

# 2015 US Open Championship

Tuesday, June 16  
Press Conference

## Phil Mickelson

An Interview With:  
PHIL MICKELSON

BETH MAJOR: Good afternoon. Welcome again to the 2015 U.S. Open Championship at Chambers Bay. Very pleased to have with us this afternoon Phil Mickelson, who is playing in his 25th U.S. Open. Phil, you've played in many of these, and I think everyone has agreed that this is a different U.S. Open here at Chambers Bay. Can you give us some thoughts on the course and your impression upon arriving?

PHIL MICKELSON: It's really a wonderful golf course. It's playing and set up much like what we're used to at a British Open. And I think this year is going to be very similar to St. Andrews. I find them to be very similar golf courses, set up very similarly, as well. So I think the guys that play well at St. Andrews will play well this year. And guys that play well this week should play well in another month at St. Andrews.

BETH MAJOR: You had a tie for third last week after a final round 65. It feels very good to come in playing well this week?

PHIL MICKELSON: I started to play better each round next week. I built a little momentum. And I'm excited about coming here and playing. You never know how it's going to go. And short game is going to be a big piece here, so I've got to get that sharp and my touch right. It will be very challenging on and around the greens. I had a good week last week and I'm hoping to carry some of that momentum this week.

**Q. Martin Kaymer was in here earlier, and, to paraphrase, he said he wouldn't count you out, because if you get in contention you have whatever it takes inside to either win or finish 20th trying. What is your response to that and do you think that you are well suited for this course this week, this time, to get that win?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I think that I've gone through kind of a period these last couple of years where I haven't played my best golf, and I feel like I'm back on the upswing. I don't know if I'm quite there yet or not. This week will be a good test to see just how far along I've



come. But I feel like I have the proper direction of my game. But you just never know, you know. It's been a little while since I've played my best golf. So we'll see. But this golf course allows for short game to save shots that may be less than perfect. It doesn't force you to play perfect golf. There's plenty of room to play and to recover from. And I feel like there's a number of holes that you can capitalize and make birdies on and shoot a good number. I feel that it has characteristics of playability similar to Augusta, characteristics of St. Andrews that allow you to play and allow you to play it less than perfect. You don't have to hit perfect golf shots here to be able to score and get around it.

**Q. Do you understand him saying about the mental, what it is inside? He thinks that not everyone, if they're in contention the last few holes, can close it out, have whatever it takes to close it out. Do you understand what he's saying and why he thinks you're one of the few?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I know statistically people with like a 54-hole lead, after a 54-hole lead, those that have closed it out. I know statistically I'm one of the top two or three over the last century. But I don't know what that is tangibly (laughter). Why is that funny? I don't get it. So it's just the ability to be able to recover on the golf course on the final day when things don't go perfect, because it never does. You're not going to play a final round where everything flows, you're going to have moments of concern and moments of lapses that you have to be able to stop trying to fix those bad shots and focus on hitting good shots to recover and turn it around. And throughout the course of my career I've been able to do that for the most part. But in doing so and in trying to play aggressive and win, I've certainly had my moments where I've given them up. But I think I've won a lot more for every one that I've given away.

**Q. This is the first time for a lot of us at a U.S. Open in the Pacific Northwest. I know you were in the area earlier, breakfast down the street. Your impressions of the area and whether or not you think a U.S. Open could come back here, maybe not to this course, but to the Pacific Northwest?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, I love how the USGA has moved the tournament to parts of the country that doesn't necessarily have year-round PGA Tour events. We're going back to Erin Hills -- going to Erin Hills in a couple of years. And I like how they're bringing Major

Championship golf to different parts of the country. But the critical part is having a golf course that can host it, that is a viable host. And I think Chambers Bay is every bit of that. And it's been remarkable how the community has gotten involved with this event and been so excited for years and how they've supported it. And I think that it seems like it's going really well. They'll ultimately be the final judge on if it's a great place for it. But it sure seems from a player's standpoint to be a good host.

**Q. When you look back at the runners up that you've had, are they more of a burden for you? You've always been very good at dusting yourself off after disappointments. Or are they things that boo you because you've been in position so many times in this event?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I've actually -- I've always been somebody, ever since I was a kid, that got motivated by failure, that worked harder because of failure. Some people get discouraged by that, and it almost pushes them away. But for me it's been a motivator to continue to work harder and get over that hump, whether it was trying to win my first Major Championship that took significantly longer than I thought it would, whether it's trying to win an Open Championship or whether it's trying to win a U.S. Open championship. The fact that I've come so close is actually a motivator for me to work harder. And it's encouraging that I've done well in this tournament. It's encouraging that I've had success and that I've played some of my best golf in this event and that I've had a number of opportunities.

**Q. Unrelated to that, a few of the guys in the last day or two, Jason Day yesterday and Rory a bit today, were talking about the advantage of length at this particular course, getting over being able to carry a lot of these bunkers here that will give you three or four clubs shorter in. Do you feel like a long hitter is going to win this thing this week?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Two weeks ago I thought so, but after playing it today I don't think that it matters. I think the course is playing so fast and so firm that there are three drives that I can think of that distance is going to be a factor. But the course is playing so fast. Holes I was hitting drivers two weeks ago, I was hitting 3-woods and even 2-irons. So I don't see it being as critical.

**Q. What holes?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, 7 obviously allows you to go much further right if you can fly it 295 yards, 300 yards. No. 11 allows you to get over that grass mound. And on the backside, No. -- the downhill hole, I think it's 14, being able to get it past that bunker in the middle of the fairway is a big advantage to have a short iron into that green. I think those three holes are critical. Potentially

12 could be the fourth, but I don't think so. I think laying up there could be every bit as good a play as going for the green. And the tee may be moved up more, so it might even be a 3-wood or 2-iron to get on.

**Q. First of all, happy birthday.**

PHIL MICKELSON: Thank you.

**Q. You've obviously had a lot of chances to win this tournament, but this is your second opportunity to complete a career slam at a U.S. Open. Do you feel more prepared this year maybe than last year, based on your play and your performance in the last couple of majors than maybe you did going into Pinehurst just because of your form? Do you also feel, though, that there is a sense of urgency because you're 45 and Hale was 45 when he won?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I don't feel that sense of urgency that you're talking about. It's something I really would love to do is complete the career Grand Slam. I feel like in this day and age -- I'm in the best shape I've been in. I feel like my golf swing, I've always felt a long golf swing, a long, smooth, flowing swing leads to a long career, and a short, violent swing leads to a short career. And I haven't had any really long-term or debilitating injuries to speak of. So if I continue to do what I've done the last eight months or so, there's no reason why I couldn't play at a high level for a while. But saying that, the last two years, my technique and my form has not been what I expect it to be, what it's been throughout the course of my career. It's been very frustrating. Recently, though, I feel like I found the direction on getting that back, getting my swing plane back, making solid contact, hitting the shots that I expect to hit. But it's in its infancy. I don't know how far or how long it will take to get it really sharp. But I saw a really good glimpse last week. Maybe it's this week, maybe it isn't. Maybe it's later this year. But I feel like it's on the verge of coming around. I've said that for a while now, but I feel closer and closer each day.

**Q. Are you more comfortable this week than you would have been had you not kind of figured out links golf? Will you be hitting some of the same shots here that you did at Muirfield?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I think that's a good point in that having success at Muirfield, when the course was dry and firm and fast and brown, much like claim is that that gives me much more confidence that I'm going to play well. I think the other thing, too, about Chambers Bay is you don't have to be perfect. You can miss shots and reasonably still salvage pars, rely on short games. Also there are banks and hillsides up by the green that balls will funnel back onto the green. If you know the right shot, can play the right shot into those hillsides you don't have to be as precise as you do on a

historical U.S. Open golf course. At Winged Foot, the greens are firm and fast and small. You've got three yards to land a 5-iron from 225 yards or else it's going to go over the green into thick, heavy rough. Here you've got 60 feet that you can hit on a hillside or at the base of the hillside or higher up that will funnel down onto the green and you're going to make par. I just feel that you have a bigger margin of error. It's much easier to make pars here. But given the conditions, it's also more difficult to make birdies because the course is so firm. But to get back to your question, I kind of rambled, sorry. Yes, success at Muirfield I feel has given me more confidence here. I probably could have just ended with that (laughter).

**Q. You've never really conceded anything to age and it sounds like you're not now, either. Has there been anything, aside from what you just said about the last two years, where it has made a difference maybe in length or maybe just not hitting the ball as far as you might have ten years ago, eight years ago, or are all those things where they were? Do you not think about your age at this point when you're competing against guys 10, 15 years younger?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Well, for the last couple of years, my swing speed had declined significantly, and I had been not able to practice as long as I had practiced in the past. And that was because I didn't put the time in. As you get older, you have to put more work in so your body can withstand the practice regime that is needed to play golf at the highest level, as well as to have the speed that's necessary I think to hit the shots you have to hit. And the last eight months have made a difference. My swing speed is back not only to where it was four or five years ago, but faster. And I've been able to hit 400 or 500 balls a day, where I had been limited to maybe 150 or 200 previously. So I've been able to put in the work and the effort needed. Unfortunately, I wasn't doing the proper things. I wasn't on the right swing plane. My setup was a little bit off. Now I feel like I'm back on track. So each day I feel like I'm getting better. Each day my touch and my shot making is coming back. It has been a while, so I don't know when exactly it's all going to come together.

**Q. Those things could have happened at 35?**

PHIL MICKELSON: And they did. In 2003, I had the same situation that lasted a year. This has lasted a little longer. I actually kind of see the turn of the corner coming. I just don't know if it's this week or if it's in a month or next year or when, but I feel like it's closer than it has been.

**Q. When you talk about comparing this to St. Andrews, is it much about the driving space that you have out here and what you might be able to**

**do with that? How important is the space when you've got a lot of it but you've still got to put it in the right spots?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Yes, I think the best example I could give is that when you play St. Andrews, you don't know exactly where to hit it. And certain hillsides will take it one way or the other, that knowing how to play it, knowing where to go is critical. Well, same thing here with Chambers. The first time you play it, balls are bouncing everywhere off the hillside and ending 60, 80, 100 feet opposite of where you thought. The third hole, that par-3 down the hill, when the pin is on the right side, you don't want to go off that bank off the right side because it hits that bank and kicks way down the middle of the green. But when the pin is way left and it's tucked, you actually have to play further away from that pin. You go higher up on the bank and it gets all the way to the pin over there to the side. When the pin is right, you're firing right at it, maybe ten feet to the right of it. When the pin is left, you're firing 90 feet to the right of it. Knowing how to play it gives you a much bigger margin of error. If you're trying to fire at the left pin on No. 3, you've got a small area to fly over the bunker, get it stopped before it goes into the back bunker. You just can't do it. But when you know to play it off that hillside, you've got a massive area, a 50-foot area that you can hit that will end up a very good spot. Those nuances you don't pick up at the first time at St. Andrews, you don't pick up here. But after playing a while, it feels like it's not as difficult a course.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

PHIL MICKELSON: If I find it plentiful, you know (laughter), I think everybody does. It seems like there's plenty of room off the tee.

**Q. Speaking of age, first of all, happy birthday. Secondly, how does it feel to be only five years away from being eligible for senior major championships?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Yeah, that's really high on my list, so that's been great. Thanks (laughter).

**Q. Immediately after Merion a couple of years ago, you said that was the toughest of your runner-up finishes. Now that you've had two years to look back, do you still look at it that way?**

PHIL MICKELSON: I do. That hasn't changed. It was a tournament I feel I should have won that I was playing well enough to win. And a couple of mistakes late in the tournament ended up costing me. And I felt like it was -- not to take anything away from Justin, who won, and his great play, he played a phenomenal final round, but I felt like I didn't have to play exceptional to shoot a lower score than that and I just didn't do it.

**Q. I saw earlier where Rory said I can't see myself**

**playing competitive golf at age 40. I wonder what you think when you hear stuff like that, with young guys who can't envision a whole life that's still to come, to where you are now?**

PHIL MICKELSON: You know, I don't know what to say. Everybody has got their own views on life and so forth. I know that I love what I do. I love playing golf. I love competing and playing against the best players. And I still have a huge obstacle, a huge challenge that I am trying to overcome and that's to win a U.S. Open and complete the Grand Slam. And I'm enjoying that challenge. I'm having fun with it. It's not a burden. It's like an exciting opportunity. And every year it comes around, I get excited to try to conquer that opportunity and complete that Grand Slam. I love it. I'm 45. I still love golf and appreciate the fact that I'm able to play at the highest level and do what I love to do. And some people don't want to do it that long, and I understand. It's each individual's own preference.

**Q. Is it true that your golf course design team was in on this piece of property before it became Chambers Bay? And if so, how involved were you on that? Is this something that you would have envisioned the way it came out?**

PHIL MICKELSON: We were involved in the bidding process and one of the final selections. And I thought it was a spectacular piece of property. But it wouldn't have turned out anything like this, no. Not good or bad, I think it's a wonderful course. My vision was totally different.

**Q. In the past at majors you've sought out the club professional and others for advice. Is there anyone that you've sought out this week to get some local knowledge on how to play Chambers Bay?**

PHIL MICKELSON: When I was here two weeks ago, I had one of the local caddies, a gentleman named Rick, who came and helped me. I asked a lot of questions from him about what his thoughts were on the golf course as we walked around, but that was about it.

**Q. Anything specific?**

PHIL MICKELSON: Yeah, lots of specifics, yeah. Very specific, absolutely (laughter).

BETH MAJOR: Phil, always a pleasure, thanks so much for spending time with us today. We wish you well throughout the week.

PHIL MICKELSON: Thank you.