

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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PADRAIG HARRINGTON



MODERATOR: We are now joined by Padraig Harrington, who's making his debut here at the Kaulig Companies Championship.

It's not your first time at Firestone, you're making your first start here since 2015. Just to start, how does it feel to be back here at Firestone?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, it's always nice to come back to a venue you played back in the day to see how things have changed.

As it's turned out, nothing's changed. The golf course is just the exact same. We're playing the same tees. Obviously less rough this week, which makes a difference to the course. It feels a little shorter than it did back in the day.

But as I said, it's a lot of similarities really. A couple of different holes, they've lost a few trees in places, makes 18 substantially easier for sure, and 13. But everything else so far seems pretty similar.

MODERATOR: This is your eighth start of the 2025 season, three top-10 finishes. How are you feeling about your game coming into this week?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: That read really bad (Laughs.)

I don't know, I've probably been distracted. As I often do, I've been working away at my game and trying to get better, which sometimes leads to poor performances in the short term.

Obviously we're now well into the season so I better get at it, it's a bit late for that. That's just my personality though. For sure hasn't been the start of the year that I would like it to be. Hopefully I get going now and finish out the year strong.

Q. You said the course is basically the same. Has technology just made it --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, I think technology over the last number of years but also attitudes have changed, even the couple years I'm out here.

I came out here and I played with a few of the guys -- you know, a few of the guys I would have played with clearly in my own career. When I came out I was looking, God, they're not quite hitting it, but a couple years of me being out there and playing with them, they're all starting to hit it as well.



So when you see somebody else hit it, and that's what's happening on the regular Tour, you go out there and play with somebody who you're familiar with, one of your peers, and all of a sudden he's hitting it a little harder, it encourages you to do it.

So I see everybody -- if you haven't gained five miles an hour ball speed at the top end of your swing -- not your average, at the top end, you're an outlier at this stage. Everybody on Tour with equipment and just a little bit of psychology, everybody hits it a little bit harder.

Q. Would you say now you hit it as far as you did in say 2015?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: No, I hit it further.

Q. You hit it further now?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Not even close. I think my max ball speed in 2015 -- you probably can go back, I'm sure somebody can go. I might have had an outlier, I remember I used a 47-inch shaft and I got 177 ball speed. Outside of that I probably got 175, 74 like absolutely killing it.

My max on the regular Tour would be 85, I've got 185 ball speed, so I've jumped quite a bit in that time.

Q. Is that from the ball, driver --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Everything, everything, all three. I think the ball is faster, there's no doubt. The driver's faster, no doubt. The players are faster, no doubt.

But probably the performance of the ball on top of that. You get a warm day, the golf ball -- watch the TV last week, you can see guys, you know, with low 170s ball speed carrying it 310. Like that's -- you know, like even back in the day if you got 174 ball speed, it wasn't carrying 310. It's just the performance of the golf ball is exceptional in the warm weather.

You get bad weather, you know, we could talk about rollbacks, but you go play golf in Ireland in the cold weather, we don't need a rollback in that situation but in the warm weather when these balls are at their absolute optimum -- remember, the golf ball is now designed, and I'm going really off track here but the golf ball is designed for a higher ball speed. So it was -- 10 years ago it was probably optimum at 170. It's probably optimum at 180 now ball speed. They moved it around.

The strangest thing -- God, I'm really going off track here.

So, well, the men have improved about five miles an hour at the top end. Only three ladies broke 160 ball speed at the U.S. Open, which is surprising because they're not going



forward at all. They're kind of hampered by the courses they're playing.

Whereas two, three years ago, the amateurs, a lot of them were getting precedent, now the lady amateurs, they're not the fastest. The male amateurs and young pros are the fastest on Tour. They're the ones coming out. It's not transferring to the ladies' game at all.

Now, as I said, maybe the ball has been promoted for a higher ball speed, but must be the golf courses that they play that they don't allow them to go at it flat out.

The men's golf courses, it's easier for me to hit the ball harder on a PGA TOUR course than it is on a Champions Tour course. So when I go to -- even at Quail Hollow I'm swinging closer to 100 percent there than I would be this week. Just bigger golf courses. And when you get a bigger footprint, you don't see -- like you go to -- there's a couple of holes at Quail Hollow the last one I played, but you don't see the out-of-bounds, they're not near the fairway, where if you go to a Champions Tour event there's always a white stake 25 yards off the fairway.

That would be the simplest way to curtail everything, it would be absolutely miserable but you put white stakes 25 yards left and right of every fairway, it would be a different type of golf played for sure. But it would be absolutely miserable.

Q. You mentioned things like looking around if you don't have this clubhead speed or ball speed, whatever, it would be an outlier. When you look around at different speeds and different increases, how do you I guess keep up or try to increase that while still staying (inaudible)?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Everybody's different. So if you were on Tour and you've got 170 ball speed and there's a couple of guys that are playing it less than that, in the 60s, if you're on Tour it's a tough life but it's OK because you're already there.

But if you're starting out and you want to play the next 20 years on Tour and you don't have 180 ball speed, it's a long road ahead of you to get out there and be comfortable out there.

So for me, I certainly don't need the ball speed out here but I want to still compete with those young guys. Psychologically, my personality, if you turned around and said, look, you can hit more fairways but you're going to play at 165 ball speed, I would tear my hair out, I couldn't handle that just because of my personality.

Straight hitters can't become long hitters but if you're -- if you're happy enough to play from the rough, you can gain speed because you might miss another fairway or two during the round. But if you're happy enough to hit shots from the rough, where I know lots of players -- well, I know players who have completely lost their game by trying to gain speed. It really is about the personality of the person.



To answer your question, when you're out on Tour, it depends on who you are and your type of person, but if you were as a young kid training, you need to train that speed going forward and get the speed before I suppose you become set in your golfing ways. I've never seen a player change his golfing personality once he's out on Tour. Once you get out there you're kind of stuck with what you've got. Obviously through college you can become a different person at that stage and change things. So you've got to do it young, you've kind of got to do it young.

Q. You mentioned like (inaudible) would you consider Firestone a Champions Tour course now or is it still the test it was?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Honestly, it's a Champions Tour course. I was looking just thinking, God, when we came here the last time it was seriously, seriously heavy rough, the heaviest -- you'd struggle to be able to hit a ball under the trees out of the rough with how heavy let alone go over them.

I think when you see that in a golf course, they're using it as a defense because how good the PGA -- the PGA TOUR is so deep. This is a difference. The guys 150 to the PGA TOUR, they can play now, so it's very deep. When you see something like really, really, really heavy rough, it's a form of defending the golf course.

I think, yeah, it probably -- there is space out there so maybe they could go back on holes and make it long. It's certainly a narrow golf course. There's lots of shots -- as I said, 18 has opened up a lot but holes like No. 3, like you can't afford -- well, when we played it back in the day you couldn't afford to miss it left because of the rough, but you can't afford at all to be right.

There's some great tee shots, but it definitely suits a short hitter. Not short hitter, straight hitter here, very much so.

As I said, if it was a PGA TOUR event would the course be a little short? Maybe a little, I don't know.

For whatever reason when it gets warm here, the ball really goes a long way. We were saying that a few weeks ago. We were watching the Memorial, Jack's event, and I think they were hitting 7-irons into 16. They were like 210. Like 7-iron doesn't go 210.

By the way, it doesn't matter how hard -- like the harder you hit the ball, the more spin you put and the higher it goes. So like a 7-iron, it shouldn't -- 210 is a long way. So the ball just travels quite a bit in the summertime in Ohio.

Yeah, this course would be short for the Tour players if they came back here. But then there's room around it so they could make it long. It's certainly narrow.

Q. (Inaudible)



PADRAIG HARRINGTON: 16? That's one of those holes -- I got caught out in 2009 when I lost my lead here, you kind of have -- you're standing on the tee, your tee shot, you're really trying to hit it but in the back of your head you really don't want to hit a great drive down there because you don't want to have to go for it.

It's kind of one of those holes that yeah, yeah, I'll be trying to hit a great drive down there and get down because you have to get down the second hill and it's a 4-iron in from there.

As I said, the green is a difficult green to hit with a sand wedge, but the rough is lighter on the left. Back in the day if you missed on the left you were -- it was awful.

There's options. But as I said, I think to be honest, a player who hits his four shots into the layup zone there, you know, has four shots from 100 yards in the fairway would play the hole better than somebody who goes for that green once or twice. I think the layup is the simple play on the hole.

Q. Question about majors, two of them in particular, Portrush and then Sunningdale. What's the difference in those two courses and what do you like about each of them?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Portrush is absolutely one of my favorite courses in the world, one of my favorite links courses, favorite in Ireland. It's a fabulous golf course to play, great event. The crowds come out.

Sunningdale is probably again slightly different style as in it's heathland but easily one of the best in the world. A shorter golf course for me. I'll have -- like Sunningdale would be one of the hardest events for me to win on the Champions Tour, it's just got a lot of irons and layups and things like that. Not that I can't do it but everybody can do it.

Like I go out there and I have a great day driving, I hit it really straight and like I come in and I'm like 42nd in driving accuracy on this tour. Like the guys, I think I've done really well, like I might have hit 10 fairways or something like that, 11 fairways. Like there's a lot of guys hitting 14. Sunningdale would be tough, but it's a beautiful, beautiful golf course, one of the best venues in the world.

I haven't played it before, but I know the crowds turn out when we play in that area, when we play in Wentworth. If the crowds turn out, it will make it a fantastic event, no doubt about it.

But The Open at Portrush is as good as any of the opens, the atmosphere and the crowds that come out, it's spectacular. Being a home open, yeah, it means a lot.

Q. First of all, welcome back. (Inaudible)

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I only have the one memory and that's 2009. I can't get by that.



Yes, that is it, that's my over -- I have good family memories because we always came here as a family. Yeah, we talk about how things changed here for a number of years, different things, players evolved. But as regards the golf course, yeah.

Q. Would lifting the trophy on Sunday be the only way that you could erase that?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, I said it the other day, I hadn't really thought about it. I have no regrets losing a three-shot lead in 2009 coming down the stretch against Tiger. I've had other runs down the stretch with Tiger where it's worked out well for me.

But with hindsight, you regret it. At the time you always think there's going to be loads more wins and you don't really think like that at the moment, but then I come back here in 2025 and I think, oh, I wish I had won on this golf course.

That's kind of one of the things, it's a strange thing as you get later on in your career. You wish you had won on all the great venues. At the time when you're winning, you're winning and you're working away, but you kind of go that's an iconic venue, it's going to be here forever.

So yeah, I would have liked to have won at Firestone. It's more disappointing to me now than it was in 2009.

Q. Thanks for sharing your thoughts. From a course management standpoint when it comes to rewarding a player, we just watched U.S. Open, right, and we're talking about accuracy when it comes to driving and hitting greens, right, and that's what the U.S. Open --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah.

Q. And you see a player like Bryson, hole is 375, he misses the fairway by three yards and he's in six inches of rough, all right? From a course management standpoint, what do you prefer from a player standpoint? And also from a fan standpoint, we see these tournaments where players win at 15 under versus --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: OK, I know where you're going.

Golf would be incredibly boring if we had the same test every week. So it is very good that the U.S. Open go with their strategy of let's make this the toughest possible test of the player's ability to hit the ball tee to green. That's what they're looking for.

The traditional -- the tradition in golf is the best player is thought to be the best ball-striker, the straightest hitter, the guy who hits the most greens in regulation, and the U.S. Open certainly seeks that out. And obviously quite a bit of fortitude.

Short game wise it tests a certain amount of short game, but sometimes the bad short game



guys are better or as good because, you know, if you've got an impossible -- if you've got a really, really difficult close to impossible chip shot, I'm trying to get that up and down. That could mess with me if it's really, really difficult. I could end of missing the green doing that, where the bad chipper is just trying to chip it to 15 feet, which is what the good chipper should be doing -- not doing.

But so yeah, I don't know if it finds the best short game guy. Like if you want to find the best short game guy, the PGA are kind of doing it more where they have a little cut of rough and outside the rough they give you a tight lie. If you're going to have somebody hit a really good chip shot, put 'em on a tight lie and then that will separate them.

So the PGA's doing that. They're not allowing you to putt because there's a bit of rough between you and the green, but then there's a tight lie.

So yeah, USGA are just really going for the best ball-striker tee to green.

And look, I said it would be boring. Augusta goes for probably the most risk-reward. You know, can you take on a shot on 15 and if you hit it you make eagle and if you miss it you make double bogey. You know, I've always found Augusta really hard. That choice of going for it with the possibility of missing, you know, whereas I kind of found the U.S. Opens easier in the strategy. I wasn't as intimidated by missing a green in rough, but I'm very intimidated by missing the green in water, I can't get up and down out of the water, I'm not that good.

So yeah, so I just like the fact that there's different styles of play. Sometimes we get a hard, fast golf course, sometimes we get a soft course. You know, that's the great thing about golf, it's an outdoor game played in different environments, different golf courses.

Yeah, and the majors are all trying to pick their own strategy for, you know, and I think they do a good job. I think the four majors have all their own personality. I think the PGA have upped their game over the years. I think all of them have upped their game.

I think The Open does a great job of just, hey, guys, you're getting the golf course that is here, whatever nature is giving us you're playing this week. If it's heavy rough, it's heavy rough. If it's light flyer rough, it's that. They've all managed themself very nicely and put themselves in a good place.

You'll have people hate on one, but we just don't want them to be the same. I think we're in a good spot like that.

I watched the golf last week. I found the first round fascinating. I lost my way a bit in round two and three obviously watching the Irish guys and they kind of drifted out of contention. But I found it very exciting on Sunday. It was brutal, but I wasn't there so I found it very exciting.

You know, the two best players on Sunday, you know, JJ was the best player on Sunday. I



thought Tyrrell Hatton played very well on Sunday, didn't miss too many shots. They really got the best player at the end of the day who hit the best shots.

Q. What did you think of his putt?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, I think, yeah, it was -- look, it was -- nothing to do with me but it was very similar to the putt I holed at Westchester back at the Barclays back in the day, 66 feet with a big slope and it came over.

I think he would have been just as happy to have -- like he hit a great putt. Look, it was crazy that it went in and crazy the way it all finished off. I think he just played -- like to hit the tee shot he hit on 17 and 18 straight down the middle, that was just great playing. Like he really did play beautiful golf.

Remember, he had the lead in the first round. The stress of leading a major, you know, from day one, that's brutal on you for four days. I probably -- if you look back, you know, bogeying -- did he bogey the last on Saturday evening to drop out of the final group? That might have been a big plus for him. He's going out on Sunday with just a little bit less stress than the two guys, or the leader and Adam.

Yeah, I think it was great. As I said, fully deserved, played the best golf. Holing the putt on the last is exciting, but he won by two shots. I don't know how he feels about it, to be honest, yeah.

Q. When you come to a course like Firestone, do you ever get like a target score in your head on Wednesday?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Absolutely not. Never, ever, ever used a target score. If you think shooting 4 under par for 18 holes, what do you do when you're 5 under after nine?

No, never. Just play the best I can every shot, yeah. You get caught up in that. I think what might needs to be relevant and sometimes that's kind of your caddie's job is that you don't -- I don't get a target score because I don't want to be ahead of myself. You can get drawn into going, like say if you can feel like you're out of a tournament, you might see 6 under leading the first day but maybe 6 under's going to win the tournament.

I think in terms of that, you can -- you have to be careful that you don't get a bit despondent, especially on the Champions Tour. That's kind of the opposite. The Champions Tour's very quick when you have three rounds. It's very, very quick. If you're not up there after day one, it's a long, long -- you don't have time to come back. Maybe in a four-round tournament I think like this you have time to come back, but the stats guys and the data are showing that if you're not in the top-10 after two rounds, you really don't have a chance of winning, whereas back in the day we thought we could win if you made the cut, whereas they're kind of showing now that you literally have to be in the tournament from day one. Just like JJ leading from day one, you have to be up there for the whole week. But an event like this, I



don't even know what won last year. What was the winning score?

MODERATOR: 4 under, 5 under.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, so you can be patient a little bit around here. You can get away with shooting your level pars and 1 overs with the hope that you're going to put in a low one one of the four days.

MODERATOR: All right. Thanks for the time, Padraig.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Thank you.