

Travelers Championship

Tuesday, June 20, 2017

Russell Knox

Press Conference



TRAVELERS
CHAMPIONSHIP



DOUG MILNE: We'll go ahead and get started. I'd like to welcome the defending champion of the Travelers Championship, Russell Knox. Russell, thank you for joining us for a few minutes. Just a few comments on being back here in Hartford defending your win here in your sixth start here at Travelers Championship.

RUSSELL KNOX: Yeah, I mean, it's obviously amazing to come back to a place where you've won. I mean, there are so many great memories. I got to come back for the media day a few months ago and relive the putt I made on the last hole, so that was cool. But, yeah, I mean, it's always special to come back to a place I'd won. Though I've only done it twice, I sure would like to get used to it more often.

But everybody at the Travelers, I mean, treat me and all the players and everybody so well, so it's definitely a special place to come back to.

Q. Just a few comments about your game as you're heading into the week? It's a steady season, six top 25 finishes, three of which were top 10. So, steady season, is that an accurate term?

RUSSELL KNOX: Yeah, I got off to a great start in the wraparound year. I contended the first three weeks, really, in Malaysia, China, and Mayakoba, and then it's been kind of slow since then. I haven't played nearly as good as I expected to. But at the same time, I almost expected it coming off last year, my best year as a pro by a long ways.

So maybe it was inevitable that it was going to be a slight downwards turn. But recently my game feels pretty good. The weekend in Memphis I saw a lot of good things that Sunday. I really could have shot a great score, so that was comforting. Last week was disappointing, the U.S. Open, to miss the cut. But I really didn't play as bad as I scored.

So, all in all, I'm excited to be here, and hopefully this year the Travelers Championship can get me going a good kick start to a big summer.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about this course, and is there anything -- it seems like it's completely different from the course last week other than the 18 hole?

RUSSELL KNOX: Yeah, absolutely. This is one of my favorite courses, obviously, on the PGA TOUR. A lot of

guys, not just me, I think the last nine holes here at TPC River Highlands is as good as it gets. I mean, anything can happen here. You can shoot 6- or 7-under, the year Kevin Streelman won, I think he barely blast six or seven holes to win.

But on the flip side, you can -- I finished 11th or 12th one year here and I bogeyed the last three holes. Anything can happen which makes this course very exciting.

Yeah, I mean, completely different from last week. It's a lot shorter, a lot tighter, but it doesn't make it any easier. The scores here -- I always think this course, if you tee off in the morning, the conditions, you can always shoot a mega low score. That's what Jim Furyk did last year on Sunday. But as the day goes on, teeing off in the afternoon, especially on a weekend, shooting under par is a great score if you tee off at 1, 2 o'clock. So the course changes significantly as the day goes on, just the firmness of the greens. I think players like that.

Q. Last week, I don't know what your opinion was on the course, but it seems most players seem to like Erin Hills. But you look at the reaction on social media and it seems like fans didn't like the scoring. Is that just a matter of separating out the conditions versus the golf course? Because from a professional standpoint, you guys seem to have liked it.

RUSSELL KNOX: Yeah, other than the way I played, I think it was a great week. Everything was set up perfectly. The golf course was very different. I thought there was a handful of unbelievably good holes. I thought there was -- I mean, there was definitely three or four holes that if you could hit it 320 yards, you got a massive advantage. So from that standpoint, I didn't really like those holes.

But, it was fun though. It was tough. It was long. But because of the width of the fairways, a lot of the greens kind of funneled in, which helped the scoring. I mean, 16-under par was incredible.

I was a long way off from shooting scores like Brooks did. But, all in all, no, I thought it was amazing. It was my third U.S. Open. Merion and Oakmont, so it was nothing like those courses. Do I think next year 10-

over par might win? Probably.

Q. Is there anything in particular that's held you back the last couple months? And second of all, how are you doing with your new hoop machine?

RUSSELL KNOX: I don't know. I took a lot of time off. I played a lot at the end of last year, so I think managing my schedule this year was a little bit different than in the past. When I did take time off and then I played, I struggled a little bit. So I wasn't able to get in any rhythm. I just kind of lost my confidence.

This game is all about confidence. If you're starting on the tee kind of worried about your game, you have no chance. So I've decided to play a lot more. This will be my fifth week in a row, and I'm going on to Europe after this to continue playing.

So I've just decided, hey, I've got to play. I've got to try to play my way out of this little funk, and I think I will or have done already, so I look forward to playing.

No, my proper short game is on form. If you don't know, the guys from Travelers, Andy Bessette and his crew gave me a pop-A-Shot game for media day for being the champion. So after a couple hours of assembling it and my fingers were killing me, I decided to practice a little bit of that. Maybe that's what's affected my golf game. Too much Pop-A-Shot.

Q. Going back, did you watch over the weekend at the U.S. Open? And secondly, what is your take on the U.S. Open going to what was clearly a different kind of venue versus, obviously, a more traditional one, especially coming up?

RUSSELL KNOX: Yeah, I did watch. I always watch the conclusion of tournaments. I'm a golf nerd. I love it. I still can't believe I'm playing on the PGA TOUR. It's been five years now, six years. But I'm a huge golf fan. I love watching the tournaments and how gay guys handle the pressure of winning and whatnot.

Yeah, I think it's great they went there. Everything about the tournament was great. I mean, they got an unbelievable winner, so that was really good. I think if they go back they'll probably make some changes to make the scoring a little closer to par, but there's nothing wrong with 16-under par winning a tournament.

I mean, Brooks played incredible. There were a lot of people that struggled and there were obviously a lot of guys that played incredible golf. The round that Justin put up on Saturday, I mean, he hit some Tiger Woods' shots and it was pretty impressive to watch that. Not everybody's capable of shooting scores like he did.

I think it was cool. I would prefer if the fairways were

super tight with mega thick rough. That's more of probably a U.S. Open where I have a chance to win. But I have no excuses. I could have played better than I did, and it was certainly fun to watch.

Q. I guess where I was going with that, it didn't maybe in some ways feel like a U.S. Open. Did you come away with that sense?

RUSSELL KNOX: I don't think I've played in enough U.S. Opens to really know what a U.S. Open is meant to feel like. I mean, Merion was really tight with extremely thick rough, and obviously Oakmont is the U.S. Open, pretty much. Very famous.

Yeah, it was different, but I mean different is not always bad. I think they got, like I said, Brooks is an amazing champion. He's going to win major championships and they got a great winner.

Q. (Asking about European schedule)?

RUSSELL KNOX: I'm going to play the French Open, week off, Scottish Open, then the Open Championship.

Q. It took you a few years to get to the winner's circle, but nowadays we're seeing a lot of 20-something's winning much earlier in their careers. Do you have a theory on why that's happening?

RUSSELL KNOX: It's the Tiger Woods' effect. It's starting to come through now the last five years or so. Myself included, I'll be 32 tomorrow, so it's not like I'm super young anymore. But we grew up watching Tiger Woods dominate and idolizing this guy and practicing and training and eating better all because this guy was dominating golf and he was our hero.

So now, I mean, these guys Justin Thomas, and Koepka, I mean, there's a hundred of them, they played golf because they watched Tiger Woods on TV dominate.

So Tiger has made everyone so much better. I mean, college golf programs have improved significantly. Junior tournaments, like everything's going in the direction of improvement. Technology has improved, coaching has improved, so people are just ready to come out and win in their 20s now and maybe -- I mean, a lot more than we were 20 years ago.

Q. You're obviously part of a great field. How much do the guys pay attention to all the other guys playing in a particular tournament? Do you guys like when the competition is as it is this week?

RUSSELL KNOX: Oh, absolutely. Guys look to see who else has signed up for tournaments. Yeah, you always want to have the best players in the field. I mean, there were more World Ranking points, but it's more of a bragging point. Whoever wins this week can

say, hey, I beat Rory McIlroy, Jordan Spieth, Jason Day, Bubba Watson. I mean, there's an unbelievable field here this week.

Whoever wins this week is going to have to earn it. He's going to have to play incredible golf because those guys that I named, I mean, they're capable of shooting unbelievable scores. So whoever wins this week is going to truly deserve to be the champ.

Q. This is kind of an off-the-wall question, but they just sent out a release they're going to start blood testing for players next year. There's been a concern that that could be intrusive, that if you get a blood test that could somehow hurt your golf swing. Have you talked to anyone about this, is there concern?

RUSSELL KNOX: Yeah, I saw the email yesterday or so. I don't really have an opinion on it. I mean, it's not going to hurt your golf swing, I don't think. That's a bit of a joke.

I think it's a good thing. I don't know if it's going to affect anybody. I sure hope it's not going to affect anybody. It's not going to affect me. The yeah, we all want a fair playing surface, playing field. So if that's the step that they want to go forward with, then I'm all behind it.

Q. You've been coming to this tournament for a while (inaudible) what was it those first couple years that attracted you to this? What is special about this tournament?

RUSSELL KNOX: Yeah, 2012 was my first year. I missed the cut my first year, but I remember packing up my stuff thinking that this is a course that I could win on. Kind of weird when you miss a cut and still think you can do well on a course.

But every kind of hole, I don't really feel uncomfortable on. I mean, you don't have to overpower this course. I remember watching the year before. I think Bubba Watson and Corey Pavin were in a playoff with Scott Verplank maybe too. And I remember thinking what an amazing course this must be that the shortest hitter and longest hitter in the field are in the playoff. So I think that it just shows what a great course this is.

Potentially, last week Erin Hills, the shortest hitter and the longest hitter would not have been in a playoff. So this course, I think, allows everyone in the field to win, and I think that shows what a great course this is. That's why they're getting such great fields to this tournament.

Q. Off-the-wall question part two. The TOUR also part of that will announce when a player has been

suspended for recreational drug use. Your thought?

RUSSELL KNOX: Yeah, I think that's fair enough. If you choose to do something you're not supposed to, it should be public.

DOUG MILNE: Russell, we appreciate your time as always, and hope to see you back in here this week.