

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: JEAN VAN DE VELDE
July 6, 2016



STEWART MOORE: We'd like to welcome Jean Van De Velde to the interview room here at the 10th annual Dick's Sporting Goods Open.

Jean, two-time European Tour winner, a member of the 1999 Ryder Cup team. You're certainly making your debut here on the PGA Tour Champions this week. Maybe talk about your excitement for coming out here to En-Joie and joining the Champions Tour.

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: Well, I'm super thrilled, to be very honest. I just am 50 a month ago. As maybe some of you know, I was pretty busy up until two days ago, last Monday. I've been running the French Open on the European Tour for the last five years since I retired, so there hasn't been much golf on the schedule. But ever since I retired you feel like you kind of miss the adrenaline of competing, and I have to say that's not something that goes away that easily.

Unfortunately, my clubs are not really listening right now. What else is there to say? I'm super happy to be here, I'm super happy to be playing with some of the best players in the world which are my age or even a little older than me, so I feel like a youngster out here, which is good. Having said that, you know, the course is beautiful, the greens are amazing, and yeah, I'm looking forward to play, to tell you the truth.

STEWART MOORE: You were quoted a couple months ago saying you play golf about 20 times a year. Is that accurate?

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: Yeah, that would be in a good year. It would vary between 10 rounds and 20 rounds, but this is about to change. So yeah, yeah. As you know, The Open Championship is -- Senior Open Championship I should say, is going back to Carnoustie, so I will definitely join the action over there. But having said that, I need to -- yeah, I need to put some rounds of golf, I need to practice and I need to get back into swinging the club more than once every month.

Q. So just welcome and just initial thoughts of the En-Joie Golf Course, how are things kind of rolling out there for you and what are your thoughts on the condition?

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: Well, I have to say if it was an average 30 yards wider, that would be better, but it's not so it's going to be a matter of -- I felt pretty tired today. As I said, I was very busy until Monday night where we had two outings on Monday on the course of the French Open, so I flew in on Tuesday morning.

Having said that, the course is immaculate. If you can manage to put the ball where you want off the tee, you're going to give yourself some great angles and then play in the right

section of the greens, it's going to be a matter of making a few putts. So the greens, they appear faster than they are, I think. If you're on the wrong side of the hole, they're going to be quick. If you leave yourself uphill putts, you leave yourself some great opportunity to be a little more aggressive. They're quite receptive and the fairways are firm. I mean, the conditions are superb, to be honest.

It's quite tricky. There's a few shots off the tee that you need to think where you want to, as I say, where you want to leave the ball. If you want to be aggressive and leave yourself with a short iron, like I think it's 15, that par 4 where the water is down the left, if you drive, it's nothing more than a wedge. If you don't drive, you leave yourself with quite a bit of a second shot in on that tiny green, especially when the pin is medium left there behind the water, or back right. So strategy's going to play a part. Yeah, trying to hit it well where I want to hit it is going to be the biggest part.

Q. You've had ups and downs obviously as most golfers do, and then you mentioned the layoff, a few years in between playing. Do you look at the PGA TOUR Champions as maybe a fresh start or a little bit of hit the restart button in a way?

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: I wouldn't say hit the reset button. I look at it like, as I said, I still want to compete and I want to compete with the guys that I've been playing with over the years. I don't feel like going out there with a 22 or 23, no disrespect to them, but we don't have -- as time goes by, as you become an older man, there's a few things you have in common which is the passion of the game and a couple of other things, but there's too much of a gap between us.

I'm happy to come here to be able to compete because the level is high and, as I said, I'm quite busy otherwise. Playing is for my personal pleasure I will say more than anything else. Playing well would be as well for my personal pleasure. Making money would be as well, but that's not the main goal. The main goal is I want to play -- I stopped six years ago because, you know, not that my time has gone but you're 44 years of age, you have four children, you want to see them grow up, you want to be there a little more. There's many things, many reasons why you don't want to get out of the bed and go to the golf course anymore, and after 25 years you feel like you've been around the globe enough as it is. So now it's more, yeah, it's more getting what I want from competing and competing with a different frame of mind, which is completely different, to me anyway.

Q. Is there a reason why you chose the Dick's Open?

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: Well, I was invited two weeks ago as well, which was a week before the French Open, and I felt like my bosses were not going to be very happy with that. It was quite -- as I said, I had other things to do. But coming here, yeah, listen, I turned 50 a month ago, I want to get back playing golf and see how far I can push it. If I can play as much as I can, I will play as much as I can within the next three, four, five years. You know, the schedule, I think you have 26 tournaments here. If I was to play between 15 and 16 or 17, whatever I feel comfortable with and I can still do what I'm doing otherwise, that would

suit me perfectly. But the main reason is yes, I want to compete and I want to put some good rounds in my back pocket. That's really what I want to do.

Q. Is your confidence level still at the same height?

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: The confidence level, I don't think it has risen from the ground yet. It's very, very low. The confidence in my abilities is higher than that, but that's not what the ball shows right now. Having said that, I still hit quite a few good shots. I practice quite a bit. I'm not going to say I haven't. I haven't put any competitive round together, and putting and chipping hasn't -- I haven't put the volume that I need to put.

The biggest thing here is getting used again to the speed of the greens. That will take time, but I'm a pretty patient man. So I'm physically okay, although I'm very tired today from all the hectic schedule I've been having, but I'm sure come Friday I'll be feeling 200 times better.

Q. How do you measure success this weekend with the limited golf you've been able to play?

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: Probably not finish at the bottom of the leaderboard, or the list because it won't be the leaderboard. If it's the bottom of the leaderboard on 18, I still will be very happy with that.

No, again, I have no expectation. I want to get back into the rhythm of how do you make a golf score. Sometimes you don't have to play pretty golf, sometimes you just need to think your way around, you need to hit the right shot at the right time, you need to minimize the mistakes. All these I know it's deep inside somewhere, I just need to open the right box and pull it out. So again, I'm going to be patient with that and I'm going to -- the biggest thing is to forgive yourself quickly. I'm going to make mistakes probably that I haven't done for years. Rightly so, I haven't played, but even before. But I need to accept that, yet the mind is not working towards maximizing the score that I can do. It's not like playing with your mates out there; it's playing to, again, to try to shoot the lowest score you can. Am I going to be able to do that? Well, I will tell you on Friday and Saturday and Sunday, irrelevant of the quality of the shot, that's what I mean. And little by little I hope that I can, yeah, that the engine can run properly in a few months' time.

Q. In terms of compare and contrast, this type of course a lot tighter than the European courses that you're used to?

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: No, it's not tighter from the European courses. The fairways are pretty generous, the rough is okay, it's not that deep. It's not a long golf course by any means, but are you talking about the Senior European Tour or the regular tour?

Q. Senior European Tour.

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: Sorry. I've yet to play there. I'm a spring chicken, I'm a newborn kid there.

Q. Then go back to the regular tour, the European Tour.

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: This is not the same. You should have seen the French Open last week, that's not the same golf course. But rightly so, okay? The average age is probably 28 out there and here it's a little more.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about the talent level in this field that they're going to have at this course between Vijay Singh and John Daly just coming out and what you're expecting to see in terms of those guys?

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: Well, I'm expecting to see them all, whether it's Vijay, whether it's him, whether it's John Huston. Who's turned 50, Miguel and all the others. Again, I grew up playing against them. I started touring the same year as Vijay and we used to go to the same hotels. I'm pretty close to him. They never stopped playing, all those guys. That's what they've done. Even if they didn't play as often on the PGA Tour, on the regular tour, they still played pretty much day in and day out.

This is not where I've been. I'm a little far behind. But again, you get out on the first tee, you have 18 holes to play, you can beat anybody in the world. And this has always been in the back of my head and it's never going to go anywhere else. I'm going to try once again to hit the best shots that I can, to think the best way that I can because those guys don't make too many mental errors. They make some once in a while but not in how to cope with the golf course. I'm pretty sure I will make a few of those. So despite the bad swing I'm going to make, I'm going to have less of an advantage, but hey, it's just a matter of time.

Q. Do you think it might play to your advantage at all that you haven't been touring? A lot of golfers, a lot of times when they start out the season they're not mentally in your head, do you think it will help you out?

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: Yeah. Well, it will because I have zero expectation. I have zero expectation in terms of what my game can give me, I have zero expectation of how well I can swing the club on a consistent and on a daily basis. Definitely. I mean five rounds in a row, the last time I did that I think was six years ago, so I don't remember even playing five times in a month.

Yeah, I will say that I will have a fresh mind. My acceptance level is going to be quite high I would think. Although I will be sometimes boiling inside, I will have to face the fact that it's just a process again. Up until I have the right volume of chipping and putting and hitting balls on the range and playing with a scorecard in my back pocket and a pencil, I have to have basically very low standards. I can have standards with whether I think about the shot, but the rest, that will come as the days go by.

Q. Say the '99 Open, what comes to your mind immediately?

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: What comes to my mind? It was very windy, always comes to my mind. I played one practice round over there which was on a Tuesday and I decided not to go back on the course on Wednesday because I didn't need a confirmation that I could miss every fairway off the tee. And my approach was pretty simple. I was thinking go as far as you can off the tee somewhere forward because if you miss a fairway and you have an awful lie, maybe you can bring the ball closer to the green or close enough to the green. If you miss -- you hit an iron trying to find those fairways and you miss the fairway, there was absolutely zero chance you could do anything. It was, yeah, the week was brutal. When you think you could hit a 6-iron 275 yards, that's about 100 yards further than what I usually hit it.

But yeah, it was an exceptional week when you're up ahead, you're in front of the three, you get caught, you get back ahead again. It's a good problem to have. It's a nice feeling to get, so it's great memories.

STEWART MOORE: Any other questions? Jean, best of luck this week.

JEAN VAN DE VELDE: Thank you so much.