

U.S. Open Championship 2020

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Mamaroneck, New York, USA

Winged Foot Golf Club

Mike Davis

Dan Hicks

John Bodenhamer

Craig Annis

Navin Singh

Press Conference



just promises to always, regardless of what championship, bring a great outcome.

But, listen, as Governor Cuomo said a few times, this is really an important week. It's inspiring. It's not just inspiring to golfers, the 144 here that want to win that coveted trophy, this is one of the oldest and most important championships in the world, and playing for that Jack Nicklaus Gold Medal.

But this is about inspiration this year. To crown a U.S. Open champion, not only just in New York that was one of the hardest hit states and the state that really got hit the hardest first, but in Westchester County, is really remarkable.

But the week's also very important for other reasons. The USGA is a nonprofit. This is our week. 75 percent of the revenues that we bring in come from this week. Things like how we invest in other championships, how we invest in governance of the game, how we invest in things to grow the game, whether it's junior golf programs or funding internships.

And then you think about all the things we do for golf courses, whether it's turf grass research, trying to have golf courses use less water, best practices, all of this, if you think about roughly the \$225 million that the USGA puts into the game a year, so much of it comes from this week.

So this, to be able to be here at storied Winged Foot and to be able to play the 120th version of the U.S. Open, is incredibly important.

BETH MAJOR: Great. Thanks, Mike. John, when we confirmed the championship would be held here in September, we also announced the U.S. Open would be conducted without qualifying. Can you talk about how this year's field came to life?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Well, good afternoon, everyone. And it's been quite a journey this year, and a lot of important decisions along the way that this year will make up in 2020, and really the decision to forgo qualifying was really one of those decisions.

BETH MAJOR: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the 120th U.S. Open Championship at Winged Foot Golf Club. My name is Beth Major. I'm senior director of communications for the USGA, and on behalf of the association, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to Winged Foot for what promises to be a memorable championship.

With me today, from left to right, from the USGA are chief commercial officer, Navin Singh; chief brand officer, Craig Annis; CEO, Mike Davis; senior managing director of championships, John Bodenhamer; and from NBC Sports, Dan Hicks.

Mike, I would like to start with you. We're all here on a beautiful day at Winged Foot Golf Club, but it doesn't seem like so long ago that we questioned whether this day would actually ever come. Can you talk about what it means to be here this week and why conducting the U.S. Open was so important this year.

MIKE DAVIS: Well, Beth, you're right. I mean, back in March and April, we were very skeptical we were going to conduct this. Certainly when you think about the magnitude of the virus, and the epicenter was literally a couple towns over from here, and it really wasn't until several weeks later that we determined that we could in fact come back to Winged Foot, but it wasn't going to be until September, and, you know, listen, it is great to be here.

It's great to be here because this is such a storied golf course. It's our sixth U.S. Open. You think about the great Bob Jones winning here. It's also a great site because the golf course is just so quintessential U.S. Open. Wonderful test of golf that you'll hear John Bodenhamer talk about. It

It was heartbreaking, and I say that with all sincerity. Because qualifying is part of our DNA, it's part of our -- it's a cornerstone of USGA championships. It's been part of the U.S. Open since 1924. We take that very seriously.

We agonized over that decision and considered every scenario possible to conduct qualifying, but in the end, as we consulted with our allied golf associations around the country, national federations around the world, we knew that health and safety was the most important consideration.

And so we made the very hard decision to forgo qualifying this year and play with a fully exempt field. As we developed our fully exempt field, we really thought a lot about what our primary objectives should be in building this field. It really was one thing: It was try to build a field that was representative of what a U.S. Open would normally be in every way possible.

What do I mean by that? Well, we really felt like as we designed exemption categories we wanted those that followed and loved the U.S. Open, our fans, even the players; that as they looked at the field that we ended up with here, well, you know what, maybe they didn't have qualifying, but, boy, that field sure looks like they did. And we feel good about what we have achieved.

With this in mind, we started with our traditional exemption categories: past champions, using the official World Golf Ranking ranking. But we also instituted a number of additional exemption categories which were new this year, not the least of which was quite unique, and I think quite innovative, some "play your way in" opportunities, through PGA TOUR events, through European Tour events, through Korn Ferry Tour events, as well as and including the PGA Championship, which was one of those events along the way during the summer. And we're really grateful to our partners at the Tours and at the PGA of America.

We also included exemptions for our top amateurs, looking back over the five years, and that's the data set that we looked at over the past five years of U.S. Opens when we built this. We looked at how many amateurs play each year on average in a U.S. Open. And it was about 15. And so we started with that number. Our field is a little smaller this year. So we started with 13. And that's what we're at this week here at Winged Foot.

And we also have a number of PGA golf professionals. Really, those exemptions include also from other international tours, the Japan Golf Tour, the Sunshine Tour in South Africa, the Australasia Tour and the Asian Tour. And we're really proud the way that things came together.

We couldn't guarantee that everybody would be able to play because of travel restrictions, but we really wanted to give folks an opportunity to follow their dream in this year's U.S. Open, and we feel good that we achieved that through those exemption categories and had success in getting folks here to play.

The groups that I mentioned also are represented many years in final qualifying for the U.S. Open proper and often make the cut. And this year the openness of our championship will be demonstrated by all of those diverse groups. So you can look for that.

The field of 144 players this week is complete, and we're thrilled to welcome them to Winged Foot. It's a fabulous U.S. Open venue and requires every facet of a player's game to be clicking at the highest level.

The setup you'll see this week reflects the challenge this golf course presents. We will let Winged Foot be Winged Foot. And if you come here next September or if you were here last September, you'll see Winged Foot just about the same way as will the players this week.

As Mike said, this promises to be a memorable U.S. Open. In fact, with everything we have overcome this year -- players, fans, Winged Foot Golf Club, especially -- really has a chance to be a U.S. Open for the ages.

We can't wait for two local players, a little special start tomorrow. Brandon Wu from Scarsdale and Danny Balin from White Plains will hit the first shots off the 1st and 10th tees tomorrow morning when we start, and we're pleased by that. Thank you.

BETH MAJOR: Thanks, John. And certainly looking forward to that. With no fans with us on site this year, bringing the championship to fans around the world is more important than ever. I would like to talk about how we plan to do that this year. Craig, I would like to start with you.

CRAIG ANNIS: Yeah, so thanks, Beth. Fans play such an important role in live sporting events. The players feed off of their energy. Folks watching from home live vicariously through their experiences. And while we feel strongly that it was the right decision not to have fans here and appreciate the collaboration between the state and the county and our organization and Winged Foot, the reality was we were disappointed that we weren't going to be able to provide that opportunity for fans.

But that also gave us the chance to sort of redouble our efforts around what that virtual fan experience can be like, not only for the fans that would have been here, but for the



ones that are home and thinking about what we can do moving forward.

So a couple of things I think are worth noting. First, back in June we launched the Victory Club, which is a free club for fans. And I encourage everyone to go on usopen.com and join. It provides unique and special content.

A couple things that we're doing that I encourage everyone to check out. Thanks to our partnership with Cisco, we have got two unique experiences. The first actually is right over there. We have got a virtual fan board where parents and kids can sign up through the Victory Club and get autographs with players. So to interact, to ask them questions, where the players sign different keepsake things, and then we mail them to them. Shane Lowry was over there yesterday, I think for maybe 30 or 40 minutes. It was just so amazing to watch.

The second is on the first tee, we're also going to have a virtual experience where fans can log on and, thanks to Cisco, be able to watch what happens in realtime on the first tee. And players can interact as well, which is really a cool thing to do.

The other thing we're doing is we're redoubling our efforts from a social media perspective. So we brought on a cadre of social influencers that are really trying to bring this experience to life for those at home.

And then I would say the final thing, we actually are going to have one fan here, Andrew Haynes, and he's going to be experiencing this championship and sharing all the sights and sounds through his eyes, through his ears, on our social, taking over some of our channels throughout the week, which we're excited to do for the first time ever.

So just a couple things for people to tune into and to get excited about.

BETH MAJOR: Great stuff. I know yesterday I think all of us enjoyed watching the video of Amy Bockerstette welcoming our defending champion, Gary Woodland, to the first tee, a really great moment for both of them, but certainly for all of us to enjoy. So really great stuff.

Navin, perhaps the most visible way that fans will enjoy the championship is through our broadcast. Can you take us what viewers can look for this week?

NAVIN SINGH: Sure, and thanks, Beth. We look forward to bringing the championship to our fans. And through our partnership, renewed partnership with NBC Universal, we'll be delivering nearly 45 hours of live coverage across NBC, Golf Channel and Peacock. We're also proud to deliver the

last hour on Sunday uninterrupted thanks to our partnership with Rolex.

As we reconnect with our friends at NBC, we're thrilled to have such a talented group of broadcasters under the direction of Tommy Roy and Brandt Packer, featuring our good friend Dan Hicks, Paul Azinger, Nick Faldo, David Feherty, Terry Gannon, and Mike Tirico on the call, along with five USGA champions as part of the team.

We look forward to the team providing in-depth perspective on the championship and celebrating the great players that compete in it.

We also aim to cover all 144 players in the field. They worked so hard to get here, and they will live the dream of competing in the U.S. Open, and we want to give them the opportunity to be shown on broadcast.

A hallmark of a U.S. Open has been innovation, and we're proud to partner with NBC to have two hours of exclusive coverage on Peacock each day, free or all users. Usopen.com, our U.S. Open app, and the U.S. Open OTT app powered by Cisco will continue to have extensive complimentary coverage of the championship, including live featured groups and featured hole coverage throughout Thursday through Sunday.

We'll be unveiling new features for our digital platforms as well to further immerse our fans in the championship, including new player comparison tools and interactive Q&A features that compliment our live streaming coverage.

We're excited to provide fans also a U.S. Open augmented reality app through our partnership with Deloitte which will feature a 3D shot tracer on every hole of this year's championship.

I'll close by giving a big thank you also to our broadcast partners all around the world who will deliver our championships to golf fans in every corner of the planet. It's truly a global event, and it's our privilege to ensure all those that want to enjoy the U.S. Open can do so. Thanks, Beth.

BETH MAJOR: Thanks, Navin. Terrific. Look forward to watching with fans around the world. Dan, no doubt some additional excitement for you. Not only are you broadcasting the U.S. Open here this week, but you're doing so at a place that means so much to you. Can you talk about calling this year's U.S. Open and your personal connection to Winged Foot Golf Club.

DAN HICKS: Well, Beth, it's hard to put into words what this week and what this championship coming back to



Winged Foot not only means to me but the rest of the members here.

I became a member here about 11 years ago. So to know intimately the staff, the members, the people that make this place go, 36 holes of nirvana every time you come here, is incredibly special. To be able to try to now portray the spirit of the membership here, being a member here is a dream come true. And there was a time when, again, the gentlemen here telling us, well, we don't know if we're going to have this championship, there were those moments, but now to have it and be in September at a different, obviously, kind of year is -- I think there's a silver lining to it.

And one of the silver linings is you're going to see this great golf course like you've never seen it before at a major championship because the build-out is not there. There are vistas that you can look through, holes and fairways and greens that you can now see through that weren't here 14 years ago before Gil Hanse did an unbelievable job of restoring this place. So without the stands, without the spectators, that's going to be missed, but you're going to see Winged Foot shine like it's never shined before.

I cannot -- I've been talking to the members, the staff, from Mike Gilmore, the head professional, to Steve Rabideau, who is, in my book, not -- being a little biased here, but I think he's the best superintendent I've ever seen. The first guy here; last guy to leave. The work ethic is unbelievable. So they have been waiting a long time for this.

And I speak on behalf of all of us at Golf Channel and NBC how thrilled we are to be back broadcasting these championships. And in the words of our esteemed leader, Tommy Roy, it's incredible to broadcast events that really mean something.

This U.S. Open, the 120th edition at Winged Foot, means a heck of a lot and I think, with everything that's happened, could be one of the more powerful major championships we have seen in a long time. So it's great to be back doing the U.S. Open.

BETH MAJOR: Thanks, Dan. We are all thrilled to have you back here with us this week. While we're all here to celebrate the U.S. Open this week, it's an exciting time in many respects for the USGA.

Last week we announced that the USGA would establish Golf House Pinehurst at the home of American golf. Mike, can you touch on some of the highlights of last week's exciting announcement.

MIKE DAVIS: Well, Beth, it indeed was exciting. We have

had a relationship with Pinehurst well over a century. You think about the Tufts family, what it meant to the USGA and what it meant to the game. And the current ownership, the Dedman family, who has just been a wonderful keeper of one of the great treasures in American golf.

So we announced last week, Beth, that we were going to have a bigger presence in Pinehurst moving forward. And it starts with the concept that Pinehurst really is the home of American golf. They get over a million golfers coming through that area on an annual basis. It's got rich history with championships, it's loaded with wonderful golf courses in the area.

And one of the things that really got this started that certainly John Bodenhamer, to my left, who runs our championships, is we want to be at Pinehurst more often. It's one of the great U.S. Open sites. And ironically, even though the golf course is roughly a century old, we didn't go there until 1999 the first time.

But what we have done is we have really cemented it as a future U.S. Open site and what we're calling an anchor site. So we're going to have five U.S. Opens within 2024 to 2047. And specifically, beyond 2024 that we announced before, it will be 2029, 2035, 2041, and 2047.

And we just believe after talking to a lot of the players who play in U.S. Opens, a lot of our past champions, they communicated a consistent message, saying: We want to go to the best sites, and we want to go there more often. And that really led the Championship Committee to make that decision. So we're excited about it.

But beyond championships and bringing more not only to the Pinehurst Resort, we have got a rich history with Pine Needles right down the road, you but we're going to just bring more championships to the state of North Carolina. It's a state that really welcomes us with open arms.

But in addition to championships, we're going to have a bigger presence, a bigger permanent footprint in Pinehurst by moving or rebuilding a brand-new state-of-the-art research and test center right in the Village of Pinehurst.

We'll also have a second building there that will have office space, a welcoming center where we will really engage with some of these million golfers coming through. We'll also have a satellite museum where we can really showcase some of the most important artifacts that mean something to not only the USGA but to the game of golf.

So, Beth, it was an incredibly exciting announcement last week. It was roughly five years in the making. And this is just -- this isn't just good for the USGA, it will be great for

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

the game of golf moving forward.

BETH MAJOR: Thanks, Mike. Very, very exciting time for all of us, to be sure. Craig, this week fans will see a variety of new messaging from the USGA throughout the broadcast and on our social channels. Can you talk us through what they can expect to see.

CRAIG ANNIS: Absolutely. Thanks. As Mike mentioned at the beginning, the U.S. Open plays such an important role in helping the USGA have an enormous impact on the game, and we know, as a country, as a world, we have been going through some truly challenging times.

And we have also seen that golf has played a really important role as an outlet for people. It lends itself to social distancing. Rounds have been up. Golf courses are busy. And it's required us to think about the role that we play in helping to make the game more accessible and welcoming for everyone.

And so what you saw at the beginning was our new brand anthem, for all golf is and all that it can be. It really talks a lot about the special connection that golfers have to the game and what the game means to them. That's a message that we're going to continue to deliver throughout this week and beyond.

There are two others that I want to share as well. The first is a spot that we're calling "openness," which not only talks about the openness of our championship and the history with that, but also the commitment that we're making as a leading governing body and golf organization to make the game more open, more accessible, and why that's really important.

And then the third is an ad that features Michelle Wie, our champion, as the narrator, and it's an advertisement that's in partnership with SheIS Sport, focused on their "women worth watching" campaign. And it just shines a light on the importance of people celebrating, tuning in, watching and supporting women in sports broadly but also specifically women in golf.

BETH MAJOR: Great. Thanks, Craig, and thanks to all of you. We now would like to open up to questions.

Q. Mike, what do you make out of the fact that there's been so little whining from the players this week? What does that say about Winged Foot?

MIKE DAVIS: Well, first of all, it's nice to be in your hometown here. As John and I have talked about this, when I think back to 2006, what I remember about that week and that setup, and I think as most know, 5-over par

won that week. And as I recall, there really wasn't complaining.

Winged Foot is just -- as John said, it requires every shot in the bag. Accuracy. It requires you controlling your trajectory, your being able to recover, your working your way around the golf course from a course management standpoint.

I think that looking back during the setup in 2006, and I suspect that's probably what we'll do this week, we kept looking at ways how do we make the golf course a little bit easier because this is such -- as Dan said too, it's such a great test. It puts the premium on everything.

So I would say this: That, listen, the players haven't put a pencil in their hand yet, so we'll wait and see. I think you go back 125 years, and there's a little bit of history of it being a tough week. And, listen, when you think about some of the great he's U.S. Open players of all time -- Bob Jones, Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods -- you never heard them complain. They accepted the challenge. They knew -- in fact, in some ways, they knew when others were complaining, it gave them an advantage.

So, listen, part of the lore of a U.S. Open is it's a very tough golf course, hopefully set up in a fair but a stern manner, and we are just poised for a wonderful week here at Winged Foot. The golf course is fantastic.

Q. A follow-up, is this as traditional a setup as you can find anywhere when you think about U.S. Open setups?

MIKE DAVIS: Well, I'll take it, and then I would certainly offer it to John. Having seen 31 U.S. Opens now, what we have really tried to do is allow golf courses to kind of be themselves. The comment that John made, Winged Foot is a tough golf course. We didn't change the fairway contours at all here. This is what the members play. These are tough greens. They're deep bunkers. There's a lot of doglegs.

When we go to Oakmont, its personality is very deep bunkers, incredibly fast greens. When you go to Pebble Beach, it's small greens, it's windswept. When you go to Pinehurst, it's native sandy roughs. Every course has its own personality, and what you're seeing out there is, as John rightly said, Winged Foot's being Winged Foot.

BETH MAJOR: John, speaking of Winged Foot, a question from the WebEx: What is the biggest challenge in maintaining the golf course in September as opposed to June?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Daylight. We have two and a half hours less daylight this week than we do in June. So that's less time for us to prepare the golf course, present the golf course. We're actually doing much of that work -- or I shouldn't say much, some of that work in the dark in the morning. We're out at 5:45 a.m.

And Steve Rabideau, as Dan mentioned, is a magician, magnificent golf course superintendent. And his crew is out even earlier, under lights, mowing, preparing, filling divots, everything. I think that is the biggest challenge.

BETH MAJOR: Another WebEx question for John. You mentioned letting Winged Foot be Winged Foot. Can we expect anything different from 2006, and do you expect an over-par winning score?

JOHN BODENHAMER: You know, I think there will be a few things different because it's September, but that question leads me back to something I read, I spent a lot of time with the club historian here, a wonderful gentleman by the name of Neil Regan, and he shared a quote with me a week or so ago that when asked a similar question back in 1929, before the U.S. Open then, and a member of the media said: Are you going to make Winged Foot tough? Are you going to put all the tees on the very backs of the tees and tuck all the hole locations in the nooks and crannies of the putting greens? And Tillinghast just turned and said: We're not going to outfit Miss Winged Foot in any different way than she otherwise would be. No fancy clothes, no special jewelry, just a simple calico dress, and no furbelows -- that's right, furbelows, I love that word -- and just wash her face up for the party, and she'll be good enough.

And that really is what has inspired us to think of Winged Foot being Winged Foot.

BETH MAJOR: Very good. Very well said. We have a question here.

Q. For either Mike or John, I have two questions. First, in regard to setup, the rough is what it is, and all the players are saying you can't really get out with much more than a wedge. So is the key -- what is -- how would you describe the philosophy regarding pin placements? Do you have to leave them somewhat accessible because the greens are so sloped?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Well, Winged Foot -- in letting Winged Foot be Winged Foot, Winged Foot is narrow. And our U.S. Open DNA is about placing a premium on accuracy off the teeing area. We think that's important. We think that premium by driving a player to drive his ball into the fairway and hit his approach shot from the fairway

onto these magnificent putting green complexes and keeping the ball below the hole is key.

So it's really not about what the rough entails, it's about getting the ball in the fairway. And I think we have tried to present this in a way where that narrowness is there, but we have also -- we're using rough heights three to five inches. As we've said all along, that's been our plan. We're right there. That the more off line you are, the more penalty you're going to face.

And one of the differences I would say from June to September is there are no fans trampling rough outside the rope lines here this week. And there are no grandstands in which you can knock it into and get a free drop in a drop zone. So beware, if you get it outside the rope lines this week, it's going to be significant.

But that's just kind of where we are, and I think we have set it up in a good way with width in various rough heights that will present a good test.

Q. Mike, I think you might be the best for this, but when you talk about working with the state to keep the course here, how close did you come to having to move it, and was there a pivotal point in those negotiations that made the difference? And were you worried that if you moved it someplace else, COVID would catch up later in the country?

MIKE DAVIS: Yeah, that's a complex question. What I will tell you is that soon after in that early part of March when we knew this country had a problem, the commissioners of the different tours, the European Tour, the LPGA Tour, and the PGA TOUR, along with the organizations, the leaderships of the organizations that run the Majors, we got together on a very regular basis, via phone, and worked through really a calendar for the rest of the year.

And to be very transparent with you, we thought we were going to be playing the U.S. Open in December in Los Angeles. We were that close. It really wasn't until the day before we went public with the schedule that we realized that the R&A's Open across the pond couldn't be played in September, which gave us an opportunity to play in September at this wonderful, storied golf course.

And, you know, your point about kind of coronavirus following -- going up and down in certain areas, we thought about that. There was a period of time, John will tell you, that we thought we were going to have limited spectators here at Winged Foot.

And the state, as I say, and the county, the town of Mamaroneck, the members at Winged Foot had just been

wonderful, but it really -- it wasn't until several weeks out that we just realized there was no way to do this in a safe manner.

And, listen, at the end of it, while we want spectators here, it's the millions of people around the world that have an opportunity to watch this, but it's also those 144 players getting to play for that coveted trophy and that Jack Nicklaus Gold Medal, that's what really counts and that's what history is going to remember.

JOHN BODENHAMER: Can I follow that with a couple things. I think that's really well said by Mike. I think really looking back at our journey we have come through the last several months, a couple of key moments for me, and this is important, I think.

We were really -- I'll never forget it. We were sitting in our conference room, our Merion Conference Room at Golf House on March 13th, several of us, and the world began to shut down. Our phones were blowing up, the NCAA, the NBA, the NHL, everything. We all experienced it. It's one of those days you'll never forget. I never will.

But there were a few things along the way that kind of brought us here. One was we had some wonderful medical advisors who said: Be patient, because what is a hotspot now may not be a hotspot later in the year. And we followed that, and it paid off.

And a couple of other things. As we sat in that room on March 13th, we determined that we would have a few primary objectives.

Number one, health and safety would guide every single decision we would make. Health and safety for our players, our fans, our staff, all of our stakeholders. That was number one. It fueled every decision since.

Secondly, we wanted to crown as many USGA champions as we could.

And, third, our intention was always first to play at Winged Foot Golf Club. Mike said, rightly so, we looked at every scenario, but we knew what Winged Foot was, and we wanted to be here. And when that September date came, I can tell you Mike and I looked at each other: Let's go. Let's do this.

BETH MAJOR: Another question for you. With the absence of spectators, you mentioned this earlier and the impact outside the ropes, what measure are in place to assist competitors with balls that will find their way into the rough?

JOHN BODENHAMER: That's an interesting question. That's something we thought, put a lot of thought into, and we have -- we have got a good game plan. It's not entirely different from what we normally would do for a U.S. Open with volunteers, and we call them stationary marshals or ball spotters, that will be strategically positioned at certain parts of the course.

We have done research in the practice rounds leading up as to where balls are going. We have actually charted that. We know where the more difficult areas of some of the rough grass is. So we're positioning people that way.

We have got about a dozen or more bodies on every single long hole. We have got somebody signalling from the tee into the fairway, and we have got people up on the hole. We have even gone to the extent of bringing in some of the wonderful Winged Foot Golf Club caddies who are doing this on a daily basis when they're here, and they know this golf course better than anybody.

We feel great about the opportunity we have given to find golf balls this year, and we're going to do a great job of it.

Q. Dan, from a TV production standpoint, do you know if it will be shot any differently, from a video or audio standpoint, without spectators? Are you focusing on anything different because the spectators aren't here this year?

DAN HICKS: I think from a television perspective, I think what we have been seeing throughout the summer of golf coming back in the middle of June, I think that we're picking up more audio than we even used to, even with our furry mics right there to pick up whoever we happen to pick up, caddie, player conversation. So we're picking up a lot more of that. I think it's the job of the announcers to lay out so we can hear that kind of thing.

From a visual standpoint, nothing really new, other than the fact that we're going to see different vistas here than we have ever seen before. This place has been absolutely opened up. So Winged Foot is going to be seen like it's never been seen before at a big championship like this.

So if you look back at 2006, it is entirely different. So not a lot of new innovations necessarily, we have the tracers that everybody loves that are going to be able to sit there and see where these balls are going. But it's just going to be -- from our standpoint, from a production standpoint, it's going to be like the mantra these guys have been talking about, we're going to let Winged Foot be Winged Foot and let the drama come to us on Sunday.

BETH MAJOR: Another question for Mike. You discussed

earlier the need -- you know how important U.S. Open revenue is for the association and for the game. Can you talk a little bit about the impact having a championship without spectators here on site this week will have.

MIKE DAVIS: Yeah, Beth, there is a big impact because if you think about the revenues, much of the revenue of a U.S. Open comes in from broadcasts and digital right fees, not only domestically but internationally. It's shown in, I don't know, what was it a couple hundred countries a year, Navin, something like that?

But there's obviously millions from admissions, there's merchandise on site, corporate hospitality. And we won't see those this year. So our revenues will indeed be down, but I will say this, that the USGA is very solid financially. We have always been conservative about our monies. And at the end of the day, we believe our monies are the game's monies.

We do -- at the end of the day, we're asking ourselves, if we're going to spend a dollar on something, how do we do it? Junior golf, turf grass research, running championships, governance programs, internships, doing things to make the game, as Craig was saying, more accessible.

So it's a really important year. So we know our revenues are going to be down this year. But at the end of it, we just felt, for reasons we said before, it was critical to play the championship and allow these players, and we're so happy to be here at Winged Foot, to see this great golf course. And so we're -- listen, when it's all said and done, we feel very blessed.

And the last comment I'll just make is at the game as a whole on a recreational level, you know, it's great, because I think that we have seen it across the country, other countries have seen it, that you quickly realize that golf is a way that you can recreate. You can safely socialize. You can get exercise. And we are seeing numbers of rounds up everywhere in the country, around the world. And a lot of new golfers have been introduced to the game. Lapsed golfers have come back. Families are playing together.

And so, listen, there's not a lot to cheer about with COVID, but in one sense it has had some nice things with the game of golf. So we're pleased.

BETH MAJOR: Along those lines, we actually have another question around the handicap system. There's been an effort over the past few years to simplify the rules, which has been very well received. Many golfers seem to find the handicap system complicated as well. Can you imagine a simpler system? For instance, you couldn't make worse than a triple bogey, a quadruple bogey. Can

you imagine any dramatic changes to the handicap system that might have any widespread effect?

MIKE DAVIS: Well, Beth, you start with the premise that one of the wonderful things about the game of golf is it's a game of a lifetime but additionally, and compare this to other games. You can play golf with different skill levels on an equitable basis. And there's very few things, maybe bowling you can do that, but it's one of the -- one of the bedrocks of what makes our game so good.

What we have done with our sister organization, the R&A, is over the last several years we have come up with a worldwide handicap system. And it's based on the USGA handicapping system. We have made improvements to our system. And, listen, at its very essence, to be able to go around the world and play on an equitable basis with people from different countries, to be able to have golf courses rated the same way, is really what's important.

And I do believe with this new system it is simpler, it's easier to understand, and we're already seeing the effects of it. In fact, we're seeing the number of rounds, people submitting for handicap scores in this country up substantially this year.

BETH MAJOR: Question for Dan. How does it affect your experience in the booth to not have fans? And on the other hand, how does knowing the course so well help when you're calling this championship?

DAN HICKS: Well, I'll take the second question first. It's a big relief because a lot of times we're in scramble mode, especially if we're at a venue that we're not too familiar with.

So that has been a real comfort level for me to actually give Gary Koch and Paul Azinger and some of the other guys -- Bones on the ground -- just a little bit of advice, here and there.

I didn't play the game for a living, you would never go in that direction, but you can certainly say, hey, listen, I've hit it in all the bad places here. I know where you don't want to hit it, and I can relay that information, I think, in a pretty confident way.

But I think that from a broadcast without spectators, we have done a few already, we did the U.S. Amateur, which was an unbelievable experience. And, again, the U.S. Amateur doesn't have the crowds of a U.S. Open, typically, but it still has that intimate kind of environment.

I found that there wasn't too much difference there. If you tell the story, you let the stories come to you and you react

to what you're seeing, kind of like a fan at home, that's who we're broadcasting to.

So we want to let them know when we're excited, but at the same time a championship of this magnitude is different. And I think you just have to kind of see where you're at on Sunday, first of all, what kind of things happen.

But I've definitely not wrestled with it, but definitely thought about it. And I think in the end I'm just going to kind of be myself and be that person that's maybe watching at home and react to it.

We had a couple of unbelievable finishes in the recent FedExCup playoffs which were pretty cool, and I think with the atmosphere that we're going to have at Winged Foot, with significant amount of members on the course, there's going to be a little bit of atmosphere. And so if they take time off from maybe searching for somebody's ball and they look over their shoulder and somebody made a long 60-footer, that they can give a little clap. I think you're going to have a little bit more of an atmosphere here with that.

BETH MAJOR: Great. Terrific. A few more questions.

Q. Mike or John, has the reception and kind of the reaction that you've gotten from the membership from the leadership here led you to believe that the gap between visits to Winged Foot might be shrinking?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Well, I can't predict the future, we can't predict the future, but I will say this, with all that we have come through this year, it's been really, it's really highlighted the great partnership we have with this club here at Winged Foot Golf Club.

I can remember really working through a postponement when we began to talk about that earlier this spring, and I don't think this club has left any stone unturned, from keeping their golf course in premier condition through an incredibly hot summer and a busy membership, to really adapting to a no-fans U.S. Open, all the testing protocols, and just, really, their spirits, the club's spirits, leadership's spirits have been tremendous.

This is not what they signed up for. And it's just been a real testament to perseverance on Winged Foot's part, and we could not be more grateful. And I assure you that will be recognized within the USGA.

BETH MAJOR: Two final questions. Mike, do you envision other golf courses becoming anchor sites, and is there a timeline for that decision?

MIKE DAVIS: So here's what I would say on that. As I said, the USGA did research, we talked to a lot of players, we talked to past champions, and there was a consistent theme that they want to go to our greatest U.S. Open sites and they want to go there more often.

So really John and team started first with Pinehurst working on that. So I think let's let the future play out, but there are some treasured sites, as John has said. We have got Nick Price, who was a world No. 1 on our Board of Directors and sits on our Championship Committee, and he has said, you know, it does matter where you win your U.S. Open. And I think we, John and team, all of us took that to heart. And so that's what we're looking at right now. So as they say, stay tuned.

BETH MAJOR: One final question for you, Mike. Has anything you've seen this year accelerated or intensified the USGA's position on distance? And do you have any idea, can you speak to the timeline after March 2021?

MIKE DAVIS: Sure, Beth. Well, listen, in February of this year we put out a two-year study, what we called a Distance Insights Report. It was a large set of data, looking at literally over a hundred years of what has been the causes of increased distance and really what have been the effects, how have golf courses been affected, how have -- how is the game played now versus how was it played in yesteryear. And it was really a very factual data set.

And then on top of that, the USGA and the R&A really gave our perspectives. And the short of it is we do feel that while distance clearly has been increasing for more than a century, and what's followed is, for more than a century, golf courses have been impacted. And we're not talking just PGA TOUR courses, we're talking about -- because there's long-hitting players at virtually all golf courses -- and clearly that's affected the cost of the game, the resources. If you're building a new course, you need more land. It's affected the pace of play. It's affected how much water gets used.

And at the very heart of this, the USGA and the R&A do believe that, long-term, we think something needs to be done about distance, because we believe it's going to continue to increase. All the data would suggest that. We don't think that's in the best interests of the game, but we also acknowledge that there are a lot of different sectors within the industry. There's the golf courses that are really the things that have been impacted the most, that have taken the brunt, that have had to spend billions of dollars to continue to change because of what's happened with distance.

But then there's the other things, there's the elite players, there's the recreational players, there's the, you know, individual golfer. We want to make sure the game is enjoyable. We want to make sure it's sustainable. We didn't get here overnight. It took over a hundred years. And our belief is, if we collectively as an industry look at this and say, what is in the best interests of the game long-term, we're going to get there.

So essentially what we did when COVID came out is we have just delayed this project, but we believe -- or in the first quarter of next year we'll put out what's called an Area of Interest Study, which really are the topics we want to engage with the industry. We want to engage with elite players, with equipment manufacturers, with golfers, with golf courses. We want to do it on a global basis and then continue to look at this. Because, again, at the heart of this is what's in the best interests of the game long-term.

BETH MAJOR: Great. Thanks so much, Mike. Dan, John, Mike, Craig, Navin, thank you all so much for being with us here today and to all of you here in person and the WebEx around the country, we very much appreciate it. Look forward to a wonderful 2020 120th U.S. Open Championship here at Winged Foot Golf Club.

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