

U.S. Open Championship 2017

Wednesday, June 14, 2017

Dustin Johnson

Press Conference



BETH MAJOR: Good afternoon. Welcome again to the 2017 U.S. Open Championship at Erin Hills. Very happy to welcome our defending champion, Dustin Johnson, who won the title last year at Oakmont Country Club. The world No. 1 has had a pretty exciting week. Also became a father for the second time week. Congratulations.

Dustin, can you talk about the last few days and the excitement and everything that's gone on the last few days.

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Yeah, it's been very fun the last couple of days, obviously having a new son on Monday was awesome. Everybody's healthy. Mom is healthy. The baby is healthy. So that's good. They just got home today, so that's exciting. Everything is going really good. Got in yesterday afternoon, got to play some golf and practiced this morning and played nine holes.

BETH MAJOR: You had made a trip here about a week and a half ago. You've seen the golf course. Can you give some impressions about Erin Hills?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean the golf course, to me, I really like it. It's another course which -- all U.S. Opens there's a big premium on hitting the fairways. You've got to drive it in the fairways. Some of them are really wide. But they don't play quite as wide as they look.

But it's a typical U.S. Open venue where the fact is that you have to hit the fairways. You can't really play from the rough. So they do give us a little bit more room here, which is nice. Obviously with the weather conditions we've had the last few days the course is really soft and going to play long. I don't know, I like the golf course. I think it sets up very well for me.

Q. The biggest question is, do we have a name for this son yet?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: We do. River Jones Johnson.

Q. (No microphone.)

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Mama.

Q. You are No. 1 and you won the major last year.

And Japanese favorite, Hideki Matsuyama right now is No. 4 player, but he hasn't won a major yet. What do you think of his play recently and do you think he has a chance to win a major this week or in the future?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, Hideki is a very good player. He's got a very good golf game, all around. So, yeah, he's got a chance to win at any tournament. I think he's a good, strong player.

Q. Just going back to the last 48 hours, can you maybe just give us more thoughts on that. How it compared to the first time. Just in terms of leading into preparation for this, as well?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Well, I got to come -- it actually worked out pretty well that I missed the cut the Memorial, even though I didn't want to. I came up here and got to practice for two days. So it definitely helped with my preparation coming in because I knew I wasn't going to get here until Tuesday afternoon. It did work out that I got to spend two days up here and get some practice in. Even though I came in late I wasn't really -- I didn't feel like I was behind the eight ball at all because I got to prepare ten days ago or so.

But, yeah, the last 48 hours has been awesome. Having a new son has been fantastic. Everybody is healthy. So it's been great.

Q. Congratulations, first of all.

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Thank you.

Q. But for a 3-putt at Chambers Bay, you may be going for a hat trick this week. Given that Paulina's dad was a pretty good hockey player. Two part question: One, can you ice skate, and, if you can, if you drop the gloves with Wayne, do you think you can handle him?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Yes, I can skate. Not very good, but I can skate. I can stand up, at least. I don't know how long I'd be able to stand up in a fight. If we dropped the gloves, I'd probably try to tackle him first.

Q. You mentioned you came here earlier last week. When you did so, I understand you worked with some of the local caddies, what do you think some of their in sight did for you preparing for this tournament or preparing for your practice rounds

this week?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Well, I mean, my brother was here with me, but I did have one of the local guys. Obviously it was kind of good for the first time around to have one just to -- on a few holes, you need to know where to hit it. And if you haven't played here before it definitely helps if someone knows the course. It was definitely helpful in trying to figure out some lines off the tees.

Q. How many drivers are you hitting on the golf course? What's the longest irons that you're finding you're hitting into some of these greens?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: It just all depends. Probably 5-iron maybe. 5-iron is probably one of the longest irons I've hit in. I hit a lot of drivers. It all depends, though, they have, obviously, a lot of maneuvering they can do with the tee markers, so it just depends. If they play it all the way back, I'll hit a lot of drivers. And it depends on the wind, too. There's only a couple of holes where I might not hit a driver. But for the most part I can hit a driver on just about every hole.

Q. Seems to me as I'm walking the course that No. 9 being a par-3 is pretty difficult. How has it played for you in your practice round and where do you see that hole being scored as?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: It's a difficult par-3. It's fairly short but the green's small. If you miss the green you're in trouble. There's really no good spot to miss it. You've just got to hit a good shot. And really 9, I think, is going to really depend on the wind, what direction it's blowing and how hard it's blowing is going to determine how tough No. 9 plays.

Q. You kind of talked about the whirlwind 48 hours that it's been for you. How do you mentally prepare? You seem like a pretty calm customer, but how do you mentally prepare? Monday you have a son, Tuesday you come here to work, Wednesday you're defending a U.S. Open title. Maybe you're so pumped up you want to go out there and play now. How do you go about that range of emotions?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: You just do it. I don't know. I wish I had an explanation on how I do it, but I don't. I just -- you know, I get here, obviously, and it helps that Paulina and my son, they're at home now. She's a lot more comfortable and everybody is healthy. Obviously I don't have to worry about them. Obviously that's a big relief, not having to worry about them. But now I've got to play golf. This is why I'm here. I'm here to play golf. I'm here to compete. So that's what my job is this week.

Q. Could you talk a little about the night before the Masters this year? How disappointed you were at

that point when everyone seemed to think that you were going to go out and win that thing. Does that make you more determined than ever to win this one after the disappointment of missing that?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Obviously it was very disappointing not to be able to play, kind of with a freak accident. I'm excited to come back and defend this week. The game feels like it's in really good shape. I've been working really hard at it the last couple of days. And also it just all depends. It's going to be a long week. I'm going to have to -- every part of the game is going to have to work well this week if I want to have a chance here on Sunday afternoon. I feel like I'm prepared, I feel like I'm ready, and we'll see what happens.

Q. With the baby being born this week so close to tournament, was there any initial thought that you might have to miss this tournament?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Yeah, it depended on when she had the baby or when we could have it. Yeah, it was definitely a thought, but everything worked out and I'm here playing.

Q. Did you watch any of the Masters? And if so, what was going through your head?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Yeah, well, I couldn't really do much else, I was laying on the couch. And there wasn't a lot on TV other than the Masters. So, yes, I watched a lot of it, unfortunately, it from the couch. I just wish that I would have been playing, especially leading into the Masters I was playing the best golf that I've ever played. So it was definitely disappointing not to be able to play. And it's taken me a while to get back to where I was then. I've still got some work to do to get back to when I was playing that good.

Q. Congratulations to all the family. Disappointment of not going into Augusta National, the Masters, that would have been your first major as well at No. 1. Now you get a chance to do it at the U.S. Open, how does that feel?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: It's a U.S. Open. To me it doesn't matter what number I'm coming in here as. But, yeah, it feels good to still be No. 1. I'm here to compete. I'm here to give myself a chance to win on Sunday. But I'm going to have to play really well if I want that chance.

Q. How well do you know Curtis Strange, and what's the first thing you think of when you think of Curtis?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: I couldn't hear you, sorry, Doug.

It's raining. I don't know him that well. Obviously I've met him a few times and we've spoken but I don't know him that well. But, yeah, I do know he won back-to-back U.S. Opens.

a guess for you. I haven't even thought about it.

Q. I've been asking this quite a lot this week, you're one of six players -- you're one of six first-time major winners over the course of the last six majors. Why do you think we're seeing this pattern, this trend right now?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: I think there's a lot of very good young players that are coming up. There's a lot of talented golfers out here on the PGA Tour and throughout the world and so that's why. It gets harder and harder to win majors is because there's just so many good players.

Q. I was going to ask you, being world No. 1, being the defending champion and given your length off the tee, do you feel that would intimidate your rivals this week?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: I hope so. Shouldn't it?

Q. Can you expand on that, please?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: I can't. I really can't (laughing). I don't know. You'd have to ask them.

Q. Congratulations on the baby. I was talking to Alex Noren a couple of days ago about his good play and what he attributed it to, and he said largely a lot of it was fatherhood. Fatherhood has changed his approach towards golf, a more balanced life and so forth. I'll ask you, do you think fatherhood has made you a better player?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Yeah, I think so. It's been great. It just gives you a whole new perspective on things, where before kind of golf was the most important and now my family is the most important. At the end of the day whether I'm having a good day or bad day, when I either see my family or talk to them, whatever, if I was upset or even if I was happy with the way I played, none of that matters. Just I'm always happy and excited to be with them.

BETH MAJOR: Dustin Johnson, thank you so much for wearing the title of U.S. Open Champion so wonderfully over the past year. We look forward to watching you defend your title this week at Erin Hills.

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Thank you.

Q. I realize this is a difficult championship to win, but why do you think it's gone the longest of all the majors without a repeat winner?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Just because of what you just said, it's a difficult championship to win. It always plays very difficult. You've got to play good, every part of your game has to be working very well if you want to have a chance to win.

Q. Given that parenthood is such a big theme this week, when's the last you talked to Phil and what do you think about his week and the choice he made about going to his daughter's graduation?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Well, last time I talked to him was when we played together at the Memorial. We talked about it, and he said, obviously, if there was some kind of delay tomorrow then he might make it. Sometimes there's things that are more important than golf and family is definitely more important. I respect his decision to stay home and be with his family when it's an important moment for his daughter.

Q. Congratulations. Being No. 1 in the world, Jason Day has talked about it a bunch when he was No. 1 that he sort of felt, I don't know if it was a pressure, but definitely it was something that he wanted to defend, and it was something that he actively talked about. Do you feel that same sort of pressure? And what does being No. 1 in the world mean to you and has it changed you?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: No, it hasn't changed me. I'm still the same person I always am. For me it is more -- it gives me a lot of ownership in the fact that what I'm doing is working. It's more of -- and it drives me to work harder on the things that I'm doing. So whether it's in the gym or my practice. It just validates everything that I'm doing, that it's working and I'm working on the right things.

Q. Just curious where you did your work before you came out here? How did you go about your practice before getting here?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: Like last week? I was in Sherwood, practiced a little bit and played -- played almost every day last week and practiced a little bit, too, every day at sure wood. And then I played Bel Air on Sunday, just went out and played at Bel Air on Sunday, and then that's about it.

Q. Which part of your game do you think needs the most work right now?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: It can all be a little better.

Q. If you had to guess, what do you think the winning score will be on Sunday?

DUSTIN JOHNSON: I have no idea. I don't even have