

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Monday, July 12, 2021

Tommy Roy

Gary Koch

David Feherty

Justin Leonard

John Wood

149th Open Championship Press
Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Thanks, everybody, for joining today's call previewing the upcoming Open Championship. In a moment we're going to be joined by NBC Sports golf commentators Justin Leonard, David Feherty, Gary Koch and John Wood as well as our producer Tommy Roy.

This week NBC Sports will surround the 149th Open Championship at Royal St. George's Golf Club with nearly 50 hours of live tournament coverage on NBC, Golf Channel and Peacock, and that number balloons to nearly 150 hours if you factor in featured holes and featured groups coverage.

As some of you may know, due to COVID-19 protocols and restrictions, much of our production will be originating from our international broadcast center in Stamford, Connecticut. Our producer Tommy Roy will touch on some of those details momentarily.

We'll begin with opening remarks from each of our speakers starting with our executive producer Tommy Roy.

TOMMY ROY: Thank you, Jamie. Hello, everybody. We are very, very grateful for the opportunity to televise the Open again. We have completely fallen in love with this event. So much fun; from day one it hit our hearts, and it's awesome.

Last year obviously we didn't get the chance to televise it as the event was postponed until this year, but grateful to be back doing it.

The pandemic is still creating issues for us. We've had to



significantly downsize our onsite crew. We are going to be taking the world feed pictures and splitting our announce team into two, where the guys who normally work on the on-site announce towers will be in a studio here in Stamford, Connecticut, and our walking announcers, interviewers, will be coming from Royal St. George's. Myself and the rest of the production team will be working out of a truck here in the parking lot in Stamford.

This is obviously not ideal, but the Open Championship world feed is top-notch, and I'm creating this as a challenge to produce telecasts that are of a quality that our viewers have come to expect. Really looking forward to getting started on Thursday.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Tommy. We'll start next with Gary Koch. Go ahead, Gary.

GARY KOCH: Thank you, Jamie. The Open Championship is very special to me. It's actually where my professional career began back in 1975. I played on the United States Walker Cup team at the Old Course at St. Andrews, played the British Amateur the very next week and then turned professional, got through a 36-hole qualifier and played in the 1975 Open Championship at Carnoustie for the first time as a professional.

I've always enjoyed the Open Championship. I think the identity is linked to the fact that -- the unpredictability that the links golf provides and the ever-changing elements, and it's always fun to see who can deal with those two things the most and the best.

I have played Royal St. George's. I was fortunate enough to play in the Open Championship there in 1985. I do remember the course as being very quirky. It seemed as though there were more humps and bumps in the fairways than any other links course that I had played over in England, Scotland or Ireland, the type of course where you can hit a drive where you thought it was perfect, walk over a dune and find it 30 yards left of where you thought and in the rough.

Some of the things that we'll see the players deal with I'm sure later on this week.

I did read where three-time Open Champion Gary Player said that he felt the St. George's course was the easiest or



one of the easiest on the Open rota. I'd have to disagree with that. If you look at the numbers of the 14 previous champions there at St. George's, only one, Greg Norman in 1993, who shot 13-under par, had a winning score of lower than 5-under par.

I expect St. George's to be a stern test this week. I think the rough will be very lush, as it sounds as though they've had a very wet May and June over there. It seems to me it'll be a course that'll put a premium on driving the ball well and also maintaining a good attitude as you get some of those funky bounces that links golf can produce.

I'm very excited about being a part of the broadcast team. Looking forward to it very much, and I know we'll have a great week.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Gary. We'll go next to some thoughts from David Feherty. Go ahead, David.

DAVID FEHERTY: Thank you, Jamie. I must say I'm really looking forward to this Open. It's a golf course that I'm familiar with. I played a British PGA there, played the Open in '85, also, and I recall starting 6, 6, which is not something that you forget in a hurry.

I would agree with Gary that I think it's actually one of the more difficult golf courses on the Open rota. There isn't an even lie.

There was a story told about Royal St. George's that on the front nine you need to play with your left shoe on your left foot and your right shoe on your right knee, and the other way around coming in.

It's a fabulous golf course. It's a very old-fashioned golf course. There are a lot of blind and semi-blind shots. It's the sort of place where the more practice rounds you get in, the better. There's a lot of places that you don't want to hit it, that's for sure, and the bunkering is among some of the most magnificent that I've ever seen. The riveted faces, big high lips, there's huge walls of sand, and I think probably in and around the greens, again, one of the more difficult Open Championship courses that you're liable to see.

The fact that we're covering it from Stamford, Connecticut, is unusual, that's for sure, but really other than the fact that we're not getting a hands-on look at the golf course, those of us that know it well, there isn't really that much difference. We'll be calling it off monitors as usual, and it's business as usual for us at NBC.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, David. Next we'll go to our 1997 Open Champion, Justin Leonard. Go

ahead, Justin.

JUSTIN LEONARD: I agree with David and Gary. It is quirky, and I don't think that they prefer that term. It's probably more "natural" that they prefer. It's interesting to me that so many of the undulations in the fairways and the greens run kind of parallel to the hole or even diagonal, so you play a lot of across these dunes or kind of ridge of mounds to where the fairway is blind and you really don't know if your ball is in the left side of the fairway or if it's in the middle of the fairway or it could be in the right rough.

Because of that, it can frustrate players. I know it frustrated me a bit during my career, and actually St. George's was my first experience in the Open. I qualified as an amateur in '93, got to go over and play, and it was just a great experience and really where I learned to love links golf and all that it required.

It wasn't just about skill or about hitting the ball high, it was about being creative both off the tee, around the greens especially, and then so much just -- it was about your attitude, know that you were going to face difficult conditions. It could rain one minute and be blowing 40 the next.

I just learned to really love all those experiences, and one of the reasons I love links golf I think is because I played well over there with a good attitude, and it's a reason why I so look forward to this week each and every year.

THE MODERATOR: Last and certainly not least, we'll go to one of our folks on the ground this week as an on-course reporter, John Wood. Go ahead, John.

JOHN WOOD: These guys have said it all. The Open Championship has always been one of my absolute favorite events. It just presents of type of challenges that week in week out on the PGA TOUR in America we don't get to face very often. The ball is played on the ground so much more. You've got to plan for so much more eccentricities along the ground in terms of bounces and rolls. The fairways are generous, where there's about a four-yard first cut and then a second cut of another three or four yards.

Beyond that the rough is really thick. And Justin, you could speak to this, as well. Sometimes you get that fescue that's very wispy and the ball sits pretty clean and you might get a little turn but you can pretty much make good contact. That's not the case this week at all. The undergrowth is super thick in this fescue.

I'll piggy-back on Gary's comments about the premium on hitting it the fairway (indiscernible) players' reactions. If

they react, throw their hands up and put their head back and woe is me, and Tiger was incredible at this, walk up, no reaction, don't waste any emotion on it, this is the shot you're presented with and you have to move on from there. I love watching players' reactions when they don't get maybe what they were expecting.

One thing we were watching today was they're going to be (indiscernible) rain this morning through last night and throughout the day, and starting Thursday and Friday I think it's going to be pretty dry, so the course will start to really firm up.

It's one of those cases where you prepare for one course and maybe see another one starting Friday, so it'll be interesting to see who adapts best to that.

The other thing I like over here are bold putters. Justin, you know the greens over here don't get fast. The ball typically can't get away from you, and you can take a lot of the break out and hit it straighter and firmer. I'll look for guys who (indiscernible).

THE MODERATOR: We'll definitely work with John's connection as we caught I'd say probably 90 percent of that. We'll hang in there with you on some of these answers, technology being what it is in 2021 even though sometimes the connection isn't great, but we'll hang in there with that.

Thank you, John. I think we're set to go to some questions from the press.

Q. I'm curious what you think of Louis of late. Some great finishes, hasn't been able to close it out. If you were his sports psychologist, what would you be telling him this week?

GARY KOCH: I guess if I was his sports psychologist I'd be telling him to keep doing what he's doing. He keeps putting himself in position. I think you talk to most players, they'll tell you that that's all they ask for on a Sunday afternoon, especially in a major championship, is to feel like they have a chance to win the tournament.

Yes, there were some poor shots at the U.S. Open on the back nine late in the day, but there were also a number of good shots, as well. You know, a good sports psychologist is going to remind you to think and focus on those good things that happened and try to let the bad things go.

I know his instructor quite well, Justin Parsons. They have really kind of perfected a routine for Louis that he's very comfortable with, both his putting and his full swing, and keep putting yourself there and sooner or later the door will

open.

DAVID FEHERTY: I was just thinking there, if I was a sports psychologist, I would probably take this week off. This is a golf course where it's not so much what happens to you when you play well, it's your reaction to what happens when you get a bad bounce because there will be some very strange bounces out there at Royal St. George's this week, that's for sure.

It's about being patient and understanding that it happens to everybody.

JUSTIN LEONARD: I think the one thing I would tell him is almost try and elongate the week. He seems to play beautiful golf at the first part of the week to get himself in position. Sunday hasn't been his best day, so almost think of this week as maybe going a month long and make it into a four-week tournament where yes, he's got a few days off in between or maybe a week off, but try and look further down the road so that come Sunday morning or Sunday afternoon when he's teeing off, he doesn't feel like he's looking at the finish line but it's more of the longer term process.

Q. John, you've been with some guys that have been real close to winning majors. What would you say to Lee Westwood, who also, so many chances, playing really good golf this year but hasn't got across the finish line yet?

JOHN WOOD: Yeah, I would say very much what Gary said: Enjoy it. He looks like he's so mature -- he's always been a mature golfer, but now I think he's reached a level where he's confident in what he's doing, he knows what he's doing, he knows what he's good at, he knows his limitations, and he seems to be enjoying golf more than he ever has in his entire career.

I would look at it almost like when Darren Clarke won here. I know it's a similar situation. But I'm sure he's out here to have a great week and just enjoy it, and I think that's when he's playing his best golf these days is when he's trying to just enjoy it.

Q. Question for Tommy: What particularly about this tournament being unique or rather being remote for this tournament, what are some of the unique challenges that come with being remote for this tournament?

TOMMY ROY: Well, when you're on-site you're producing your own telecast. For this we're taking the world feed, and the world feed is excellent. It's headed up by a guy name Jim Storey. He's one of my great friends in this

business. We actually first worked together when we were young bucks covering Wimbledon back in 1983, and so kind of grown up with him being on that side of the pond and me over here.

The world feed is going to be great, but it is different than the customized telecast that I normally would produce for our American audience. They are the primary feed for all of the UK, plus they have their international clients from around the world that they're catering to, as well.

That's different. It's not what we would normally do, but we're going to make the absolute best of it. I'm actually looking at it as quite a challenge. Having John Wood and Bones and Notah and Karen Stupples over on that side is not going to be much different than me being in a truck and pressing the button to their headset and they can talk back to me.

I think the challenging thing for the guys is over here not being able to experience the conditions that the players are dealing with out there as they make their way out on the course and can look out the window of their tower and see what's going on. They're experiencing that from several thousand miles away.

But you know, we're going to do the best we can with it, and I think it's absolutely going to be a great challenge. I've been producing our golf for 29 years now; about time I get a challenge like this, so I'm looking forward to it.

Q. What's different about producing this tournament from sort of a traditional tournament that you would produce on the road? What looks different for you specifically?

TOMMY ROY: Well, what's different for us is what the guys were talking about, playing it on the ground, where we're trying to show the American audience it's not flying it at the flag and get it to stop by putting a bunch of backspin on the ball. This is landing the ball short 20, 30 yards short of the green and bouncing it up.

We've put a lot of effort into our tracing technology and what we call bounce-and-roll to show the American viewers just how golf is so much different, plus you're dealing with the weather conditions, the wind. We put a lot more effort into documenting the wind, what's the wind speed on one side of the golf course versus what it is over on the other side because it's usually blowing much harder over near the water. Keeping track of that, and have the wind direction for the morning, changes to the afternoon and how does that make the course that much harder or easier depending which wave you're in.

So keeping track of that, and then whether you get rain or torrential rain, how that affects the different waves, as well. That's what's significantly different about covering golf over there versus here.

Q. Just kind of curious who you guys have to keep an eye out for this week, and do you think anybody can carry the momentum from some of the performances we saw at the Scottish Open last week, specifically good results from J.T., Xander, Jon Rahm, Matt Fitzpatrick, those kind of guys?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yes, I absolutely think you can take -- players will try and take some confidence from a good week last week, seeing how it was links golf and they had a little bit of weather on Sunday, and I think you have to look at the guys who played well last week.

Jon Rahm, being his form of recent, the fact that he played well and got himself in contention again last week after a couple weeks off, I think he's certainly the betting favorite, and even though he slipped to No. 2 in the world because he finished in seventh place rather than sixth place last week, I still think he's probably the guy that you've got to look out for and has the best chance of being in contention this weekend.

GARY KOCH: I would agree with Justin. I think in my years of playing in major championships and televising major championships, it's very rare when we see a player find it the week of a major event. You look for previous performance as an indicator, so certainly the guys that played well last week you would give a nod to.

I actually like Ian Poulter, to be perfectly honest with you. I think he's a similar age to what Darren Clarke was when he won the last time it was at St. George's. Played very well last week at the Scottish Open. Seems to have developed a little more maturity than we've seen in years past, and it would be something for an Englishman to win there since one hasn't won, I guess, the Open Championship since Faldo did back in 1993. It would be quite the story.

JOHN WOOD: You look at the betting lines, and I think all the favorites are going to be there at the end. Maybe not Bryson DeChambeau. I have a feeling that he may struggle this week. He's never played extremely well in an Open Championship. He's dealing with a new caddie, and I don't know that that style of golf works here. I know it works in a lot of places, but like I said earlier, the fescue undergrowth is so thick, it's very easy to even lose a golf ball out here this week.

I like a guy like -- I really have a good feeling about Jordan Spieth this week. He's made this tremendous comeback

from the depths of golf in the last eight months, and the last remaining piece is to get back in the winning circle at a major. I think he's really in great position to do that. I think his confidence is soaring. He knows he can win on this style of course, and he's a guy that can put a score up in multiple ways.

I think that's incredibly important at a major because you have to have everything working but you're not going to have everything every single day. So maybe one day you can do it with your ball-striking; one day you can do it by making a lot of par saves; the next day you can do it with your short game. Jordan can do all of those things.

I really think he's going to have a great week here.

Q. Tommy, is this the world feed with no enhancements on your end, or is there some stuff you can add in from one or two different cameras you have over there?

TOMMY ROY: Yeah, we are sending three RF minis plus we can cover the 18th hole, but the three RF minis will be going with the leaders and with star groups on Thursday and Friday.

You know, a big part of what we do on these telecasts is it becomes a travelog for us, as well. We're taking American golfers to a very unique part of the world and unique golf that's being played there, and there's a lot of history surrounding it in the town of Sandwich, where there's humorous things about sandwiches and et cetera.

We still will be working that in, it's just not as easy. Golf is a game where they don't stop playing when you go to commercial. If you're producing a football, baseball, basketball game, they stop when you go to commercial, but here they keep playing. It's incumbent upon us to pick the ideal time to go to break.

If I was in control of the broadcast I can make sure I record the most important shots and come out and play those and then go to an interesting little travelog piece, but here we have to do the reverse order: Come out, play the travelog and then try to catch up with what we've missed. From that standpoint, it's much more complicated.

The world feed has -- as I said, it's top-notch, and it has tons of technology, so we're not going to miss anything there with tracers and interesting graphics, the animation, et cetera, super slo-mos, et cetera. It'll still be terrific I'm hoping.

Q. John, you have so many relationships with so many players, and for you and your fellow on-course

reporters on the course and being the eyes and ears that the guys back in Stamford won't have, do you think you'll be relying a lot on those relationships and even maybe off-air conversations you guys have back to the folks in Stamford to get them the information that they would normally have if they were on-site?

JOHN WOOD: Yeah, it's interesting, it's a great question. I was thinking about that today as I was walking the course and thinking I may just send a cheat sheet for stuff that they would normally be out looking -- I know Gary and Dave and everybody gets out in their carts and looks around and spends two or three days looking at a golf course in person, and obviously they can't do that.

Trying to be helpful and their eyes and ears a little bit before the rounds or before the tournament starts, I might send them some things that I've noticed or that I'm seeing to pay attention -- special attention to or to look out for.

Yeah, I'm going to try and -- I think Notah and Bones and Karen will all be doing the same thing and trying to give those guys a heads up on certain things that if they were here would have certainly noticed and noted themselves, but since they're not maybe we can help them out a little bit with that.

TOMMY ROY: Yeah, every single one of the announcers that's going to be here in Stamford except for Dan Hicks, all of them have been to Royal St. George's and have played there or called other Open Championships there. So it's not like it's unfamiliar territory, it's just the immediate conditions of how things are over there since they're not going to be able to see them firsthand, but certainly we'll be able to describe what they're seeing.

Q. For Justin, you were talking about momentum coming out of the Scottish Open. How about somebody like Rory who missed the cut but was able to get to Royal St. George's early, and he feels like with the weather that might be there today and tomorrow, he got some better practice in than he would have otherwise potentially. Do you think that's an advantage for Rory?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Well, if Rory thinks it's an advantage for him, then it's an advantage. Golfers, we're an odd lot in that we will find -- try and find a silver lining on any cloud. So yeah, absolutely, Rory is going to say, you know what, he got two good days, the weather was better. Now the weather is coming in, he's seen the golf course, he's got his work done. He is absolutely going to convince himself that that's an advantage, and that may prove true by the end of the week.

Q. Is there a hole or stretch of holes at Royal St. George's you've really got to hold on or survive? Is there a critical stretch there?

DAVID FEHERTY: Well, I'll tell you, it's one of the toughest openings in Open Championship golf. The first hole you've got -- the holes there to start off with, getting off to a good start is a tremendous advantage at Royal St. George's.

GARY KOCH: Yes, especially David through the first four. The first hole is a very difficult par-4, the second a good one, the third, a good par-3, the fourth hole is the longest par-4 on the course and played the most difficult in 2011.

You know, it's really before you get to the fifth tee, the par-5, where you really feel like you can kind of breathe, not be holding your breath the whole time.

JUSTIN LEONARD: And then there's a really difficult stretch on the back nine, 13, 14 and 15, and you think, well, 14 is a par-5, but Bernhard Langer hit it out of bounds there when he was in contention in '93, Dustin Johnson hit his second shot out of bounds there when he was in contention back in 2011. Then you've got the long par-4, 13, a very difficult long par-4, 15.

That stretch there right through the middle of the back nine always has great repercussions on what happens at the end of the tournament.

GARY KOCH: You might as well throw in that right bunker on the par-3 16th, because that certainly has an effect.

JOHN WOOD: I thought 2, 3 and 4, it's one of those courses where you can get off track very early. You can get frustrated very early, and once that happens you're kind of done.

Even if you have those -- start out bogey-bogey on 2, 3 and 4, something like that, you've really got to say, hey, everybody out here is going to struggle with those holes. I'm not the only one. So I think getting off to a good start like Gary said is going to be huge this week.

Q. Now that Jon Rahm has a major under his belt, who do you consider to be the best player never to win a major?

DAVID FEHERTY: You've got to throw Westwood in there I would have thought. That's a good one.

GARY KOCH: I'm going to go a young guy, I'm going to say Xander Schauffele. His major record in his brief career so far has been very impressive. He's already had a couple of chances to win. Seems like he finishes top 10

virtually every time he plays in a major, and in my mind he's going to get one real soon.

I know he hasn't been around a long time and hasn't gotten one yet, but I think he's due, and it'll happen soon.

JOHN WOOD: I would throw Tommy Fleetwood into the mix. I know he hasn't had the year that he's been looking for so far, but there was a two- or three-year stretch there fairly recently where it seemed like every Sunday at a major his name was there somewhere. I just think he's got the mentality to win a tournament like this, so I would say Tommy Fleetwood is right up there.

JUSTIN LEONARD: That was a veteran move by you guys to jump in there real quickly.

You know, I think of a young player -- I don't know if I would pick him like the best player not to have won a major yet, but I think Viktor Hovland is also going to win a major championship soon. He's a ball-hitting machine, and I love his attitude on and off the golf course. He is a tireless worker, and so I look for him to break through much sooner rather than later.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much, everybody, for joining.

As I mentioned at the top of this call, we're going to have a transcript of the call on our press site, NBCSportsGroupPressbox.com later this evening. We're going to have comprehensive coverage all week of The Open Championship. It begins very early on the East Coast or late if you're on the West Coast on Thursday or Wednesday. Thursday morning 1:30 eastern here on the East Coast exclusively on Peacock to start and we're going to have 50 hours of coverage all across NBC, Golf Channel and Peacock. Thank you all for joining and have a great afternoon. Thanks so much.

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