

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT: TOM WATSON
Wednesday, June 26, 2013



PHIL STAMBAUGH: We welcome World Golf Hall of Fame member Tom Watson into the interview room this morning.

Tom, you come back to a place that you really enjoyed playing last year and I believe this starts a pretty good run of five tournaments in a row and a bunch of majors. Just talk about coming back to Fox Chapel.

TOM WATSON: Fox Chapel last year was a wonderful surprise. This is a gem of a golf course. When I play a golf course, if I can remember more than a few holes on the golf course at my age, that's really pretty good. I can remember all 18 holes of this golf course and that's how I assess what a good golf course should be. If you go out there and you play a golf course, you remember the holes like it was, you know, the back of your hand, like I did last year at Fox Chapel. That's why I said it was a gem and I still love the golf course.

It makes you fit the ball in the fairways. There's a lot of slope to the fairways, left to right and right to left. There's elevated shots, downhill shots. It's a combination of a great set of shot values for me and that's what I love about the golf course. It's in wonderful condition. Of course we got three inches of rain overnight and it's going to make it play a lot softer, so we'll see what happens there. I don't want it to play too much longer, especially holes like No. 4. 4 is a long hole. What is it? It's almost a 500-yard par 4, but it was playing pretty short yesterday.

This starts a run of five tournaments in a row for me. I'll be playing against the kids three of those -- two of those five. Actually, it starts six out of seven weeks for me, five in a row. I'm playing next week at the Greenbrier, where I'm the pro emeritus. Then I'll play at the U.S. Senior Open in Omaha, Omaha Country Club, and travel overseas to play in Scotland at the British Open, to England for the British Senior Open, a week off, and then against the kids again in the PGA Championship up in Rochester at Oak Hill.

PHIL STAMBAUGH: Talk about your game. You actually did beat the kids last week in Kansas City in your own tournament, right?

TOM WATSON: Yeah, a couple weeks ago I had a tournament that started in Kansas City about seven years ago, I call it the Watson Challenge and it's a tournament just for Kansas City golfers; the best amateurs and best professionals in Kansas City are allowed to play. I played pretty well, drove the ball well, and ended up winning by about five shots over those kids. It's fun to be able to win.

Q. Just curious, Colin Montgomerie is making his debut on this Tour this

weekend. How would you compare the level of competition now to when you made your debut on this Tour a little bit ago?

TOM WATSON: I didn't understand the last half of your question.

Q. The level of competition now between when you joined this -- when you started playing on this Tour, is it harder to win now? It seems like it's a deeper field, it seems like it's not one or two guys.

TOM WATSON: Again, when I started on the Tour, Hale Irwin was in his run, he won about everything, and Lee Trevino was kind of finishing his run where he won everything. Now you've got several players, first and foremost Bernhard Langer, then Tom Lehman. David Frost is certainly showing his stripes right now and playing awfully good golf. To win out here, it takes -- you have to play, you have to play really good golf. And we don't play short golf courses, we don't. We play golf courses that you're required to hit some long shorts. It's not pitch and putt, although it's pitch and putt for Freddy. I forgot Freddy. He's in a different world, Freddy. We play some pretty long golf courses and it's a challenge out here. How he will find it, he drives the ball very straight and he putts the ball very well and I suspect him to do very well out here.

Q. You mentioned how Hale was sort of dominating at the time you joined the Tour. Did you think, hey, when I get there I can go out there and be a top player right away? Did you expect to go out and be able to compete or did you think --

TOM WATSON: Yeah, I did, I expected to go out and compete and win. I won my second tournament out down in Dallas, won a few times. I've won six majors so far out here. Of course, it kept kind of a string alive at the British Senior Open as I did against the kids when I was a kid. That's been probably the highlight of my senior career, being able to still play those links golf courses so well over there. I don't know what it is. People ask me, you know, what makes it that you win over here so much? And I said, I really don't know, it could be my short game, could be the haggis because I win them all in Scotland, who knows, but I just enjoy playing golf over there and have a good feel for it.

Q. Last year you were coming off the injury when you came here, that was your first tournament back. Are you healthy now?

TOM WATSON: I'm in good shape now, injury free or pretty much injury free. At 63 you always have a few things you could complain about but I'm not complaining. What I'm complaining about is my memory, I can't remember stuff, although I can remember the holes on this golf course, as I said earlier.

Q. In your role as Ryder Cup captain, is there anything you do out here on this Tour or are you primarily just paying attention over there?

TOM WATSON: I ask the players out here, especially some of the caddies who have caddied in some of the other tours who's got it, and "it" is -- the way I look at it, it's not too subjective. It means can you play under pressure, can you play with the lead, do you have the heart to win, can you make that five footer when you have to every time. That's what "it" is. I'm asking the players out here who have played with some of the kids and some of these players. I see on television the stars, but I'm talking about some of the players that will be on the team that we don't know who they're going to be yet. We kind of know who some of the players are going to be, but I expect there will be two or three players there we don't know right now. So I'm asking questions about those "I don't know" players.

Q. With all the rain and the conditions out there right now, how does that affect the way you attack the course out there this weekend?

TOM WATSON: Well, rain does two things, it makes the course play longer, it also makes it play a little easier as far as stopping the ball where you want it to stop. It basically stops pretty much where you fly it and that's very good when you're going into greens. If the greens dry out, fairways remain soft, it will be about as tough a golf course as you want.

One thing I do like about the golf course, though, is a lot of the fairways slope. You have slopes to a lot of the fairways, and to keep that ball from running off those slopes is a lot easier when it's softer, but you still have to fit the ball in the fairways. There are quite a few, a number of short holes on this golf course but they play really tough. If you make just a slight error, you're going to be struggling to make par.

Q. And what would you say are some of those make-or-break holes this weekend for guys out there?

TOM WATSON: Well, let's see, how are they playing it now, the dogleg right around the corner, that tee shot, is it 12 now? What's the one that goes around the corner right from the clubhouse, that's 12 or 13?

Q. 13.

TOM WATSON: 13, that drive right there is a critical drive on the golf course. 17, the Biarritz hole, getting the ball in the right side of that flag there, it's a wide green but it has slope to it, and of course it has the big pocket in the middle and it's a long hole, so that plays tough. And then I get back to the 4th hole, it's a long, long hole, the 4th hole, and that plays tough. My favorite hole is No. 8 on the golf course, the most beautiful drive. It's a dogleg right, you hit downhill, you've got two bunkers there that are just magnets for the golf ball and it goes right and back up a hill to the green that perches out over the slope on the right-hand side. That is the best hole, the greatest hole on the golf course in my opinion. You have to drive the ball in the fairway there

and then you have to hit a really precise second shot there. That's a make-or-break hole.

Q. Tom, you talked about your success at the British Open including five with the young guys as British Open champion, and then Freddie Couples goes out the last several years and really plays great at the Masters. You look at a guy like Tom Lehman who's been pretty consistent on this Tour. Do you think he'll follow that same kind of pattern where he can go back and play with the young boys, the kids as you say, and have success?

TOM WATSON: Probably not as easily as Fred. Fred hits the ball longer than Tom and the length is certainly a huge factor. The height with which Fred hits the ball, he hits the ball very high. That's the way the kids play, high and long. Tom hits it a little bit lower. He hits it fairly long, but he doesn't hit it as long as Fred and Fred can compete with the kids a lot easier than Tom can, I think, and Tom can compete with them easier than I can.

PHIL STAMBAUGH: Tom, good luck this week.

TOM WATSON: Thank you.