

U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Tuesday June 26, 2018

Fred Funk



THE MODERATOR: We're now pleased to welcome Fred Funk, the 2009 U.S. Senior Open champion and runner up in 2008 and 2013 at the Senior Open. This is Fred's 11th appearance at the Senior Open. And it's good to have you back, Fred, after missing last year.

FRED FUNK: Yeah, it was hard to miss. I heard Salem was unbelievable last year. But, yeah, it's great to be back, especially here at Broadmoor. I had almost unbelievably great memories here.

But a great spot. And obviously so beautiful. But being the U.S. Open came back and it's become a Senior rota golf course. So hopefully that's the case because I think everybody really loves it. And anyway it's good to be back.

Q. How is your health, and what's your attitude coming into a championship where you've had more than a good share of success?

FRED FUNK: Answer, health-wise, I've been dealing with two torn hamstrings. And I did it last November playing golf. How do you do that? You'd think I have a violent swing and I might tear it. But I don't. I barely have any club head speed. And I've lost a lot more distance on top of that since I've done it. Even though it's feeling better, I'm just not hitting the ball very far at all. And that's an issue.

And the golf course is playing really long right now. And even with the altitude. But the fairways are much softer than what I remember them being in 2008.

And it will be difficult for me. I gotta tell you the truth. It will be difficult for me to compete if it plays this slow or soft this week. But I'm so excited about being here. And we'll just see. Might find something. I temporarily found something about ten minutes ago, that's why I was late. I was, oh, shoot, I gotta go.

Q. Take us back to 2008, when you had the lead or were near it for most of the competition. The back nine on Sunday wasn't too kind to you.

FRED FUNK: Really, just one hole. From what I remember I had a three-shot lead going to 13, playing with Eduardo. And it was pretty much a two-horse battle at that point. It was just me and Eduardo. Unless something unforeseen would happen with both of us and we let somebody else back in.

But I never hit 3-wood off the tee, very seldom. And I had a new 3-wood in the bag. Took it out on 13. And I was playing it today; I'm thinking, why did I hit 3-wood here? But anyway, I hit 3-wood and pulled it a little bit and it went into the tall fescue, which was brown then. Now it's just green, really thick rough that's about this high and back then it was about three feet high.

And I took a swipe at the first one, it didn't move very far, and ended up making triple. And Eduardo made birdie. I went from three up to one down. He went on to win and I finished second.

I had complete control of the tournament. And I just let it go. It was something that I would normally not do. And that was -- still haunts me a little bit. I was looking at that hole today, every time I went by, going, why did I do that?

But things happen in golf. And it felt good to come back the following year and win the way I did there. But you hate to let them go when you have that kind of opportunity. And I was playing really good.

And honestly it's a blur on how I played and how the golf course was playing. I just, I know I got here, I think, a week early. And I got really comfortable in the greens. I'm out there today wondering how I was so comfortable on these greens because they're really tough greens.

Feels like a lot of times you're putting like you're on Oakmont with some of the back-to-front slopes and the speed of these things and the breaks that you have to the sides, putting to the hole. And then you get above the hole, it's really, really tough.

So it's great memories, but I just don't know what to expect this week, other than just to have a good time.

Q. Since you experienced it, what role does the elevation play both in how you play and endurance-wise?

FRED FUNK: Walking. You're always catching your breath. I don't know how soon you can actually get acclimated to this kind of altitude. And also we're going to have the heat coming with us this week.

But you just gotta walk a little slower and then when



you have the honors on the tee -- I remember playing Castle Pines in the day, and we always, there was two brutal walks. And the one I remember, from 8 green to 9 tee, if you had honors, you just stalled at the watercooler.

And usually you were breathing so hard, you had a cup of water, you couldn't drink it anyway until you got your breath back. And you just took your time. It was like a timeout.

And I think it was going from 10 green to 11 tee was another pretty big climb. So, yeah, you just gotta pace yourself. It is going to be a little bit of an endurance. A lot of guys are probably not used to walking.

That's going to be an issue, especially four days, well, really when they come here you're usually doing seven straight days if you make the cut -- when they haven't been walking at all. And for the guys on our tour that do all the walking, that will help, I would think.

I was tired -- I walk every day, and I was tired when I got done today. Soft ground, too. You've got the soft ground, makes it a little harder, too.

So you have a combination of things. But I think you just -- everybody will be, I think, going a little slower pace. And probably the rounds will be a little bit longer for sure.

Q. What about golf ball flight?

FRED FUNK: You know, there's a huge difference from what I remember, well not from what I remember, but just the fact that when you do get really warm conditions in altitude, you get a guy like a Kenny Perry hits the ball really solid really high it's a much bigger factor in how much shorter it will play or the percentage off.

And I remember Kenny would say, when he got a really hot day in Vegas, he was taking 20 percent up there. And I remember playing with him at Castle Pines, he hit an eight iron on the 11th hole and it must have gone 230 yards, and it was only 160-yard shot. And the marshals, the two marshals went, like, looking over and Kenny said, just give me double because it was Stableford, just, the heck with it. And he was just laughing.

But guys like that I think it's harder to judge. And I think for me, where I don't have the speed or the horsepower, even from what I normally do, I could take 10 percent and that's not going to work. I gotta take more like five, I think.

And if it gets really hot, and I start swinging really good or I catch maybe the shorter clubs that go a little

higher, then you can go 8 or 10 percent, maybe, but it's a little bit of a guess. But I think the harder and higher you hit it, the more the discrepancy, I think, in where the ball is going to come down. I think you have to really figure it out.

Q. You're mentioning not hitting it as far as you used to or maybe as far you like --

FRED FUNK: I never hit it long, I don't want to be --

Q. You've always been an accuracy guy. I mean, is that still something that you can rely on and that gives you some competitive --

FRED FUNK: I'm hitting it -- I've lost eight miles an hour clubhead speed, which is a lot. And I'm getting some of it back but not consistently every day.

And I went from probably my best was 105, 106 clubhead speed to probably, when I was healthy, 102. Now I'm down to about 94. And maybe back up to 97, if I'm swinging good, 98.

But that's not very fast. And I can't carry the ball that far. And it goes through the whole bag. So I was playing with Bernhard today. I was hitting it terrible today and Gene Sauers, and those two hit it about equal. And they were 40, 50 ahead of me every hole. It's hard to beat a guy when he's five clubs, six clubs shorter in the greens.

I can do it with one or two clubs, but -- it's funny my irons are about the same. It's just my driver. I can't get the horsepower. I can almost hit the same irons they do into par 3s, but at the most a half a club difference. And the driver is 50 yards. It's ridiculous. I'm trying to find something. That's what I was trying to find out there. So we'll see.

Q. New driver maybe?

FRED FUNK: I'm working on that. It is Toys"R"Us out here. (Laughter).

Q. Did the hamstring injury happen, do you think, because of all the multiple injuries you've had where you've had to kind of compensate?

FRED FUNK: I think it has. I was talking to some orthopedics, and when I had my knee replaced, over the years there is compensations for that. And your body is trying to compensate.

And then I just know my back got really tight last year right on the belt line. I was trying to generate, force generate power and speed, and I was working really hard to try to get things moving.

And my back was not really wanting to go. And I think the loose link in the chain was my hamstring was really

tight, too, and it snapped or pulled it. I didn't tear it completely off the bone, but it's partially torn.

And felt like a knife going in the back of my bottom of my rear end there, and -- right where they attach. And you don't realize how much you use them in any injury until you hurt them. You realize in golf how much you really use almost everything. And it's hard to counter and figure out how to compensate for that.

I've been really stubborn, and I got a "can't fix stupid," I've been working on that a long time. Hadn't worked. But taking enough time off to actually let them heal. I've been trying to play through it like I always do. And I need about eight weeks. In need to do the PRP, or whatever -- well, that is what it is, the PRP -- and take the blood and stick it in there and let it work.

But I'm just trying to -- I miss all the guys on the Champions Tour. I don't want to leave. That is partially true, actually.

Q. Earlier John Smoltz was in here having qualified for this championship. And he made the statement that it's the number one accomplishment in his career. How do you react to a statement like that? And do you know where he's coming from?

FRED FUNK: Well, with what he's accomplished in his own career is as high as it gets. Cy Young, how many times did he win that? Only one time he won the Cy Young? Well, that's still as good as it gets.

He's known as one of the -- definitely Hall of Fame and Cy Young. He's voted in the first time? So what he's done in baseball. And to say this is the greatest accomplishment of all time for him, obviously it's outside of qualifying for something at this level outside of his sport, that's a big deal.

So I can see where he's coming from, but it's a great thing, but what he did in baseball is pretty remarkable. But for him to say that, I think that's great for the tournament, great for us. And it's great that he's in the field, a guy like that is in the field. I was telling you when you were driving me over that -- when I saw him earlier, I congratulated him. I've seen him before, and talked to him before, but he's a big guy. Almost everybody is big to me, but he's a big guy. And it's neat to see the guys in person.

Last week, I saw Shaq for the first time in person. Now, that guy is the biggest guy I've ever seen on the planet. He's ridiculous. His hand, he's like shaking my whole body. (Laughter). It was great.

Q. When you were playing your best, that was the 2009 championship when you went head-to-head

with Greg Norman. I'm wondering what that was like, what that felt like. And do you work off of the feeling of that when you're still trying to play now?
FRED FUNK: I'm not the player I was then -- now than I was like I was then. I had enough distance and enough consistency in my swing that I could play and I could -- and I just caught a really hot week with the putter. I was in total ball control, but my putter got smokin' hot.

And that was really the thrill of my life to have Greg Norman in the group with me the last two days. And all the headlines were Greg this, Greg that. And then I ended up winning the tournament.

So that felt good in his company to do that. And that was really special. It's hard to put that one above the Players for me. They're right there. That was a big deal. And I had my name on the USGA trophy was something that I would have never dreamed of back in the day when I was a golf coach that some day I'd win the US anything.

So that was really special. So I've had some really good runs, and I think I've had three seconds and a first in that order, I think. I think I went second first, second, second or something like that.

And could have been somebody. It's like Bernhard, if I had won four of those in a row. But that was a really good run. And usually U.S. Open set-ups were perfect for me. It's ball-control golf courses. It's keeping it out of the rough. If I can get my driver going the way I normally can, then I could maybe compete this week because the rough here it's chip-out rough. You're not moving the ball out of this rough very far, unless you get lucky with a lie. But we'll see. It will be a great week.

It's a great venue. And they've got the golf course set up really good. And I think they're going to be able to have it any way they want to have it. Take the water off and they'll get a little cooked out there. So we don't need any bears in the middle of the fairway like we did last time.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.