

The 150th Open

Mixed Zone

Thursday, 14 July 2022

Danny Willett



DANNY WILLETT: Lovely 3-wood straight down it. Got a nice straight bounce and a little cheeky 35-footer and straight in the middle. So nice way to finish.

Q. How exciting is it to do it on the 18th in front of the big gallery?

DANNY WILLETT: Yeah, I've never done that before in here. It's always a pretty good hit, I think, during the Dunhill. With the wind, there's not a different way around it. To get it downwind like we have the last few days, you can see some of them. Obviously with the front flag, it makes it tricky.

Q. How would you reflect on your round as a whole?

DANNY WILLETT: We had two bad drives that cost us, 12 and 17. 17 we got away with in fairness. I made a good 4 down there.

But yeah, 12 really killed the momentum that we kind of nicely had going on the front nine. But played -- you know, we missed two greens, missed three fairways, a couple of fairways, I think. We had a lot of putts. But it's hard to get it really close to all these flags.

So you've got to get your pace pretty good and get lucky on a few. Yeah, all in all I'd say it was pretty good.

Q. You're in the hunt with this score?

DANNY WILLETT: Yeah, you know. What is it, still probably an hour and a half, two hours of tee times. So it's always a strange one at The Open when you get the first two days and yeah, you're in a nice position, and all of a sudden if the wind lays or something happens and guys can go crazy on the golf course.

But yeah, it's a thrill on a Thursday in a major to finish that kind of score, that kind of position, you've kind of done your bit for the day. And you can set yourself up nicely for the week.

Q. The greens here are so big. I'm curious, how have you refined your approach to them since 2015? Have you changed your thinking about them at all or just sharpened it up?

DANNY WILLETT: No, the greens are running really well actually. So notoriously around here they can be a little slow because the wind gets up. But I think with the forecast being good, they've really been able to get the golf course in really good shape.

The greens are probably the quickest you'd be able to have them within reason. They're firm. They're running at 10-ish, which again for links courses is pretty quick. They're running really true.

But yeah, they are huge. They are huge greens. But actually there's like two or three real defined sections on each of them. Barring a couple, 5 and 13 back is a huge pretty flat green, but apart from that, you need to section them off pretty well. And hitting into the sections, otherwise, you can see some really funky, 40, 50 footers.

So they are big greens, but if you're obviously going to try and do well and play correctly, you need to narrow your focus and try to pick out what section you're trying to hit it into.

Q. What is it about this place that you seem to enjoy so much?

DANNY WILLETT: A bit of history. I think it's just good fun. You can just cleverly golf your ball around this place. You can hit certain shots that you wouldn't ordinarily hit. You're trying to use the wind to soften the flight. You're playing your round of golf a lot. You're not just standing there hitting the same shot time and time again.

You see a lot of different approaches down different holes. Guys hitting anything from 4-irons to drivers, depends on what they see, what shot shape they hit. And so I think it lends itself to real nice shot-making and nice visualization. You can run it up to certain flags like 17. Some guys trying to spin it and hold it softly against the wind. There's just lots of things you can do.

I think notoriously if you look back at the Opens around this place, they're very, very good winners.

Real good ball-strikers, good flight. People can fly the ball really well. It's just a nice shotmaker's golf course.



Q. You had a good run seven years ago, didn't you, what do you remember of that?

DANNY WILLETT: I remember I played with Zach on Sunday -- well, Monday. And we both played really average on the front nine downwind and lost a few shots and played brilliantly back into the wind, both of us hitting it, controlling our ball flight pretty low back then into the wind on the back nine and both, I think I came back in probably 1-, 2-under, which picked up a lot of shots, and he came back in 3 or 4.

And I remember giving him a nice read on 18 and him rolling it in. I missed mine and he rolled his in. That ultimately got him into the playoff where he managed to come through.

Q. Where do you feel your game is at the minute? Hasn't been the easiest of years?

DANNY WILLETT: No. Yeah, you know what, we're working hard and it's on and off. Things are good. Things are bad. It's just -- always seems to be a little bit roller coaster. We're trying to get the ball flight under a bit more control. Hit a couple of shots I don't like. I hit a couple of them today. So just keep kind of grinding through that and see.

But it's always nice to come back to a place where you don't have to necessarily hit it perfect around here, but you just have to be smart and clever at the right time to try and pick off a few birdies. It's always nice to be able to feel your way around a golf course you know pretty well.

Q. The women are playing the championship at Muirfield for the first time obviously in Muirfield's history. How cool is it to for them to have the opportunity to play that?

DANNY WILLETT: It is. Golf's a real old game, and there's still a few traditions in there that will change over the next decade and I'm sure they're trying to change and now obviously playing at Muirfield.

Yes, the best in the ladies of golf to never experience it, that would be harsh. That place is a fantastic golf course. We had great fun when we played The Open there when Phil won in -- '13?

Q. Yeah, you were top 15?

DANNY WILLETT: Yes. It's a phenomenal golf course. It's nice they got the opportunity, and they're going to get a great winner there.

Q. Any advice for the ladies as they get ready for that particular course?

DANNY WILLETT: All depends how it plays. When we

played there, it was potentially firmer than this. I remember that. That week was ridiculous, how firm. The golf course was yellow from Monday onwards, I think. So just don't hit it in the bunkers, like around this place.

Q. Hit a lot of greens, just really keep it in front of you?

DANNY WILLETT: Same as anything, really, just hit it as good as you can.

Q. What did you think of the pins today? Were they tough?

DANNY WILLETT: They were probably what they have to be. And I think you'll probably continue to see tricky ones. It was actually a couple that were relatively nice. 16 I made a mess of, but actually with where the wind is, it's quite a nice flag, middle right.

Yeah, they have to. Unfortunately for them we've had quite a lot of wind the last three days, and then today's been probably at least half. So you're going to get guys going to have a lot -- you'll have two short irons into the par-5s, and you'll be able to drive it on probably two or three of the holes if you take driver.

And so they're going to have to sneak their pins a little bit to try and curtail the score, if that's what they want to do. If not, I think The R&A are not bothered really. They just let it play out as it is.

Regardless of where the pins are and how it is, you've still got to be on the fairway to control your spin, and the greens are still firming up. And I presume they'll let them get firmer as the week goes on. So come Saturday, Sunday, this place could play extremely firm.

Q. Are there any pin positions you hadn't seen out there before? Paul Lawrie was saying on 10 or...

DANNY WILLETT: Yes. 52. 52 out on 10, yeah. You don't look at your pin sheet and see 101 from 153 flag very often. But then, by the same token, at some point this week I'm sure guys will have 210 front on 5 and have 300 pin.

It's the nature of this place. That's what makes it pretty cool. We're in the home of golf. With it in as good a condition as it is, it enables the guys to do whatever they want.

They could keep the score really low and soften it up for us and kind of tuck the pins and see if guys can shoot a good score. Or they keep it firm and keep it tricky and kind of try (indiscernible) it that way. No one really knows it. It's up to them.

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