

Senior PGA Championship

The Concession Golf Club

Bradenton, Florida, USA

Friday, April 17, 2026

Justin Hicks

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined now by Justin Hicks here at the 2026 Senior PGA Championship. Justin, 3-under on the day. What do you think about your round out there?

JUSTIN HICKS: It was quite the ride, quite honestly. We got off to a really nice start. Flagging it out of the gate early on in our first nine holes on the back nine and missed some really nice short birdie putts in there, but still made a few. I was kind of wondering where is this day headed. Trying not to look too much on the boards, because for me I'm better off just playing my own game.

But, yeah, I hit a lot of great shots. Then we kind of made the turn, and golf happened a little bit. Usually this time of the week I've got my 4:00 lesson coming in and everything else, so this is just nice to have the week off to play golf in a tournament.

Lost out on a couple of three-putts there. Second green seemed a bit slow, but I got a little distracted before I hit that one. Came up quite a bit short and then missed the second one there. Then that sixth hole is playing -- was it sixth?

Five was playing pretty tough today with the wind kind of pushing off the lake. Hit a great drive, though, and I'm drooling over the second shot, but the lie and the wind were really not setting up well for that pin. I mean, I had 145 yards. Usually if I'm at home, I'm licking my chops from the center of the fairway, but ended up three-putting that one.

I don't know if I got mad I hit it 30 feet and thought I should have been closer or what happened, but I ran it by and missed the come-backer and started thinking, what happened to this round, because it got off to such a good start where.

I hung in there and decided to try to give it a run there at seven. Left it just short and holed a long putt from just off the green there. Tom, my caddie, made a great read on it, and I had good speed on it. It went right in.

I think I was so excited I didn't know how to hit the next tee shot, though. Got it up and down from 77 yards and then had to have a really good two-putt on the last.

Yeah, it was just an up-and-down day, but that's kind of what we sign up for with this game. All in all, you know, coming away with a big smile on my face I think and looking forward to playing the weekend.

That's part of -- you know, you don't want to think too much about cuts as a player, but you know in the back of your head that you want to be playing the weekend out here, so...

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. I was wondering, what was the struggle on the par-5s and if that eagle on seven kind of changed the outlook on how to play the par-5s?

JUSTIN HICKS: You said the struggle on the par-5s?

Q. You couldn't get any birdies there. Pars on the par-5s.

JUSTIN HICKS: I mean, the par-5s out here, I don't know if I see them quite the way that maybe some people do. There's a lot of severity to those greens. A lot. I mean, more than maybe I've ever seen in my life, and I've played everywhere but Antarctica. I don't know. I feel like there's a lot of severity out here.

I talked to Mike Small before the start of the week, because he was here with the college kids a few years back. I asked him, How did you go about coaching these guys with these things? He said, Well, you know, if these guys have a great wedge game, we're going to go at it. If you don't have a great wedge game, you're going to lay up and hit it in there from a distance.

I've been going with more of that because I don't want to get kicked in the teeth with some of these par-5s, and there are some areas that -- I found one of them today on 17,

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and I had to scramble just to get out of there with a five, and I was green-side in two.

I don't hit flop shots off of cart path lies over bunkers with, you know, three steps a green when I'm at home. I guess I got to figure that out there, but I don't have the grass to figure that out (laughing). I don't know.

That's the thing, every time I play these Mr. Nicklaus's golf courses, I always come away with it, like, I got to remember that shot and how do I figure that one out? I mean, I played Memorial years ago, and there was a handful of them out there. I think this place here too, it's, like, man, I'll go back home, and I'll have, you know, thoughts about it, and I got to have that shot because, you know, there are certain shots out here you just don't see everywhere, but if you can figure them out, it's good for a lot of other places too.

Yeah, the par-5s, you know, I didn't necessarily make birdies on the back. I only had -- I was in between 5- and 6-iron on 17 too. For a second day in a row I wanted to hit that green and have a roll at eagle, but you know, that's golf.

I think PGA TOUR stats 5-, 6-iron they're going to hit the green auto 50% of the time. I'm playing a few times a month and teaching, so I'd say I'm doing pretty good, yeah.

Q. How long was the putt on 17, and just how much did that kind of salvage your round?

JUSTIN HICKS: I mean, I don't know if I can answer the first part of that, because my head was spinning. I don't know. Must have been probably 12 to 14 feet at least. Might be way off there, I don't know.

Q. I meant the eagle on...

JUSTIN HICKS: Oh, the eagle putt? Oh, that thing was probably 45 feet, including the fringe area that I was putting through, yeah. So, yeah, that was a nice one.

When I first hit it I thought, Oh, this will be good, it's going to be nice and close. Then for it to disappear was just, like... You know, we're playing with two guys that have been world-class players for decades. You know, Notah and Justin Leonard, you're watching their wedge games and watching them hole it out from back right on 18. I mean, that's just, like, phenomenal, to hole that shot for birdie.

Then Justin, when he miss a green, he chips it close and then putts it. Then, you know, his wedge shots, I mean, he hits it 5 feet almost every time he gets a wedge in his

hands. Watching these guys, it inspires me to understand, you know, don't settle for where you're at. Keep pushing, trying to get better.

There's no such thing as hitting it too close or making too many birdies in this game, but it's fun. Fun to watch those guys and fun to kind of, you know, whatever, be in contention out here and have fun with it and continue to shoot under par and see what can happen.

I mean, it's nice being in Florida, kind of having that little bit of a home feel. I mean, West Coast always plays to me a little different than East Coast where I live, but Bermuda grass, Florida, hot, you know, it's definitely comforting I guess in some ways.

I don't know if I would have gone up last year to play Congressional and if I would have felt quite as comfortable in some of these situations, but there's certainly something to be said for it. We don't have quite as many awkward lies, and the hills -- we have hills, but we don't have quite as much pitch.

Yeah, that was a big one. I think I let out a little bit of a yell there (laughing). I was pretty excited, because just making an eagle, but much less making a long putt was fun.

Q. Justin, the scores today were pretty good. Halfway through a major we got two 10s, an 8, and today there was a 7, a 6, and three 5s. Is this course that gettable, or can it show some teeth over the weekend as we look for 36 more holes?

JUSTIN HICKS: Well, it's hot. The ball is flying. It can be gettable, but I think there's a lot of risk/reward going on out here. I think some of these guys might have gotten a few putts to fall, and they might be taking a little bit more chance at times, and there's a lot of pins out there that if you're off by a little bit, you can catch a little -- you don't have to hit it off the green. You can catch a little area on the green, and it's 30 yards off the green in a heart beat.

So, you know, I don't know if they're playing smart golf and giving themselves the proper side or if they're just going right at it. I've seen a little bit of both from people that I've played with this week, but it's somewhat gettable, I would say.

The par-5s, the bigger hitters, you're going to be able to get to every one of them, but it's a serious gamble going at some of these pins and some of these greens on par-5s even. Yeah, your work is cut out for you.

There's a number of holes out there, like a nine or an eight, if you put it in position, you're going to have a wedge.

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Even the second hole it's a long par-4, but we've had gap wedge into it both days.

You know, the first hole is a pretty tough starting hole, believe it or not. I don't know what the numbers are showing on that sucker, but you put it in play, and you still have a pretty good length in. That's a pretty good starting hole over there.

Ten, you get it in the fairway there, you're going to have a wedge there too. Yeah, I mean, I think the place is gettable with some length off the tee, but you got to play smart, and I think there's a lot of risk/reward. Maybe some of the guys out here, you know, they're playing enough weeks to them where it's either win or go home. I don't know, but we're trying to play four days and have a good go of it.

Q. Justin, do you even take a peek at how the other PGA professionals are doing, or is that something that's not even on your radar this week?

JUSTIN HICKS: The only thing I'm seeing is occasionally my eye will catch a leaderboard and see what the leaders are at. I really don't know what anybody else is doing out here this week. I'm always kind and say, How's your day going, or something like that to the guys I pass, but I don't really leaderboard-watch that much.

My goal is just to try to treat this like I'm playing a tournament back home, because it's in Florida kind of a feel, and go out there and try to shoot it under par every day and see what happens.

You know, it has some moments out here where you got to hit some really, really tough shots, and you got some moments out here where you're holding wedge, and you're hopefully taking advantage of that.

So if we keep driving it well and getting short irons on a lot of these holes like I've been fortunate enough to do, I think we'll have hopefully a good weekend and keep talking to you guys every day.

Q. You mentioned your lesson today at 6:00 p.m. usually.

JUSTIN HICKS: It's at 4:00, yeah. It's the same junior every week. It's two hours.

Q. I wonder what kind of feedback, what kind of messages you expect from your members and if they're going to come this weekend to watch, do you think?

JUSTIN HICKS: It would be nice if they did, but I don't know. There might be some that come over. There were some that were talking about coming over, but I think a lot of them, with it being on TV and everything else, you know... Who knows? If it was a little closer to home maybe, a little better chance of that.

I think any time I play in these things, it's always fun to kind of incorporate things like watching Notah and Justin out there. There's probably going to be some conversations and some lessons about how their short games were and the kind of shots they hit and their temperament.

Get some people out there, they get really hot on the range with me because they want those balls to go right where they're looking, and it's, like, Hey, the best players in the world don't hit it right where they're looking, so we have to change our expectations here.

I think for the most part I think this game is great, and I think a lot of people recognize that. Maybe not everyone is cut out for it mentally in some ways to understand that, but I think even through the frustration of it, everyone loves it, the challenge of it.

Today was challenging for us. I was saying yesterday we told a lot of jokes out there, and we did our best to keep them going today, but there was times where it was not always easy to be laughing out there, and that's just what this game does to you.

Yeah, it was a lot of fun to battle. Like I said, this is a week off for me, so I'm just trying to have fun with it and play golf (laughing).

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