

US Open Championship 2017

Monday, June 12, 2017

Henrik Stenson

Press Conference



BETH MAJOR: Welcome again to the 2017 U.S. Open Championship at Erin Hills. It's my pleasure to welcome the reigning British Open, Open champion, Henrik Stenson, to the media center today. Henrik is playing in his 11th U.S. Open with two top-ten finishes. He's currently, this season, he has five top-10 finishes around the world, and is currently ranked 6th.

Henrik, can you talk a little bit about your first impression of Erin Hills, having just arrived?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, I think, I actually took a sneak peek, I watched one of the videos online, so I had seen a little bit before I came here. But it looks kind of linksy style, a little linksy. But it plays softer, for sure. I only walked 18 today, so I actually haven't hit shots out there, but in doing so I saw quite a few of my colleagues hitting shots, and it seemed like it was quite receptive on the greens and not that fiery off the fairways, either. So, we'll see what the weather brings us this week. But I'll still expect it to be a bit more target golf than links golf still.

And, impression? It looks kind of narrow in places, but I think that's because it's such a huge piece of property. You're standing on a big, high elevated tee box, and you see this massive piece of land, and the fairway looks kind of small. But when you actually look at the fairways, they're quite wide and quite generous.

But as always, the USGA likes to trick it up a little bit at times, and if you go off track, then you're going to notice that that's not the place to be in a lot of areas.

BETH MAJOR: Can you talk a bit about your preparations and the patience that's required heading into this week?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, it's one of the majors, it's one of the toughest mental tests that you're going to encounter out there, and it's important to be fresh and, at least I think I've got that part. I've had a week off in Sweden, and haven't really focused much on golf. So at least we're fresh, and hopefully, you know, we can pick up the kind of freshness in the game that we need these next couple of days and be ready by Thursday. It's important to have your mental strength and energy over the weekend, especially, if you're going to do well. And not to overdo it in the first couple of days. So I walked 18 today, and then I'll play nine tomorrow and

nine on Wednesday, and that should be good.

BETH MAJOR: Great. Thank you very much. Questions?

Q. I know you didn't get a chance to actually hit shots out there, but were you able to get a feel for --

HENRIK STENSON: One thing I forgot to say, this is hay fever heaven, and I expect any local pharmacy to sell out of antihistamines. If you haven't gotten yours, make sure you get them quickly. I will. I forgot to take my pills this morning, and I've been sneezing about 50 times already. The question again, please?

Q. Were you able to get a feel today for -- you don't hit a lot of drivers off tees. You're pretty long with the 3-wood. Because the fairways are wider, will you be able to be more aggressive or do you think there is some sort of built-in advantage that you have because you can hit the 3-wood so long and control it that you can play from the fairway?

HENRIK STENSON: I think there's always going to be a few holes where you can debate whether it's going to be a driver or 3-wood. There are certain holes that are definitely a 3-wood, and there are certainly a bunch of holes that are definitely driver. I mean, we had a discussion on the -- let me see -- the 7th, because we play around with so many tee boxes, and then given your external conditions with the wind and so on, it's going to be a lot of decision making in that. If you play a certain hole off a forward tee and a certain wind, then if you're driver, then you might take some big problems into play, and it might be wiser to lay back even though it's a forward tee and so on.

But I think it's pretty straightforward most of the holes on the front nine. There are a couple holes on the back nine where strategy and maybe patience is certainly -- and experience is going to pay off. There might be a few holes where you'll be quite happy if you can play them as easy as possible and try to make stress-free pars and then watch a lot of my colleagues try to look for the balls in the hay and rack up some big numbers. So there is certainly that kind of balance where it will be patient and a bit more defensive, and holes you've got to be aggressive. Because at the end of the day, you've got to take your chances when they come as well.



and, yeah, that's what it's about.

So I didn't have a chance to come up here early because I was heading back to Europe to play. So I couldn't really do a little trip and come by here at the end of May, which I possibly would have done otherwise.

Q. I feel like you've done this before where you've shown up and walked 18 holes on Monday, limited your practice, I guess, is the point. How do you strike that balance between maintaining your energy throughout the week and learning a new golf course like this week?

HENRIK STENSON: What was the second part?

Q. How do you maintain that balance between maintaining your energy and learning a new golf course?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, just not doing too much practice. I feel like maybe I'm not in full form, but I'm feeling like it's in the right direction. Had a good session with Pete this morning, and after 30 minutes, 40 minutes I felt like there was no point in standing here another hour or two. I better go out and spend time on learning the golf course. So it's just not doing too much, especially when it gets as hot as it is.

Also I came in from Europe yesterday, so that jet lag is always showing up at some point and dragging you down a little bit. So, yeah. The plan, as always, would be to show up at the events in decent shape so you don't need to stand out there long on the practice grounds beating yourself tired before the event starts.

Q. This will be your first U.S. Open with four 5-pars. Obviously wind is going to be an issue. But do you have the sense that it might be easier to lay back a little bit rather than go for them and play safe for a birdie rather than kind of risk anything? Is there some comfort zone there for you?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, if there's ever a way to play safe for a birdie, I'd love to hear the way to do that. I still haven't figured that one out. But I see what you're saying. I mean, I think depending on the wind and tee placements, there's not going to be an option to reach a few of them in two, whether you like to take the risk or not. I guess that depends on how much USGA want to move around the tee boxes and give us the opportunities. But that's some of the work I did today trying to say, okay, if we're playing this forward tee box and you've got into the wind, are we going to do something different or are we just trying to hit the same spot as I was from the further tee box. So a lot of thinking and a lot of looking.

No, I mean, normally if it sets up correctly, then I'm all

Q. A quick question on the whole spat of recent first-time major winners. We've seen six of them and you are one of those. Why do you think we're seeing this trend right now at the highest level of World Golf?

HENRIK STENSON: Oh, you're the one that should make up these answers, not me, right (laughing)?

Q. Over to you, mate.

HENRIK STENSON: Thanks. I think the competition on a weekly basis is so tight out there and so tough. It's so many players in the field that can win. Whether it's a trend or if this is going to continue or not, or if there is going to be a few guys stepping up and becoming second and third-time winners short of them having more first timers, I guess that's yet to see. But I think in general it's very hard to predict who is going to do well any other week. It's been like that in the last year and a half in the majors, for sure.

Q. For what it's worth, as you asked me my two cents, is you're all inspiring each other. You're all raising each other's games to new heights. What do you think of that?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, there could be something in that. A lot of times you see that, if I go back to Sweden, I'm sure that success is kind of pushing on more success, and we've seen that within countries, for sure. That might be the case as well that you say, okay, he won his first major, why shouldn't I win mine? Even though that was not something that was kind of in my mind when I played at Troon last year or in the lead up to that. But, yeah, I'll agree with you.

Q. How many events a year do you have to start your preparation basically from scratch? You talked about going online, looking at videos and that kind of thing. When you come out to a course like this that you haven't seen, what is the No. 1 thing that you have to see first to get a good feel for it?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, it's not that many times. I mean, there's probably three or four tops in a year. I mean, I've reached that age where I keep on coming back to the championship courses that I've played 10, 12 years ago, so that always makes it a bit easier. Starting from scratch is going to take a bigger effort, for sure, to learn the golf course and figure out a game plan. So, it takes a little bit more out of you, and that's why I decided to do it this way, to walk 18 today, because it's good to have that picture clear in your mind before you're playing it. So at least you've done the analyzing part and figured out a strategy between myself and my caddie, and then we'll go out and test that, and there might be one or two tweaks on that most of the time. So I think we get it right the first time

for trying to get home in two, but if you're taking too much into play and too many risks, then sometimes a three-shotter is definitely the smart option.

Q. Did you have an idea in your head what the U.S. Open was all about before you played your first one? And if you were to tell a young player getting ready to play his first one now, would what you tell him be the same as what you were once told?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, I mean, patience and pars is always a good score. No matter how easy a hole might seem, stress-free pars is always going to be good in a U.S. Open, and patience. You've got to take the hits. There will be times when you want to get mad and it's going to get to you, but you've just got to stay focused and press on. It's going to be the same for everyone. That's why you've got to have a fresh head and be able to keep your patience this week.

Q. In your general comments you mentioned the weather and also discussed the wind. Are you looking at that forecast already through the weekend, or do you just take it day by day?

HENRIK STENSON: No, I try not to spend too much time on the future and those kind of things. We know the weather can change quite a lot. Obviously, if you're checking it out for the next day or so, then you might get a more accurate idea, but it's just to keep that in -- a lot of times I think if you've figured out where you want to be on a particular hole off the tee, that spot stays the same if it's pumping into, it might be a driver to get there. If it's pumping downwind, it might be a 4-iron to the same spot. If I decided that that's where I want to hit, it doesn't really matter where the wind is. It's just going to be a different club to the same spot. So I normally don't pay too much attention on the weather forecast up in front. My caddie normally checks it out as well, so he'll be in charge of that part.

Q. After Sergio's break-through win at The Masters there seemed to be an outpouring of support for him from the golfing community. Obviously you want to win week-in, week-out, but describe what it's like to see a fellow pro grab an emotional victory?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, I was in a position I had two of my good friends out on TOUR. My Ryder Cup friends and partners battling it out for the green jacket. So it was an exciting Sunday to watch for me as well, especially since I didn't play well, so I was at home watching it. It looked like certainly he got off to a good start, and then Justin kind of got the upper hand and he was very close for him to get that much in front that it might have been too late for Sergio, but at the right time he managed to come back and win.

Obviously, as a friend, I'm delighted for him. He's been

close so many times before, and his career certainly deserves a major championship. So I was very happy to see Sergio win. Even though I certainly feel the pain and I've been in similar situations myself as Justin was, but that's the name of the game. You win some, you lose some and, yeah, that's sport. No one would watch it otherwise, right?

Q. You had, I guess, an understanding with your caddie last year before winning The Open that he would quit smoking if you won a major --

HENRIK STENSON: This is not a question for me. You need to get him on this one. He tried for a month. He faltered and he's heard it numerous times.

Q. I was just going to ask you if you've been giving him any grief about that?

HENRIK STENSON: Of course, what do you think? I'm not the only one either. The whole world knew about that bet, and, yeah, I got a lot of support from a lot of people to give him grief.

Q. How far back does it go? Do you recall when you first put that --

HENRIK STENSON: It was about a year. It was Tampa the year before. It was actually one of his friends who said what can I -- one of his college friends that live in Tampa, and he said, what can I do to make you quit smoking? And he said, well, if you guys win a major, will you quit? And he was like, yeah, yeah. So obviously he never thought I was going to win a major (laughing). So then we did, and he gave up, and three weeks into it he said I'm not sure. I almost wish that Phil would have won because this is just too painful. So he tried, but not hard enough.

Q. There was a point on the back nine at Troon where you brought it up to him; correct?

HENRIK STENSON: It was on the 7th, yeah. Walking down on the 7th he lit up a cigarette, and I said, enjoy it, because it could be one of your last ones.

Q. What is the biggest contribution to your success that Pete has made?

HENRIK STENSON: That Pete has made? Obviously, I came to him in 2001. I was kind of lost with my golf swing and my confidence, and it was a lot of hard work getting that on track. Then I'd say I've always been a pretty good ball striker. The long game has been a base of my game in my career, but it was really when I elevated my short game in 2005-ish then that's really when I stepped into -- I broke into top 50 and positioned myself top 20, top 30 in the world rankings and stayed there for many, many years. I mean, overall, I'd say the short game was a big contributing factor to my career.

Q. And what made you originally decide to work with him?

HENRIK STENSON: That was done by suggestion of Grant Berry who now caddies for Daniel Berger. He caddied for me for just over two years at that time back in Europe, so 2001 and 2002. He introduced me to Pete and Grant lived in Manchester at the time, and Pete and Sheff are not far away, so I flew over and actually met him at an indoor facility a couple of times that winter. And, yeah, he hasn't gotten rid of me since. Even though I got rid of Grant.

Q. Can you talk a little about the Olympic experience and how it differed from the normal tournaments or majors and what you got from that in addition to, obviously, having a pretty good summer as well?

HENRIK STENSON: Yeah, I'd say it was almost better than a pretty good summer. No, it was great. I'm a big general sports fan. I grew up in Sweden, always watching the summer and winter Olympics, so to be able to go to Rio and represent my country and take part in that experience and become an Olympian, it has a nice tone to it. So that was great. Then once we knew that we were going to be participating in Rio, of course, I had my sights on one of the medals, hopefully the gold one. We got the second best one.

Yeah, it was just a great experience, and I hope I can be there for 2020 in Tokyo and see if I can make it one better.

Q. What is the difference between your -- in other words, looking forward to a U.S. Open, is it different than the way you look forward to maybe playing The Open?

HENRIK STENSON: Sometimes it's always been a little bit hard. Golf at the U.S. Open has always been a bit harder at The Open or any of the other ones. We know Augusta has got the challenges, and The Open you've got the weather. The U.S. Open you normally play on golf courses that are tricked up just to the limits, sometimes over the limits and sometimes just underneath. So it's certainly a tiring week. But it's all worth it if you stand there with the trophy on Sunday.

BETH MAJOR: Henrik, always a pleasure. Thank you so much for joining us today. We wish you well throughout the week.

HENRIK STENSON: Thank you.