

Travelers Championship

Tuesday, June 19, 2018

Jordan Spieth

Press Conference



TRAVELERS
CHAMPIONSHIP



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome our defending champion of the Travelers Championship 2018, Jordan Spieth. Thanks for joining us. Obviously, a spectacular finish last year at this event. I need to ask you, before we get into any other questions, since that year has gone by, how many times has that bunker shot come up? Do people mention it to you every day, talk to you about it, have you replayed it? What sort of reaction have you had through the year since you've been here?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yes, yeah, it's come up here and there a bit. It actually kind of made a reappearance last week. I think there were quite a few fans from New York up here that also went out to the U.S. Open last week, like, "See you next week or great finish at Travelers," whatever -- which is, and I've seen the shot a lot of times. Especially the week, couple weeks after the golf tournament. I kind of probably watched it every single day it was so cool. Then it would come up, pop up here and there in social outlet or whatever and I'd see it.

But it feels good to be back. I was able to play the back nine, and walking up to 18 it was really cool. The last time I walked up that hole was obviously in the playoff. Just this is a golf course that I have pretty much all good memories on. I don't have any bad experiences here.

It's just such a well-run event, and the golf course itself kind of have two nines that take two different shapes to it, that always yields for an exciting finish.

THE MODERATOR: Well, there are a number of things that you just mentioned that makes the tournament so special. And last year, the PGA TOUR awards it was voted as the tournament of the year, and it received a number of other awards. But one of them was the Players Choice Award. Can you just talk to some of the aspects of it, and why it wins that vote from a player's perspective?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I mean, it's pretty easy for us off the golf course every tournament. The red carpet is rolled out. We're treated extremely well every single week. So you're kind of picking between a difficult, fantastic choice. But it's pretty special. The fans make it very special for us this week. The amphitheater finishes, the constant large galleries, which is a lot of

fun. Then the food, hospitality, the people, the guys in the locker room, the volunteers to anybody who is making this tournament possible, all do it with such class.

Again, just like every other tournament, so it's hard to speak to this one specifically, but people come here after the U.S. Open too and take a nice exhale. It's easier to kind of get into your routine. The golf course is a little easier on you while still presenting its own challenges.

Q. I don't suppose you tried the shot today, did you?

JORDAN SPIETH: I didn't. I told Michael I know what it does, so I don't need to practice it today.

Q. Of all the craziness and all the things that have happened, is there one particular thing that really sticks out in your mind after what happened last year at the 18th hole?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I thought what looked choreographed club throw to rake toss, that I don't think I had seen by the time I had talked to the media after the round after the tournament here. I mean that was pretty special. I don't think we could do that again no matter how many times we tried. Michael just throwing the rake up in the air, and the fact that nobody got hurt with either one of those was great too, and with the chest bump that neither one of us got hurt.

Just that celebration in general, I blacked out. I saw the ball go in, and at the time I hit the shot, I'm looking up, almost trying to read it as it goes by the hole. I knew it was a good shot. I was trying to read that whatever, three-footer I was going to have coming back. And then it drops and you just react.

For me, I've had a few instances where I've been able to celebrate or react on a 72nd, 73rd hole, 74th hole, whatever it may be, and it just shows how much it means to us.

Q. Speaking of exhale, have you had a chance to do so after last week, particularly what happened Saturday, of course, getting away from USGA?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I had a great Saturday. I didn't miss a shot. I didn't see any of the coverage. I didn't watch any. I had a pretty relaxing Saturday

compared to most others. At the same time I knew if I squeaked by the cut line when I saw the scores, I was even more frustrated at my finish, because going out early Saturday and you shoot something under par, say 3-, 4-under, and I would have been in the last couple groups and had a chance to win the U.S. Open. That was a bummer for sure.

But I've come here, I've kind of regrouped over the weekend, and this is my sixth out of seven weeks, and I had an extra couple days to rest and be ready for this one. I great a break after, but it was the same deal last year. I was able to leave it all out on the course.

Q. What did you do this past weekend? Did you go anywhere?

JORDAN SPIETH: I kind of went and hung out at the house Saturday. Then went into the city Saturday night, Sunday, came up here Sunday evening.

Q. (Inaudible)?

JORDAN SPIETH: Did you see a show? No, I just had a good dinner in Central Park, I had never been. I'd been in the city a lot and never been to Central Park. Reminded me of Elf, so it was pretty cool. Kind of serenity in the middle of the madness. But it was fun to visit the city.

Q. How would you assess the state of your game compared to where you sat entering last year's round?

JORDAN SPIETH: I was really stripping it last year coming in. I felt great about my ball striking. Putting wasn't quite up to form, and I didn't hit a lot of practice putts the week of the Travelers. I didn't spend a lot of time on the green. I just said, you know what, I grinded all last week on the greens, just go play. And I didn't putt great at last week's tournament, but I hit the ball so well.

I've kind of got to where my putting is making a lot of progress right now. It's getting back to where I'm seeing my lines, and it's getting back to where it could be top level. And in that process, I've spent a lot of time on the putting and less on the swing, and that's gotten off, so I'm just not sure. I'm not sure where the state of my game is right now.

If I strike the ball the way I have been this year, then the results are coming. The last couple weeks I've played Muirfield and then The Open, and I hit the ball really poorly and didn't give myself that many opportunities to let the putter do the work.

I think here this week, the key for me is just to get out in the first round and not try to do too much. I mean, 90-plus percent of the tournament the last two years

I've thrown out my chances to win a golf tournament on Thursday. I've had to do too much from here on. And the only tournaments I shot, I averaged good scores in the first round and I've had a chance to win Sunday, and that's by not trying to do so. Just hit greens and let the flow of the golf course come to you.

Q. Graeme McDowell mentioned that before he decided to commit here that he had spoken to you about this tournament and what it's about. Do you remember that conversation? If not, what do you tell people when they ask you about this tournament having experienced it the first time?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I think we were paired together at the Byron Nelson. I'm pretty sure it was there. I remember saying I added this tournament having watched it on TV, and I've seen the exciting finishes and kind of what the back nine presents, which is always cool. I also had to add a tournament last year to my schedule. Naturally this one worked out extremely well. It couldn't have gone any better. But I'm glad I did.

There are tournaments on the PGA TOUR that could be great fits for me and this is one of those. I just regret I hadn't been playing here my entire PGA TOUR career. The course just seemed to come to me pretty easily. I hit the ball really well, but I really liked the shape of the holes. So that's what I told Graeme. It's that simple. This is where I played my whole career. It's a lot of fun, and the people say it's the Players Choice golf tournament, and that says a lot.

Q. You were working really hard last week on the range trying to hold up your game and tighten it up at the U.S. Open. How challenging was it under those conditions on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, when the wind is swirling around, to really get yourself into a groove? How challenging is it to go from those conditions to here at Hartford where it was windy out there today, but it's a totally different style of golf that you're trying to play and win with?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, Sunday and Monday at the U.S. Open we didn't have any wind. The golf course was soft, and I don't think I missed a fairway for those two days. So it was, okay, I understand it's not going to be like this. Let's try to get a feel for the course. Tuesday was pretty windy. Wednesday wasn't bad. So showed some teeth, and I kind of knew what was coming.

But Thursday was just really difficult. I started 3-over through 2, 4-over through 2, which I wish I started on the front nine through the first round. I kind of think I'd have a different golf tournament if I were late early instead of early late. Even though that was the worst draw for me. The first round being kind of the key. 1,

2, those are a little nicer starts than 10, 11 out there. So I just tried to do too much early into the first round and it hurt me.

That was frustrating because I did put that much work in. I really did work hard last week. I saw the putting coming along, so I got pretty excited about it. Then I just got off to that start, and it was like, man, you know. Put in all this time and effort and then don't even really do much wrong, and all of a sudden it was just chipping. Like really? I did all this work everywhere else, and chipping. It is what it is. It happens. I think it was just bad timing. But the state of my game is better.

Q. Stylistically you've got to play a little bit different style here at TPC River Highlands than you would at Shinnecock Hills. Do you think it's difficult to change gears back quickly from one to the other?

JORDAN SPIETH: Not to come back this way. It's almost more difficult to go to the U.S. Open here. This is typical. I think last year this was 12-under. This is actually one of the highest, I mean, average to higher score to par. It just comes after the U.S. Open, so there are a lot of scoring opportunities. There is a 60-shot, I understand you can shoot low scores, but over the course of four rounds you've got to just wait and let the golf course give you what it does. I haven't had a hard time changing pace for this week before going to the U.S. Open.

Q. Talking about that, you talked on it a little bit. But can you mention the challenges at TPC River Highlands presents and how you prepare for that?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I think one of the bigger challenges is if you're doing scoreboard watching, you feel like you need to do a lot. Guys are going low every day. But like I said, four days in a row, it doesn't add up to what these 20-under weeks got up to. So if you look at it that way, just don't scoreboard watch and just play the golf course, then you're ahead of the game already.

Then you start getting these risk-reward holes mixed with these holes that bring water into play, so you kind of are like, okay, I hit a good tee shot here. I've got this drivable par-4 and I can get up-and-down for birdie. Then you go to the next two holes and you've got to deal with wind and water. So it kind of makes the -- I see myself making birdie or eagle, and then, man, I've got to play to the right spot on this hole. Just back and forth, kind of changed the holes. Each hole kind of changes that mindset.

Q. There is a new crop of college guys that are popping out here starting this week. We had a 19-year-old Joaquin Niemann who has been tearing it up. Are you feeling like an old guy already? Why do you think so many young guys are having such

success at an early age do you think?

JORDAN SPIETH: I'm not yet. I'm not feeling old yet. But it is crazy. Like I played with Doug Ghim today. Doug just graduated from Texas. Like, did he graduate in three years? I thought it has to be. There's no way he's already done with school, but time kind of flies when you look at that. But why are guys -- I think the same as you saw in our class, it's just getting competitive. You're playing tougher golf courses with more competition and more accessible competition at a younger age. Junior golf, college golf. These tournaments we're playing in the AJGA Invitationals, the college events are structured like PGA TOUR events. The golf courses are in pretty similar condition and speeds, and the competition becomes deeper because of that, not to mention now you have these main tours where guys are traveling internationally to play in these. So just the accessibility now over the last, I'd say, five, ten years has significantly trumped probably the previous ten years that allows you to just feel more prepared. Like you've had better competition on tougher golf courses and you take the next step.

Q. You've talked at length about the state of your game right now. You've had stretches in your career where you could miss a couple cuts and go on a huge run and win two or three times in a row. What do you need to see this week to give you that flicker to think the pendulum could start swinging in the other direction in six out of ten tournaments?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, tee time Saturday would be nice. That's a good start. Just starting to see my eyes match-up. When I'm over the ball consistently lining up where I want to lineup to and committing, being assertive to shots. It's just all been alignment stuff, putting and full swing.

It's your basic things that sometimes get off, that the harder you try to get them back on sometimes, the worse it gets. It can be frustrating or you can just kind of wait for it to come to you. I think I'm okay with where things are, whether it's the rest of this year or next year. I feel like there are good scores coming. In order for it to be ready, major championship ready for the Open Championship, I think being in contention this week would be a big key. It's tough to go win a major championship if you're not at least coming off of top 10 finishes in tournaments where you had a chance to win.

The three that I've won, I came off two seconds going into The Masters. I came off, I think, a third at Muirfield before the U.S. Open, and maybe a second at Colonial to a second and a third, and The Open last year off of a win here.

So it doesn't have to be a second, third or first, but those go a long way for me in my confidence to work up a leaderboard in a major. So, again, it starts by just letting the golf course come to me in the first round.

Q. I'm curious, because there was no shortage of conversation over the weekend, what your reaction was when you saw what happened with Phil?

JORDAN SPIETH: I thought I laughed. I thought it was really funny. I played with him in the first two days and we talked in depth, and with Rory, about just the added sections to the greens. They added yardage to the width of the greens and it allowed for more pins, but these pins were kind of unpinnable-ish, or not as fun locations for anybody, we thought. The green were at speeds where it was fine. I thought they were the slowest U.S. Open greens I had ever puttied on the first two days, and I was amazed at how quickly they could get dicey.

You don't normally see a turnaround within morning to afternoon, and that's when I talked to other guys, that's what happened. They got to No. 10, and it was like, wow, this golf course has changed or something like that.

Phil knows the rules. If there was a chance it was going to go back behind the bunker and he's got to chip back or he was going to play off the green anyways, so he was potentially saving himself a shot. So if that was the intent, then what's the harm in that? He's playing the best score he can.

I don't think people thought that was the intent, but I'll take his word it was his intent. He knows the rules.

Q. You just talked about how having good form in the game and then going and winning like The Open last year, can you a little bit talk about the strategy on the TOURs you did win?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, it's with me this week. The TOUR, the Claret Jug and where it's gone? Yeah, so, for the first three or four months it was always next to me. It was like traveling like I had a kid in the stroller. I was always walking with it in the airport and it was always with me. Then members of the team got to use it. Michael took it over Thanksgiving, Christmastime a little bit. Then my agent Jay took it. My dad got to take it where he grew up.

So I think it's done what would probably -- if I had to do it again, and hopefully I'll get the chance to, I'd probably do the same thing. But in this next stretch of time off, I do want to host some family and friends over for dinner and just kind of have it as a toast to going away, at least for a week, if not longer. Hopefully we'll get that last opportunity next week.

Q. Going back to the celebration last year, if the bunker shot was ranked 10 out of 10, how would you rate the celebration itself?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I don't regret anything of the celebration. I thought it was just pure emotion. It was great. I was in the zone, in my own world walking up to the green. When I saw it afterwards, instead of kind of playing along with the situation, I was kind of head down to get the ball out of the hole and quiet everyone down.

But it's never about -- it's never about the people, the noise, any of that. It's more for me, the situation, the golf shot. It felt the moment, and that's where I was living. Then it was, okay. I had it, now Daniel's got his turn. You know, let's chill out. Once that was done, then it was time to celebrate.

Q. But you and Mike wrote talk about that. You talked more about the shot or did you talk more about the celebration?

JORDAN SPIETH: More about the celebration, for sure. Yeah, it's been more about the celebration than the shot itself.

Q. This kind of goes off of what you were just talking about. You mentioned earlier that you blacked out and just reacted. But I was wondering if there were any specific memories that you have from your winning shot?

JORDAN SPIETH: I remember just really quickly as I was going to throw my club, which I don't know why I was throwing my club. I've never done that before in celebration. I've thrown clubs, but not in celebration, after I was going to throw it I kind of for whatever reason in the back of my head I was like -- when I hit bunker shot, chip shot, I kind of, as I released it I kind of club twirled. So the club comes halfway down the shaft in my hand instead of staying on the grip. So if my hands are still on the grip and I really threw it, it could have hurt somebody. Instead it was like throwing a baton, like throwing the middle of the baton and throwing it.

In the back of my head, I saw the bank of the bunker and I knew no one was going to get hurt, so I threw it there. Then the next thing you're worried about in the back of your head is Michael going to go chest bump or side bump? So I think I went side while he went chest, which is better than the other way around.

There's been a lot of pretty bad celebrations on the PGA TOUR. There's been a lot of missed high fives. I've been part of plenty of them. It's pretty hard to miss when I'm going into Michael for a chest bump. But, yeah, I just remember kind of like the throw. Okay, I

kind of see my spot. Throw it off there as I'm just reacting.

Q. When you're in the midst of a stretch like this where the results aren't up to your expectations, is there a temptation to put pressure on yourself that this is the week that things turn around, especially given how quickly you turned them around last year?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think that's easy to do. I think I'm tight now a little bit, because not true, it doesn't have to be. Just another golf tournament. But it's something that you fight, sure. Whatever you're kind of looking for results. But I wouldn't say that's any different from going to the Byron Nelson. Like, man, this could jump start my year at my own tournament or going to the Colonial. Man, I've gone first, second here, this is a great opportunity.

It's been that way just about every tournament except maybe Muirfield, because then you go to the U.S. Open and think you don't even have to shoot under par to win this golf tournament.

So as much as that kind of comes into your head, it's not bothering me this time. I'm going to try and have fun and make progress. That's what I'm going to try to do this week.

Q. When this tournament was first put after the U.S. Open, even Nathan has said he had his concerns. Obviously, Travelers has done a great job of taking a potential negative and kind of making it into a positive. Because a U.S. Open can be such a grind on any given year, the majority of the players that then come here, does it make this course more fun? Because it's certainly fair from the standpoint of when you hit good shots, you expect rewards and then get penalized when you hit poor shots?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I think it's easier to swallow both of those. When you hit a good shot, it will end up good. When you hit a poor shot, you're going to be out of position. But you can still walk up and most of the time be able to make do if you miss it in the right spot. Just the U.S. Open is almost completely out of your head when you play this golf tournament. It's more the preparation for the tournament itself that feels like the (indiscernible).

Once the tournament starts, it's another PGA TOUR event, and it plays similar as far as difficulty levels to the majority of tournaments that we play in. So I don't think the U.S. Open is on anyone's mind, really, unless they're drawing momentum off of having played well. But when they start, man, it's always totally different.

I'm not sure how it will be effective once we start going

west coast, east coast, west coast. That's tough. That's tough. That's certainly affected me playing the tournament in the past. Like Chambers Bay, right after that one, I was not inclined to come all the way across the country six hours to play that next week, whether I won or not.

So hopefully -- Travelers, whoever has made it happen, has been fantastic at getting a shuttle and charter, and making it as easy as physically possible. But it's still kind of tough at the same time for such a great tournament to go after a major especially from the other side of the country.