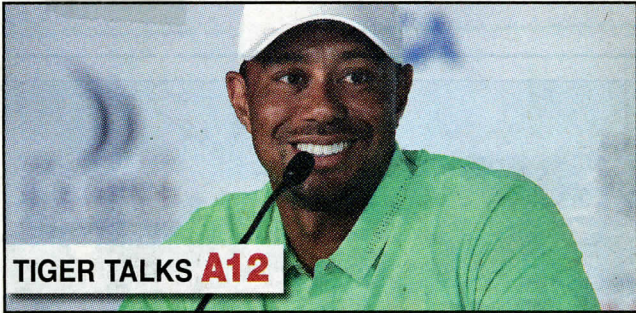


T. Sports-Golf Chambers Bay

FREE • Friday, June 19, 2015



TIGER TALKS A12



JAZZ UNDER THE STARS B2



PHIL TALKS A12

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# 115TH U.S. OPEN

## THE WAIT IS OVER



PHOTO BY ROCKY ROSS

By Justin Gimse

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**S**unburns and smiling faces were in full force as the 2015 U.S. Open week finally kicked off at Chambers Bay. As the Puget Sound hosts its first major PGA tournament, the mood next to the waters

was festive and awe-struck.

To put it all in some sort of layman's terms, it felt like the Super Bowl or World Cup was going down at the old gravel pit. Ask anyone who made it down there, they'll back that up.

The whole shebang started on Sunday, June 14 with a flag-raising ceremony by local servicemen and servicewomen,

followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. It was a fitting moment for the thousands in attendance as it was also National Flag Day. After Major General Kenneth Dahl of I Corps JBLM brought forth the U.S. Open Championship Trophy, the festivities were off and running.

The day included practice rounds by some of the best names in golf, such as

top-ranked Rory McIlroy. McIlroy is one of the longest hitters in golf, despite being just 5-9 and 160 pounds soaking wet. Science is still trying to figure out how he does it.

The kids also got into the act with junior golf activities while folks were entertained by the sweet sounds of the

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JBLM Orchestra. Sunday was a free admission for fans, and the thousands that showed up seemed to be having some of the best times of their lives.

But wait, things were just getting started.

Monday ushered in more sunshine and a fuller contingent of U.S. Open golfers descending upon Chambers to play nine or 18 holes of golf, hoping to get a better feel for this golf course that has been the talk of the world for several weeks now.

Throughout the day, no matter how many fans were surrounding fairways, tee-boxes or greens, the Spectator's Square area was constantly buzzing with activity. Between the tasty eats offered up by the likes of Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, Chamber's Grill and the Seafood Shack, golf fans had quite the variety of dining options. Surprisingly, for an event this size, the prices were a little less or at most, on-par with sporting events at Centurylink Field.

The 41,000 square-foot Merchandise Pavilion was a sight to see. You didn't read that incorrectly. The souvenir shop at the U.S. Open is approximately the size of a grocery store. Upon entering, I was surprised to hear some John Mellencamp playing overhead, shortly followed by some 38 Special. Needless to say, I felt right at home. I grabbed four items, made it through the check out and was back out in the blistering sun in a record-setting time of 12 minutes.

They have that place running like a well-oiled machine, much like pretty much everything else on the sprawling thousand-acre golf wonderland.

The golf course is looking spectacular, and if you find yourself spending

time on the 16th and 17th holes, the proximity to the water adds a charm and touch of coolness to the surroundings that is probably only matched in a handful of golf locales around the world.

Tuesday, I felt I had burnt my skin enough the previous day to qualify for some extended Media Center time and I dropped anchor for much of the day taking in press conferences with the biggest names in golf. When you're a fan of golf for decades, it's certainly a special feeling to sit mere feet away from the best in the game and even ask them a few questions.

I expected Tiger Woods to be stiff and cold with the media. For several years now, the media has been Woods' worst enemy and I wasn't going to blame him if he came across as stand-offish and distant.

Instead, what we got for over 30 minutes was a funny, relaxed and engaging Woods that was an absolute delight to behold. I for one was not the only journalist fan-boy a little moved by his appearance and the way he conducted himself. I'll be pulling for Tiger just a little bit more this week during the tournament.

Phil Mickelson was great. He was very open about having to approach the game and his body a little differently now that he just hit his 45th year on this planet. What I also enjoyed about Mickelson was his



PHOTO BY ROCKY ROSS

**NO SWEAT.** While many golfers raked their golf balls out of the bunkers during practice rounds, some decided to blast away.

sense of humor. He's got a sneaky one and I'm sure there were several writers in attendance that couldn't tell if he was being serious, or having a little fun with the journo-throng.

I don't really know what I was expecting out of the press conference with 15-year old Cole Hammer. The young Texan defeated scads of older golfers in his Texas qualifier to advance to the Open this week. While the kid wasn't exactly an old-pro on the microphone, he was leaps and bounds ahead of what you would expect from such a young

man. It looks like Hammer has some great parents, because they're obviously raising a well-mannered, well-spoken, happy and humble kid. I would love to see him make the cut on Friday and play the final two days of the tournament. It would be huge for the game of golf.

Barbara and Jack Nicklaus appeared later in the day on Tuesday for a heartwarming conversation. Yes, that Jack Nicklaus. The legendary couple was not in town just to take in the tournament. Barbara was awarded the

2015 Bobby Jones award, which is the United States Golf Association's highest honor in recognition of distinguished sportsmanship in golf. The couple spoke warmly of their early days together, their time during Jack's long golf career and what seems most-important to them now: the Nicklaus Children's Health Care Foundation.

After the Nicklaus press conference, we were all invited to sample some of the new ice cream flavors from the Jack Nicklaus Ice Cream line available

through Schwan's. All the profits go to charity and in short-order the Nicklaus line of ice cream has become the biggest seller among the tasty, frozen treats that Schwan's delivers door-to-door.

Jack's Strawberry-Lemonade flavor was some of the best ice cream I've had in a while and knowing they do all this for the betterment of children's lives made it taste even sweeter. What a great way to end Tuesday at the U.S. Open and with the tournament starting on Thursday, now the real fun begins.