

The 151st Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 18 July 2023

Collin Morikawa



OLIVIA McMILLAN: Ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be joined by 2021 Open Champion Collin Morikawa. Thank you so much for joining us.

You've had a few days here at Hoylake now, and you've really got a good look at Royal Liverpool. What have been your impressions?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, I've enjoyed it a lot. The course is in front of you. There's not really many blind tee shots, not many blind approaches, a few coming on the back nine, but everything is in front of you.

Obviously they've always talked about staying out of the bunkers, but it's really true. It's a shot penalty if you hit it in these fairway bunkers. So that's step number one this week is to stay out of as many fairway bunkers as possible, and then hopefully give ourselves some birdie opportunities.

There are some short holes out here where you're able to hit a wedge into some greens, and you're going to have to be able to take advantage of some of those and the par-5s.

Q. I believe in your preparations you've also went and took a look at Birkdale, where of course The Open will be going shortly. What were your thoughts over there?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I actually loved it. It was one of my first -- I haven't played much links golf, but it was probably one of my first links golf that I've truly loved.

St Andrews was amazing last year, but this was just really fun to play. You could see how the course was just kind of found within these dunes and within the hills, and just loved it from start to finish.

Q. You, like Wyndham Clark, won a major championship without having the experience of being in the heat of battle before in a major championship. I was just wondering, what have you learned since, insight into what special thing you did and Wyndham did, but also since you've played major championships, just how difficult is it to convert a really good opportunity?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Majors test everything. I think if you

compare me winning for the first time and Wyndham winning for the first time without playing that specific major per se, it just comes down to believing in yourself really. That's how you get to the top of the level. That's how you get to where you want to be.

Whether it's the PGA TOUR or whatever it is, that's how you get there. You first have to believe in yourself, but everything has to go your way.

The way things line up, you have to have that lucky bounce or you have to have that lucky break or the tee shot go your way, and you can always kind of pinpoint it to like one or two shots, whether it's Saturday or Sunday coming down, things just go your way.

When you're playing well and you're in contention, you get those breaks, and it's just being able to pull off the shots when it matters the most.

I think Wyndham, what was it, Saturday on 18 pulled off that shot on the 18th hole out of the fairway and hit it to 10 feet and made the putt.

That's the difference of being in that final group and finishing it off like that versus not being in the final group. It's a different setting. It all has to line up.

But really just starting to believing in yourself and really knowing that you can do it.

Q. Is it true that your first links experience was the week before you won at the Scottish Open?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yep.

Q. How did you adapt so quickly? Do you feel like you're still learning?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I am still learning, but I think I've played enough now to know what I need to do.

I think I was playing really well heading into the Scottish that year, in '21, and felt like I was playing better than the scores posted.



Whole story, blamed it on my irons, changed to different irons, figured it out.

But I think you have to just learn how to control your golf ball out here, and not just height but also control spin. I think going back to last year, I remember Jordan talking about creativity. Creativity is the biggest thing out here, but also knowing how creative you can be, not getting really stupid with it, but being able to hit your shots, flight it where you want, hit your windows, and I think that's why you see some great players and you see a lot of good players come out of Open Championship wins is because they have to be able to create different shots.

Especially out here, how 1 through 9 kind of goes out, comes back. You're going to have a prevailing wind I think for the first few days off the left coming off that back nine. Being able to control your golf ball, hitting shots, whether it's drawing it up into that or playing the wind and staying out of those bunkers.

Q. Curious, most club golfers would open the curtains this morning and cancel their tee time. How do you go about preparing when conditions are like this on a practice day, and is there any part of the weather when it's like this that sort of spoils the occasion for you?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: No. We could be playing in the rain. It's not really raining that hard out there. We've seen way worse.

At the end of the day you've got to get your prep in, whether it's saying it out here a little later. I mean, what's great is that the sun stays out for quite a while out here so you can play at 6:00 p.m. and get done in a couple hours.

No, but I decided to go out early. It was gorgeous this morning, got in 18 holes, done with practice now, and I can go relax for the rest of the afternoon.

Q. How do you assess the last two years since Royal St. George's, and how much do you feel like you need a big week at the last major of the year, especially with it being a Ryder Cup year?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I would love a big week. Obviously the goal is to win. That's what it is every week. Ryder Cup is obviously a huge goal of mine and has been for the past two years, especially turning into the beginning of this year, and it still is. That's a really big goal of mine.

But winning takes care of everything.

I would say the last two years have been interesting, not the way I would have guessed it would have gone two years ago,

but that's golf and that's life. You really don't know what to expect. It's really about learning and truly learning about it.

To really realise the steps that I took, would I have changed anything, would I have done anything different? Maybe a couple things, but it's all about putting that game plan together, refining things, knowing what you're going to do, and I think I've kind of done that and gotten better.

Being in contention two weeks ago was the best feeling, walking down those last nine holes, it felt like it was just back to normal. It didn't feel like it was out of the norm. It just felt like, man, we're here to make birdies, we're here to win the tournament. The playoff didn't go the way I wanted, but it just felt comfortable.

To know that that's still there, that's the best feeling.

Yes, absolutely I do want to be back on top. I know it's going to come. I don't know when. Hopefully this week. But it's going to happen. It's just putting everything together, hitting the right shots, and like I said earlier, having things go your way, so hopefully it's this week.

Q. You're a past champion; this tournament has the richest heritage in golf, and yet year after year there's a semantic battle that goes on. The tournament clearly wants to be known as The Open, but some insist on calling it the British Open. Where do you land on that, and why do you think that semantic discussion goes on year after year?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I definitely called it the British Open the year I won and then people gave me hate for it, so then I called it The Open last year, but I played better when I called it the British Open, so I might call it the British Open.

But obviously British pertains to certain parts of Europe, but I guess -- I'm not too good with this whole geography, world stuff.

I think people understand whether you say British Open or The Open. At the end of the day if you win it you can call it whatever the hell you want.

Q. 2006 Tiger won over here, very famously just using the driver once. Rory won over here using his driver several times and to great effect. What do you think is the perfect strategy to play this golf course then?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Whatever allows you to win.

I watched some video from when Tiger won in '06. It was as brown as could be and dry as could be out there, right, and like that was his strategy, but he also had a lot of mid to long irons in.

I think that's a mix. Even today with no wind I was hitting 3-iron, 3-wood, driver. I hit every club off the tee. It's going to be a mix.

It really is how much you want to take on the bunkers, how aggressive you want to be off the tee. Is that going to give you a 9-iron versus a 6-iron. Out here, it could be the shot penalty that costs you that momentum swing one way or the other. It could be for your benefit, or it could be the other way.

I think it's a blend of certain ways. A guy like Rory, how far he hits it, yes, he's going to be carrying some bunkers that I can't carry, so he might be playing a little different strategy.

For me it's really to stay away, plot my way around this golf course, and take advantage of certain holes where I might have a wedge in.

Q. You switched things up this year, skipping the Scottish. What was the thinking behind that?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I mean, look, I gave credit two years ago, and I still do. I don't take anything away from that, but I just haven't played well the past two years, I was like screw it. Why not get some extra prep, come out here early, get ready, get adjusted.

So we played some great golf courses. I was able to play Walton Heath where they're having the Women's Open or the British -- whatever it's called. So that was a lot of fun.

Played West Lancashire Saturday.

Played Royal Birkdale on Sunday.

So I got some really good prep in aside from --even though tournament golf you can never trade that in. It was a well-needed kind of two weeks off, get some prep in, and feels great to come into this major.

Q. When you say we, was it a buddy's trip?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I did some buddies, some college friends that live in London on Sunday. Played with my agent all three days. Had my caddie and J.J. and Stephen Sweeney, my putting coach, play on the weekend Saturday and Sunday, so we had a lot of fun.

Q. You finished second early in the year in Hawai'i, second just a couple weeks ago in Detroit. What was the difference in how you felt coming off that last green at those two tournaments?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: Yeah, I mean, pretty deflated I'd say in

Hawai'i knowing that I gave it away. Jon played really well. You can't take that away. I think he shot 10-under that last day in Hawai'i. But I also gave him a few shots to give him a little bit of a cushion let's call it where I had to make up the last three holes, which I didn't.

But what I did in Detroit two weeks ago kind of felt like -- I think a lot of my wins from come from behind, if not all of them, where it just felt like, man, we could get to the top, we can post a number, we can be in the lead.

But it sucks. I was happy for Rickie. Rickie has been playing amazing golf. But I truly thought I hit an amazing putt, a perfect putt, what I thought was a perfect putt, and perfect putts don't always go in, a perfect putt on 18 in regulation.

And I never walk off shots, but I thought the shot on 18 in the playoff was also perfect. But that's what's great is it did exactly what I wanted. It's not always going to turn out that way, but in situations like that when you can pull off a shot you're seeing or pull off the shot you and your caddie are talking about, that's all you can ask for.

Whether that could have been a foot shorter and it would have spun all the way back, that's a game of what-ifs. But it gave me a lot of confidence kind of heading into this really last push of the season, heading into the Playoffs, that the game and everything is still there.

I just had to take out the left side of the golf course, get rid of those left misses. I forgot about our bet. I'm not going to tell you what I worked on. I didn't win.

But yeah, it's good to take out one side of the golf course and swing freely. It really was.

Q. You've talked an awful lot about the positivity and momentum of winning the Rocket Mortgage. If you combine that with the fact that this is obviously still a happy place and happy tournament for you and you won it so brilliantly two years ago, how much do you then tap into that Claret Jug on top of what you've just said to really try and win this and really compete hard this week?

COLLIN MORIKAWA: I think all the wins in the past and all the knowledge you get from those you tap into, and -- you don't tap into it, it just comes and it flows into your body and everything of the routine when you're really on that Sunday in contention.

Everything else for me Thursday through Saturday is just all the prep. Everything I've learned in the four years I've been a pro and even before that on just what I need to do to get myself in contention.



I would say I don't have to tell myself to do this or do that. It just happens, and how do I get that started Thursday morning on that first tee shot. Like I want to be ready on Thursday, not be ready hopefully by Sunday.

Q. Seeing all of this around you has got to maybe have an extra slight edge in dimension, as well, after what you did so wonderfully.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: To be honest, not really. I was able to go to Wimbledon on Thursday, and it's cool to take something in as a fan and do something that -- I'm never going to be playing on centre court. I never will. I know I won't.

But when we're here it's just pretty normal. We show up, I go to my locker, go out there, go practice, go home. It's pretty routine. It's pretty boring, but it's routine for us.

Yes, it is The Open. It is another Open. It is our last major. But it's just another week, and that's how I treat it.

I put everything I can into this week, but at the end of the day I'm not really changing anything. Yes and no to that answer.

Q. I think I'm right in saying you're playing with Max and Tyrrell for the first two rounds. Tyrrell is obviously a home player and someone I think a lot of fans would like to play a round of golf with. Can you talk about what he's like to share the course with, and how much or how little do you really engage with guys that you're playing with? He's someone that is quite effusive and I guess quite talkative on the course as well.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: This might be one of my favourite pairings I've ever had. Max obviously because I've gotten very close with him. I call him a really, really good friend and he's obviously a lot of fun to play with.

But Tyrrell, when people as me who I like to play with I say his name because it's entertaining. It's enjoyable. But it's no hate against you. He doesn't disrupt you. He doesn't slow you down. We're fast players.

His caddie, Mick, is also incredible. You ask that question, I mean, we literally talked about it 20 minutes ago at lunch with my caddie. It truly is one of the best pairings I could ask for.

I enjoy it. He's a lot of fun. He's never really that negative. He'll talk to you at any point, even if he is mad. We've seen a lot of those moments.

But he is a really good guy. He does have a good time, but he's very professional in a sense of like respecting his other playing partners for sure.

Q. I think the rain might change this a little bit, but I was just wondering how penal the rough is out there.

COLLIN MORIKAWA: It's spotty. Some places are really bad. Some places you can get a really good lie. Obviously if it's wet, it changes a lot.

There's some spots out there where you might be chipping out sideways but also a foot away the ball might be sitting up and you might be able to go for the green. Things got to go your way.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Thank you very much for your time today. Wish you the best of luck this week.

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