

# U.S. Open Championship 2021

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San Diego, California, USA

Torrey Pines Golf Course

## Phil Mickelson

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2021 U.S. Open Championship. We are here in the interview area with six-time major champion Phil Mickelson. Phil, just start a little bit a reaction to the whirlwind over the last few weeks.

PHIL MICKELSON: It's been a really fun last few weeks. It's exciting to have a major championship here where I grew up in San Diego at Torrey Pines, and then to come into this event as the most recent major winner is special as well.

I'm really looking forward to the week and excited about the way this will showcase to the world what a great job everyone's done to get this course ready and how beautiful it is.

THE MODERATOR: Talk a little bit more about your love of San Diego, golf in this area, and, again, playing a U.S. Open here.

PHIL MICKELSON: It's been a special place for me to grow up and play our high school matches, play a lot of golf out here as a municipal course. To make the course open to the masses is a special thing, and to have a major championship on that venue is exciting.

Although it's a lot different than when I grew up 35 years ago, it still is a special site, and it's in remarkable shape.

THE MODERATOR: Much like at Pebble, this is a course you guys see often. Talk about the differences of what you're seeing out here this week in terms of a U.S. Open setup.

PHIL MICKELSON: So when we play here at Torrey Pines, it's in February. The golf course is a lot wetter and plays a lot longer, what starts to come out are the subtleties and the nuances. And with the fairways being contoured the way they are and being firm now, they're going to be more difficult to hit. You've got to shape it into the fairways.

And the greens are very challenging. There's a lot of pitch, a lot of contour, and as they get firmer, like we saw today,

from just a couple of days ago, they're significantly firmer than just the last two days.

It's very difficult to get it to some of the pin positions, and it's going to be a difficult test. As long as it is at sea level it's going to be a difficult task, but it seems like the setup is pristine, and it's going to be a fun, very difficult challenge.

**Q. Phil, this golf course has evolved quite a bit from when you first started playing it and even since you first started winning here, but what knowledge can you lean on this week that might help you?**

PHIL MICKELSON: So I feel like -- what's happened for me is I spent so many hours as a kid that, when the course was redesigned, all that local knowledge went away. I really haven't come out here and spent a ton of time. It's hard to get a tee time out here, and when you do, it's a long round.

So I don't spend a lot of time out here other than the Farmers. I really made an effort here, having the last week off, to spend time out here and really learn, relearn the greens. So I spent a lot of hours out here on the greens last week to see if I can get that local knowledge again, and we'll see how it goes, but I had a lot of fun kind of relearning and spending a lot of time out here.

**Q. What was your day like with Akshay Bhatia, another young left-hander you have kind of taken under your wing?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I love seeing left-handed golfers thrive, and yesterday watching a young lefty win on TOUR for the first time was impressive. Akshay is not far behind. He's a very impressive golfer. I think he's going to have a lot of success and a long career.

**Q. Phil, Tim spoke about just the self-belief you had before the PGA. When you win a tournament like that you have that kind of confirmed. How much more does that grow after that?**

PHIL MICKELSON: It's a big thing. It's one thing when you are playing at a certain level but not getting the results.



It's very frustrating and it's tough to be patient. But when you know that you're playing at a certain level and you are patient and it finally does click, like it did at the PGA, I felt like I had been playing at that level for a couple of months but I wasn't getting it out.

Then when it all comes together at a perfect time like that was exciting to put it together. I feel like -- or I'm hopeful that some of the things that I had learned heading in will carry over and give me some more opportunities this summer, because I feel like I'm playing some good golf.

**Q. The tweet you had before the tournament about accepting failure really kind of took off after that and seemed to resonate with a lot of people. I was curious what your reaction was to seeing that after the fact.**

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, it's challenging when -- like I was saying, when you continue to work hard, do the right things, and see the progress but not get the results, it's very frustrating, and a lot of times people will stop or quit because they're just not getting out of it what they feel they're putting into it.

But you kind of learn in plateaus, and every now and then you might be working hard, working hard, doing the right things and not getting the progress, and then you kind of get a spike.

That spike came at the PGA to where it all kind of comes together and you put it all together it was at the right time. Hopefully, I'll continue to play at a new plateau, at a little bit higher level, because some things started to click.

**Q. So with the Ocean Course, final round on Sunday at 16, I don't know that this got talked about a ton, but I think you hit a 366 off the tee there, which might have been the longest ball all weekend. You're up two strokes at the time, some players might protect a little bit. Can you talk about your decision to go for it there, and if it reflects your confidence that your game is at right now in terms of that shot?**

PHIL MICKELSON: The last two holes are really difficult at Kiawah, and I knew there were going to be birdies there, whether it was from Louis or Brooks, and to maintain the lead, I needed to make a 4. Fortunately, I hit a good drive. The fairway was wide enough. It was downwind, a little bit right to left, and I hit a good drive that rode the wind, and fairways were firm, and it got out there pretty good where I could hit a 6-iron just over the back that allowed for an easy up and down 4.

That was a critical shot because, like I said, those last two holes were difficult. I drove it well that week. When I did

miss the fairway, it was just off the edge, which was a big thing. It will be a big thing for me here, too.

**Q. I have two things, kind of not really related. First of all, what did you do when you got back to just to bask in Kiawah and whatnot with the Wanamaker? Were there any specific things you were able to do before you started getting back to it a little bit?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I came back home that night and celebrated with Amy the next couple of days, and then I went and played Colonial. Because I missed the cut, I took the weekend to kind of hang out and enjoy it. Then on Monday I got back to work to get ready for this tournament.

It's a unique opportunity because I've never won a U.S. Open. It's in my backyard. I have a chance to prepare properly, and I wanted to put in the right work. So I've kind of shut off all the noise. I've shut off my phone. I've shut off a lot of the other stuff to where I can kind of focus in on this week and really give it my best chance to try to play my best.

Now, you always need some luck, you always need things to kind of come together and click, but I know that I'm playing well, and I just wanted to give myself every opportunity to be in play at my best. So I started working Monday shortly thereafter.

**Q. Just as a follow to that, you just spoke about that spike and kind of you were waiting for that to come, and it came at Kiawah. What has that -- because obviously everybody looks at your win as a pretty unlikely win at Kiawah because of whatever, the course setup, you know the drill. What has that done for you now as you walk into this week, regardless of where it's at, just in general with your form?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, you have those -- you just have those moments where you just kind of know that things have clicked or whatever, and I went out and played a number of rounds of golf where the game just started to feel easy again.

I was able to hit the ball in play. I was not hitting it close, making some putts. It just started to feel easy again, and when I went out on TOUR I wasn't quite putting it together day in and day out like I was at home, but I knew it was just a matter of time.

So I had seen the progress. I knew that I was going to win again soon, but the results weren't telling anybody else that. So unless you were really playing with me day to day you wouldn't have seen the progress either.

But it's exciting to be able to put it together like that when nobody expects it.

**Q. Can you give us an idea of what kind of work you put in last week, how much time you were out here, exactly what you were concentrating on the most.**

PHIL MICKELSON: I put a lot of time in on the greens, because even though they're not at tournament speed, I needed to kind of relearn and see the breaks and know what the ball does on these greens. Because then when you see the way the ball rolls you know where you have to be for your approach and you know what kind of shot is the best shot to hit into certain approaches.

Granted, I've played out here a bunch since the redo, but I really haven't spent a lot of time to learn the nuances, and I did that early last week.

**Q. Secondly, I'm just curious, what exactly were you and Bryson doing on 18 when he was filming and you were flopping? It was fascinating to look at.**

PHIL MICKELSON: There's kind of a misunderstanding on how the flop shot works. Bryson and Chris Cuomo, they understand it, which is you hit the ground first and then the club bounces into the ball. Most people kind of try to flip with their hands and catch the ball first.

They were getting a close-up of how I drive the club into the ground first and then it bounces into the ball.

So I guess there was a conversation amongst a bunch of guys, and Chris just wanted to show the evidence because he was -- he's right in that you actually hit the ground first before on a flop shot.

**Q. Phil, I'm interested in your friendship with Tom Brady and if you've gleaned anything from that as two competitors and sort of where his game is and what you maybe picked up from him.**

PHIL MICKELSON: So I've been fortunate to spend time with him, and when I'm around him I learn a lot. I learn a lot by just watching and observing the dedication, the hard work. When we would go play at Augusta and he'd stay at the cottages, he'd would be up hours before we played. He would go to the gym and do a bunch of band work for an hour just getting his shoulders and knees and hips and everything firing and activated.

He's very disciplined in what he eats and recovery and taking the time to do the right things after the round and so forth. It's inspiring to see, because when you see somebody do it and do what he's doing, which is play

football at the highest level at an age that really nobody else has ever done it, it's inspiring, and it's motivating. When you see it happen, it's much easier to do.

**Q. I was just going to ask about his game. He obviously holed out on that shot when he was really down. I wonder if there were things you saw that sort of reflected the kind of competitor he is.**

PHIL MICKELSON: So he played really well the back nine, and when we've played, he plays a lot better than what you saw on the front. He just hadn't been playing at that time so his game wasn't sharp and he just didn't quite have it that day. It almost made him more human because he excels at everything he does. To see him struggle like that was very humanizing, I thought. I thought it was a good thing.

Then the back nine he kind of clutched up and played and hit some shots, and we made a good move at it and ended up losing 1-up. The way he can mentally slow down when things aren't going well and process it and then start to perform is another trait that you learn from him.

**Q. So you played a lot of golf with Xander and got to know him a little bit. He's had a lot of second places. You've had some close calls, at least in this tournament before. Is too much made about him not winning and being in second? And how big a leap is it to be a top five in a major and win a major?**

PHIL MICKELSON: So I would just say that I was 33 when I won my first major. He's significantly younger than that, and he is an incredible talent. He's easily one of the best players in the world today, and his game is so complete with no weaknesses that I really get a lot out of playing with him and watching how he does things.

It's a little bit different in places than I do it, but I still learn from it. I think he's just that rare talent, and like I say, when you learn in plateaus, when you get that spike, once he gets that spike I think he's going to stay at that new level for a long, long time.

**Q. And one other subject, what's your thoughts on arm-lock putters?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I don't really have any thoughts. It's been around for quite a while and it works for some, and I think it's worth a try for a lot of guys. It's not really for me, but I think it could really work for a lot of people. I don't know.

**Q. Could you give us your best story about 2008, the first two rounds, where you had that one, two, three**

**pairing? That was a bit of a zoo out there with Adam and Tiger, but have you got a story for us from those two days?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I don't have any like particular funny stories. I remember the Tiger bogeyed -- or double bogeyed the 1st hole, and I think he did it both days and still won the tournament.

I thought that was pretty inspiring the way he didn't let that affect him. He stayed to his game plan, stayed focused, stayed patient, and ended up kind of picking his spots where he could get a shot back here or there, and he did, and he ended up winning. That's impressive.

**Q. That Friday afternoon when he made that little run, it just seemed mental out there. I was here as a young spectator myself.**

PHIL MICKELSON: I don't remember the run. I don't remember a lot about that. It was 13 years ago and I don't remember the details of it.

**Q. Phil, what kind of advice do you give Akshay playing in his first major in that practice round today?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Not too much. He has as many questions for me as I have for him. I'm curious how he does things too because he's got a lot of club head speed, a lot of strength, a lot of shot making. He might ask me a few things on chipping. I might ask him a few things on clubs.

I always see our new equipment at Callaway in his bag. He had a new hybrid, a new 3-wood. I haven't seen those yet. It's always fun to go through the bag of another left-handed player.

**Q. Beyond the redesign of the south course, how much has this property changed since you first started playing here? A lack of trees, in particular. It just seems so much different than when you first started playing here. How do you view that? Is that a positive, negative?**

PHIL MICKELSON: The evolution of the course has been so slow over the years you almost don't notice it until you look at 30 years ago and today, but the views seem to be more open. I like the way some of the holes have gotten rid of some of the rough to open up the canyon and bring that in play and allow it to be a little bit more friendly for the average guy, but yet difficult for the good player because the canyon's in play.

17 is a good example. There used to be a lot of rough on

the left side, but now the canyon is the hazard. I think that's cool.

But the views without as many thick, dense trees certainly open up the ocean views and make it spectacular.

**Q. Mini driver this week? What's going into the bag from a mini driver standpoint?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Just a 2-wood. I call it a 2-wood but it's a mini driver. Just a 2-wood. I think at least half, if not a fraction more, of tee shots will be with that club just because the way the fairways are a little bit firmer than Farmers.

The ball runs out and it gets down there to a pretty good spot. There's a lot of holes where it kind of turns or tightens, and I don't really want to get to that spot. If you look at 4, you get it down too far and it starts to pinch in by the canyon. You look at the contour on 7, how much that fairway pitches. I really don't want to get it down there.

That 2-wood, I'll call it, seems to fit the right yardage on a lot of those holes for me.

**Q. A different club from Kiawah?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I go through a few heads, and this is a different head than I had there but it's the same loft and same -- just about as same as can be.

**Q. Your comments earlier about coming out and trying to learn the course last week, what have you, is it fair to say that you maybe fought that a little bit over the years after the redesign? Did you just not want to take that on? Were you stubborn? How do you explain it?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Maybe, I don't know. There's a proper way to play here. I mean, Tiger's won here eight or nine times. There's a proper way to play here to each pin, and I just have tried to do too much in the past. I felt like if I could learn the greens and know what a lot of the 30- and 40-foot putts do, then I don't have to try to get it into these tiny little shelves, and I can make easy pars and make a few of the longer putts. That was kind of my thought process.

That will hopefully allow me to play a little bit more stress free so I'm not trying to take on too much. Also, a typical thing of Rees Jones is every bunker the green goes away. Wherever the bunker is, the green is pitched away, so you really can't short side yourself because you can't get it up and down out of those bunkers that are pitched away.

Now, on TOUR the average course we play, if you were to

have a bunker shot, it's ten yards. That's the average shot, 30 feet, right? But here, because of the way it angles away, it's 15 yards. So it's a little bit longer bunker shot than what we would average on any other golf course.

That also makes it harder to stop it on those short side shelves. So knowing to play away from the pin or being able to play away from the pin, give myself 30 or 40 feet, if I know the break, if I know the read and believe I can make it, then I'm more inclined to not force the issue and not press. That was my whole thought process.

**Q. Also, the idea that this is obviously your home, but after you became a pro, would there have been any instances when you're coming out here to play in between tournaments here at Torrey Pines? Obviously you've got your home course, other places to practice, it's crowded. So I'm just trying to get a sense for is it a place you really have played a lot in the last 20-some-odd years?**

PHIL MICKELSON: No, it's not. I don't play it other than the tournament. I play it tournament week, and then we're still playing the other course. So I try to play practice rounds over there. So I haven't really -- and I've only played kind of half the days a lot of times here, too. I haven't spent as much time on here as I should to really know it until recently.

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