

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Dan Hicks

Kevin Kisner

Notah Begay

Smylie Kaufman

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to our call. We're joined by our commentator, Dan Hicks, and on-course reporters Kevin Kisner, Smylie Kaufman and Notah Begay. We'll begin with opening remarks from Dan Hicks.

DAN HICKS: Every time I hear that music, it never fails to give me chills. So thanks for starting off with the Yanni U.S. Open theme on NBC. Great stuff.

It's great to be getting back to Oakmont. I've had the privilege of covering three previous USGA events there. We did the Amateur way back in 2023. We did the U.S. Open then, the 2007 one. And then the 2010 U.S. Women's Open was just after that one; Paula Creamer won. Great championships. Looking forward to another one. This is the fourth one for me and our crew.

Just to mention, when you say the word "Oakmont," I don't think any other course brings that instant thought of that tough, unrelenting difficulty that this place has. They of course don't hold U.S. Opens at places of a record 10 times now, which is credible, without its ability to continue to challenge the best to the absolute limit.

And I say "continue to do that" because a lot of you know that Oakmont recently went through a big restoration by Gil Hanse and his company. From what I've heard, the membership was really, at first, hesitant to fully commit to it. But I understand that it would be completed right before the slated U.S. Open, so I understand how they were a little hesitant.

Gil Hanse needed to do it right and he did. I can't wait to see it. In fact, he's described it as open heart surgery with a little bit of plastic surgery in there as well. Really looking forward to what he did to restore it, with respect to William Fownes, the original architect.

I'll end by saying, I can't wait to work with our NBC team again. I think it's really coming together. Really excited to do a first major sitting next to Kevin Kisner. Really think he's a natural at this.

I think you either kind of get TV or you don't, and sure you get better with more reps. And Kis is just starting out. But I think he's a really smart guy who comes across -- I'll say it -- he's kind of a no-BS guy. I think the audience has picked up on that. And I think he's really going to be great at this year's U.S. Open, an event that really tests your guts.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go north of the border to the no-BS guy, Kevin Kisner.

KEVIN KISNER: Appreciate it. I'm going to get Dan to call my wife and convey those same sentiments to her that I'm just the perfect fit after this call.

I appreciate everyone having me on. I'm looking forward to doing my first major with Dan Hicks and the team at NBC. Like I told everyone, it's been the greatest experience for me being the first-time employer ever in my life. NBC has been a great team, brought me in with open arms. Kudos to all of them.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the golf course. I spent time with the USGA a few weeks ago going over the changes and how they want the U.S. Open to unfold.

I think from a venue standpoint, you cannot have what the USGA wants at a U.S. Open more than Oakmont as the perfect U.S. Open venue. They could have the U.S. Open pretty much anytime of the year if you wanted to show up, and the course is ready.

The USGA doesn't have to make a lot of changes to the course. I've gone through the changes with Gil Hanse's team and USGA. And I think the number one priority that USGA wants to have hope in the U.S. Open is driving the golf ball. I think those changes will put a premium on driving the golf ball just like they do at every U.S. Open.

From a greens standpoint, over the years, tons of sand splash out of the bunkers has created more of a collection area to the greens at Oakmont, that they've lowered these



bunkers back down to the original levels and I think you'll see more balls run away from the center of the greens which will make approach shots more difficult and getting the ball up-and-down more difficult.

I think they'll have more hole locations than we've seen in the past. Some pins will even appear they're off the edges of the greens with the renovation. And looking forward to getting there and seeing it.

One of the things USGA likes to accomplish -- I love this quote -- was get every club in the bag dirty. And when I finish a golf course no matter where I play I think that's one of the greatest attributes to a golf course if you hit every club in the bag I think Oakmont will be the perfect venue for that.

THE MODERATOR: Smylie.

SMYLIE KAUFMAN: I'll talk about the field and then just my experience in playing at Oakmont. I'll start with the field in general, just about what to expect coming into this U.S. Open.

I think we're all just so excited for what could be, at this incredible U.S. Open at Oakmont with Scottie Scheffler, of course, playing as good as he ever has. I didn't think we could ever say that again, but Scottie Scheffler coming into the U.S. Open has a lot of people excited to see if he can win two majors in a row.

And of course Bryson DeChambeau, the defending champion from last year, I mean, being on the ground last year with Rory McIlroy and watching it unfold, the back and forth in the two groups, just how fascinating and cool it is to be part of such an incredible event, which gets me very excited for this year.

I think anybody could really -- I wouldn't say anybody -- but there's different types of games that can win on this golf course. I think when you go back look at the leaderboard from 2016, you see that there's a lot of different varying distances of players that actually competed. Andrew Landry found his way in that group. A very straight hitter if the golf ball. Shane Lowry, a four-shot lead going into Sunday, and he's probably playing as good as he ever has. And Sepp Straka, another player, reminds me of Shane Lowry and how they play the golf game.

Accuracy, as Kevin Kisner said, is going to be very important, hitting fairways. And even then you're going to have to have conservative targets.

When you have a green light, which you don't have much at Oakmont, you need to find a way to make a birdie.

That's asking for a lot of this very difficult golf course as I played it in 2016 in the U.S. Open. And I can tell you I thought I played better. But that's kind of my whole career; I kind of thought I did a little better than I did.

I went back and saw the results, and I thought I was around like two or three over par and missed the cut by a couple only to realize that the cut was plus six. And I actually shot nine over and missed it by three.

It was an incredible experience playing a U.S. Open at Oakmont -- the crowds, and just the views that you have as a player. When you get on that first tee and you look out on that property and you can see the entire U.S. Open in front of you, it's a really cool deal.

I'm excited for all the players. We've got some great storylines from this Monday that just happened. A dentist I believe has made it in. We have some cool storylines outside the top lines. Just really looking forward to working, I guess this would now be my fourth event, working a U.S. Open with NBC. I'm excited to get going.

NOTAH BEGAY: Great to be with the NBC team again. I'm really looking forward to the broadcast, especially the venue. I think it's going to present such an array of different challenges, as Kis and Smylie and everybody alluded to.

I covered the last U.S. Amateur to be played there, won by James Piot in 2021, I was there covering it for our broadcast team. I just found it really unique in the sense that in an era of analytics and looking over all the different information that players are evaluating on sort of how to best pursue certain strategies on certain holes, I don't know that that necessarily is going to help them at Oakmont, which I think is interesting because every week players are trying to use these numbers to help them factor in certain decisions, when to go for certain holes, and when to be a little bit more conservative.

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THE MODERATOR: I think we may have lost Notah. We'll effort to get him back on the call. We'll open for questions.

Q. I was curious, for the guys, about Rory and just the last few weeks, if you will. We were all obviously down at the PGA, and he chose not to speak to the media for four straight days. Then the following week it was kind of curious what took place at Memorial. Jack made mention he never reached out to him. I'm curious about that because obviously he spoke to us on Wednesday of PGA week and just seemed so satisfied and happy and such a great place after having

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completed the Grand Slam. It seems a bit curious for Rory, what took police at Charlotte and even the Jack situation?

KEVIN KISNER: I'm not sure how to respond to the no-media request at the PGA. I wasn't there and I don't know what was going on with that. But I think on the Jack thing, scheduling -- he's an RBC guy. He has to be up in Canada this week and the U.S. Open last week. And all the emotions that went into winning Augusta and the Masters, and how big a deal for his career, how much effort he put into that, I think the emotional roller coaster that takes over time can just wear on you. And I think the scheduling impacted his decision not to play in Columbus.

I saw him yesterday here in Canada. He seemed in great spirits. I think that might have just been a one-off at the PGA. But who knows? I think he's good to go, and we'll see how it goes at the U.S. Open.

DAN HICKS: I'll jump in, until we hear from Rory himself, I think it's all speculation. He's been such an accessible guy which obviously was so curious about what he did at the PGA. And he's kind of gotten off the grid a little bit.

But as Kis said, maybe he needs that kind of time. But I think until we hear from him specifically, he's been pretty honest with everybody about a lot of things. So I think until he talks and kind of -- he'll respond to it. He has to. He knows that. So eventually we'll get some word. But until we do from him, I think it's just all speculation.

Q. Is Notah back? I did have a question for him. One for you and also one for Smylie. For Smylie, I was just curious if there's going to be a Happy Hour for the U.S. Open and perhaps moving forward for the rest of the season with the British Open and FedEx Playoffs, and if you have any insight on what you plan to do or who you plan to have on for that, if there is going to be one? For Notah, I was curious if perhaps you've spoken to Tiger and if you do have an update on how he's doing.

SMYLIE KAUFMAN: I'll take the first question in regards to Happy Hour. For the U.S. Open we're not going to be doing a Happy Hour. The USGA elected not to do it this year. Not ruling out future years, but for this year in particular they're not going to do it.

But when we come to Happy Hours for the rest of the year, expect to see us be doing it at every single playoff event. Of course, I love doing it. It's definitely added some fun to some -- not only for me, but just having these players come on, tell us about the golf course and really let them be the analyst. It's been really enjoyable for me to have these

guys come on. And definitely wish we were doing it but it's one of the those things we totally understand. And we're excited to call the U.S. Open.

NOTAH BEGAY: With regards to the Tiger question, the only Wood playing good golf these days is Charlie. I don't even think it's that much of an issue. Those injuries, they take forever to heal. So definitely still in recovery mode.

Q. I know a ton has been made about Bryson's bunker shot last year. Can't rewatch that one enough. It was, you know, a 50-to-1 or 100-to-1 shot. But can you explain how anyone -- the best player in the world, the worst player in the world, whatever -- can sort of conjure up that shot under that much pressure, just how surprised or amazed you were to see it happen under those circumstances?

SMYLIE KAUFMAN: I was standing there watching Bryson DeChambeau maybe six, seven feet away. And seeing when his feet hit the sand and how much sand there appeared to be in the bunker that really had not gotten much play throughout the week. I'm sitting there thinking, where would I hit this and where do I think Bryson is going to hit this.

When he took this big swing, the amount of confidence that you have to have to hit it that close to the golf ball and not accidentally catch too much ball and send it on top of the clubhouse, it's a very fine line.

I think when Bryson said after that he was going for more of a chunk-type of play, that takes a lot, lot of strength to be able to hit it that close to the ball, take that much sand and carry it a good 30, 35 yards.

So watching it that close enough and personal, it was one of the greatest shots I've ever seen, pressure-packed shots I've ever seen and maybe will ever see around the green. So it's going to be a shot that we talk about for years to come, the up-and-down by Bryson at 18 at Pinehurst. Let's see what he has in store for us this week.

NOTAH BEGAY: On top of that you ask how these guys do that. They work every single day, every week at these facets of the game in hopes they will have an opportunity to try it.

I think one of the most overlooked things about professional golf is all the calculation that happens on the fly in evaluating certain shots, which way the grass is laying, where the ball's going to land and on top of all the normal things.

And for Bryson to be able to -- you just heard Smylie

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explain how many different factors --

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THE MODERATOR: I think we may have lost Notah again, unfortunately.

Q. Just curious, maybe starting with Kis, but anyone feel free to chime in. How do you describe the evolution of Bryson DeChambeau from guys not really liking him to becoming maybe the most popular golfer in the world right now?

KEVIN KISNER: I'm terribly shocked you asked for my opinion on that one. I think what Bryson realized is in the current space he's playing in he better have as many fans as he needs, and he's done a heck of a job using social media channels to connect with viewers, connect with golfers, connect with -- and show his true personality because I think he probably didn't do a great job of that early on in his career.

It's amazing to watch the amount of people and the way he's reacting to the fans these days. And I think the transformation is amazing. I commend him for realizing that he needed to probably change that. And a lot of guys don't take the time or the effort to do it.

But I think he's done an awesome job with it. And watching him just at the PGA, the way he was interacting with the fans and doing all the things, I think heck of a job he's done to connect.

SMYLIE KAUFMAN: Yeah, pretty much everything that Kis said I would reiterate. I would say his ability to not only just drive it so dang far, it's such a strength of his. But he brings so many different people into the game from his YouTube channel that get to watch him show his personality a little bit. I think a lot of players can learn from Bryson and how he's been able to leverage his brand.

But what he's done a great job of, too, is he's really used the crowd to his advantage at many events. He's been a major killer over the past couple of years now. He's always near the top of the leaderboard. It's incredible how this guy, he is kind of the needle out there when it comes to getting a crowd going. It's fun to be around his groups because you can definitely feel where the Bryson fans are and when he gets it going.

It's fun to be a part of it last year at the U.S. Open, especially watching his game after not seeing it for a couple of years, how incredible it is when he gets that driver going.

Looking forward to seeing if that iron game can kind of tighten up a little bit this week at Oakmont because that's something that -- getting to these little sections of these greens that are going to be tough to get to, that's probably been his biggest weakness in not winning more majors, as the short game and driving ability has been plenty good enough. That will be a big test for him is how good his iron game will be this U.S. Open.

DAN HICKS: I think he's the game's ultimate marketer right now. I think he's been incredibly smart with his transformation, whatever you want to think. I think he's the same guy, but he's just used the showmanship routine to really take his stardom to a whole new level.

And as Smylie said, I think he's learned that whipping up the crowd, becoming connected with the crowd only helps him -- not only helps him get cheered for, but I think it helps him with his own confidence level of, look it, they're all cheering for me; now I'm going to give them something really special.

I think he's learned that formula. I think he's become a lot more dangerous of a guy, especially at the biggest ones they play, the majors. And that's proven to be true.

Q. Why do you guys think he's the one guy who went to LIV who has been able to capitalize and play even better than he did before in the majors?

KEVIN KISNER: From my point of view, watching the Ryder Cup, he's had six starts to get points. And he's third in the points. And the next least amount of starts for any points-getter is 15. I think that's fascinating. It shows how well he's played in the biggest events.

And I think he's really shown that at the biggest stage he can shine. That's one of the greatest compliments you could pay a golfer, and the way he's preparing for those biggest events. He's got two more opportunities to lock up a spot on the Ryder Cup team which I think is fascinating.

NOTAH BEGAY: And to that point, you've got to understand how Bryson approaches golf and his mindset. This whole iron thing started when he was in high school. The best thing his father, who is a PGA member, did for him was he didn't try and change him. He wasn't heavily recruited because of that. A little bit socially awkward. And he just kind of had to kind of exist in his own silo. He does not like to play casual golf. Bryson likes to practice.

I think that he's the only one that's figured out -- I thought John Rahm had kind of figured it out when coming down the stretch at the PGA, but we saw that in the last three holes, when he needed to shine, he didn't.



But Bryson will completely evaluate what a certain golf course is going to demand, and he will do it analytically, and then he will go and exactly practice for that. And he's a physicist. He's a mental giant. And I think it gives him more time to focus on these specific events and try and quantitatively deduce what exactly he's going to have to do and the shots he's going to have to hit.

Smylie brings up a great point. He's going to need to get his wedges a little bit sharper because that's going to be an element of the game that's required here. And I don't think that he's going to overpower this golf course like we saw at Winged Foot.

I think that's sort of his edge is his ability to evaluate, decide what the requisite skills are going to be required, and then go and then work on those for weeks, weeks after and --

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THE MODERATOR: I think Notah is gone.

Q. Kis and Smylie, golf is supposed to be fun. It's supposed to be something you're supposed to look forward to. This is a major. This is the national Open. And yet you see these reports coming out from scouting trips that Rory and Adam Scott are making and it's, like, oh, my God. How do you get yourself into a mental head space to actually enjoy what you're about to do if the outcome is carnage?

KEVIN KISNER: I think you just change expectations. Just because one week we shoot 25-under par and that's fun, you have to change your mindset and 3-over par might be fun. I don't get too caught up in the whole carnage, pre-tournament reports because we hear that almost seemingly every year at these events. And then when we show up on Thursday, somebody's 3-under at the turn and it's, like, what happened to all the carnage reports.

You put 156 of the best players in the world at a course, it doesn't matter; you stick a hole in the ground and they're going to figure out a way to make birdies.

I'm interested to see how the scoring is. But to answer your question, I think it's just the expectation that just because it's the setup and the venue you change your expectation to allow yourself to have fun and enjoy making pars and the grind of it instead of feeling like you have to birdie every hole to be around on Sunday.

SMYLIE KAUFMAN: I was on the range yesterday hitting a couple of balls late in the evening. This gentleman came

up to me and said how excited he was for the U.S. Open. And the reason why, he's, like, I love watching these players suffer. And I laughed. I said I guess now me too now that I'm in the broadcast.

But I think it was really -- it made me think about it a little bit more, just about just what this U.S. Open is. And I think maybe it was Dan or Kis earlier that said, you've got to get dirty, you've got to test every club in your bag.

The mental side of the game for this U.S. Open, there's going to be moments where you feel like this wasn't normal, this wasn't fair. And you've got to find a way to completely just get rid of that thought and just know that everybody else is going through the same crap out here.

It's going to be an absolute physical, mental grind. I think you'll see the toughest players on Sunday that are in contention, it will be the guys that have been able to keep their wits about them, not have those blowup holes completely derail their championship.

And I expect an over-par U.S. Open winner. Of course, weather will be a huge impact, like if we get a bunch of rain like we did '16. But based on some of the reports I've heard, I agree with you; it sounds like it's going to be crazy, crazy hard.

I heard that Adam Scott hit every fairway on his opening nine and shot 3-over where -- there's going to be some interesting stuff too like the first hole. It slopes straight down towards the green where some of these really long players might be able to drive it on this first green.

But of course it's going to be a test that we're really all excited to see who is going to pass and who is mentally going to be able to keep their wits about them.

Q. Kevin, where do you rank Oakmont as a U.S. Open venue from either what you have played or what you have seen? And a second question, if I could, because Notah mentioned this about Bryson, you look, Ángel Cabrera won in '07, Dustin won in 2016, two bombers of the ball. Is Oakmont a course that favors bombers?

KEVIN KISNER: To answer the first question, I think it's number one. I think that's exactly what the USGA is trying to capture in hosting a U.S. Open. Like I said in my opening remarks, the course is pretty much U.S. Open ready year-round during the season.

They can be ready in a couple days, and you give them time to prepare for an event that they want to showcase what they want the U.S. Open champion to achieve, I think it's the epitome of a venue. So I would rank it right there at



the top. And I think a lot of people at the USGA would agree with me.

As far as bombers, like Smylie said and Dan, Shane Lowry had a four-shot lead the last time we were there. I was having breakfast with him yesterday and he said he didn't remember, but he had a three-shot lead on the back nine on Sunday and didn't win. He's not known as a bomber. I think he's known as a grinder, and figure it out and get the ball in the hole.

I think it's a perfect venue that will have a lot of different opportunities for guys to compete. I think one of the things the bombers get away with that others don't is their misses are further away from the fairway and sometimes can be in less dramatic rough outside the rope lines. And I think that's an advantage for a bomber.

But there's a lot of different ways to play Oakmont, and I think you'll see a lot of different variety of games near the top of the leaderboard come Sunday.

Q. Dan, this is the 25th year since Tiger's tour de force at Pebble Beach. I know we do these retrospectives every so often. But Dan, as time goes on, what perhaps is the one or two memories that just jump out to you still immediately 25 years out?

DAN HICKS: Well, it starts and ends with me at Pebble Beach. That was my first time in the 18th tower with Johnny. It was Pebble Beach and couldn't believe what this kid was doing.

And I'll never forget that as the historic records began piling up, I felt this pressure to try to keep up with him and get it all right. And the numbers were just mindboggling. Just every round there was another milestone. There was a possibility of setting a record, putting it out even further.

It starts and ends with Pebble Beach in 2000. So 25 years ago, he had that incredible stretch of play and that was it.

The U.S. Open will never see a better performance in a major championship. It's hard to say that, but I think we're never going to see anybody win a championship by that many shots, 15.

I have a board in my office that I'm looking at right now that has all the scores from the final round of that U.S. Open championship, and Tiger started the day at 8-under and Ernie Els, the closest to him at plus-2, so he had a 10-shot lead, and just to look at the numbers of what everybody else did, it's a sports performance that I think will never be repeated. It was that dominant in a game which you just never see that kind of dominance. That's my thought. It

starts and ends there, as I said.

Q. Dan, as Sunday went along, it's obviously not competitive at the top, but it's record-breaking. How do you balance the kind of enormity, so to speak, of what Tiger was doing and not just have your every focus on what Tiger is doing, you're still covering a tournament, sort of?

DAN HICKS: Yeah, sort of. That's the keyword because there was no one else. It was a complete show with one guy.

You look at the ratings back then, I can't recall exactly what they were, but they were huge because -- as the day went on, as the lead got bigger, the audience got bigger. And that shows you, you know, you don't always -- you want a close championship, that's the real reason we get into this business, but this was that and much more.

This was history, and I think people picked up on the fact that how can one single guy be that dominant? How can one guy take it to 12-under par and the next guy be plus-3? We're never going to see anything like that.

I think it was a fascination with a guy at perfection in a game which no one really comes close to that. So it's the absolute Sistine Chapel of major championship performances, and I really believe it will never be equal.

Q. Smylie and Kis, it's weird that we have been on this call and I don't believe one question has been asked about Scottie, which I think is kind of perfect, because we just almost expect the remarkable stuff he's been doing. But can you guys both kind of address that, how he just kind of motors along? He's putting Tiger-like numbers together. Yet, when we were on these calls back in the day when Tiger was doing these things, probably 18 out of the 20 questions would have been about Tiger. What does that say about Scottie, and how remarkable is this run that he's on in your minds?

SMYLIE KAUFMAN: I think with Scottie, he's the best player that I've ever seen with my own eyes. I, of course, have watched Tiger on TV as a kid growing up, and so I can't really speak to watching the golf ball in the air like I can with Scottie, as I've gotten the opportunity and really just lucky to be able to watch him as much as I have over the years, and it's the best I've ever seen.

He's got no weaknesses in his game. You just feel like when you're behind Scottie, you have to press because you know he's not going to make any mistakes.



I think it's just a blend of so many great things that he has. Like, when you're a 65-percent-accuracy driver of the golf ball and you hit as many fairways as he does, then you couple it with maybe one of the best iron players to ever play the game, and now throw in a strokes-gained, top-20 putter along with a second in scrambling, he just doesn't have any weaknesses.

I think the best comparison that I can make with him and Tiger Woods, other than you can look at all the stats and the numbers say it is very close, but what Scottie does an incredible job of doing is his bad days, he shoots 70. And Tiger Woods used to do the exact same thing. The days where he doesn't have anything -- and when you look at all the top players in the game right now, how many times have you seen Rory McIlroy or Xander Schauffele or Justin Thomas shoot rounds of 76 or higher on major championship Thursday rounds and all of a sudden they're out of it?

Scottie Scheffler doesn't do that. He turns those days into 71s, 70s, 69s. And it just speaks to really just being an athlete and finding a way to get it done. I would say that's probably the most impressive thing that Scottie does for my eyes.

KEVIN KISNER: To follow up on that a little different is two of the things that impressed me with Scottie is, I was fortunate enough to watch him hit every shot those nine days in Montreal at the Presidents Cup and played with him numerous times.

He does the exact same thing the last 20 seconds before he hits a golf shot, every shot in practice and in play and in competition, and he plays with his grip and gets it perfectly. He has the same look in his eye. When he steps in, he has the most intense concentration that I've ever seen on every shot, and he makes sure that he's in the zone on every shot. That's something that, in my eyes, I always look back at Tiger Woods in his heyday, and that's what he did as well.

One of the other fascinating things that's starting to happen that happened when Tiger was on that run was his peers are starting to talk about him in the same way that Tiger's fellow competitors talked about him.

You saw Jordan talk about him last week and a few others. I just found it fascinating that it's getting to the point that his peers are even talking about how good he is and how great he's playing and how hard it is to beat him, and I think that even helps your advantage when you're the guy that others are talking about.

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