

U.S. Open Championship 2017

Sunday, June 18, 2017

Brooks Koepka

Press Conference



BETH MAJOR: Good evening. It is my pleasure to welcome the 2017 U.S. Open champion, Brooks Koepka. Brooks, have you had a chance to let that sink in yet.

BROOKS KOEPKA: I have not. I probably won't for a while, but, I mean, that's probably the most emotion I've ever showed coming down the stretch. I mean, it feels amazing to get my name on this trophy with so many other great names. It's truly an honor.

BETH MAJOR: Brooks shot a 5-under 67 today. It was his fourth sub-par round in the championship. He finished 16 under par to claim the 117th U.S. Open by four strokes here at Erin Hills. The 16-under par ties the championship scoring record for most strokes under par over 72 holes, a record originally set in 2011 by Rory McIlroy at Congressional Country Club.

Brooks, can you talk about your play throughout the week?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I played really solid from the moment we got here on Monday and all the way through until today. The ball-striking was pretty solid. It had to be today, especially with the wind. And I got out with the putter there for a little bit today and all week. So all around my game is pretty solid and I couldn't be happier.

Q. You talked about showing more emotion than you ever have coming down the stretch. A lot of us didn't quite see that, I'm wonder if you could --

BROOKS KOEPKA: Did you see that fist pump there on 18?

Q. Huge. Yeah, big. Yeah, you and Dustin. Can you give us some insight what was going on inside since we didn't see much outside?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Just staying one shot at a time. That's what I kept doing.

Dustin actually called me last night and told me the same thing, just stay patient. Just keep doing what you're doing, you're going to win the thing, and just don't get ahead of yourself. A bunch of people told me that.

And I felt like I really stayed patient all week. Between conversations I've had with Claude and Pete Cowan

sat me down, I think, on Tuesday, and kind of had a conversation with me just kind of staying patient, not trying to win.

I felt like that has been the thing lately with me, why I haven't really played that well, I've been trying to win so badly. I felt like I've underachieved. And the more patient that I can become, the more times I'll put myself in this situation.

Q. You have won all over the world, what is it about your game that you can take to every continent and get a victory?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I feel like I can strike it pretty well. I control the spin. I drove the ball really well this week, so that really helps. Obviously the fairways are a little bit wider. And to have that where some of the misses typically would be in a bunker and deep rough, and like the typical U.S. Open. But they were able to hang on, especially with the wet conditions.

Q. A few years ago you gave an interview where you said if you could do it all over again, you would have stuck with baseball growing up. Sitting here with the U.S. Open trophy and \$2.8 million extra in the bank, did you make the right decision?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I think so. I think I'll be all right.

Q. Congratulations. Can you talk, two things. One, can you expand a little bit on the phone call I guess you got from Dustin last night you said. And, two, can you talk about that three-hole stretch. At that point it was a wide open ballgame at that point, no one had really stretched out the lead and you kind of seemed to take it with that 3-wood I believe it was on 14. Can you talk about that stretch and through that stretch, as well?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, that stretch, that par save was massive on 13. That's the reason I felt I had so much confidence coming down, especially with the par 5 coming up, knowing that you needed to birdie that. And to be honest with you, I think it was like 300 to the pin, but I knew I could get there with 3-wood if I just turned it. And leaving it in that bunker wasn't that bad. Anywhere over there was fine.

And on 15, I kind of hit actually a poor tee shot, but that second shot was unbelievable. That pin is hanging off the back and into the wind. It was pretty impressive, or

I thought. It was probably one of the best shots I've hit all week, to be honest with you.

And then I mean I saw the pitch mark on 16 and that almost, I think, stayed up top. I don't know, we couldn't see the bottom of the flag. But I flushed it right at the flag. So ball-striking was really good. And anytime you're striking well, you're going to give yourself some chances and I just built off that putt on 13. I had some confidence.

Q. And the phone call from Dustin?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I mean there's probably not that much that's that interesting (laughter) to be honest. It was a long phone call. For us it was like two minutes (laughter) it wasn't much. But he just said a few things, and just stay patient. And I'll win if I stay patient and just keep doing what I'm doing.

Because we played Tuesday practice round together and, I mean, he watched me play. I thought I played pretty solid on Tuesday. And he said he was pulling for me and just hang in there. It will happen.

Q. There are players in the Hall of Fame who didn't win their first major until their 30s or 40s. Why did you feel like an underachiever at 27?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I'd won once on the PGA Tour, once on the European Tour. And I felt like I put myself in contention so many times. And I don't want to say got unlucky, I felt like I just never fully came together. I put myself in some good chances over the majors over the last few years and never really quite came through.

The PGA last year, I felt like I had a good chance and, unfortunately, my ankle and having to walk like 30 holes in wet conditions probably wasn't ideal for that.

But I just felt like I should be winning more. I don't know why. It's one of those things, not a big fan of losing, I don't think anyone out here is. And I just couldn't stand the fact that I'd only won once.

Q. Claude was just talking about how you struggled early this year, but you've been able to bounce back. What was going on early in the year, and how did you get yourself through that?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Just some stuff off the golf course, that's it. I'm not going to expand on it. Sorry.

Q. At 16 under, this tournament always bills itself as golf's ultimate test. At 16 under, did you feel like you got the ultimate test?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yep. I felt like -- especially today with the wind. I mean, this golf course, you had to put the ball in the fairway and if you didn't you really got penalized, just plain and simple. I was in the fescue a

couple of times, I think maybe three times, and it all jumped out straight left on me, I didn't even have a good lie. I can't imagine if I hit it in there a couple more times how bad it would be.

With it being wet, it made the fairways a little wider and the greens more receptive. This golf course is in fabulous shape. I love it, obviously. Yeah, I thought it was a great test.

Q. With the first major under your belt now, does it take pressure off of you going into future majors?

BROOKS KOEPKA: No, I don't think so. I've worked my tail off over the last six months, made some changes, from grinding every day in the gym, trying to make sure that I was physically ready and strong enough to be able to swing the club the way I wanted to. During that struggle the beginning part of the year, I never quit. I mean, I was grinding all day, every day is what it felt like. And I just couldn't get my mind to free up. But I'm past that now and everything's fine.

Q. You referenced the Ryder Cup pressure last year. I just wonder even though a completely different scenario, is there any part of that pressure you were able to draw from in terms of how you handled that then and how you handled today?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I think the Ryder Cup was kind of the first real taste of true pressure I think I've ever felt. I don't get too nervous. I don't really think about -- think too far ahead, usually.

And to be honest with you, this week I don't think I ever got nervous, not at one point. I just stayed in the moment. And I thought that if I thought ahead, I was going to -- if I strayed from the game plan at all, I thought that's where things were going to go wayward and sideways. You start thinking ahead. You start thinking about having the trophy or start thinking about other things. You're here to play golf. You've got 18 holes, just gut it out for that long and then you can celebrate.

Q. Did you know the record was 16 under? Did you know you had a chance to go to 17 and break the record today?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I did not know that. I wish I'd have gotten up and down on 18, I know that. It would have been nice. But it's still a pretty cool accomplishment.

Q. You took a pretty unconventional route to get here, leaving America, going to Europe. Do you feel that made you a more complete golfer from the kind of skills you had to learn over there? What were some of the crazier stories that you encountered when you were over in Europe?

BROOKS KOEPKA: There's some pretty crazy ones.

Going over to play the Challenge Tour was really, really cool, to get to travel the world at 22, 21 years old, and do what you do for a living is pretty neat. I love traveling. I'll go anywhere. I think it's so much fun. And some of the places we went to were pretty neat. And to go over there, I think it helped me grow up a little bit and really figure out that, hey, play golf, get it done, and then you can really take this somewhere. And I built a lot of confidence off of that.

Q. Following up on that question about the Ryder Cup, when you're trying to win a major for the first time a lot of guys who already have them said that you've got to have something else, there's got to be something pushing you. How much did that help you or what was it that allowed you to separate yourself to that?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Just -- it's the basic answer of just staying one shot at a time. I was not thinking about anything else out there. I wasn't thinking anything other than the shot I just had or was about to hit.

I don't think I even mentioned to my caddie, Ricky, even about winning all week. He just told me you're playing good, just keep going. Let's go. Let's finish this thing off. One more good shot. One more good shot. And that was kind of all we talked about all week. It sounds pretty boring, but it's the truth.

Q. It was a top 5 finish at the U.S. Open that got you your PGA Tour card, now your first major is the U.S. Open. Is this tournament going to be special for you? Did it mean more to win here? My question is, does it mean more because this is the tournament that propelled you on to the PGA Tour?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I was going to find a way, I think, to get my card either way. I mean, I love U.S. Opens, I think anytime you test your whole game. You can't make a double bogey in a U.S. Open. It takes two holes to recover from that, where a bogey takes one, it's just simple. You can't make mistakes every shot. I mean there's a double and a triple waiting around every corner, if you just kind of take your mind off of it or just relax for a half second.

There's something about majors where I just focus in a lot more. Obviously I need to do that more often. But it's got my full attention. Every shot, every putt, even if it's 12 inches, a foot, foot and a half, I'm still reading it, still doing everything, and it's got my attention.

Q. Considering you say you're underachieved to this point, how lofty of your goals in the game of golf?

BROOKS KOEPKA: They're pretty high. I'd say -- I mean we started out this year and I figured -- I thought I needed to win multiple times and a major. I'm sure

someone heard me say that. I thought the way my game set up I think I can win multiple times a year, I really do. And I think this is hopefully major number one and there's many more to come.

Q. Obviously you played here in the 2011 Amateur. You didn't even make the 36-hole cut. Now you win here. So looking at this course and this championship and how it played out with the six of the top-10 not even making the cut, should the U.S. Open come back to this golf course at some point?
BROOKS KOEPKA: Absolutely. Yeah, I think they should (laughter). I'll be a big fan of that.

Q. Was the club and distance on 15 and the club on 16?

BROOKS KOEPKA: 15, I don't remember what it was. I think it was 155. We chipped an 8-iron.

And then on 16, it was a 9-iron. We just tried to hit a three-quarter 9-iron on 16. Lucky it didn't go on the back of the green, because that would have been an impossible putt.

Q. Going back to the journey that got you here, does it make it more satisfying to go the route you went and got here? And was there ever a low point?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, actually there was. There was a low point. I called Blake Smith, my manager, I think, right before I won the final Challenge Tour event to get to the European Tour. And I think it was the night of the third round. I called him and I was like, I don't even want to play. I just want to go home. I was kind of -- I don't want to say homesick, it was just tired of golf. Tired of traveling. I just wanted to be home, even though I think I had the lead at that point and was about to win the third one. For some reason I just wanted to get out and go home. I don't know why.

Q. Then after you won, you went down and qualified for the Open the next day, didn't you?

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, I think so, yeah. It was one of the -- I've never felt that way. I don't want to say -- I don't even know what was going on. It was one of those things, I think I had played so many weeks in a row, not a day off, it really got to me. That's all I can say, I guess.

Q. First of all, congratulations. I'm curious, a lot of players will have their theories that, oh, if I could win a major I'm going to do this or that. How will you reward yourself? Is there something you plan on doing now that you've accomplished one of these goals?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I have a couple Michelob Ultras, that would probably be a good start.

No, I mean, I'm just going to enjoy it for right now. It hasn't even sunk in, but I think it will be special. I want to see my family and be with them. I think that will be pretty neat. And with everyone that's kind of played a part in helping me win this, I just want to be with them and my family, to be honest with you.

Q. Congratulations. Just talking to Charley, Rickie, Tommy Fleetwood, Justin Thomas, Brian, coming off the course, every one of them said something in their post-round interview, like Brooks is too good to not have won one of these. He was bound to win one of these. Those types of comments. So you talk about feeling like you're an underachiever, but clearly your peers are not surprised to see you win a major championship. How does that make you feel to think that your peers have seen this in you?

BROOKS KOEPKA: It feels good. We all hang out together. We played golf together since we've been 14, 15, with Justin, Rickie, all those guys. We all hang out. We hang out back home. Everybody knows everyone's potential. You've just got to be able to do it, and luckily enough this week I was able to do it.

Those guys are going to win a bunch of majors. They're going to have unbelievable careers. I wouldn't -- I think the younger generation that's kind of coming up right now is really impressive. You look at those guys, look at the top of the leaderboard, even Hideki, I mean it's so impressive, it really is. And it's getting that much harder to win them.

Q. You had said before you were staying in the moment. A lot of people have a really hard time. Golfers are not just staying in the moment, one shot at a time kind of thing. Are there any tricks that you do to help you accomplish that?

BROOKS KOEPKA: To be honest with you, me and Ricky, my caddie, we're walking down the fairways, I don't think we talked about golf. I don't think we ever really talked about golf. It's one of those things until we get to the ball and he says the yardage.

We were talking about vacations we've been on coming up 18, I think. We were talking about we went to Bali last year, and we were talking about that. We were doing something stupid, and we were -- coming down 18 that's what we were talking about.

So we're always -- you know, you're out there for, what, five and a half hours, you can't be focused in for that long, for five and a half hours, I think it's impossible. So you've got to have a little break. When I get back to the ball or kind of stand right next to the bag, okay, let's get into it, let's get going, let's focus on it right now,

whatever we're doing, and get back in the golf mind.

Q. Could you please describe the important par-putt on 13?

BROOKS KOEPKA: It was kind of an easier putt. I felt like the hole was in kind of a little swale where I think I played it just outside the cup. And it was one of those little things where I hit it just high, a little bit outside, it would seem like it was going to come back into the hole. It was kind of in a little funnel, where if I played it a little straight it might hang straight. I needed to make that if I was going to win this golf tournament.

On 10, I mean that was one of the worst strokes I had all week. I think it might have been the only three-putt, I think.

And then 11, I wasn't giving it enough pace. On 10, it barely got to the hole. 11, it ran across the front edge.

And 12, I just steamrolled it and I had four feet coming back, and that was probably a really important putt there, too, 12 and 13.

Q. Gary Player said one of his greatest accomplishments was being a truly world champion. Gary Player said one of his proudest accomplishments was being a world champion. How special do you feel knowing that you won around the world and now the U.S. Open?

BROOKS KOEPKA: It's really special. I look at all these places I won. Just won in Japan, I think, in November. And to win in the European Tour in Turkey and Phoenix. You look back at all the wins, even on the Challenge Tour, it's pretty cool. I'd love to get a map and just look at all the places I've won. It's pretty cool.

But to win my first major in the United States is pretty special. It is Father's Day, so hopefully -- like I said, I didn't get him a card, so I really hope this works (laughter).

BETH MAJOR: Well, Brooks, on behalf of the USGA, we are thrilled to call you the 2017 U.S. Open champion. Happy Father's Day to all, and thank you all for your coverage throughout the week. We look forward to seeing you next year at Shinnecock Golf Club.