

The 152nd Open

Press Conference

Wednesday, 17 July 2024

Tommy Fleetwood



LIV MCMILLAN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to introduce Tommy Fleetwood to the interview room. Tommy, thanks for joining us. Here for the 152nd Open, of course. How have preparations been going?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, good. It's been nice to see the course with really nice weather for the past three days.

I was here in 2016, but I remember so little about it. It was really good to get out there and play. The Open is always such a busy week with a really good atmosphere, even on the practice days. So just getting into the swing of things and getting into the mix of that has been great.

Q. Two golf course questions for you. One, thoughts on the Postage Stamp. I saw you hit a sand wedge there today. And then how many people have asked you how to play Le Golf National, and how much do you anticipate that will be happening?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I think the majority of the best par-3s in the world, there's very few that are over 150 yards, and I think the Postage Stamp is probably one of those. I think it should be a simple wedge shot, but it doesn't always work out that way.

I think the punishment for lack of concentration or a slightly bad shot is obviously very severe, but I think that's what makes it so -- you know, one of those unique holes and one of those that will keep people talking all the time.

Yeah, I think it's a fantastic hole because also there's a huge amount of acceptance that goes into not trying to stiff a 100-yard shot really.

I think that along with holes like the 12th at Augusta, they're all like a mental game as well with you where you feel like you probably should be able to do better, but a 3 is a good score.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to the Olympics. I've been very hit-and-miss with Le Golf National over the years, but I have had my good times. I think, yeah, focus on those. So excited to qualify again and go and play on a course that I've played a lot of rounds on.

I haven't been there for a few years now, but I think going there with a lot of -- similar to the Ryder Cup. I think I remember playing the Ryder Cup there and it was my first one. I sort of drew on all the familiar things of having played the golf course and the people that you play with.

Nobody's really asked me anything yet, so I'll just keep still until then.

Q. Every year you come back to the Open, another year of waiting for an English winner. This week after the Euros final, obviously England looking for a boost. Is that something you'd love to do, to bring a bit of joy back to this country?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, well both individually and for the country, I guess. I would look to -- I love this tournament so much, and it has been a long time since there's been an English winner.

Like from an individual standpoint, I love the tournament and the times that I've been in contention here and the support I've always had and what the tournament means to me. I've always loved those times and looked back on those with a lot of fond memories really. So I always get excited about coming to play this tournament.

Yeah, sure, if it came to it and that was something that gave the country a little boost, then great.

Yeah, we did great in the football. It was a shame in the end, but still I think the excitement surrounding it was great for everyone.

Q. Can I ask you about Scottie winning six times at this point in the year. As a fellow player and competitor, can you articulate how difficult that is and how impressive that number of victories at this point is?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, I'd be happy with one. He's the best player in the world, and I think, as far as fellow players, I guess, I think he's great for us in terms of somebody that we want to catch up to and watch him and be motivated by what he's doing.

He's having the most incredible season, and I think winning six



times as well as being up there in contention as many times as he has been, as consistently as he has been over the last two years, is phenomenal golf in a game that is as unpredictable as it gets in a way.

I think especially with like -- I say it all the time. I think the standard is getting higher and higher and higher and the margins are getting smaller and smaller and smaller. To be up there all the time, and on top of that, to go on a win streak the way he has is incredible really. It's amazing.

Like I said, from a player's standpoint, I think having someone like that to chase and to look up to and to drive you forward is a great thing for us.

Q. Just a couple questions. Players the last few weeks have been asked about where the gold medal ranks in a career. Do you compare it to a Claret Jug or like another major or another tournament? It's not a traditional sport, I suppose, so I wonder in your mind where a gold medal ranks in the game.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: So I think from my generation upwards we never had the Olympics as something that we would ever dream of winning. For us, with it not being an Olympic sport for the majority of our childhood, that's something we would never aim for, so I think it would only be natural for us to not necessarily think about it or hold it on a pedestal just while it's started.

But I think the Olympics for me is sport in its purest form. I think it's the most amazing event in the world. I think over time, I think now for kids growing up that will watch the Olympics, watch golf in the Olympics, the last two gold medal winners in Justin and Xander, I think are fantastic for the game. I'm pretty sure kids will start growing up dreaming a bit.

Who knows if it will go in level with a major or above majors or below, I don't know. I know that for me it obviously came in later than majors for me. When I grew up, I was always practicing on the range as an 8-year-old, 9-year-old, 10-year-old, I wanted to win The Open. The putts that I holed were to win The Open or to win the Masters. That was just what I grew up with, so that was natural.

But if I was to win a gold medal, it would go there alongside any other achievement I've ever had. It really is special, and it is the most special sporting event in the world, I think. I think for us, yeah, we just didn't grow up with that, but I'm sure kids will from now on, and it will be very high.

Q. Finally, how would you rank your top three Open rota golf courses?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: What would I rank as the top three?

Q. Yeah, maybe your top three favourite.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Well, I would obviously pick the two at home, so I'd have Birkdale and Hoylake. That's just me from a personal standpoint and the support that I get at those. Then you can't name a top three without St Andrews probably.

That's just me. I grew up in Southport, so Birkdale can never not be on it. St Andrews can never not be on it. And Hoylake, the memories that I have there and it being so close to home, I can't ever pick any other three.

Q. Ian is back on the bag for you. When something like that happens to a person who's so close to you, so young, what kind of perspective for life changes for you?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I'm wondering if caddieing for me caused him any issues and gave him heart problems. Look, yeah, it was pretty -- it was a bit of a shock, and I think it does put things into perspective.

I spoke to him most days through the whole process, if you like. Ian's obviously very close to me, and he's much more than a caddie to me. So I think caring about him first and more than anything and his family was -- that always came first.

For him to have got back this quick, I told him I didn't think he had a chance really of caddieing in these events, so it's amazing that he's got back and done so well, and see how determined and motivated he was really to get back to normal life. He's done amazing.

I think for him it's been really cool, just the messages of support that he had, people from the Tour and everything texted him quite a lot. I think it was really lovely for him to see just how popular he is and what impact he's had on a lot of people.

I think for everything, he's back now and he's great and he's done amazing and he's healthy, but I think that side of things was really cool for him, and I feel great for him that he's come through it.

Q. From an amateur's point of view, I was thinking that maybe after The Open is the time that he comes back on the bag for you, but he did that almost two weeks before that time. How important is it for you to have him on the bag this week?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Well, I've obviously had him on the bag for a very long time, and having him back feels great. I think last week felt very normal, felt very comfortable, and I think when you've had someone by your side for that long, I don't think like a three-month period has a huge effect on the way that you've always worked.

Yeah, it's great to have him back. He loves The Open, and we've done well in this event in prior years. So just being back to work together and going out tomorrow is very exciting, and it will be great. It's great to have him back.

Q. What did you most miss not having him those three months?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: It was quieter. I think every experience that I've had on a golf course for the last eight years, he's been there to experience it with me. It just becomes so comfortable, becomes so normal. Obviously when that changes, the way that you work -- I was unbelievably lucky with the guys that stepped in and caddied for me over that time, over those three months.

Obviously, it's different. I think you, whether it be majors, whatever it will be, I think you have a certain way of working, and you go through a routine every day, and he wasn't there really for it. That was the main thing. I think just the routine of it all, conversations that would just be about a certain shot that I might not think about normally, you either talk differently about it or I have to figure out on my own, things like that. That was it mainly.

Q. What is your level of frustration, scale of 1 to 10, say, in not having won for a while?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I try not to dwell on it too much. I get frustrated like anybody else. I get down on myself like anybody else. I don't win anywhere near as much as I would like, and I'm probably not sort of in a position in the game where I want to be, even though I'm doing perfectly well. It's not where I believe I can be, and the results don't always show that.

Like I said, I try not to dwell on it. I try to focus on positives and what I need to do to actually get to where I want to be or contend in tournaments and win tournaments. I try to focus on that every day, but yeah, to be sure, the game's annoying. Even when you play well, you come off frustrated because you might have missed a putt or you might have finished a shot or two behind where you thought you could.

You always start a new week fresh, and I try to focus on that as much as possible really.

Q. Just picking up on that, Tommy, have there been any particular technical or maybe psychological focuses to get yourself over the hump a bit more because you put yourself in so many great positions and you play a lot of great golf without those results.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: No. I think, as sports people, we try

to reinvent ourselves every single day. There's always different things you're trying.

Honestly, I've been playing really, really well this year, and I actually haven't been in contention that much. I think one of those things is the standard of golf, I think the margins for error, and I think that's why I think it's unbelievably impressive what Scottie has been doing. I haven't actually been in contention much this year. I've had decent results without amazing results.

But I feel like I've been playing sort of as well as I have done in the past, just without it quite happening. I think the first step for me will be getting into those positions, starting tournaments a bit hotter.

Even last week in Scotland, I got very, very close to being in contention, and that kind of just slipped away in sort of one hole on 18 on Saturday and kind of naturally just struggled a bit on Sunday, but I was never quite sort of there where I could get into the mix of things and feel that pressure.

Just continuously for me trying to -- the hardest thing, I think, for all of us is dealing with our own expectations. Everybody's is going to be high, but dealing with that in the best way possible and going out with that accepting attitude, continue to work hard, and eventually, hopefully it will all come together.

I've been doing a lot of good things and just being that sort of step or two behind so far this year, but who knows if that changes this week.

Q. Obviously last year everyone was so desperate for to you do well with it being home for you. Is it liberating this time to not have the home pressure? Would you have advice for the likes of Bob MacIntyre and the other Scottish guys about the pressure and expectation of it being your home?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I think being at home brings its own pressures. I think you put it on yourself as much as anything. You want to do well so badly. It does mean that bit more to you.

No matter what anybody says when it's that close to you and it has such an emotional connection to you, it does mean a bit more. At the same time, it's one of the best times in your life. When do you ever get that kind of support and a crowd picking you up whether it's going good or bad and carrying you as much as they can do?

The receptions that you get throughout the whole round honestly is the most special thing. I'm so lucky to get to experience that. I think -- yeah, just always keep that in mind really because it is, it's amazing to play a tournament so close to

home, and it being The Open as well and the support that you get. I just look back on it with a lot of happy memories, and I enjoyed it a lot.

Q. Just to follow up on British winners of the Open. I wonder if you have any sort of explanation as to why you think that it may be 25 years since, why you think it may be.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Don't know because we've had a lot of good players, and it just doesn't seem to happen. Who knows if one breaks through and then there comes a flood of British winners. I think you look at tournaments that didn't quite go the way of some British players in the past. I think there's definitely guys that have done enough and it just didn't happen. It's just one of those strange runs, I feel like, that hopefully finishes sooner rather than later.

Yeah, it's a strange one because you think for all of us we grow up, especially on the amateur circuit, playing a lot of links golf, and we've had some phenomenal golfers over the years.

I guess it's one tournament a year, so you get one opportunity a year. It's not that easy. There's always a lot of great golfers. But it's hard. You can't really put any rhyme or reason to it. It's just the way it's been.

Like I say, hopefully that streak can end and we can put it right.

Q. Just wondering how you get still motivated after 14 years of being a professional player.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I still love golf. I think golf is my absolute favourite thing to do, and I still -- I don't believe that I've reached my potential at all in what I can do. I think I'm still very driven by that.

I still wake up every day and want to be the best player I can be, and I still want to find things that will make me better and what I can improve on. There's still so many tournaments that I enjoy playing, tournaments that I want to win.

Yeah, until -- I'm sure one day I might wake up and might not have the same enthusiasm for it, but it's never left me yet, and it continues. I'll wake up tomorrow excited to play The Open. Whether I play good or bad, I might be disappointed, but I'll probably want to go and practice afterwards and see if I can get better.

Yeah, like I say, it's still my favourite thing to do. I love the game.

Q. You mentioned how you feel the standard of play has risen and that's margins of error have shrunk. I'm curious from a player's perspective, like where that evidence exists? When you say that, what comes to mind as an example of

that is the margins getting tinier, that is the standard raising.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I feel like when I -- I could be completely wrong. It's obviously always just a sense that you get. This year -- so we haven't actually played this year. There's been a lot of events without a cut, which is fine. But I still think you get some courses that are unbelievably difficult, and the cut is the one that impresses me the most because I think last year Quail Hollow might have been a 2-under cut. I mean, it's ridiculous that 65 players have shot better than 2-under over two days. I think that's quite often more impressive than the winning score.

Then you might get a course that's scorable, and you look at the winning score at John Deere or where 10th place was. I just think that on the most difficult courses, I think that the bottom end is better, so the bad scores aren't that bad and it's very easy to shoot a bad score, very easy to make bogeys. When you get a course that's more scorable, I think the scoring goes through the roof.

I think you look at a lot of the amateurs coming through and you look at how ready they seem to be to play on the Tour. I think that's just an example of the strength and depth and the amount of players that are able to compete and just ready to take your spot at any given time.

Yeah, I think there's obviously a huge combination, and the thing is golf will continue to improve. We have everything possible to make us the best players we can be, and everybody's using it. So I don't see it slowing down any time soon.

Yeah, just competitive golf at a professional level no matter what sort of level you're at, it just seems to be getting stronger and stronger.

Q. Talking about your admiration for Scottie and how he's won all these tournaments and everything. Is there one thing that he does with his golf or the way he approaches it that you would like to copy? If you could choose one thing.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Well, I'd love to play like him; that would be number one. But I think the way that he manages his golf ball and the way that he manages himself are probably the two most impressive things about him.

He has so much control in the way that he plays a golf course and the way he positions himself, the way that he plays, the way that he doesn't force anything. On top of that, I think obviously if he's won six times, mentally he's doing the right thing because there's no way he's played great throughout that period, but I think he's clearly managing himself and his golf ball better than anybody else on the planet by a clear margin at this point. I think those two things obviously stand out.

