

US Open Championship 2017

Monday, June 12, 2017

Andy North

Press Conference



BETH MAJOR: Good afternoon, my name is Beth Major, and on behalf of the USGA and Mr. North, I would like to welcome you to Wisconsin for the 117th U.S. Open Championship. We are thrilled to be at Erin Hills for this year's national championship. It seems fitting that we would have Andy North join us to kickoff the activities here in the Media Center this week.

Andy, as you all likely know, is a Madison native. The 1969 Wisconsin Amateur champion and an inductee into the Wisconsin Hall of Fame in 1998, and a two-time U.S. Open champion.

We thought we'd show a video that looks back at those two U.S. Open victories. As I mentioned, Andy did win the 1978 U.S. Open.

(Playing video.)

BETH MAJOR: Wonderful moments from two U.S. Open victories. Andy, we were just laughing about it's a bit of a far cry from today when you do something and three seconds later everyone sees it. To go back and look at that footage, can you reflect on, first, the two U.S. Open victories and the passage of time?

ANDY NORTH: We didn't get to see it, but were there some great pants in those videos? It's always a great thrill to be able to be introduced as the U.S. Open Champion and having been lucky to have done it two times is really special.

Most of us growing up, the U.S. Junior, U.S. Amateur, the U.S. Open were the tournaments that we really felt strongly about and wanted to do well in, and to be a USGA champion is second to none.

So it's a great thrill. It's been a great thrill for 40 years now, 39 years, to have been an Open champion and wish we could still go out there and tee it up today. But there's no chance of that happening, guarantee it.

BETH MAJOR: This must be very special for you to see the U.S. Open come to your home state. Can you reflect on that as well?

ANDY NORTH: When it was first announced that we were going to have an Open Championship here it was really a big deal. The folks at Erin Hills have done an unbelievable job getting this facility ready for an Open.

As you can see, the work that's been done as far as hospitality and the tenting around this golf course is second to none. It's going to be great to see the fans of Wisconsin come out and support it, as well. We've had a couple of PGAs, a Women's Open. But I think this is going to be really special to have a championship that I really care about right here in your backyard. Hopefully it's a great week, and we've got some decent weather and we have some great play.

Q. Have you seen enough of the setup to be able to speak to the width of the fairways, the length of the rough and what kind of challenge this presents?

ANDY NORTH: Well, I think that the one thing that is awkward coming here for the first time is that no one really has any idea what to expect. Will the winning score be 4-over, with the winning score about 20-under. No one has an idea. That's not just the players, but the staff trying to set up the golf course.

The golf course has been closed the entire spring. We've had a lot of rain. It's in unbelievable shape. The greens are wonderful, the fairways are great. There's no divots anywhere, which is pretty neat. You don't get to see that very often. I think because of that there's not going to be the complaining that we heard a couple of years ago where the greens weren't very good. So it's in wonderful shape.

It's a different type of Open set up. Is it right? Is it wrong? I don't know. It's a situation to where the fairways are as wide as you've ever had at a U.S. Open. There's not any rough around the greens. And I think wind is going to have a huge impact on what happens. Yes, there's a lot of fescue out there, but you've got basically an area of 50-plus-yards wide to drive the ball to keep it out of the fescue.

There are going to be some big scores. I could see some rounds where a player makes three birdies, 14 pars and a triple. You have one error, and you'll see big numbers. If you put the ball in the fairway, as long as these guys hit it, don't get caught up with the 7700 yards, these guys hit it long enough that that's not that long for them. If you put it in the fairway you're going to see some decent scores, but the winds is going to have a huge factor.

Q. When you heard the championship was coming

here, an event you've won twice, and it's coming to your home state, what was the first thing that went through your mind when you heard the championship was coming to your home state?

ANDY NORTH: Obviously very, very excited. At that point in time when the announcement came and Erin Hills was a really young golf course action and they've done some work on it since then, but the amount of pride that you have to see this event in your backyard is really special.

Q. With all your experience at the United States Open have you found from the mid-'70s all the way to now that the level of complaints has gone up or has it gone down. And what would elicit the most complaints this week if there were any at all, of course?

ANDY NORTH: Kevin Na gave us insight on what the fescue is like in places. I think the complaining has probably decreased dramatically over the last 25 years. But the setups have changed. We've gone to a different philosophy in rough. This week I think it's very interesting that you have a U.S. Open and there's not one single green that has rough around that green. So it's going to be a totally different test of golf.

We're trying to identify the best player, and however they do it, that's great. It will be interesting to see how it goes. There will be some complaining, I'm sure, but maybe not at the degree that we once had.

Q. Can you speak to what this week might be like for Steve Stricker. Obviously you can feel that being from here, you've never had an opportunity to do what he's doing.

ANDY NORTH: I mean the fact that he really took it on a challenge to go ahead and qualify, which I think is special. He played unbelievable golf leading up to that and hopefully he can continue that level of play.

This is going to be a tough week for him. In talking to him he's already said I've had to say no more this week than I probably ever have. He's here to play in a golf tournament. He's not here to entertain people all week long. As long as he's able to do that, it's a golf course I think it sets up, even though it's a longer golf course, really well for him because he's such a good pitcher and chipper of the ball. He's a great putter obviously, but he also drives the ball very straight. And this is the week you've got to drive the ball in the short grass. You can't afford one or two or three bad swings that cost you maybe ten shots over the course of the week.

Q. Where was your first U.S. Open and for a lot of the fans here, this is their first experience walking into this village here. I don't imagine the infrastructure of your first U.S. Open is what you

saw today?

ANDY NORTH: My first one was at Medinah 3 that Lou Graham, John Mahaffey. There were hospitality tents there, not as many. Medinah, obviously a totally different golf course than this. But it was a great thrill to finally get in. When I tried to qualify I'm guessing eight or nine times before I finally got in. So it was nice to finally get in one. And I actually played pretty well and finished high enough that that got me in the Masters the next year. So that kind of started my love affair with this tournament.

Q. No Phil, we think, and no Tiger, unfortunately, this week. How does that affect the pretournament buzz?

ANDY NORTH: Well, you know, this is golf for the next, you know, ten years, maybe. Will we see Tiger play? No one has any idea, particularly him. Phil's situation is a little bit different. He's played enough really good golf that I think he would have been a real factor this week. He is able to raise his level significantly when he gets to major championships. I think this would have been a reasonably good golf course for him, if he could have driven the ball.

But at the same time he's doing something that's much more important, to be able to watch your daughter, who is valedictorian and give the speech, that's pretty cool. So good for him.

Q. If Tiger were in his prime playing out here, would there be one or two holes where you'd be curious to see how he played?

ANDY NORTH: He would have figured some way to get it around here, I guarantee it, he would have figured that out. We saw what he did at Hoylake that year, he decided not to hit any drivers. And won going away and played some of the best golf you've ever seen. And any golf course that Tiger played in his prime, he'd have not had any problem figuring it out.

Q. With Steve qualifying, when he didn't get a special exemption and didn't really have a long performance history with the USGA, you won two of these, why didn't you ever get a special exemption, did you ever ask for one?

ANDY NORTH: I, ironically, did ask for one. I asked for one -- my last year of exemption was going back to Oakland Hills where I won my second Open. And they decided a year or two beforehand to change Oakland Hills to Shinnecock, so Shinnecock could have the 100th anniversary of the Open, which was pretty cool. I would like to have the chance to play on the golf course I had won on and asked and didn't get one.

Q. (No microphone.)

ANDY NORTH: You look at people they've given

exemptions to, and there's not a very big list once you get past Arnold and Jack and Watson. That's a pretty good group.

Q. It's you and Steve Stricker, obviously, have had pretty solid careers growing up as Wisconsinites on the TOUR. What do you see from Jordan Niebrugge and where he's been and where he might be going?

ANDY NORTH: Jordan is a really talented young man. He hit the ball a hundred miles. He's had some success, I think most -- the most important thing for most young players with a great skill level, which he has, is figuring out a way to be more consistent. Once you sort of figure that out then things become much easier. To do away with the bad days, the bad nines, the bad holes, figure out a way that maybe you don't go to your best shot. You have to figure out some other way to get it out there, and he'll figure it out. He's on a nice progression, and it's going to be pretty cool. I believe he's hitting the first shot this week, isn't he? That's good for him. That will be fun to see.

Q. You've always said that you were comfortable with pars, and this tournament fits your style. Do you feel like this course is set up that way, as well, where guys that are maybe a little more risky, a little more gutsy, it may sting them at some point or do you need to cash in on some birds out there?

ANDY NORTH: That's a great question, because we have absolutely no idea how this place is going to play. Generally at a U.S. Open if you can make a bunch of pars and not make too many mistakes, you'll hit enough good shots to make some birdies, could three or four under par win here, absolutely? Could 17 under par win here? Absolutely. We have no idea.

The weather is going to have an unbelievable affect on this golf tournament. And you that are here locally, there are a lot of days the wind can blow 15 to 20 miles an hour out of the west, and about 2:00 in the afternoon the wind swirls and comes back off the lake. The temperature changes. That happens a lot this time of year. If that's the case, that becomes very difficult for the USGA, that they go ahead and set the golf course up figuring you're going to have a certain velocity of wind for a certain direction, and if that switches around all of a sudden you have some holes you might not be able to play.

It's going to be an interesting week for everybody. Hopefully the weather is decent. If we had winds here like we had on Saturday, there wouldn't be enough balls to finish some of these holes. It would be fun.

Q. I wonder, are you amazed that we're here, given 20 very short years ago what was here? What are

your words for the very idea that we're here?

ANDY NORTH: Could you try that one again, please? I'm sorry.

Q. Are you amazed of the brief history of this place and the very idea that we're here now doing this?

ANDY NORTH: I think that's one of the surprises when it was announced that here's a golf course that's so new. And I've always felt like such a big part of the championship is the history that goes with it. To go to Oakmont and know that these guys won there before, that Arnold did that and Johnny Miller shot this score, that's really neat for the player.

And then you actually then have some idea what it takes to win there. Ideally I tried really hard to figure out what the score I needed to shoot when I came to one of these events. And then you try to fit your game plan around trying to get to that score at the end of the week. When you don't have any idea, it makes it much more difficult.

Q. Did you have any role either directly or indirectly in some way in bringing The Open here?

ANDY NORTH: No, I had absolutely nothing to do.

Q. Obviously you played so well in The Open and you see a guy, modern-day guy, someone that might be in this field as a modern-day Andy North that seems to have a record that is built getting up for majors in this championship?

ANDY NORTH: They're all better than that old guy, trust me. I've always loved the way Jim Furyk plays, he's an older guy, obviously. But he's a guy that seems to always be around. The number of top 10s he's had in major championships he gets it around. Some of that is being lost.

But what Rickie has been able to do, I love the way he plays. Jordan Spieth has got a lot of old school in him. And I think that's important. You look at Tiger and Phil, they were a wonderful combination of old school thinking and skill. And still have the ability to hit it a hundred miles like the young kids. And that's one of the reasons they beat everybody so many times.

Q. Being the two-time U.S. Open champion what advice do you have for all the players out there this week and how would you play the course had you been out there this week?

ANDY NORTH: Well, I think the most important thing is try to figure out how to get your tee shot into the first fairway into the wind. That's going to be a very difficult tee shot. Every player is a little bit different. You've got to figure out what your strengths are. And then you've got to play within those strengths the best you can. If it's laying up on holes or being aggressive, that's

something you have to figure out in your preparation for the event. There's not one idea or plan that fits everybody. You watch Dustin Johnson play, he plays a lot differently than Rickie Fowler as far as strategy and that sort of thing. You have to figure it out. The key is you have to figure it out. You have to figure out what's best for you and try to play within it.

Q. What does it say about U.S. Open, what does it say about golf here in the state of Wisconsin, are you hoping another U.S. Open might be played here again?

ANDY NORTH: Well, I think you start looking at Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, they're great golfing areas. Our season is different than the people that live in the south. You get a day that's 45 degrees and the sun is out, shoot, go out and play, it's beautiful. You've got high activity amongst the golfers in this state. It's great to get a big event here to come out and watch it. The number of kids that come out this week, I hope there are a ton of them, to watch how they handle themselves, which can will help increase the activity of the kids and is hopefully lead to some more good players down the road.

Q. A lot of talk has surrounded the 9th hole, that par-3 can play really tough. I want your thoughts on the 18th, could play into the wind, the wind at your back, and could decide things on the final day?

ANDY NORTH: I've never been a huge fan of a par 5 at the end unless it's a hole like the 18th the Torrey Pines that all kinds of stuff can happen. If you've got the lead and you're playing a par 5 and all you need to do is make a par on the last hole, it's a pretty easy finish. Versus the 18th hole last year where Dustin Johnson laid two great shots. It's hard to make a par if you're trying to make a par to win.

The I think the nice thing about 18 is no matter what direction the wind is, it's playable. If it's into the wind your tee shot is going to be short of the bunkering, and you can layup short of the next set of bunkers, and it's probably 5, 6, 7-iron for your third shot, which is a lot of club to be playing into that green that's really severe, particularly in the back part of the green, which is a little crazy, you get a good shot, the ball rolls 50 yards off the green. I think it sets up downwind. If you fit the ball in the fairway amongst the bunkers, you can hit a swooper off to the right and get the ball to run up to the front part of the green. I think it's a well-conceived hole for whichever way the wind blows.

Q. Last six majors have been won by someone who's never won a major before. What do you make of that and what are your thoughts on that?

ANDY NORTH: I think we go through those stretches.

We've had that in the past and it helps when Phil and Tiger aren't in the -- it was hard to go six in a row when Tiger was playing his best. He's going to win one of them. There's a ton of really good players.

There's a lot of the younger players that are now getting into eight, nine, ten years on Tour, starting to figure out how to play these events a little bit better. I think it shows the depth and the fact that you don't have that one or two guys at the top that are winning all the time. We could have another first time winner this week.

Q. If we go back to your first U.S. Open, do you recall how long it took to play 18 holes on the Thursday and Friday? Why does it take so much longer in your opinion?

ANDY NORTH: I wish I knew, but I believe it was a little quicker than it will be this week. Cherry Hills is a much smaller golf course, the next tee was 20 yards from the green, that sort of thing. Where this week the walks in between, it's going to take a long time to play. I can't imagine any rounds are going to be under five hours this week, which is sad.

Q. Did you ever play the Dell hole here, the blind par-3?

ANDY NORTH: I did not. I understand I didn't miss anything (laughter).

Q. Have you ever played a blind par-3?

ANDY NORTH: The way I've hit shots you might think I was the blind person, but there's not a lot of those, no.

BETH MAJOR: Thank you so much for joining us. We look forward to spending the week here in Wisconsin.