

The Senior Open presented by Rolex

Press Conference

Saturday, 27 July 2019

Tom Watson

THE MODERATOR: Delighted to be joined by five-time champion Golfer of the Year, three-time Senior Open champion Tom Watson. Tom, I understand you have some news you'd like to share with us.

TOM WATSON: I do. I will not seek, nor will I accept, my party's nomination for the President of the United States. (Laughter).

I've thought quite long and hard about the decision I've made, which I'm going to tell you. It has to do with really a pretty sensible assessment of how I play the game now.

I don't have the tools in the toolbox. I've mentioned that before, that sometimes you lose the tools in the toolbox. I just don't have enough tools in the toolbox to really compete successfully.

So, therefore, I'm basically declaring now that this is my last Open Championship, Senior British Open Championship. And along those lines, I'm also going to hang up the spikes in the U.S. Senior Open.

I've had a good career playing professional golf all these years. I've run across so many fine people who have helped me and supported me. First of all, my wife who is battling cancer now. It's going to give me some time to go out and compete with her.

I think many of you know what my real passion is right now, it's not particularly playing golf; it's competing on the back of a horse. And I started this about three years ago, and it's called cutting.

And I have made it my goal to try to surpass Hal Sutton. Hal Sutton's lifetime earnings, \$42,000. My lifetime earnings right now is \$19,000. So I'm after you, Hal. Hal's hung them up as far as the back of the horse is concerned, but I guess you could say that this might be riding off in the sunset on the back of a horse, but essentially it is.

And I'm good with it. I'm very good with it. And will I play any more tournaments? I might play a few selected tournaments still. But my playing days really -- you know what I am? I was making the assessment



when I was coming down. I played with Darren Clarke and Jimenez the first two rounds, and I'm three clubs shorter than Darren and two clubs shorter than Jimenez.

And when I was one club shorter, I felt like maybe I still could compete. But when you get that short, the realization is there that you really can't compete. It's not to say that I don't love the competition. I love the competition. But I'm going to focus my competition on something a little bit different, on the back of a horse now.

And over the years we've been around each other. I've seen a lot of people from the press over the years over here. Really enjoyed the times I've spent. It's not to say I won't be over here again. I'll be back at the Open next year as a master for R&A.

But my competitive days in The Open Championship are finally over. And as I said, I'm good with it. It's a decision that I am very happy with.

Q. Tom, you made 56 appearances in Open championships here in the United Kingdom. Any particular memories that stand out over all those years?

TOM WATSON: In particular, no, because I've got a plethora of memories. Geez, I thought my first year of playing in The Open Championship, in 1975 at Carnoustie, the playoff with Jack Newton, the last hole there; '76, meeting Bobby Locke in the practice round before the tournament started. He was in his tie, Plus 2s and his bonnet, his white bonnet.

And to be able to play on the golf course when Gene Sarazen made two. I think he played at Troon and made a two at Troon. I think I was playing that. Maybe I wasn't playing that year. That was '73.

But you can just go down the list, '77 at Turnberry, I made the comment there that was the tournament that gave me the confidence that I could beat the big boys when I beat Jack.

And when he said to me, he put his arm around my neck and said, "Tom, I gave you my best shot but it wasn't good enough. Congratulations, I'm very happy for you." And to be able to -- memory of playing with

Arnold Palmer in an emergency nine at Muirfield 1980 in the practice round. There's a story behind that. I won't go into that.

There's just all kinds of stories. '82, Nick Price. '83 coming down the last hole with the one shot lead hitting two great shots, best 2-iron I probably hit ever in my life.

And continuing on to play in Open championships, '94, boy that was a big disappointment. Of course 2009 was a big disappointment. But '94 really hurt. That was probably the one that hurt the most at Turnberry.

I was playing so well and my putting was just way, way off. And then you start on the Senior Open, and the Senior British Opens at Turnberry and Muirfield and Royal Aberdeen and to be able to win there and continue to play.

I take pride about not missing a cut, I really do. It's just one of those things I really take pride about that. I feel that, when you miss a cut, you really failed. You fail a lot in golf, you fail a lot on the golf course, but missing the cut is the ultimate failure to me. Didn't play well enough to play on the weekend. So, yes, there were a lot of memories, a lot more. But maybe I can make some memories in the show pen now on the back of Go Daddy and Thunder, and maybe they'll let me ride Hurk or maybe Rolex. Got a horse named Rolex. They do.

And with saying that, I do want to thank -- all the years we play, we play for a lot of money. And the money comes from sponsors like Rolex and other sponsors that just, they come to the fore and they help us -- they help the tournament out. We get to play for a hell of a lot of money.

And we've gone back and talked about the first Open I played in, I believe I made 16,500 pounds, and I won. I go back further than that, I tell a story about Byron Nelson. My good friend, Byron, who I spent a lot of time with Byron.

And one day, I just said, "Byron, you played in the British Open." He said, "Yes, I did, I played in the British Open."

"How many times did you play?" "Once."

"Why once?"

He said, "I finished third, won 7500 pounds. It cost me \$1,500." And that was the reason that the Americans didn't come over. The prize money wasn't big. And it cost a heck of a lot of money to come over here and compete.

Keith Mackenzie in that era, along with Mark McCormack, they really took the Open to the second stage, you might say.

Arnold put it in the first stage from the American standpoint, when he came over and qualified after he won the tournament; he had to qualify the next year. And it was Arnie brought Jack, brought a lot of the other American pros, and then took a while but the prize money got up there. And now, of course, it's enormous.

And we wouldn't be there without the various sponsors that we have, especially here, Rolex. Want to call out and give them kudos.

Q. A difficult decision, was it a long time coming, or was it something that you just decided as you said you can't compete and how difficult a decision?

TOM WATSON: The decision is kind of welling up for me inside. It's been welling up for a while. And it just made sense that this is the time to do it. And I'm good with it. My wife's good with it. And honestly I called Jack and, I said, "Jack, what made you hang them up?"

He said, "Probably because I couldn't play anymore." And he said that, really. He said "I couldn't compete anymore."

And I've been kind of spinning my wheels out here. I haven't really been able to compete the way I would really want to. And last week I really practiced hard for this tournament. Two weeks ago I was practicing hard and I was out testing how far I was hitting the driver in the air.

My standard hitting the driver in the air is 250, 250 yards in the air. And I was pretty confident I could. Well, I can't do that anymore. I can't get that 250.

And it makes a difference. It just makes a difference. But it's funny, before the tournament started here this week, I wasn't putting very well at all.

So I decided I'm going to try my old setup, I saw one of my old setups on the films right here. I had my hand real high and I was standing close to the ball like this. The ball was that far from my toes.

My recent setup, the ball's about that far from my toes. So I got really close, got my hands real high, and I start rolling it. The last three holes here, God, I felt just like Tom Watson of old.

But is that going to bring me back? No. But it's still -- you still chase the grail. But it's time to chase it

somewhere else, and that's on the back of a horse.

Q. Could I ask you to talk a little bit about your relationship with the public, the Open when you were conscious when you became a favorite. What do you think it's going to be like tomorrow?

TOM WATSON: I've been remiss not to give them a shoutout. It's just been -- all those years back in the '70s and then the '80s, the public's been so gracious to me: Come on, Tom. Come on, Tom. I had some wonderful characters who called me around from Ricky to Sean, to all kinds of other people who they just constantly called me. People who love the game of golf.

And you know, I go back to when I was a kid. And I answer a question that I get quite often from amateurs. "Do you ever get nervous playing in front of people?"

And I say I never have. And they say why. And I say because I want to show off. I want to show them a good golf shot. I'm there trying to show off, trying to show off for my father, trying to show off when I'm playing competition. Just show that I can play some great shots and win, but to show off.

So I never got nervous in front of the crowds. But I never ignored them. I always felt that the crowds were especially over here.

It's been said before, and I agree, the most knowledgeable crowds there are are right here, in the UK. They know the game of golf. They understand it. They understand when the conditions are bad and you just eat the ball on the green from 150 yards, they appreciate that because they know how tough that shot is. And that's why I love it over here. That's why I love to play golf over here. I'll continue to play golf over here, just not in competition.

Q. This decision could be 10 years out for somebody. Any significance on (indiscernible)?

TOM WATSON: No, just getting old. Just can't hit it out of my shadow. I was getting to the point where the joke is you can hear it land with the driver. But no, there's no significance there.

That was a bittersweet memory, but it was one that -- it got away even when you hit a good shot. Like today, there are a couple of instances today. I hit a really good shot at No. 12.

When I think of Royal Lytham St Annes, I think of the 12th hole, par-3, the toughest but the best hole on the golf course. Just an elegant par-3. And I have not hit the green yet.

And today I hit a shot, I hit a good shot today, and I hit it just over the front bunker where I was trying to hit it. I caught the downslope, and it rolled right off the green down there, and then took a little 5-iron, ran it up about ten feet short, missed the putt, made bogey. But I hit a really good shot.

And that's an instance -- a 4-iron, I remember hitting 4-irons there. And hitting higher shots with 4-irons there to be able to play that hole and watching Darren hit it yesterday, he just hit it sky-high like that and that's how you have to play that hole; you've got to put it up in the air and have it come down.

I don't have that shot. But getting back to 10 years ago, you asked me about that, that's about the only time I think about it, when people ask me about it. It's over and done with.

Q. So much has changed in golf over the last however many years you've been coming out here. What's it say about the links courses, still remain a joy and challenge?

TOM WATSON: I think the R&A has really done a great job in lengthening the golf course and putting the bunkers where they should be and really making it seem like they've always been there.

I think their go-to guy, Martin Ebert, who redesigned Trump Turnberry, it is elegant. We'll probably have to wait until after 2004 for the tournament to be played there. But it's a great golf course.

I love just playing this golf course, they said they took out 42 bunkers and added two. It doesn't look like it at all because I keep getting in those damn things. I just keep doing it.

But the game will last on links, it really will, because it's a chess game. It's more of a chess game. It's not a power game.

Power comes in. Power comes into certain shots. But it's a chess game. And you have to understand how to play from point A to point B and take the luck of the bounce. You have to do that. And that's why it's always going to remain viable in the world of golf.

With Gary Player last week, Gary says these players are going to be driving the first green at Augusta. I don't know if they're going to be doing that, but I do feel one thing; that the equipment and balls, I think they've hit the plateau as far as how far a driver can hit it and how far a golf ball can go. But what hasn't -- what has changed is the speed with which these players are now swinging the golf club because they're really working out and they're swinging the club fast, faster and faster.

They understand the game. They understand that's the way you hit it. Long hitters have the advantage. And they're going to see bigger players, wider arcs, 130, 140-mile-an-hour swing speeds playing on the TOUR.

Now, you just see those just in long driving contests, but you're going to see these guys actually start getting good enough to play the TOUR. And then we're going to see some shots that, when I was a kid, when I was eight years old, all I wanted to do was see someone hit the ball nine miles.

The farthest hitter, George Baird. Anyone remember George Baird? Big guy, 6'5", big loopy swing, went inside like this, came over the top, hit a big cut, but he hit the ball the furthest.

I went out with my dad to the Kansas City Open: Dad, I want to go watch George Baird. I want to watch George Baird. We go up to first tee and right down here is the fairway, and George Baird hit it two fairways over, like this. And we went over and kind of watched him from this over here and knocked it on the green and made par and dad said that's enough, let's go watch Sneed. But I wanted, as a kid, to watch these bombers. I wanted to see it go far. That's what impressed me.

And these kids out here, same thing: They want to see them go far. And these athletes are going to be doing this. They're going to be hitting farther and farther and the equipment is going to be staying the same.

Q. (Question off Microphone)?

TOM WATSON: Yeah. It was Seve par or Watson par, that's the reason why we did well over here. We could get the ball up-and-down.

When you play links golf courses, you don't hit a lot of greens. Especially when it was windy and dry. You miss a lot of greens. And that was right into my forte. My wheelhouse is getting the ball up-and-down, putting, chipping and putting. Seve was the same way, a magician with his hands.

So we made -- yeah, I broke a lot of people's hearts, I did, over the years, just getting the ball up-and-down and making 40-footers for pars, things like that. That's the way I played the game. I was just showing off.