

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Wednesday, July 6, 2022

**Paul Azinger**  
**Notah Begay**  
**Dan Hicks**  
**John Wood**  
**Tommy Roy**  
Press Conference



JAMIE PALATINI: Good afternoon. Welcome to our 150th Open Championship media conference call.

In a moment we're going to be joined by our lead producer, Tommy Roy, play-by-play commentator Dan Hicks, and our lead analyst Paul Azinger, and on-course commentators Notah Begay III, John Wood.

NBC Sports will present nearly 50 hours of live Open Championship coverage from the Old Course at St. Andrews across NBC, USA Network, and Peacock, from July 14th through July 17th, and Golf Channel will provide nearly 75 hours of studio coverage on Golf Central Live from The Open Championship next week beginning on Monday July 11th.

That coverage will also stream on Peacock.

In addition, tonight 8:00 p.m. Eastern on Golf Channel, Golf Films presents its latest documentary "The Open at St. Andrews" led by Emmy award winning producer Israel DeHerrera. You won't want to miss that. That's tonight at 8:00 Eastern on Golf Channel.

We will have a transcript available of this call later this afternoon on [NBCSportsGrouppressbox.com](https://www.nbcsportsgrouppressbox.com). We will get to questions from the press, but we're going to first start with opening remarks from each of our speakers.

We will begin with our producer, Tommy Roy. Go ahead, Tommy.

TOMMY ROY: Thanks, Jamie. Well, after not getting a chance to broadcast last year and having the majority of the team working The Open from our Stanford

headquarters all because of COVID, we are so grateful to have the entire team where we belong on site at St. Andrews.

We've been looking forward to the 150th at the Old Course. This week we became broadcast partners are the R&A seven years ago. It's finally here, and we are pumped.

Once again, this year we are proud to partner with the R&A's first class World Feed, add our own array of cameras, and our best-in-the-business announce team.

We're excited that for the first time a couple of new things to look for. A 350-yard wire cam that will be used out at the Loop to give the viewers a new perspective of holes 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11.

Additionally, there will be a hightop tracer at the 17th tee mounted on a 30-foot pole, and an incoming tracer out beyond the 17th fairway to show the drives flying over the shed of the Old Course Hotel.

Up at the Road Hole green for the first time there will be a rail cam mounted just above the wall next to the road itself, and it's 780 meters in length.

Our main announce booth is situated to the right of the 17th green with views in the background of our announcers of the 17th green, the 18th tee, the Swilken Bridge, and the 18th green and first tees, and the R&A Clubhouse back there as well.

The Mike Tirico booth is situated beyond the putting green beyond the first tee, with the first tee and the R&A Clubhouse in its background.

Most of you know the charm and history of the town of St. Andrews and how it's intertwined with The Championship, so we have a live view camera that is dedicated going around town where we can briefly work in live images from these storied locales.

One other note. After 15 years of working for the Golf Channel, Nick Faldo, as you all know, is retiring from broadcasting. In a nod to the halcyon days of the Tirico/Azinger/Faldo announce team, they will partner up once again on Friday from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Eastern time in a final tip of the hat to Nick.



What an incredible week we anticipate, and I turn it over to Dan Hicks.

DAN HICKS: Wow, Tommy. Just hearing you describe all the coverage plans and whatnot just gives me chills. This really is a bucket list kind of broadcast call for me and a lot of our people at NBC Golf.

We've been doing majors, big championships for nearly 30 years. Been to almost every conceivable great golfing destination and championship golf except this one, and the fact that it's the milestone 150th makes it even sweeter.

To check this one off is a dream. There's no doubt about it. I've been to Scotland and the area many, many times, played golf over there, covered championships over there, but I personally have never even been to St. Andrews.

I tell people that. They can't believe it with as long as I've been in this business. They cannot believe I haven't been to St. Andrews, and I kind of can't believe it either.

I've heard from everyone I've ever talked to who has been there. They all say the same thing. This place stands alone. No other place compares.

It's just as much the town as it is the course, as you heard Tommy say. There's no other atmosphere in golf like it. No wonder Jack Nicklaus once said, you know, if you are ever going to be a player to remember, you have to win an Open at St. Andrews.

No wonder Tiger Woods has had success he's had there. I know he is chomping at the bit to get back knowing that this is most likely his last chance at another Claret Jug there.

So maybe it's kind of the same in golf broadcasting as I look at it. Maybe your career isn't really quite complete or rounded out until you cover one at the home of golf, so that is just a huge reason.

In addition to always -- it's always an honor and a privilege covering a major, but it's also another reason why I couldn't be more excited to get to Scotland and just soak in all this atmosphere for myself. Just totally psyched to get there, get immersed in that feeling and the whole scene. Cannot wait.

With that, I'll send you over to Zing.

PAUL AZINGER: Well, I'm excited for you, Dan, honestly. I can't believe you've never been there. I guess I can join that long list.

Yeah, it gives me chill bumps to think about you going for the first time ever and seeing the town and the whole setup and how that just -- the golf course lays into the landscape the way it does.

I've played at St. Andrews a few Opens. I think I played in '90 and '95 for sure. 2000, I don't know. Yeah, but, you know, I think it's an incredible place to hold a championship. It's not just this historic nature of it, but it's, I don't know, the intricacies of this golf course.

Immediately it feels like a moonscape. You can't just go there and expect to be able to get around. You have to have help. You have to have a seeing eye dog or a good caddie to get you around that golf course.

As an announcer, I broadcast the 2010 when Oosthuizen won there, and I broadcast when Zach won. You look at the place differently.

I never really thought about avoiding bunkers with a name. Anything that's got a name on it at that golf course, you want to avoid it it feels like. You don't want to be in the Cheape's Bunker.

You don't want to be in the Shell Bunker; the Hell Bunker is famous. I think Calcavecchia and I used to have \$1,000 bet if anyone hit it in the Principal's Nose. There's three pots there on 16, and it wasn't the first two from the tee. It was that little one on the other side.

It was just -- it's a magical -- it's just a magical place, guys, and I'm looking forward to being there. Like I say, I've been there as a player. I've been there as a broadcaster. There's nothing like it in the world. I just can't wait.

Notah, I hope you feel the same way. I'm pretty sure you might.

NOTAH BEGAY: St. Andrews holds a special place in my heart because it's the only place I had a chance to play. Injury kept me from the other ones. I made a double bogey on the 17th in round one and actually got a chance to hit a shot out of the burn left of the green at 17.

I took the shoes off, took the socks off, rolled the pants up, got in there. The crowd went wild when I stepped in there, and so this is just one of golf's memories in terms of my own personal relationship with the venue.

Obviously, getting a chance to see Tiger play the type of golf in his second consecutive major at St. Andrews. The strategic requirements I think are going to be good for us or challenging for myself and Woody to sort of explain out

there.

Some of the widest driving areas I think players will see in a major championship, but it does ask you to take on risk at certain times to create better angles to fit hole locations.

I find that a lot of these holes require -- in order to access where the hole is cut at certain periods throughout the event, you need to have a good angle.

And then, as you said, if the wind switches and you don't have a caddie who has done their homework and has been able to sort of make those adjustments for you as player to put you at ease with some of those shots, it can be very, very frustrating.

I'll let Woody talk about some of those challenges when you are standing alongside your man trying to get him through some of those difficult shots that players are going to face this week.

JOHN WOOD: Thank you, Notah. Yeah, an Open at St. Andrews is unlike any Open. There may be better courses in the rota, but nothing compares to the history and the stories that are told at St. Andrews.

It's just completely is different. I remember watching Jack play his last Open there sitting on the steps next to Brad Faxon, and there were so many players out there watching him come up on this sun-drenched day.

It was just one of the most -- I get goosebumps just thinking about it. I worked for Calcavecchia there once, and there was a great story told me early in the week.

He was staying at the Old Course Hotel. He said, Woody, meet me on the second tee at 5:30. I was thinking that's kind of strange, but okay. Calc like to do things differently. So I met him in the second tee.

He brought the bag over from the hotel. We played 2 through 17, and then he walked into the hotel. I handed him his bag. I said, Calc, is this how you're going to play your practice round? He said, yeah, if I have to practice on 1 and 18, I have no chance this week anyway. That was kind of funny.

It struck me the other day, I was thinking about the year that we've had, and to be able to telecast the U.S. Open from what is arguably -- not arguably -- the home and the birthplace of American golf. Now we get to go across the pond and broadcast from the actual home of golf.

It's a really special year, and to go from the country club at Brookline to St. Andrews, it's a year I'll remember for a long

time.

JAMIE PALATINI: Thank you. If you would like to signal with questions, please press star-1 on your touchtone telephone.

**Q. Hey, guys. Thanks for doing this. This is for specifically Zinger and Notah. I'm kind of curious what your expectations are for Tiger this week, and is there any sort of vibe? We just heard what he said the other day at the J.P. McManus us about wanting to get one more run at this when he is still highly competitive. Any sort of vibe maybe once Sunday comes around -- hopefully Sunday -- when he is walking that last step over the Swilken Bridge that this is kind of an ending for him to any degree?**

PAUL AZINGER: You go first, Notah.

NOTAH BEGAY: I do think he realized that the end is imminent and a lot closer than he would like to admit, just reflecting on his performance over the last couple of majors. Very valiant that he was able to play going into the weekend. Obviously, with the stamina and the leg not holding up.

I do think this is by far the best venue for him just in terms of the major challenges he has are physical, number one; number two, there's rust around his short game.

But the thing that I really sort of look at as a very big positive is that he did tee it up this week in the J.P. McManus event, so he was able to shake off a little bit of rust.

Now, Adare Manor isn't what you would classify as a textbook links venue. It's more of a parkland type of venue. But just to be able to get the reps and get the body moving, get some touches under pressure I think is going to really help him because that's really, I think, what's been the challenge in the last two events, is he has been unable to salvage some key saves here and there that is going to be critical this week.

That's the one thing that I think really went a long way for him when he did play here in 2000, the complete game. Probably the best we've ever seen. It's more of a physical battle for him if he is going to be able to deal with and get more mileage out of the strength in his leg.

PAUL AZINGER: Yeah, I think that it is going to be physical, obviously. That's what golf is. It's his physical ability to walk around that's going to be in question, but physically you have to be sharp as nails to play well at St. Andrews.

You have to be very precise from the tee, and you have to be really good on and around the greens. The winner at St. Andrews inevitably is at the tippetty top in putting. The greens -- hopefully the greens will be slow. I'm hoping between nine and ten and a half or nine and a half, ten and a half.

The R&A has (audio cut out) maybe three times here with high winds, but you have to have a delicate touch. If ever there was a place where Tiger could put the magic and piece it together, it would be here, because that touch that he has is extraordinary.

If he can draw on that and have a miracle week on and around the greens -- if he can play this course backwards, you know, just get on 18 green and stand there and look back down the fairway, where do I want to -- this is where I want to end up, play the whole course like this. Zach Johnson did it the same way.

Not overpoweringly long. Every single hole at St. Andrews could actually be -- there could be an onslaught or birdie barrage, except for 17. No hole if there's no wind isn't a birdie hole at St. Andrews. If the wind blows it's a different story, but the physical part for me and Tiger is going to be his hands, in his touch with the putter. That's what it's going to come down to for the winner.

**Q. This is a quick follow-up. Will you have any feel -- assuming Tiger makes it to the weekend, which I think he will, but then on Sunday when you see him walking over that bridge, what will you feel, do you think?**

PAUL AZINGER: It would be easy to start looking at Tiger misty-eyed and wondering if you are ever going to get to see this again. Historically this is where the greats have taken their final walk. Generally, the greats haven't been injured like this and had their leg look crooked and stuff.

I'm not sure how sentimental it's going to feel to watch Tiger play this go-round. I think personally that he has more in him. I don't know when the next one is. It's usually a five- to seven-year gap. I don't want to say this is a swan song just yet.

**Q. Tommy, I'm wondering, as we all know, links golf is a bit of a different format than what maybe American golf fans are used to seeing on a week-to-week basis. I'm wondering how is the challenge different for you from a production perspective on covering an event in a links setting?**

TOMMY ROY: Well, it's a little bit more challenging, and it will be in particular for the World Feed producer. We're

going to be taking their feed.

But what the big challenges are at St. Andrews is all these shared greens. You get on there and it's like, okay, you go. No, you go. Well, no, you go. And so the rhythm of the players making their way around that complicates things.

The other thing is the whole bounce and roll of how you play links golf. Here in the U.S. we fly it all the way on to the green and the ball bites; whereas here you have to land it short and let it bounce up.

I think the process of showing that to the viewers, how that works, is pretty critical for them to understand links golf.

The other thing that we have that we're going to try to show is unique things about this course. Like the massive size of 1 and 18 fairways where you can actually fit five American football fields in there.

Or the green that shares 5 and 13. You can fit like eight basketball courts in there. It's crazy how big some of these areas are.

So we're going to try to show that.

**Q. This is for the whole group. For a course like St. Andrews, do you think it's important for someone who thrives on links-style golf courses, or do you think there are any specific players that are trending well heading into the week?**

NOTAH BEGAY: Can you repeat it? It kind of cut out on me a little bit.

PAUL AZINGER: Yeah, I couldn't understand the question.

JAMIE PALATINI: I think I heard it okay. Basically he was saying is there -- tell me if I'm wrong -- it sounded like you were saying is there a benefit to having -- is it better to be playing really well on links courses, or maybe is it better to be trending hot right now but not necessarily having a real strong links-style game or a game that's suited to that, so to speak. I think that's where that was going.

**Q. That's right. Thank you.**

PAUL AZINGER: I'll just say the ball don't lie. If you are hitting that ball on the button, it doesn't matter where you take that game. At this level these guys can travel, and the number one thing is that they're getting it on the button.

The second thing you have to learn about that golf course,





conditions can sabotage a good player. One day you think you're sitting pretty, and the next day that's the worst place to be.

So it's that kind of golf course, and then you have to have the touchy-feely stuff in the end. That golf course around the greens on and around the greens historically that's where the trouble begins.

Yeah, it doesn't matter. You got to hit it on the button. The game will travel, but can you adjust to the greens? That's the key.

NOTAH BEGAY: Yeah, I would agree. I think form supercedes links experience. Would I rather be a (indiscernible) play that will affect a Fitzpatrick or even a J.T. Poston who has been playing some great golf coming in. I would rather be in their shoes.

And then coming in with -- you have to have an open mind when you come to links venues, because you are going to hit some great shots that turn out poorly, and you're going to hit some poor ones that turn out okay.

You just kind of got to run -- that's the one thing that Tiger, in our discussions about links golf and his ability to win this championship multiple times, is that he always has had a good mindset and knew that he was going to get some bad breaks, but also knew that they were going to balance out throughout the week.

It's not as predictable as American golf. There are just a lot of little subtleties that create the difference between what the PGA TOUR players do week in and week out and what they're going to experience this week.

I certainly would rather be someone that's playing well coming in here and then acclimate to the links style. You look at a Jordan Spieth who came -- who has already spent some time playing some links golf according social media posts with him out there.

So it's obviously in the forefront of his mind to try and get a few more reps and a get a sense of how to navigate some of these different shots. Especially if you are creative and have a lot of different shots available like he does around the green.

You just have to kind of pick and choose which ones are going to work well under certain situations.

JOHN WOOD: The one thing I was going to say to that question was that a lot of it depends on conditions, what conditions we get. If we get fairly benign conditions with not a lot of wind, it takes away a bit of the advantage of

being a great links player.

If we get one of those very windy weeks and some rain blowing in and 30-mile-an-hour winds, when it almost becomes more of a first fight than a golf tournament where it's just survival, that's when links players I think will shine where they can say, okay, I know how to put up a score in these conditions.

So I think it depends on conditions as to who to favor.

**Q. Hey, guys. Dan, first of all, the most important question is are your clubs making the trip since you have never played the Old Course?**

DAN HICKS: They are not making the trip. Although, yeah, I will not be playing the week of The Open Championship. I have played a lot in Scotland. I definitely, definitely plan on getting over to the Old Course to play it at some point, but I feel like with what everybody has said, I need to learn more about it before I take my game out there. (Laughing).

I can't wait to walk it, see it, and realize all of the things that people have been telling me for years. Sometimes you look at it for the first time and you wonder what the big deal is. Then you see it another time and you start to recognize the nuances of it, get used to it.

I'm going to be that guy. Just totally getting a feel for it.

No, to answer your question. It will be all work and watching the guys play and putting on the best broadcast we possibly can.

**Q. Then for whoever wants this, what is it about Will Zalatoris that has gotten him into contention at major after major after major? He still does not have a PGA TOUR win, and I think so many people think whether it's this week in Scotland or next week at The Open, that it could be his week. Notah, John, you may have walked with him recently. Paul. Whoever wants to take this. What is it about his game that rises up in majors?**

JOHN WOOD: Ball-striking travels better than any other part of the game. And that was woody. That's all I can say about it.

When you can strike in the middle of the club face every time, it travels better than any part of the game.

NOTAH BEGAY: Yeah, and Woody is 100% right. That ability to separate yourself from your peers, you're talking about the best players in the world, and he has been able

to separate himself in terms of his tee to green game. It becomes even more valuable at the bigger tournaments because there's just the higher premium.

There's less margin for error. Missed shots are penalized a little bit more so. When he is just creating that much more of an advantage for himself, that many more opportunities for ball-striking, that's point in case why I think his ball-striking elevates him a little bit further at the hardest tournaments and at the biggest venues, which is why he can be an average putter and still get himself in contention.

PAUL AZINGER: He doesn't have any real choke in him either. That's another thing. Both those last two majors where he had his chances, he really played great. He played great down the stretch. I can tell you, you only get so many chances. You want to capitalize, and the pressure then is starting to come not just from within, but from the outside looking at Zalatoris.

Part of his charm is that he is not jaded by negative questions and all that. If there comes a time when getting in contention you think it's going to be every time and the ball-striking will never go away, I know this, when you have confidence, you never think you'll lose it, but when you lose it, you never think you'll get it back.

Right now he is one of my favorite players in the world to watch. He is like a junkyard dog, and he is on your ankle the whole time, but he just has to bite the ankle off and hoist that trophy.

Jordan Spieth capitalized early. Tiger capitalized early. Arnold Palmer capitalized early in their careers. Jack Nicklaus, he pounced early. Zalatoris is in there. Rickie Fowler didn't pounce; he almost did. He almost did.

I think now -- like I say, he is one of my favorite players. He is still not jaded by any negativism, and the focus is all looking really bright for Will Zalatoris, and I expect him to get in contention. Confidence is a beautiful thing, and he is full of it.

I just can't wait for him to walk through the door. I'll be celebrating with him.

**Q. Real quick follow-up: Does the slower green help his short putting, which can get kind of weird at times? Paul.**

PAUL AZINGER: I would like to think yes, but I can't say that for sure. It's hard to adjust from greens that are running 13 every week to running 10, and I really hope that the R&A understands that because St. Andrews is really an

easy, easy golf course if the wind doesn't blow. It's the easiest by a wide margin, and they need the elements there.

I believe slowing down the greens is a requirement at St. Andrews. That's going to be the big mystery for whoever figures it out, but generally you would think a stroke that looks like Will Zalatoris would probably like a slower green, but where would he be used to ever putting on a slow green? I don't know.

**Q. Just a quick follow-up for John. John, you touched on the conditions at St. Andrews, but from a caddie's perspective, do you think that role is more or less impactful than at some other courses than St. Andrews?**

JOHN WOOD: Definitely more impactful. There's so much to learn there in a relatively short amount of time if you have never been there.

Caddies who have been there three or four times -- I think I've caddied there four times in Opens -- have some knowledge going in, and that's hugely an advantage because you don't have to do all the homework that somebody new to the place does.

A guy like Ryan Goble who caddies for Will, he is probably going to get there pretty early and do a lot of work before will is on the ground because there's so much to learn in terms of lines off tees because most of the trouble at St. Andrews, you can't see.

There's those little pot bunkers that are flat to the fairway that you can't see, and you have to work out exactly what lines those are on. You have to figure out what clubs can reach those bunkers, what clubs can carry those bunkers.

Then you have to figure out when. Look at the forecast for the week. The wind there sometimes quite often can change in the middle of the day. Completely 180 right in the middle of the day. You've got to be ready to play every hole in every conceivable wind direction and be ready for your player at that point.

I would say St. Andrews is one of the most challenging courses to caddie on, especially from a tee shot standpoint.

PAUL AZINGER: That place has to be a caddie nightmare, Woody. Look, the one thing that you cannot control is the bounce of the ball, and at St. Andrews it's really exaggerated and magnified. It just has to be a caddie nightmare, especially if the conditions change, because one day you're aiming at the spire -- generally the

rule of thumb at St. Andrews is just keep it to the left, keep going to left. It's not always the case.

JOHN WOOD: You are totally right, Zinger. Another factor that goes into it a lot is the fescue. Sometimes if the fescue is fairly light and you have that yellowish hard pan on the bottom, those shots aren't that hard. You can get away with it.

When it's thick at the bottom and you have the fescue, that narrows your target area so much, so that could be another factor.

Yeah, it's probably -- I did probably more homework at St. Andrews than any other tournament during my career.

PAUL AZINGER: Let's not forget. We're talking about the great history of this place and the uniqueness of the whole nine yards. They're going to try to win a championship here. Someone is walking out of here as the champion golfer of the year.

While we talk about the history of this place and all the nuances, intricacies, it really comes down to that, doesn't it? It's like, man, who can figure this place out the fastest and hoist that trophy? It's going to be exciting.

**Q. For Tommy: You sat down with your World Feed partners to put together what we will be seeing next week. How helpful has the Dunhill Links event been and the fact that that is played at the Old Course every single year, and what specifically will we see next week that was taken from those experiences?**

TOMMY ROY: Yeah, so what was formerly known as European Tour Productions covered that event every single year. Now it's DP World Productions. Those guys all worked on that.

Jim Story, who is the director, has done that event for years, and so those guys have a plan in place of where the best locations for the cameras to show what the golfers are trying to do, what they're trying to attack and to take on that golf course.

I think it was very helpful for them to have all that experience. Again, everyone is talking about experience for the players. I would say the experience for the broadcasters is just as critical.

Again, dealing with those shared greens where they're trying to figure out who is going to hit first, you know, who is away, who is going to play first even though they're not away? That's very helpful to those guys.

**Q. How much, when you sit down, Tommy, and bring us on the air, and especially down the stretch Saturday/Sunday, because this is a partnering with the World Feed versus yourself in the truck -- how different is it for you and Tom Randolph, or does it feel like any other week in those clutch moments, 15, 16, 17, 18?**

TOMMY ROY: Yeah, it's significantly different because the shot by shot action is being decided for us essentially. The good news is those guys are very good at what they do.

David Mold is the primary producer for them, and, again, as I mentioned, Jim Story, the primary director, they've done a heck of a job. Last year was the first year where we (audio cut out) cameras, and it was a good learning experience for us to sort of have a pattern down of when the best time to go to commercial is with them.

We know when there's a big moment what their replay pattern is, so maybe we can help supplement that with our own replays, et cetera, et cetera. Yeah, it's sort of out of our control, but now we know what they do. I think we'll be able to make our broadcast even better.

JAMIE PALATINI: Great. Thanks, everybody, again for joining. As I mentioned, we're going to have a transcript of the call later today on NBCSportsgroupspresbox.com. Golf Central, live from The Open on Golf Channel and Peacock starts next Monday at 9:00 a.m. Eastern, 150th Open at St. Andrews.

1:30 a.m. Eastern live exclusively on Peacock next Thursday, July 14th. Thanks, everybody, for joining, and have a great day.

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