination. But that is a possibility, that some

players will never, ever get a chance to play in a major championship, never get a chance to experience this right here, walk down the fairways at Augusta National.

That, to me, I just don't understand it. I understand what Jack and Arnold did because playing professional golf at a TOUR level versus a club pro is different, and I understand that transition and that move and the recognition that a touring pro versus a club pro is.

But what these players are doing for guaranteed money, what is the incentive to practise? What is the incentive to go out there and earn it in the dirt? You're just getting paid a lot of money up front and playing a few events and playing 54 holes. They're playing blaring music and have all these atmospheres that are different.

I just don't see how, out of 54 holes -- I can understand 54 holes is almost like a mandate when you get to the Senior Tour. The guys are little bit older and a little more banged up. But when you're at this young age and some of these kids -- they really are kids who have gone from amateur golf into that organisation -- 72-hole tests are part of it. We used to have 36-hole playoffs for major championships. That's how it used to be -- 18-hole U.S. Open playoffs.

I just don't see how that move is positive in the long term for a lot of these players, especially if the LIV organisation doesn't get world-ranking points and the major championships change their criteria for entering the events.

It would be sad to see some of these young kids never get a chance to experience it and experience what we've got a chance to experience and walk these hallowed grounds and play in these championships.

Q. Tiger, you've said throughout this comeback that golf is not the hard part, it's walking. Obviously Augusta is a super tough walk, and you struggled physically at Southern Hills. How are you finding your body responding to this walk compared to those two?

TIGER WOODS: It's still not easy. Granted the inclines are not steep in any way. They're not -- the declines are not steep. But it's the unevenness that is still difficult on me. I have a lot of hardware in my leg. So it is what it is. It's going to be difficult.

Yes, the walk is certainly a lot easier than those two championships that I played in before this year. I'm able to walk a lot more holes. Also, then again, I've gotten a lot stronger since then. I spend more time now that I've gotten a chance to work in the weight room and get stronger and get the endurance better in my leg.

Playing Augusta, I didn't know. My leg was not in any

condition to play 72 holes. It just ran out of gas. But it's different now. It's gotten a lot stronger, a lot better. Hopefully it will continue to get that way. But again, as I said, having a lot of hardware in there makes it a little bit of a challenge.

Q. Tiger, understanding your physical state and, as you say, the very limited schedule going forward, what have you learned this year about the challenge of playing so little? In terms of sharpness, in terms of TOUR golf, month off, playing again. What's been the biggest challenge?

TIGER WOODS: The biggest challenge is I'm not playing tournament golf to get tournament ready for the majors. I'm not hitting shots in tournaments to know what works and what doesn't work. I've had to do that at home. Yes, I can do that. I can do that at home to a certain extent, but it certainly is a lot better when I'm able to play tournament golf to feel tournament hardened coming into these big events.

But that's no longer my future. I'm not going to be able to do that again. So this is what my future is, a very limited schedule. I'm going to have to somehow figure out a way to practise at home efficiently and come to these events maybe just a little bit earlier and get more looks and try to get a better feel for it, and really trust what I'm doing because I hadn't proven it to myself in any other tournaments prior to this.

Hey, just the fact that I was able to play Augusta when I just started weight bearing six weeks prior to the event, that to me was quite an accomplishment. Then Tulsa was another accomplishment. So this whole year has been something that I'm very proud of that I'm able to have gotten to this point with my team to get here to where I've been able to play in these tournaments when it looked like I would never have this opportunity ever again.

Q. The history of the game has always been a very important part of your golfing development, I feel, because you've always appreciated it. Do you think that young kids who are planning to be the next Tiger on the golf course take this into account, or are they just too much all about golf?

TIGER WOODS: In what way? I'm trying to understand.

Q. The fact that you love the history of the game, and the modern kid probably couldn't tell you the first thing about who won what before Tiger.

TIGER WOODS: Well, I think it's different. I guess nowadays you can just look it up on your phone. And you don't have to go to the library and try and figure out who won what. You can just look it up on your phone, and the world has changed dramatically.

The history of the game is certainly something that I've taken to

heart. I think it's a very important part of understanding the development of our game, where we've come from, especially for me, for a person who's had to struggle at times for admittance into clubhouses or onto golf courses.

So I understand it from a different historical side too as well. But you have to appreciate everything about this game, how it's developed, and the people who have paved the way to allow us to play in these events, who created the energy behind it.

The first time golf was ever on TV was Arnold Palmer making a birdie-birdie finish to win. What he did for our sport TV-wise was incredible. Then I came along right when the Internet hit, so that took it to another level.

Now these kids are dealing with so much information at a younger age. I hope they appreciate it, and I hope they do understand it.

There's so many great champions, like yesterday for instance, that were out there, that I hope a lot of these -- some of these kids who were watching at home got a chance to appreciate that, to see them playing out there.

I saw Bob Charles out there on 18 hitting. I think he won in '63 or something like that. Just to be able to see that in person, live, God, it was just so special. I just hope the kids appreciate that.

Q. Does your son appreciate the past?

TIGER WOODS: He does. He understands the history of the game because I make it important to understand where this game has come from and also his heritage, where he's come from. He's come from a very mixed background. So just understanding where you come from and understanding this game, how hard I had to work to get to where I was at. I had to earn it every step of the way.

Nothing's ever given to you. You have to go out there and earn it, and I earned it through the dirt. I'm very proud of that.

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