

U.S. Senior Open Championship

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Stevens Point, Wisconsin, USA
SentryWorld

Ernie Els

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Please join me in welcoming Ernie Els. Tell me about your impressions of the golf course.

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, I went off this morning at 7:00. Thought I'd get it in the books. I walked a bit yesterday. Didn't want to play. It was very windy.

Obviously you see the rough, and you see the wonderful condition of the course. It's seriously one of the finest conditioned courses I've ever seen. Really well-done to the greens crew and the members here.

But it's a U.S. Open setup, really. The rough is as high as I've ever seen it. Even in my heyday back in the day when we played in the northeast, Oakmont and those type of courses, this rough is very juicy.

It's a very good setup. Seems like they've changed two holes into par-4s. Seems like No. 9 and I would say the No. 2 hole looks like par-5s. So those are going to be demanding holes because the greens were built for a par-5, and normally a par-5 you make a green smaller.

So now it's a par-4 and we're coming in with big irons, so those holes are going to be difficult.

But overall very, very fair test and very demanding test. It's going to be a good examination.

Q. How do you think the course maybe plays to the strengths of your game?

ERNIE ELS: Well, I'm starting to drive the ball good, so if you're fairly long off the tee and you can keep it in the short grass, that's the first obstacle.

Then your iron play has to be spot on. There's places where you can go to flags, and then obviously places where you've got to kind of bail out.

Overall it's a shot maker's golf course, and then you've got



to be lucky with lies around the greens. It's very thick around the greens.

You've just got to be patient, and you've got to have a lot of game here this week. It's going to test everything in your game.

Q. You were atop the leaderboard last week, top 10 at Am Fam. What's it going to take to be atop the leaderboard do you this week in terms of this course and the test it gives you?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, like I said, you've got to bring some game. You've got to hit all the shots, but mainly hit the ball in the fairway, and if you can do that for four days, if you can hit 70 percent of the fairways or even 80 percent, obviously that's going to be great. That can give you an opportunity to be fairly aggressive.

Then on the green surfaces, the green surfaces are unbelievable, but there's a lot of slope. It's going to test everything in our game. It's just a wonderful layout.

Q. You mentioned this course being up there with the best you've played. What makes it stand out, and what do you think about the greens here, fast, slow? Where do you see them?

ERNIE ELS: It's I guess a fairly new course. It's probably I would say 30 years old it seems like. There's been a bit of renovation done. I can see that, also. There's some new bunkers put in. The bunkers were put in very strategically. It's almost where you want to finish your ball, there's a bunker. It keeps you a little bit off balance.

That's a good sign in designing. Keep a player a little bit off balance.

But there's room in the fairways, and as I say, the rough is very, very high. But it's a wonderful layout. You have to drive the ball long and straight, and you've got to be aggressive, but you've got to be cautious.

Then the greens, some of them are quite big. Got a lot of slope in them, so you've got to really place speed putts very well this week to kind of cozy it to the hole.

Q. Steve Stricker and Jerry Kelly are playing in their



home state this week. What's that like for a player, and what challenges does it present that you wouldn't have on a normal basis?

ERNIE ELS: Well, it's got to be a dream to play a major near your home. I think that will be a major factor, especially Steve. He's been playing unbelievable golf this year. Definitely he's going to be right at the top of the leaderboard.

Jerry Kelly is a great, tough competitor. Whenever you play at home, you feel at home, and there's a little bit of extra motivation to play well in front of your crowd.

I would definitely put those two as serious competitors for this week.

Q. Do you get juiced up a little more when the hometown crowd is rooting for you?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, absolutely, and especially you can feed off the home crowd. You get going, the crowd gets behind you, there's a lot of momentum coming your way.

Yeah, it's going to be interesting. It's four days of golf. I'm just happy to be -- I've played many, many other U.S. Opens, so I've had to deal with the crowd. It's a home crowd for you guys, and I understand that. I've dealt with that before.

It'll just be great to have a chance to -- let's say Steve and Jerry is up there. It'll be great to come down the stretch with those guys.

Q. Are there any specific holes or stretches throughout the course that you think could be a tipping point for the field this week?

ERNIE ELS: Yeah, I think to start, 1 and 2 are two of the strongest par-4s you're going to find. You've got a 460 on the first hole, and then the second hole is over 500 yards. So those are two very strong holes.

The back nine, even No. 10 is a 580-yard par-5, very narrow.

The par-3s are strong. No. 12 is over the water, green sloping away from you.

The other one is a strong par-3, No. 7.

No. 3, you've got a false front to the right.

The par-3s are strong, and as I said earlier, No. 2 is a par-5 they converted to a 4, and then No. 9, also, so those

are strong holes.

THE MODERATOR: Ernie, thanks for your time. Good luck this week.

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