

Travelers Championship

Wednesday, June 18, 2025

TPC River Highlands

Cromwell, Connecticut, USA

J.J. Spaun

Press Conference



TRAVELERS
CHAMPIONSHIP

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome the U.S. Open winner J.J. Spaun to the room here at the Travelers Championship. J.J., it's been a whirlwind since a dramatic finish to win your first major. You spent all day yesterday in New York City yesterday on a major media blitz. What's the last two days been like for you?

J.J. SPAUN: It's been pretty hectic but also very fun. It's been nice to be given the opportunity to express my feelings, my emotions. A lot of people want to hear from me. I was really grateful to have the opportunity to tell everyone about it. So I enjoyed it. It was a fun time.

I actually wanted to go to New York City at some point between Pittsburgh and Cromwell. I was telling my wife it would be fun to take a little one night trip to the city. She wasn't for it, but it ended up becoming mandatory after the week on Sunday.

Q. You're back here at the Travelers Championship. How excited are you to get back this week?

J.J. SPAUN: Super excited. I didn't get to play here last year. I love the area. I love the course. Such a great course that they have here at TPC River Highlands. Looks like we're going to have some pretty good weather too, so that's nice. Just excited to get the week going.

Just got in, so kind of got to knock the rust off.

Q. Finally, a couple years ago, you won the Travelers Charity Challenge, formed a really good relationship with Andy Bessette, longtime Travelers executive and very much the heart of this tournament. He's someone with whom you've formed a personal relationship given you've been open with some of your own health journey. How cool is it been given the history with Andy, which if you could share a little bit about that and what it means arriving back at this tournament as a major winner?

J.J. SPAUN: I believe that was 2018 where I won the Umbrella Challenge right in the lake right there off of 16. I

had just recently been diagnosed -- or maybe that was 2019. But in the fall of 2018 I was diagnosed with diabetes type 2. It was just kind of a crazy diagnosis I wasn't expecting. I wasn't feeling great, so I knew something was up.

Yeah, I just was kind of going through the whole learning experience of what diabetes is and how to treat it and how to approach this disease, but I remember winning that and you get to donate \$15,000, \$10,000, I believe, to a charity of your choice, and I chose JD RF, which is the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. When Travelers got word of where I wanted that donation to go, Andy Bessette kind of broke down apparently and was kind of touched very deeply because he's a very integral part of that charity and donates quite a lot of money too. So that initiated our connection.

He's kind of been there for me the whole way, where if it was doctors I needed to get in touch with or CEOs of JD RF, it's been nice to have that connection and his network to kind of help me along this journey because I had just been diagnosed with it, but diagnosed incorrectly. Even when I got my diagnosis corrected, I guess, it was even more so helpful to have JD RF and Andy on my side to kind of help me navigate another new territory, I guess you could say.

I'm happy to be back. Hopefully I can win the challenge again and donate some more money to JD RF.

Q. In the last couple days, you've become a U.S. Open champion, gone to No. 3 in the Ryder Cup standings, very busy the last two days. Where is your head right now as you prepare to play this tournament?

J.J. SPAUN: I'm not like fully in the clouds still, but we're getting a little below the ceiling, the cloud ceiling. Yeah, it's been a whirlwind. Everything that the aftermath of this whole championship has been so crazy but so much fun, and all these doors opening, it's stuff that you don't expect ever really to happen in your career. The Dodgers reaching out and Ryder Cup potential, the Today show. It's just insane.

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I'm super grateful to have won the championship and to be given this experience. It's something I'll never forget obviously for the rest of my life. I guess I'm a part of history now.

Q. What was the timeline kind of like between winning the U.S. Open and where you are right now?

J.J. SPAUN: It was crazy. I got whisked off the green and then back onto the green probably around 8:45 p.m. and then did the whole formalities of the ceremony, signing a bunch of memorabilia, obviously getting the trophy, seeing it get engraved. The USGA did a great job of kind of giving us our own little room to kind of hang out and chill all night till whenever we wanted to leave. We didn't leave until about 1:00 a.m., we didn't leave Oakmont until 1:00 a.m. back down to Pittsburgh where I was staying.

Then it was a quick three hours of sleep. I got back at 1:30, and I just kind of sat in bed, trying to maybe go through my phone. Took a quick shower, started going through my phone to respond to some people and just tried to see what was going on to help me like soak it in and realize that it actually happened because it's just been such a blur since then.

Then we were off to New York City. Had a nice dinner with my family on Monday night. We went to do all the media 6:00 a.m. on Tuesday morning. Didn't finish -- it was literally nonstop. Didn't finish until 3:30, 4:00, hopped in a car, got driven up here. That was about 3 1/2 hours. Didn't walk through the front door of the hotel until 8:00 p.m.

Finally got some good sleep, though. I slept about eight hours, which was nice. The last two nights, I got the same amount as I did last night combined.

Q. Over the last day or so, who are some of the coolest people who have reached out to you to congratulate you?

J.J. SPAUN: I heard from George Lopez, comedian and actor from Los Angeles; Mookie Betts, who was actually my Pro-Am partner at Pebble Beach; Scott Van Pelt; a lot of people. I'm still like halfway through my messages. Curtis Strange, Hale Irwin, just some great champions that have been there and know what it's like, people that I have never even talked to, but it was great.

Q. I was looking through your iron specs after the win, and I saw they're not exactly off the rack. Is that something you like to dive into, or is that something you just kind of leave it to your team at Srixon to handle for you?

J.J. SPAUN: It's definitely something that I've been -- kind of a standard that I've been playing for the last almost eight, nine years with them. I don't have an incrementally sound progression in lies and stuff and lofts. It's just kind of been I like to tweak it to where I feel like it needs to be to hit where I want with that club. It's just been something that the team at Srixon has just kind of kept very consistent. We haven't changed anything really at all.

Q. Obviously the LAB putter is new this year. How did you get into that putter, and what do you like so much about it? Obviously you're the first person to win a major with a zero torque design.

J.J. SPAUN: Yeah, that's cool. I got one of those -- I've always been interested in it, but I've never really wanted to stray away from the traditional blade putter because I'm so feel. I like to feel the toe flow. I like to maybe push the putt a little more on a right-to-lefter and pull it maybe on a left-to-righter to err maybe on the higher side.

I didn't have a great putting year statistically -- and I'm not statistically an overall great putter. I'm pretty hot and cold, I would say. But I got it last off-season and tinkered with it and had enough time five, six weeks at home to play with it and get comfortable with it and see what my tendencies were with it.

I felt really good with it, so I put it in play. First week was the Sony Open with it, and I almost won there with it. I've just been putting a lot more consistently with that putter. It's obviously proven itself this season.

Q. J.J., earlier today, I should say, Scottie Scheffler and Keegan Bradley, who was just in, said they both hope you really enjoy everything that sort of comes with the win, that you can appreciate having sort of fulfilled this. At the same time obviously, you want to continue and play your best. Have you had any opportunity so far with your team, your family, to sort of just sit down for a second and try to plan out what could be the next couple weeks, or is it at this point still day by day trying to ride this thing?

J.J. SPAUN: It's been day by day. I still haven't really been able to enjoy it and not have any responsibilities. It would be nice to just sit on my couch at home and have the trophy sitting right next to me and watch some SportsCenter or something, but that's kind of how I like to enjoy things, just kind of vegging out, especially after long weeks on the road and big tournaments.

We're getting closer to what I have in plan for the next few weeks, but just so far taking it day by day.

Q. What do you think will be the biggest challenge for you, certainly through the rest of the season, in terms of compartmentalizing what you need to do to be successful, to play good golf through the rest of the year, and also at the same time, again, appreciating that win?

J.J. SPAUN: I definitely need to keep the hunger there. I think I will have the hunger just because I want to continue to prove myself, but not prove myself to anybody other than myself, I feel like, and that's kind of been my biggest barrier throughout my entire career is just trying not to be so hard on myself and not ruining any sort of confidence that I've built from all these experiences on my journey as a golfer.

As long as I keep that up, I think I'll continue to play well, and obviously winning the U.S. Open is going to be a huge boost to that sort of inner ego, I guess you could say, to keep that self-belief alive and burning.

Yeah, I need to enjoy this, like Keegan told me that yesterday. He said, you need to enjoy this. Do your best to just enjoy it. It's easy to kind of let it out the window and get right into the next week and forget about it for a while, but just do your best to enjoy it.

I'm planning to enjoy it next week, that's for sure, at least for next week.

Q. J.J., you mentioned it's been a whirlwind week for you. Two years ago, maybe not quite to the same extent, but at this tournament your daughter was born on Monday. You didn't know if you were going to be coming out until the last minute. Your memories of that week, was that kind of a whirlwind as well? Obviously good memories, I assume, regarding your family. I guess she's probably got a birthday coming up too, right?

J.J. SPAUN: Violet's birthday is on Thursday -- tomorrow. I don't even know what day it is.

(Laughter).

Yeah, the last time I played here, it was almost a similar sort of whirlwind. My daughter was born Monday. My wife didn't get discharged out of the hospital until Tuesday, late Tuesday. It was our second born, and she had -- she was very nice enough to tell me, if I want to go play, I'll go play. So I flew out here Wednesday night. I got in at like midnight. Luckily I had like a 1:30 tee time Thursday, but just literally -- and keep in mind I had a week off before because I'm pretty sure it was the U.S. Open and I wasn't

in.

We had been in the Shea Birthing Center four days prior to that getting ready, going in and out, being in triage for the birth. So I didn't really touch a club until -- I didn't touch a club five days before I even teed it up in the tournament.

So it was wild to come all the way from Scottsdale to Cromwell was kind of a journey and getting in late. I had to do some extra diaper duty for leaving her so quickly, but we made it work.

Q. Are they here this week, the family?

J.J. SPAUN: Yeah.

Q. As you look back on the last year and a half or so from where you are now, that point you've told the story where you nearly stepped away, now obviously a U.S. Open champ, what's your big takeaway from that rise, and what do you hope people take away who learn that story?

J.J. SPAUN: I would say pretty cliché, but to never give up. I think the biggest thing is you can always -- there's two ways you can kind of take away when your back's up against the wall. You can kind of succumb to it and just say, okay, this is my way out, or I'm going to fight back. I've been kind of through these situations in my life before, and I've always kind of fought back and come out the other side instead of kind of succumbing to it and letting it get to me and ending any sort of dream I had, whether it was like the diabetes or going through a bad slump in golf.

I think that's kind of the mindset, and I think it just shifted my perspective, where if my fate is to be on this TOUR, if my fate is to be a U.S. Open champion, it will happen, and all I can do is just try my best and give myself the best opportunity to play my best. I think taking a lot of pressure off yourself is the biggest way to do that.

Q. J.J., you've been an incredible ball striker throughout your career. When you hit the shot on 17, the tee shot, did you know?

J.J. SPAUN: Knew what (laughter)? It was going within 12 feet, no. When it was in the air, it looked really good. I had hit good drives there all week. Even in the practice rounds, the first practice round I played the back nine, I hit it to probably 20 feet. So I had good imagery in my head on that tee shot, and it fits my fade. I prefer 99 percent of the time to hit a left-to-right shot with my driver.

So kind of given the situation, I just picked my spot, tried to start it there and bleed it off that bunker. It was amazing

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

because you can't see -- it's 14 yards uphill. You can't see anything but the top of the flagstick. At least for me, maybe Tony can see the whole flagstick. You hear the crowd, the roar growing and growing as the ball was getting closer and closer, and then the big oh, miss sort of screams.

It was cool. It was probably the shot of the tournament.

Q. As a follow-up to that then real quickly, when you go through your pre-shot, do you use a lot of visualization? Like when you're picking your spots and everything? Do you think about historical shots? Does it make you feel comfortable? Is that part of it?

J.J. SPAUN: I would say, when I'm thinking of the shot that I'm trying to play, I kind of go back to whether I did it earlier that round or earlier that week, but I don't like go too deep into it like J-Day where he closes his eyes. Maybe I should try that. I just try to get in there and put a confident, committed swing on the ball and just take where it ends up.

Q. You're the first PGA TOUR Americas alum to win a major. Then 2021 you went back to the Korn Ferry Tour finals and finished second in Boise to keep your card. I was wondering if you could kind of contextualize the importance of those pathways in your development to get to this point, and specifically how big that week in Boise was to finish second when you're on the verge of losing your card?

J.J. SPAUN: Like I was saying earlier, I've kind of been put in situations where it's not looking good, but I've always fought through those ruts and was able to come out on top.

I've had that on the Canadian Tour. I played great one year, then I lost my card the next year, probably like 2014, went to Q-School for Canada Tour, PGA Tour Canada at the time, Mackenzie Tour, then came back next year and won the Order of Merit. Then the next year finished third on the Korn Ferry Tour, got my PGA TOUR card and was off and running the next few years. My fifth year on TOUR, lost my card there, struggled all season. Then went down to the first playoff event on the Korn Ferry at Boise, fought back, finished second, got my card back in the first event, then came back the next year on the PGA TOUR, won the Valero.

It's just crazy. It's like all this back and forth in my career. Then kind of what happened last year the first half of the year, kind of slumping, falling down, and getting back up. There's a Confucius -- yeah, Confucius quote. He says -- God, I'm going to butcher this. Maybe you guys can correct me. Something like the glory isn't for how high you get or something, but it's more about the rise when you get

pushed down or something like that. The glory isn't for how high you get in your peaks, it's more of like when you bounce back, that's where it's at. That's kind of, I feel like, my career.

Q. The nervousness -- if you look back, the nervousness or even if there was a sense of calmness that you felt over the last hour at Oakmont, how did that compare with what it was like in San Antonio?

J.J. SPAUN: Very similar. Very similar. San Antonio, awful start there too. I double bogeyed the 1st hole Sunday at the Valero and ended up winning. I think the only player at the time to do that was Tiger Woods at the U.S. Open in '08.

I knew at the U.S. Open at Oakmont I didn't have to get to a fiery start, even though I was 5-over through six. I did feel like the wheels had fallen off. It felt like I was maybe playing for like a top 10 at the time, but the rain delay and the weather delay where we stopped play, that was pretty big, I think, and the shift in momentum and kind of getting to go back into the locker room and reset.

Because the same thing happened to me at THE PLAYERS this year on Sunday. I was leading going into Sunday. I was a couple over par on the front nine, lost the lead. Boom, rain delay going into the back nine for three, four hours. Came out, fought back, and got myself in the playoff with Rory.

When I knew that happened, there was just so many weird things that now looking back, so many weird things that I have connection with the U.S. Open at Oakmont that I don't see how I couldn't have won.

Q. If somebody told you on Sunday at the U.S. Open you're going to be tied for the lead with three holes to play, would you have expected to be nervous?

J.J. SPAUN: Probably. I think it was just the way the round was going where all the momentum was in my way -- in kind of my corner. I was putting good swings on the ball again, whereas if maybe I was letting it slip and then ending up kind of like in the same situation, like then it would probably be very nerve-racking, but the comfort there that I was pulling these shots off, hitting really good shots, kind of in the zone, I guess, that's what helped me feel comfortable and not nervous at all actually.

I was definitely nervous, but it wasn't like that nerve feeling where you like can't even stand over the ball kind of a feel. But I think that kind of comes with the fact that I was playing really well. I played so well to get myself the lead with one hole to play.

THE MODERATOR: The quote is "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but rising every time we fall."

J.J. SPAUN: There it is.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports