

U.S. Senior Open Championship

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Stevens Point, Wisconsin, USA
SentryWorld

Padraig Harrington

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Please join me in welcoming back our defending champion, Padraig Harrington.

When you think back to last year, now that it's been a year, what memories stick out?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: A lot of good memories at Saucon Valley. I think a bit like here this week. You get to the golf course, and you're thinking I'm coming off the Champions Tour, you're thinking I'm coming to a Champions Tour event, and this is not a Champions Tour event. This is truly a USGA event.

It was a shock last year to come to it. It was a big, tough golf course. Again this week at SentryWorld, this is -- if they had this setup 20 years ago for a major, I would have been playing in the early 2000s, this is exactly what the setup would have been for a major.

Yeah, it's kind of nice. Do I like being -- coming and finding a challenge as daring? Yeah, but it's certainly different from coming off regular events. It's what the USGA do.

THE MODERATOR: Coming in off a win is a positive. Talk a little bit about that. Then being here as a defending champion.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, on that aspect, I was surprised last week when I started out on Friday. I was quite tired. I made some really bad decisions on Friday coming off the U.S. Open. It had taken more out of me. And again, I'm worried. Any time you win a tournament it takes more out of you than you think, so I'm quite worried about this week.

I'm trying to take it as easy as possible, but then I'm anxious also to practice a few extra shots that you might need around this golf course. So it's kind of catch 22.

I know the most important thing is to be fresh for the four days, but I'd also like to get a little bit ahead of it with some



certain shots.

Q. You're literally all over the globe on your schedule. How do you feel at this point in the year, and how at your age are you able to maintain the schedule that you do?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I played, I think, 33 events last year. That's right up there with anybody. I think I'm used to the traveling back and forth. I usually come for two or three weeks and then go home, three weeks normally.

I think the Champions Tour are very pleasant to play in. There's nowhere near the stress at a Champions Tour event. It's three rounds. It's very relaxed. Tee times are normally in the middle of the day. It's just a very pleasant play.

So they're enjoyable. There's no grind at those in the sense that a regular event can take a lot more out of you.

Of the regular events, I've tended to play the tough, challenging ones, the likes of Bay Hill, the likes of Honda, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and those. Obviously they're harder mentally and physically for me, but, again, I've got to an age that I can recognize these things and manage myself.

There's a lot more time spent in the physio unit than there would have been 20 years ago, I'd say. I probably don't -- I practice a lot when I'm at home, but when I'm at tournaments now I've definitely toned it down a bit.

Q. How much of a competitive edge do you think you have this week, especially coming off the U.S. Open at LACC a couple weeks ago, playing these types of conditions?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I certainly -- you know, the tougher the golf course, the more I like it. The heavy rough, it's not playing as heavy as L.A. Country Club, but it's heavier than Oak Hill was at the PGA.

Yeah, it's pretty heavy.

I played Oak Hill at the PGA this year, and I didn't drive it particularly straight, but I only -- I never had to layup for the week. I went for every green out of the rough. So I never had to chip out. I don't think I'll get away with that this



week. I think there will be plenty of chip outs.

Some of that's due to hazards in the front of the green, so you might take a chance of trying to run one up. Clearly, you're not going to do that here. I think it's a big, strong, tough golf course.

Yeah, it does suit me. There's advantages off the tee here. I can carry the bunker down the 1st on the left-hand side. Because of that, like if I hit a good drive on the 1st, it's a drive and a gap wedge. All the players have to play out to the right, and we're hitting a long iron or certainly a mid-iron.

So there are advantages on the golf course. But like a lot of times with golf, even if you have an advantage, you still have to play the best golf. If I play to my strengths, great, I'll be right there at the top of the leaderboard. But if I don't play to my strengths, then it just doesn't work out, but there is an advantage for sure.

Q. Can you hit all three par-5s in two? And will you hit some 3-woods off tees?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I'll definitely hit some layups on the shorter par 4s. You've got to hit the fairways. Even on the short holes, you've got to hit the fairways.

I only played 12 holes yesterday, so the first par-5 is the -- 5. It's kind of like Bay Hill. Like I hit my drive yesterday a little right and went through into the bunker and hit 6-iron over the back of the green. So like it off back tee -- off the front tee off it would be driver/8-iron; off the back tee, if you hit a good drive, it's a driver and a 7-iron, but you have to hit a good drive.

There's still -- there's merit in playing that as a three-shot hole because there's a lot of danger in it. I won't do that, but there's merit in it.

Obviously 17 is drivable if you have to.

So there are holes that there's an advantage on. I don't know. During the two par-5s, I didn't look. It's rare there's a par-5 I can't reach at this stage. If the ball's going out there, it's traveling. It was warm, as I said. You could get it 320 in the air yesterday with the heat that was there.

Some golf courses are different like that, but the ball is definitely -- if it stays as warm as yesterday, the fairways are tight enough that, if you hit the fairway, you can get it to run out a little bit.

I haven't seen the other par-5s, but I'd be surprised. I don't know, you'll have to tell me. I'll see them today.

Q. Padraig, you and Steve Stricker have been two of the most dominant players on the Champions Tour over the last couple of years. Could you have imagined, coming out of the stress and anxiety that perhaps you two guys shared in the Ryder Cup year, to be playing as good as both of you have played consistently, is there any coincidence to that?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I would have said no for myself, but as you just pointed out, the two of us played better after the Ryder Cup, so maybe there is some truth in that.

I turned 50, so I was kind of starting to play really nicely when I was 48, 49. When I turned 50 I started to get in contention more. The physical side was good. I just sharpened up my mental side by being in contention more often.

So I assume it was based on the fact, just a nice progression for me. But as you point out, Steve has definitely had a new lease on life.

Obviously he had a life-changing experience himself, and that can make you come out on the golf course and have a much better perspective. It's possible, but I wouldn't necessarily base that stat off those two people.

We'll have to get a lot more Ryder Cup captains down the road.

Q. You had to return the trophy, which I'm sure was bittersweet. Any memories from the year with the trophy?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: The trophy had a very nice place at home. It was very popular with people who came to my house. So I obviously have the replicas of two Opens and a PGA. I have them in my kitchen and breakfast room, and you kind of -- you get used to them in some ways.

It's only when somebody comes into the house that you can see them looking at them and staring at them, and they kind of say, oh, can I have a picture eventually.

The U.S. Senior Open was right there with it. People want to look at the names. Particularly looking at the names. People love looking at names on trophies. So, yeah, it certainly held its own.

Q. This course, now that you've seen it a little bit, does it remind you of anything on any course you've played, or is this strictly a unique test of golf?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: It's a very similar golf course setup-wise to what I would have seen, as I said, 25 years ago in U.S. Opens. It does seem to be imprinted onto a stadium golf course, though.

Normally if you went back to Winged Foot or something like that, tree-lined golf course, heavy-roughed greens, what you have here, but you've thrown in here a substantial amount of water hazards.

So it's like if we went down to Bay Hill for a U.S. Open sort of thing, and that is interesting because, as I said, go back to Oak Hill there a few weeks ago in the PGA, if you hit it in the rough you could try and chase it up the green.

But as I said, I know I played front nine and the last three. I'm not sure about the whole course. But a lot of times if you're on a course there's a hazard, like on 9 in front of you.

Even though you might only have 140 yards, I think I had 100 and -- yeah, off my drive yesterday I probably only had 100 yards front, 110 yards front. Like if I was in the heavy rough I would have to chip it out because, you know, you just can't flight -- even though I can reach it, I couldn't flight it and keep it on the green.

Yeah, that's a little bit different. Until I play the tournament, I -- it could be a case this week that it's not about how many fairways you hit, it's about how many of the right fairways you hit.

You know, if you can hit those short par-4s -- like at L.A. Country Club on the Sunday, you know, there's a lot of talk about the wide fairways. I'd prefer a wide test and then much heavier rough -- a bigger penalty for missing with a wide fairway.

But there was two short par-4s on the Sunday that cambered in, No. 3 and No. 10. So big fairways that both cambered in. Both wedge shots if you hit down there, sand wedge shots into the green, real great birdie chance.

I missed both of those fairways, and psychologically I can tell you how painful that was. You're looking, it feels like a 3 to a 5. It's obviously not that much, but it's -- both of them I missed the fairway and I couldn't -- like on 3 I couldn't hit the ball 50 yards out of the lie, and I missed the fairway by no more than a foot off the fairway.

That was a good test, if you ask me. Big, wide fairway, and then -- obviously 18 was too wide, but everything else, big punishment.

Again this week I think there's going to be a lot of punishment for missing fairways both, as we often find in major tournaments, some misses are worse than others and some are better than others.

I won't get any advantage -- normally in a major, you get an advantage. By the time you play the tournament, the rough is getting trampled down. But where I'm driving it it's not getting trampled down, so I won't have that advantage.

Some misses will be very painful this week. Like if you miss the 9th fairway, that's turning a birdie hole into a bogey hole. And if one or two like that. Then there's others that, if you get away with, you'll probably be able to get something up around the green and be okay.

Q. You just talked about the psychological of playing, wondering about having played in the PGA and the U.S. Open already, will that assist you in any way mentally this week?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You would have to think it definitely will. Like I'm kind of used to it, aren't I? You know, kind of used to the disaster of maybe a difference of one yard into the rough and you're struggling.

I think the pain emotionally here will be on some of the shorter holes. There's a few holes that are 3-wood and 5-wood off the tee, but if you miss those, the penalty is severe.

So you kind of -- you're playing safe off the tee, but you miss it and you really feel bad about yourself. At least if you miss it with a driver, in some ways, well, I was going for it.

Yeah, I think that always plays into a major tournament, that you're being tested physically, clearly, but you're also being tested mentally, emotionally out there. Can you handle what would seem like bad breaks.

There will be a lot of players that you'll hit a shot this week -- I remember every player, if they hit a shot that's hanging onto the edge of the fairway, every player in their head mentally sees that ball kicking onto the fairway.

No player has ever seen that ball mentally kick into the rough. So when it does what it's supposed to do and kicks straight and goes into the rough by a yard, that's going to be a mental test because it can be -- it feels like the difference of two shots because you think, oh, I would have got -- I would have hit my wedge from the fairway, but the fact I chipped up and under 80 yards and didn't get up and down and made 5, it's amazing how it's not two shots, but it feels like it.

