

U.S. Senior Open Championship

Tuesday, June 21, 2022

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA

Saucon Valley C.C. (Old Course)

Padraig Harrington

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're pleased to have Padraig Harrington with us. Three-time major winner, two Opens, PGA, and now this is your first U.S. Senior Open.

You had a chance to look at Saucon Valley a little bit. Can you tell us your thoughts about the course?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, I'm impressed with the course. Obviously I've played a few Champions Tour events, and I'm just trying to get used to the golf courses. Coming to this one, it's a real golf course.

It's a good setup this week, heavy rough, very fast greens, undulating greens. Yeah, I'm surprised for such a tough test on the Champions Tour. I'm not surprised the USGA has one for the U.S. Seniors, but it's the toughest test I've seen so far on the Champions Tour.

THE MODERATOR: When you say it that way, does this remind you of any of the U.S. Opens that you've played in?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, this would be very similar to what I would have played in in terms of U.S. Opens. I suppose we all hit it further now, so it doesn't feel as long as some of those courses we played 15 years ago, but it's certainly -- yeah, it's very traditional, really traditional. It's really what you expect of the USGA. It's exactly on point.

As I said, probably as a rookie, it's tougher than I expected.

Q. When you think back to all the U.S. Opens you played in, how do you get yourself mentally prepared into something that's kind of a U.S. Open, it just happens to have the word "senior" in it?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I suppose for me it's slightly different at this stage. I'm coming into these as the new kid on the block. I'm in good form. I think I've been runner-up three of my last six events. So I'm kind of coming in trying to manage any own expectations.



Looking at this golf course it's certainly one that suits me, so it really is getting my head around it. It kind of feels like how I would have been trying to manage my tournament preparation back in my heyday where I'd be going into these events, not hoping to win, but strongly expecting to be in contention.

My caddie gave me a bit of a lecture today about being grumpy, which is kind of the way you get when you're trying to organize yourself before an event that you feel you have a good chance in. You're kind of trying to get everything perfect before it starts.

Those are the sort of feelings I would have had back in the day. You kind of have to manage your expectations.

Q. Are there a couple of holes out here that you'll be glad to walk away with par for four rounds that may have a big say in the tournament?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I think every hole, if you play it well, is an opportunity out there. I'm not looking at too many of the holes -- especially if I drive it well, you can break the back of any of the holes driving it well.

I think there certainly would be pin positions on certain days on any of the holes that you'll be happy about walking away with par on. So it won't necessarily be the hole. It will be the setup of the hole on that given day.

The greens are very fast. At this stage, it's two days into my practice and I'm still uncomfortable with the speed of them. I have two more days to get that right. But I think it would be more about the setup of particular holes at a particular time during the week.

If they use that front right pin on No. 3 -- I know it's actually one of the short holes on the golf course, but hitting at that hole with any club, if you go long -- I hit a couple of shots yesterday.

Unless you have the perfect lie in the bunker you're going back into the water from the bunker over, and obviously you can spin it the water. You kind of look at it and wonder will they use that pin position? Then you kind of go, well, it is the USGA, so they will.



Yeah, watching out for the pin positions on particular holes during the week would be something that you can only deal with at the time. But, yeah, plenty of stern holes.

Q. What are your career goals at this stage of your career?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I just want to win. It doesn't matter where I'm playing. I just want to win. I think that can be -- certainly it's been a burden for the last probably ten years of my career where you're -- finishing tenth even doesn't do it, finishing fifth doesn't do it, finishing second, unless I had a chance -- the only time I'm happy with a tournament is if I had a chance of winning.

Even if I don't win, at least if I contend, I feel good about it. That can be a burden at times. If you're not in the hunt you don't feel like you're at it. You can over-try, over-practice, try and get it too perfect. To win, sometimes you just have to let it happen. I would say over the last ten years, after you've been at the top it gets harder when you're not in contention and you're not in the heat of the hunt.

Q. Also, what's been your perspective of the changing nature of golf in the past few months, year, whatever? Especially with players leaving the PGA TOUR.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, look, the two big -- no, I won't say the two biggest changes. Obviously the new possibility of changes in the rules is a big thing. If they do dial back the equipment, and it looks like they're getting pretty serious about it, that is a significant thing that was released just recently.

I know it probably won't happen for a couple of years, but, wow, that's a big thing that's gone by the wayside.

I think the other thing which is just incredible -- and, again, because there's other things going on in the world -- the change in the World Rankings system is going to hammer -- it's going to hammer the European Tour. It really is.

Like for a young player playing in Europe there's no pathway forward with the new system. It's going to be devastating for a young player. He's going to have to leave. There's no way a young player will be able to sustain or get into the top 100 in the world to get into those majors like I would have done.

My pathway was very much establish myself in Europe; when I got established in Europe, I started dipping my toe in the water by coming over to the bigger events in the states, the majors, the Arnold Palmers, the Memorials that I qualified, THE PLAYERS Championship.

After playing those from like '96 all the way through to 2004, I played enough events in America that I was comfortable in that environment that I came over and took my card.

I don't see that pathway anymore. With the World Rankings System, the players are going to have to come -- particularly the players that don't want to go to college. There's a lot of European players that don't see college -- they don't want to go to a U.S. college. It's completely outside their comfort zone. That's not where they're at.

If that pathway to turn pro and play in Europe and have the comfort of your home environment to grow your game, learn your game, to develop as a player, with this new system -- I know it's a meritocracy; I know Europe had a subsidy; I know all the international tours had a subsidy when it came to the World Rankings, but it was something that protected those Tours, and it's gone.

It's devastating, and it's not getting talked about with all that's going on. Really I'm distraught about it. For the young guys coming up I just don't see the pathway anymore to get into the top 100, which is what you've got to do. Get into the top 100 and you can play the majors, play the best events, and test yourself without necessarily throwing yourself into the deep end.

Q. Have you played much golf with Steven Alker? What do you think of his game if you have?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Steven played in Europe for a while. I would have known him over the years. He's obviously a really nice player, a lovely player. He seems to have come to the PGA TOUR or the Champions Tour, he seems to be peaking at this moment. This is his moment.

The environment obviously suits him very well. Most guys on the Champions Tour, most of us has at least one issue going on. There's something going on in our games that we're managing and trying to get by. He seems to be in the whole of his health. He doesn't seem to have anything going on in his game. He's probably in his best form ever in his life.

It's good timing and he's delivering on it, which is very impressive, too. It's one thing to play great golf, but it's another thing to win tournaments and win tournaments when you're expecting to and when you're favored, and he's doing a great job doing that.

Q. Can you imagine being your mid to late 30s and going through a season like he went, where he didn't make even one cut, and thinking about walking away from the game? I mean, you've had your challenges,

but something like that, it seems --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Gee, I didn't have any -- when? I never had anything like that, you know. I think it's credit -- shows his resolve. I think that's his personality. He's a tough nut for hanging around this long. As you said, many would have given it up.

It's not like -- he competed on the Korn Ferry Tour at the end there coming into the Champions Tour there the last couple of years. Like that would be far tougher for him than PGA TOUR because you're going and playing golf courses that suit bombers, there wouldn't be the rough, there wouldn't be this, and he's going out there treading his way around.

Those courses are not for that, and yet he honed his game, and now he's come into an environment that he has the best of both worlds. He's a lovely player who's actually probably longer than average, and for the first time in his life he's bombing it out there and making loads of eagles.

Q. One question about last year. You had a very strong result in the U.S. PGA at Kiawah. What has the last year been like transitioning over to senior golf? Have you had any thoughts that you could do some of like what Davis Love had done with playing sort of part time on both TOURS? Anything on your results make you think about how you want to transition completely or not?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I'm intent on playing the events I want to play in, the best events I can. I played some events in Europe at the start of the year and I was competitive. I feel I'm competitive at all levels.

I've liked coming to the Champions Tour for a couple of reasons. One, I'm carrying an injury that it helps me that I don't have to walk. It's a big issue for me physically to go through the 72 holes this week being a big strain on my right knee. So Champions Tour is good for that.

I look to the Champions Tour somewhere as a safe haven to find my confidence, to find my game. I feel like I'm going to be in contention most weeks at the moment on the Champions Tour, so that gives me the place that you want to be, that feeling of every shot is important, and I do believe that that helps me bring that back to my regular tournaments.

Physically I'm still capable of competing at the highest level. Mentally, that could be questionable. Funny enough, I think I've turned the corner on that end of things, so I'm actually feeling pretty good about my game and where I'm at.

I'm going home after this. I'm playing Irish, Scottish, and The Open. I'm not going to any of those three events with the idea of making up the numbers. In my head I'm going there feeling like I'm playing the best golf of my life. It doesn't matter whether it's true, I'm feeling like it.

Yeah, I'm happy I can compete, and I do believe that the Champions Tour is helping me in that sense, that I'm getting -- I'm in the environment, like we talked about with Steve or like I feel this week. I feel like, if I do things right this week, I should be in with a chance at the end of the week. That's a different pressure than turning up at times where you're hoping for a miracle.

I'm hoping for a good week. I'm not hoping for a miracle. I'm hoping to give myself a good week and I know I'll be thereabouts at the end of the week.

Q. You talked about being grumpy a little bit.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Anxious I think it was, yes.

Q. You probably saw when Justin Thomas won the PGA, had a little bit of a talking to from Jim Mackay the night before about maybe his attitude. How hard is it sometimes to fight yourself out of a negative feeling about your game in general?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Let's face it. Negativity has worked for plenty of people in the past. There's plenty of people who have broken clubs and gotten angry and won, so it's not an automatic that -- not being grumpy.

On the face of things for me, I've always played my best golf when I'm enjoying it, when I'm slightly -- I will say I definitely can get too intense. I can get just brooding, thinking too much, analyzing too much. I definitely play my best when I'm happy, talking, and not really thinking too much about my game. I would think that's the way to go.

It's been proved wrong with many people. Many people are grumpy and win. Maybe it works for me, and it worked for Justin in that particular sense. It is tough for any player. -when they have had their peak in their career, you're trying to live up to your peak, which is very difficult.

So when you've had that moment in your career where you were at your best, you're looking back at it. This is why you find so many people have ever only won one major or made one Ryder Cup team, because they're trying to compare themselves to their moment, and it only makes it harder after that.

Q. Can you speak just briefly about the knee? Is it

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

something just trying to maintain? Is it something you think you're going to need surgery at some point?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I've had the surgeon look at it. He operated on my knee five years ago. He had a look at it and felt can I handle it? I said, yeah, I can handle what's going on. He said, fine. Going in and having it scoped again would be like potluck.

Most weeks I've been pretty good. It's been very bad. I don't know why yesterday it was terrible. I'm going to go get some more physio, probably use the compression and ice it as well.

The thing is it stops me walking, it doesn't stop me hitting shots. So at this stage it's manageable. I do have good days and bad days. The physios have certainly helped it out at times.

Yeah, look, it's something to work on. I don't expect that I won't get through this week, but I'm playing six tournaments in five weeks coming up, and they're all walking.

Q. Last question. The next champion does what the best next week?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: There's three things you've got to do. Physically you've got to putt well. I think, if you drive it well this week you can break the back of the golf course substantially. If you drive it well, keep it out of the rough, hit it long.

Ultimately what leads to those two things is what we just talked about, great attitude. If you're great mentally, you'll probably do the others well anyway.

THE MODERATOR: Padraig Harrington, thank you for your time. Good luck this week.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: So three things to do one thing right (laughter)

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