

DAVE SENKO: We would like to welcome Gene Sauers, the 2016 U.S. Senior Open champion. Gene, maybe get us started. You've had a few days since your victory. Looking back, how did that feeling of finally winning the --

GENE SAUERS: Just winning out here is awesome. Not really -- being in a major is kind of like winning two or three out here. It's pretty awesome. Like I say, I was almost kind of beginning to doubt myself whether I can win again. This is my fourth year out here and I haven't won. I've won on the PGA Tour, I've won on that Nike Tour, and that was one of my goals, to win out here on the Champions Tour, and I got me a good one.

But it's a dream come true, being a major winner with everybody else. Your Nicklauses, your Palmers, your Watsons, and being in that kind of category is pretty awesome.

DAVE SENKO: How was the reception when you got back home?

GENE SAUERS: Oh, it was awesome. Like I say, I was in the clubhouse there at Scioto doing the champagne toast and all that kind of stuff, then I had to go sign flags, and everything. Then I asked one of the guys -- they're like, can I get you something? I'm like, can you go get my phone out of my locker? So when I turned it on, I had 260 texts. And when I turned it on, it kept going bing, bing, bing, bing. It was like a slot machine. It was pretty awesome to know you've got that many friends.

But yeah, the welcome home was awesome. I had to go do some local stuff for TV and newspapers and stuff like that. Everybody was really thrilled for me, which is a good feeling.

Q. Did you get the key to the city?

GENE SAUERS: They're talking about it. Chatham County, they want me to do something. They want to come on back for about five weeks, I don't know what they want to do. So who knows, I might get that key.

Q. Do you think going through what you went through health-wise makes it even that much more meaningful for you?

GENE SAUERS: I think so. Having a 25 percent survival rate when I got out of that hospital and didn't even thinking about trying to play golf and being as sharp as all these guys out here, to try and compete with all of them. Like I say, I didn't touch a club for seven years. You got to relearn everything. Hitting the ball wasn't so bad, but just around the greens, chipping and putting, the bunker shots and all that, that kind of took a little extra time to try to master. Still haven't mastered it, still working on it, but had me a good week. But just

coming back from all that stuff is extra special.

Q. How hard is it to win out here? I think there's guys that people expected when they jump from the PGA Tour to the PGA Tour Champions --

GENE SAUERS: Daly said it perfect. I played with him at Dick's up in Endicott and I got done playing with him, Dave Marr was interviewing him right when he got down and I was right there. I listened to what he said and he said all the guys that are coming out, you turn 50, you better come golf your ball because these guys know how to win and they haven't lost the drive. And he says, you'd better be ready to come play, they're not just going to hand it right over to you. You know, maybe 10, 15, 20 years ago -- how long has this tour been going on?

DAVE SENKO: Thirty-seven years.

GENE SAUERS: Back when it first started, you probably had five, 10 players you had to beat. Now you've got to beat 81 of them. Everyone that can play coming off the regular tour, they're all healthy, so it's tough to win out here.

Q. For John to come out and kind of defend --

GENE SAUERS: Us? (Laughs.)

Q. -- the reputation of the Champions Tour, because I think most of the public would say oh, my gosh, Vijay's going to rip it up or John Daly's going to rip it up.

GENE SAUERS: And there's Davis Love. Davis Love hasn't done much.

Q. That's just hasn't been the case.

GENE SAUERS: That hasn't been the case, and it's tough. Everybody out here can play. And it's not like we're playing short golf courses. We're playing 7,000 yards every week. When I first got out, Gene, you're going to tear it up, they play 6,600 yards, and I haven't seen one yet. So it's awesome.

Q. Can I follow up on John coming out here, he hasn't played well. You played with him. Is he frustrated, does he just figure it's just a matter of time? Just your interaction with him.

GENE SAUERS: I think it's probably just a matter of time. I understand that he got frustrated a few weeks ago, but we all do. When I played with him, he was humble and gracious and very kind and he was a joy to kind of play with. I know he broke some clubs -- I don't know if I should say anything about that -- a couple tournaments ago, wasn't it, he broke a couple?

We all get frustrated, I get frustrated. Even though what all I've been through, I always said a bogey's not going to matter much anymore, but boy, I get mad when I make a bogey but I just kind of put everything back in perspective.

Q. You made your Champions Tour debut here?

GENE SAUERS: I sure did. This is my, what, fourth time now back?

Q. Is it special?

GENE SAUERS: It is, it is. When I first got here and everybody heard, you know, what I went through, everybody came up and congratulated me and good to see you. Even the driving range guys, they bring the birthday cards. So I'm treated very, very special here and it's a good week for me to come back.

DAVE SENKO: And you've played well here the last --

GENE SAUERS: I have played well.

DAVE SENKO: Three straight top-10 finishes I think here.

GENE SAUERS: I've played well, right.

DAVE SENKO: What's the key on this golf course? What do you need to really do well to play well here?

GENE SAUERS: Well, the greens are tough to read. I've always had a little trouble reading some of the putts, but I hit a lot of fairways and a lot of greens. I think hitting a lot of greens and not making the stupid mistakes is what helps me around here. I like it, the weather's awesome. You know, just like, just fairways and greens and try to give yourself opportunities.

Q. If a neighbor of yours showed up and said, okay, tell me three holes I need to just go see?

GENE SAUERS: Out here?

Q. Yeah, what would they be?

GENE SAUERS: Oh, gosh, I think No. 9, that par 3. That's always a tough club selection. You've got to have the right club there. 10, the second shot, I remember my first year I come up short a couple times. It's up the hill, and I think back where I was you had to add about eight yards to get back. I think when I first got here, I added about three, four, five or something and I needed three or four more. Of course, you know, the short one, the horseshoe one, you can either go for it --

DAVE SENKO: 14?

GENE SAUERS: I just -- I can get home there, but if I pull it anywhere I'm dead. But anyway, 17's a good hole, a good -- especially when they put it over on that left side. That's a brutal tee shot there. What's that, 4 down the hill you've got to hit a good drive on. That one there you've got to see. All the par 3s I think you need to play. It's just an all-around good golf course.

Q. I know you're coming off a win. Do you feel like you're back to being Gene in terms of the sharpness of your play right now? Are you playing about as well as you have once you've been out here, it was a great week or there's some things you need to sharpen? What's the state of your game?

GENE SAUERS: There's a lot of things I need to sharpen. I have a little wrist injury, just had this taped. It probably happened that week in the thick rough. I got home Tuesday. Of course, it was a late finish and I didn't get home until Tuesday and I didn't play my first round of golf until Monday. I had my hand x-rayed and all that kind of stuff hoping that's -- what's going to happen this week, I don't know if this is going to be able to hold up. Hopefully, it does. But I'm not sharp because I only got to play really one day. I did hit balls on Saturday and hit a couple on Sunday, but I know I'm not as sharp as I was during the Open or the week prior to that. Hopefully, today I can get a good round in today and get a practice in tomorrow and try to get it back for the weekend, but it's going to be a tough week.

Q. What's up with your wrist?

GENE SAUERS: I don't know.

Q. They don't know?

GENE SAUERS: I think just hitting out of that rough all week, I had to go down and get a few of them, hitting hard on the ground. On Monday, that fifth hole, hit it in that divot, and it was like in the front of the divot, and I almost was like in a pitch mark so I had to go down and get it and I pulled it left in the sidehill of a bunker and I had to go down and do that. And then the next hole, that sixth hole, I went to go hit my second shot out of the fairway, I did a practice swing and my whole hand went numb, I mean weak. I was like, oh, shit, what's going on here? I said please don't do it while I'm actually hitting the ball. Every swing right before I hit the ball, I made sure okay, I've got a little power. Went ahead and hit it and thank God it never affected me. But I just was in the trailer and they just said that's maybe some tendons or something, whatever, this will take a while to heal.

Q. Does it feel weak or just painful?

GENE SAUERS: Painful, it's all painful from my thumb down to my wrist and over on this side and on top. I think that's where he said all the tendons run.

Q. When did it start bothering you, right after the Open?

GENE SAUERS: Well, during the week of the Open. I told my caddie, you know how sometimes you put your hands on your wrists like this waiting on the slow play out there (laughs,) and it was hurting. I told my caddie, man, my hand hurts. We just didn't think about it the next couple days, I just kind of blew it off. And then Sunday when it went weak, these two fingers -- I mean, if this hand wasn't on, the club would have went flying. I wouldn't have had no power at all. Even today, when I squeeze it's sore. So just hopefully I can maintain it and it will be okay, just take a bunch of Advil and it will be all right. I might have to take next week off to just kind of let it heal a little bit. I hate to withdraw from tournaments because that's not me, I like to play and honor my commitments, but I've got to look out for me as well.

Q. Did you consider not playing this week?

GENE SAUERS: It might have went through -- no, I love this place. They've been so nice to me, so I've got to come back. It was my birthday on Monday so this is my birthday week. And my caddie's birthday week was the week of the Open, he turned 48 on Monday when we won. Derek Sanders is his name.

DAVE SENKO: Thanks, Gene.

GENE SAUERS: Thank you. Hopefully, I'll see you all week.