

U.S. Amateur Championship

Press Conference

Thursday August 15, 2019

John Augenstein

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome John Augenstein from Kentucky, who is a 1-up winner over Ricky Castillo to advance to the quarterfinals of the U.S. Amateur. How does that sound to you?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Tiring. You know, it was a long day. As all 36-hole days out, but especially out here in the heat, and the grind of the golf course just takes a lot out of you mentally and physically. I'm tired, but I'm excited to get to bed knowing I'm playing tomorrow.

Q. How would you assess your play over the course of the two matches today?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: I played -- my iron play and my wedge play for the most part was very good today. I've continued to chip well throughout the week, and then I've holed out really well. I didn't putt as good in the second match against Ricky, but I putted very well against Akshay this morning.

And then I kind of -- I drove it better this afternoon for sure. This morning I kind of sprayed it a little bit and just found a way to win some holes. But game feels good. It's been pretty good all week, so excited to go tomorrow.

Q. You had a 4-up lead and then he goes on a tear there with eagle-birdie-birdie and wins three holes in a row. How do you hold him off?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: You know, my caddie William cane just kept saying your process is better than his process, and so don't worry about what he's doing, don't worry about his results and what he's doing but just focus on what we're doing. I just tried to stay in the moment and understand that I'm still winning the match, so he still has to win two holes to beat me, and as long as he doesn't do that, I'm going to win.

I think in match play, everybody is going to go on a run. I made some birdies early in the round to get up 4-up, and there was no doubt in my mind that he was going to make somewhat of a run like that. I think you expect it, and that way you're not surprised when it happens.

Q. The more and more you played No. 2, how much more comfortable are you getting with it? What are you learning from each round that you play? What



was the biggest takeaway today getting to play it twice for that amount of holes? What did you learn and what can you carry forward going into the weekend?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: You know, I think the first time you play 2 and even the next couple times, it takes a little while to understand that there's a little more room on the greens than you think. From back in the fairway or back on the tee, it looks like the pin is sitting on an upside down salad bowl, and you have nowhere to land it. But you kind of -- the more you're out there, you understand that you have a little bit more room to land it, and you also understand that you're going to miss greens no matter what. Everybody is.

One of the things I've done really well this week was leave it in good shots where I know I can get it up-and-down. So that's -- I think the biggest takeaway is that the greens have softened up a lot since stroke play. I think there was a little bit of rain that rolled in, and I don't know if they've watered them at all, but they're definitely a lot softer than they were in stroke play. I mean, we were seeing wedges and 9-irons roll out 15, 20 feet in stroke play, and now you can kind of hit a wedge within two to three yards of where you want it to end up.

Q. How did you get psyched up for the two matches today?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: I mean, you're playing in the U.S. Am for a lot on the line. That's enough should psych you up. But I think that -- I'm not going to go into the things I tell myself when I'm warming up.

Q. We have stories to write here.

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: I don't know. I just kind of try to find the little nit-picky things that may bother me about someone else and really just try to beat them down. I don't know.

Q. Arguably you had a really tough day, probably the toughest day of anybody out there today because of who you played.

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Right, yeah.

Q. That's got to be something to overcome.

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Yeah, both of those guys are really, really good players, and I think one thing that I heard a long time ago, I remember -- I think I was at

the U.S. Junior one year, and yeah, it was. My first year at the U.S. Junior I was playing against Jim Liu, who at the time was No. 1 junior golfer in the world, and I didn't really know that, but I knew he was really good, and my swing coach Matt Killen told me that yeah, it's pretty simple, but he said, you have to beat the best to be the best.

I don't know, I've always played really well in tough matches because I like to think that I'm going to beat them no matter what.

Q. Your stellar match play record in NAAs and other events, as well, if you were to give advice to youngsters who don't have much experience in match play, what would it be? And second question would be the fire inside, but yet you have to stay calm when you hit the shot. How are you able to manage your emotions in match play?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Yeah, so first of all, I think that what's understated in a lot of match play is that you don't have to go out -- oftentimes you don't have to go out there and shoot 6-, 7-, 8-under to beat somebody. All you have to do is hit necessary golf shots. If he hits it to 20 feet, try to hit it to 15. If he hits it to eight feet, try to hit it to seven. You're always trying to one-up the guy, always trying to keep the ball in play. If I can make as many pars while birdieing some of the easier holes, I have a good chance of winning the match. And so I think that it's just really important to never give anybody a hole. That's one of the biggest issues I think any great match play player has is when you give somebody a hole, you just feel like -- it just feels terrible. Like on the first hole in both my matches today, I hit it almost the exact same spot. They both three-putted and then I three-putted, also, and I was like, not in a bad spot. So you're walking off that hole, I'm pretty upset about it because you can never undervalue a hole. Winning a point, end up going 1-up, 2-up, it all matters so much. So when you give somebody a hole, it's pretty tough to kind of come back from. It changes the momentum a little bit.

And what was the second part?

Q. About staying calm versus the fire inside.

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Yeah, I think it's just always important to not give -- not to give the other guy you're playing against any ammunition. If he kind of sees you frustrated or something, he's definitely going to feel like he has the upper hand.

And so that is something that I've had to get better at and continue to do so is make sure that I'm kind of staying in my own moment, not worrying as much about the shot that I hit but focus more on the next one.

But the good emotions like on 18 there, those just come out. You don't plan them, it just happens.

Q. I think the quality of your singles record speaks for itself, but what statement do you think you made today to the Walker Cup decision makers?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: I hope I made a really good one. You know, you really don't know. I came here with two goals, and one was to make the Walker Cup team, and the other one was to win the U.S. Amateur, and that's the order that they go in, as well.

I think I made a good statement, but I've still got to beat some guys, and so I don't think anything is given. You've got to earn it.

Q. Along the same lines, what have you been trying to do over the last couple weeks to try to obviously keep your emotions in control about trying to make that Walker Cup team while still obviously going out and competing and performing?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Yeah, I kind of had a -- I didn't have a good start to the summer. I didn't play well early on, and I was -- in that time I was kind of trying to almost neglect making the Walker Cup, just kind of let it happen or whatever. But that's never been kind of who I am.

So after talking with Coach Limbaugh and my parents and whatnot, I just kind of decided that's what I want is to make the team, so I need to focus on that and go get it and not just kind of let it happen.

I don't think -- my attitude hasn't necessarily changed. It's just that's kind of what I'm working toward instead of just letting it happen.

Q. Can you talk about the moment on 5? It seemed like that was kind of a critical moment. You hit your drive left and you have a longer third shot. I'm sure Ricky is thinking this is a great moment to tie the match, and instead you stick one in there and go 2-up. That seemed like a critical moment.

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Absolutely. I had kind of been struggling missing my driver left the last few days, and I missed another one left there, of course, and this time it was in a really bad lie. I really just couldn't advance it very far. I was hoping to hit it further than I did, but it just came out really bad.

I didn't think that he -- like at that point I was trying to tie the hole. I was trying to make a par because where the pin was today, it was really, really tough to, one, hit it close, but also if you miss the green, which you probably will from 230 yards, it's really tough to chip around that hole.

So really what I was just trying to do was hit something behind the flag and a little left, and it just came off absolutely perfect. I mean, as soon as it came off the club, we thought it was really good. So yeah, it's always nice to steal one like that.

Q. And when you were on that 4-up lead and Ricky is making that run, he's very emotional, he's fist pumping even when he was making some of his par saves. You kind of maybe saved a little bit of your emotion until the very end. How did you manage watching him get emotional?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Honestly, I really don't -- I didn't really watch him. Usually when I'm playing match play, nothing against anybody I'm playing, but I don't really -- I don't talk small talk. I'm kind of out there trying to do my own thing. And so I was just kind of focused on myself.

But he absolutely got on a great run, and I could kind of feel -- although I may not have watched him get emotional, you can feel the emotion kind of in the spectators or just kind of how the match is going. And so I knew what he was feeling and whatnot. But I just kind of had to weather the storm. Like I said, I knew that -- you always know that runs are coming from anybody you play against, so you just kind of take the punch and get ready to go back at them.

Q. I know slow play has been a hot-button issue on the PGA TOUR, and I know the college and amateur game is naturally a bit slower. Have you noticed anything out here this week or throughout your other amateur competitions this summer at the end of the college season where that's kind of leaked into the college game at all?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Yeah, I mean, I think that we do a pretty decent job. I think we do a pretty decent job in terms of pace of play. What's tough about out here is both days of my stroke play we were put on the clock for missing a checkpoint. But if the group in front of you plays three good holes, they hit the green, two-putt, birdie, whatever it is, they're just going to be ahead of you. If one person misses the green out here, you're grinding on the chip, you're grinding on the six-footer that you have. Like it just takes a long time.

And so pace of play is a tough subject because everybody likes to play at a different pace. You know, I think that I prefer people to play quickly, but I think that more than anything, you're just trying to stay with the group in front of you. As long as you're staying with the group in front of you, you can't do anything about it. But I don't know. I don't have a whole lot of ideas on that.

Q. Why is the Walker Cup such a big goal for you?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: I think that just any time -- kind of cliché to say, but any time you can represent the United States, it's really, really special. I've never been -- I played on the Palmer Cup team, which I understand you are representing the United States, but it's not -- it's still not the same from the Walker Cup. The Arnold Palmer Cup happens every year. It's kind of like the Presidents Cup and the Ryder Cup. People want to make the Ryder Cup. The Presidents Cup is, meh, it's over there. I'm just kidding. The Presidents Cup is obviously an important deal, too, but you do see more guys be a little more fiery in the Ryder Cup than in the Presidents Cup.

So I think that the Walker Cup is just a really -- it's the peak of amateur golf. It's the biggest accomplishment is being able to say that you played on the Walker Cup team is something you can say for the rest of your life, and there's been so many great players to do so.

Q. Secondly, what do you think you would bring to the team?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: I think I'm a massive competitor, and I love match play, and so I think I'd fit in really well. I love the team aspect of golf. I love college golf and the camaraderie of the team. I would love to be a part of that because I think that that's what you need. You need great teammates and you need a lot of support, but you also need some fire and some competition.