

**PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW**  
**August 1, 2018**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON**



**MICHAEL BALIKER:** Dustin Johnson, welcome back to Firestone. 2016 champion here, your ninth appearance in this event at this golf course. Going back to 2016, what stands out about that week and leading into that tournament? You hadn't had a whole lot of success here and then the tables really turned. Just kind of briefly touch on that.

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Well, yeah, 2016 was -- I was coming off a win at the U.S. Open, so I was playing really good golf. And this, I think -- I mean, this golf course, it's narrow, it's fairly long, the rough's always up, and the greens are fairly small, undulated. So you've got to be really precise off the tee and coming into the greens. I felt like I've always liked the golf course, but I've just never played it that well. But yeah, I've had some success in '16. I feel like -- I don't even know what I did last year, but I felt like I played okay.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** 17th, yeah.

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Yeah, it's a tough golf course. I like it, I've always liked it. This year it's in really good shape. Obviously, with the rain, it's a little soft. But yeah, it's kind of really similar to last week, too, as far as the conditions.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** And with the win last week, now you and Bubba Watson are the only players to win three times in the season. And now we're getting into the busy stretch with the FedExCup playoffs coming up, there's talk about how your game is trending toward hopefully achieving that goal of winning a FedExCup.

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Yeah, that would be fantastic, something that I haven't accomplished. And I would love to become a FedExCup champion. I've still got a lot of work to do. There's a lot of golf tournaments left, a lot of big golf tournaments left, including this one this week. Coming off of last week with a win, I feel like the game's in really good form, just got to keep working at it. Yeah, I could definitely -- still can definitely improve with the putting, but I feel like it's trending in the right direction.

**Q. When you're talking about putting, is it more waiting for them to go in, or actually working on it?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Both. But no, for me it's just working on it. It's not making the putts. I feel like I still putt fairly well inside of like that six-foot circle, or even inside of 10 feet. It's more -- for me, it's more just starting the ball like where I'm looking. I'm going to misread putts, it just happens. It's going to hit something and bounce. Those are things that happen, but I can control where I start it and I can control the speed of it. So just making sure that I'm starting it on my line and I've got good speed, those are the things that I'm trying to work

on. And if I do that, I'm going to make a lot of putts.

**Q. When you said a couple times this year that I'm putting fine, they're just not going in, were you kidding yourself or --**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Maybe. I don't know.

**Q. -- were you just trying to convince yourself --**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Maybe I was trying to convince myself I was rolling it good. I felt like I was rolling it good those times. Like at the Masters, I felt like I hit a lot of really good putts that just didn't go in the hole. Whether or not that was technique, aim, speed, something. I mean, obviously something was off because they weren't going in. You know, to me personally, I felt like I was hitting good putts, they just weren't going in. But I put in some work last week, it seemed like it helped, and so I'm going to keep obviously stick with it and hopefully it will get better.

**Q. Many years ago a controversial tour player Scott Hoch called Firestone South the most boring course on the Tour, back and forth, no character, and yet everybody today seems to like the course despite the fact that they say it's rough. What do you like about Firestone South?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I mean, there's not really much you can say that's bad about this golf course. I don't think there's anything bad about it. You've got to hit really good golf shots. You've got to drive it good, you've got to hit it good, you've got to wedge it good. You've got to do everything really well if you want to be successful around here. You can't fake it around here. It's a tough golf course. The greens are tough. They've got a lot of slope. They're not very big.

So it's kind of the golf course that I like. I like the way the holes are shaped. Yeah, there's a lot of back and forth, up and down the hills, but I mean, I don't really feel like there's any holes that are the same. To me, it's a fun golf course to play, especially if you're playing well. If you're not playing well, it sucks to play this place, it does, because it's hard. If you're not hitting it where you want to, this is going to be a long day.

**Q. The bigger question is, do you know Scott Hoch?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Not really. I've heard his name before.

**Q. Just your thoughts on not coming back here? I mean, you've won here, it will be the last year for it here. Kind of sorry to see a change in the schedule like that?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Yes and no. I mean, I like playing here, I like the tournament being here, but I also like Memphis. I think FedEx and what they've done for the Tour, for them to get this event, I think it's big for them. I'm happy to see it go to Memphis if it's not going to

be here.

**Q. I was going to say, Dustin, what do you like most about being here in Akron? Obviously, you've been at the event nine times, you won it once in 2016, and this will be the last year of the tournament. But what do you like most about coming here?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I like coming and playing this golf course. This is a great golf course, I enjoy it. You really know where your game stands when you're playing this golf course. You've got to hit every club in your bag and you've got to hit good shots with all of them.

**Q. Dustin, could you just take us through how you play the 16th hole shot by shot, and do you do anything to prepare for it during practice rounds?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** It just all depends on the golf -- I mean, the golf course is pretty soft right now, so I don't think you're going to see anybody reaching it in two. I hit driver off the tee no matter what, and then generally lay up just somewhere down there where I try to give myself a number that -- depending on the wind, it depends on what number I want to leave myself, and then just go from there.

But yeah, it turns into -- I mean, y'all would probably know. How many people have hit that green, actually hit the green in two in the last five or 10 years? Probably not very many. It's a long par 5, it's hard, but it kind of forces everyone to lay up.

**Q. Tiger's won here eight times, as you probably know, and eight at Bay Hill and a bunch at Torrey. Without saying all of them, is there a course that you consider to be a place where you hardly ever fail, that you thrive at? If this is Tiger's -- what's your Firestone if you're Tiger? Pardon the way I just butchered that question, but hopefully you know where I'm going from. Tiger's got Firestone, what's DJ have?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I like them all.

**Q. I knew it.**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** (Laughing.) I know, I just nailed that for you, didn't I?

**Q. Just what I was looking for.**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I mean, what's my favorite course to play or where do you feel --

**Q. Where do you feel like --**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Riviera.

**Q. Riv's your one?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I feel like I have a lot of success there.

**Q. And what are your thoughts next week on the PGA? Have you seen Bellerive?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I have not.

**Q. In the years that you've played it, the PGA, is there a trait about that major that stands out? Like, if someone were to ask you what's the PGA Championship like, how would you define it?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I feel like they do a good job with the event and the venues they pick. They try to differentiate themselves from the Masters and The Open Championship and the U.S. Open. I think they do a good job with where they go and with the setup and how they run the event, for sure.

**Q. What are you expecting next week?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I expect to be good. I've never seen Bellerive.

**Q. Not even pictures?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** No. I'll see it on Monday.

**Q. A bunch of trees and green grass.**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Exactly. It's a golf course, I've seen plenty of those.

**Q. So the year you won here at Firestone, 2016, obviously a very big year for you with your U.S. Open win preceding that. Where would you say you are in your game right now two years later compared to where you were two years ago?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I feel like the game is getting pretty good. I mean, I think that two years ago after the U.S. Open and my game was pretty sharp. I felt like I was really playing well, and I continued that play all through the beginning of '17. Then, I mean, I've still continued to play pretty well for the last year and a half, but I feel like -- I really feel like the golf swing is starting to come around, be more consistent. I'm starting to hit the shots that I want to more consistently, so I feel like the game's in a good spot.

I've got to continue to work on the putting. But there's always areas where you can improve with golf, so there's always something I'm working on.

**Q. Could you talk about the way the schedule is? You come out of Carnoustie, you barely catch your breath, you're here at a tough course. You have the PGA next week, and you catch your breath briefly and then you've got the FedExCup. Does it affect your preparations for the PGA, or does your preparation -- do you maybe not**

**get as prepared for one of these weeks in here because there's so much jammed together here in one batch?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Well, for me, I played the Open Championship, Canada, here, and PGA in a row for the last five years or something, so it's just something that I've always done. I'm used to it. I feel like I'm always prepared for every week. Doesn't matter if I have four in a row, one in a row, I feel like I come -- if I weren't prepared going to an event, I wouldn't go.

**Q. I mean, as prepared as you would like to be, so you're happy with --**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Yes.

**Q. What did you do after you missed the cut at Carnoustie?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Went to Toronto.

**Q. Did you watch the final round?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I watched the end of it.

**Q. Watched the end of it? Did you think Tiger was going to win?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** No.

**Q. At no point, even when he was leading?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Oh, I didn't -- I wasn't watching at that point.

**Q. Oh, you picked it up after the double?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Yeah.

**Q. Would you have liked to have seen him win?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Yeah, why not?

**Q. Does it mean anything to you at a tournament you're not at, just as a spectator?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** I was watching. I thought it was a good ending. Francesco played very well, especially coming down the stretch. But yeah, I didn't even realize until obviously the announcers or the commentators were talking about it, but yeah, he took the lead, what, through 11 holes or 10 holes?

**Q. Yeah, it was a couple holes' worth. All right. That would lead to the next question.**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** He didn't have it for very long.

**Q. What's the longest you've ever sat in front of the TV watching golf?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Probably be at The Open Championship, comes on in the morning, or if I play an early round and then watch it all afternoon, because they play it all day, so probably over there would be the longest I've watched golf.

**Q. How about over here, 20 minutes, 25?**

**DUSTIN JOHNSON:** Now? Yeah, I don't watch very long, but when I was in college I probably watched a lot more.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** Dustin, thanks for the time and go get 'em this week