

LPGA Media Conference

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USA

J.D Sterba

Craig Kessler

Vicki Goetze-Ackerman

Press Conference



J.D. STERBA: Hey, everyone, welcome. Thank you very much for making the time today. We really appreciate it. We've got an exciting announcement as you all have heard. We're here with our incoming commissioner Craig Kessler and LPGA player president Vicki Goetze-Ackerman. Vicki is a member of the LPGA board of directors and was a member of the board search committee to recruit our next commissioner, Craig, and we're really excited to introduce Craig to all of you and to make both him and Vicki available for some questions in just a bit.

Quick housekeeping note. This meeting is being recorded and transcribed. Both will be available later today in the online LPGA media center, and you'll get an email from Christina about that.

VICKI GOETZE-ACKERMAN: Thank you so much for being here and sharing our story today. I can't tell you how excited we are as an organization and honored I am to be the one to get to introduce Craig Kessler today.

As you all know, we started this process back in January, and you could see that we were deliberate and we did take our time. But we really wanted to make sure that we reached out to all of our stakeholders and get as much feedback on the attributes and the things that they were looking for and thought were important for our next commissioner.

Because as you all know, all of us work together, and in order for that to happen and move forward, we need to be on the same team. We thought having them part of this process was super important moving forward.

We heard over and over three different things: One, build trust and partnerships. For the person, that would be the number one thing to do.

The next is to have someone that was visionary to lead us into the future.

And the last was someone that was energetic, had drive and passion, and clearly Craig Kessler has all those things. There's not one person that has met Craig through this process that hasn't been wowed.

I can tell you that we could not be more excited as an organization to have him part of the team and part of our family, because when you become associated with the LPGA, you are part of our family, and we are so happy to have you, Craig, and your children and wife to be a part of it, too.

Without further ado, I'd like to turn it over to Craig Kessler, the 10th commissioner of the LPGA Tour.

CRAIG KESSLER: Vicki, thank you. I am incredibly honored and humbled to have this opportunity. What an amazing organization with such a rich history, and frankly so much potential in front of us, and I couldn't be more excited.

Anytime somebody gets the chance to lead and make a difference on a scale like this, this is the type of opportunity people dream about. And to have that opportunity, again, I'm just incredibly grateful and humbled to get going with you and with the rest of the team.

What I thought I'd do, for everyone on the call, is first start by thanking you for making the time. I think one of the things that is just so critical to the future success of the LPGA is telling our story to the world, and specifically telling the story of the players who do an amazing job week in and week out.

The more we can share that story, the more successful we'll be. So thank you all for making the time to be with us today.

Here in a nutshell is what drives me and what I hope we can accomplish as an organization. Over time I hope people look at what's happening at the LPGA and they say to themselves, oh, my goodness, something incredible is happening with the LPGA and I have to be a part of it,



whether it's our players, whether it's existing sponsors or prospective sponsors, fans.

That's how we want our stakeholders to feel about what's happening at the LPGA.

In order to get there, and I say this based on dozens and dozens of conversations I've had over the last several months during this interview process, there are four major pillars that will be the building blocks to help us achieve that vision.

The first pillar, the first building block is around building trust, trust with our players, as Vicki mentioned, trust with our sponsors, trust with our fans, and trust with our team.

The second major pillar is around being visible and making sure that the incredible stars the LPGA has who leave it on the course week in and week out are actually visible, and that goes even beyond just the broadcasts.

The third pillar is around building fans, and I'll tell you, there is a fundamental difference -- today, many people watch the LPGA and we want people to root for the LPGA and the incredible players that are on Tour week in and week out.

Then the fourth and final pillar is around building a financial future that looks even better for the next 75 years than it has for the last. Everything that we do as a team will be filtered through those four pillars, with the goal, again, of creating an organization where all of our stakeholders both current and prospective say to themselves something magical is happening at the LPGA and I need to be a part of it and I need to be a part of it now.

With that, Vicki, and everyone on the call, incredibly excited to be here, and I can't wait for the opportunity ahead of us.

J.D. STERBA: Craig, you've shared a little bit with some of us on staff about telling your family about this opportunity. Can you tell everyone else how that went and that experience for you?

CRAIG KESSLER: Happy to. So my wife and I have three boys. They're five, seven and nine. Thankfully avid golfers. They love the sport, in part because they grew up in hitting bays at a TopGolf from the time they were very young.

Recently my wife and I sat our three boys dad and we said, hey, mom and dad are going talk to you like adults tonight. We want to tell you about an amazing opportunity that dad has to be the commissioner of the LPGA, and we want to

hear what you think.

So we walked them through the opportunity, and at the end here's what happened. Our nine year old son asked about a dozen qualifying questions to make sure this is, in fact, the right opportunity for his dad.

Our seven-year old looked at me and he said, but dad, you're a boy and I'm a boy, so why don't you just do boy sports. Which by the way, provided the most incredible teaching moment and we shared with them, look if all we did in life were things that looked like us, that sounded like us, we're sort of missing the plot and leaving so much richness in life on the table.

Then arguably most importantly, our five-year-old who we have told we'd be taking the boys out of school from time to time so they could go on Tour, including to Asia and Europe. Our five-year-old looked at me and said, but dad, do they sell chocolate milk in Asia?

It just goes to show you that different stakeholders have different concerns, and it's certainly no different in the Kessler family.

J.D. STERBA: Vick, one for you. I know this was a really rigorous and extensive process. Can you share a little bit more about what made Craig stand out.

VICKI GOETZE-ACKERMAN: First of all, I want to make clear we're going to have chocolate milk out, so just let me know when the family is there. Not all of our players drink it, but we will have it at all of our events from now on.

You know, it's interesting, we went through this process and we had an opportunity to speak with Craig so many times. It's a little embarrassing to say with Craig sitting right there, but we go into the interview and I meet him and I walk out and I'm like, what did I miss, like he's too perfect, like this is just too great.

His passion -- he came in and was prepared. He was prepared and understood that the LPGA is more than just the Tour. We have the foundation, we have the professionals, Girls Golf, amateurs, and he also came in and knew what he didn't know, and he asked questions.

His curiosity was amazing, and you could tell that he cared about each aspect of our organization and each person that was part of it, whether it was the players, the professionals, our staff, our stakeholders, sponsors.

Every one of those people were important to the equation of success, and you could feel it, and you left the room and you were energized. It was like, let's go.



I think when you have every single person come out of a room at different times and different meetings and different encounters and have the same feedback, you know you've got the right person.

Craig is the right person at this moment for us, and I can't tell you, Craig, we are just elated and can't wait for July 15th.

I think we've talked a few more times since before now, but I know it'll get more, and welcome. Thank you.

CRAIG KESSLER: Great to be here.

Q. Craig, first of all, obviously you're in the golf world, but as an outsider to the LPGA before taking this job, I'm wondering what sort of things did you like about the Tour and what sort of challenges have you seen?

CRAIG KESSLER: Thanks for making the time. Great to meet you, and obviously really appreciate you being here. I've been a fan of the LPGA for a long time, even though I haven't formally worked there.

I remember becoming friends with Anna Nordqvist a while back over a beer and a round of TopGolf in Augusta, Georgia, and getting to know Brittany Lincicome playing in a pro-am together and realizing she's a mother of two, a wife, a lover of dogs, and most importantly a great human being.

One other quick anecdote, playing in the KPMG Women's PGA Championship at Baltusrol with Aditi Ashok and she had her dad on the bag caddying, and together they told the story about the sacrifices her family had made so a young Indian girl could play on the LPGA Tour.

I could go on and on about these stories.

The point in sharing them with you is that what I've been a fan of are our players and our stars who all have amazing stories, and I think when the world hears those stories and we are successful at -- back to the pillars I described before -- building visibility for these women, the world will fall in love even more than ever before with the LPGA.

Q. I know you're the 10th commissioner of the LPGA Tour but third in the last five years, along with Mollie and Liz. How do you plan to stabilize the role?

CRAIG KESSLER: It goes back to the strategy I described before. I think if the team -- and the team I use in the broadest sense. It's the players, it's the sponsors, it's the staff, it's the media. If together we're aligned on a handful

of very clear priorities that ladder up to a vision, the future is incredibly bright.

By the way, these principles apply to all organizations, not just the LPGA, and we will run this organization like a business because that's what it is.

Q. We've seen sort of an incredible opportunity with women's sports right now. You've seen the TV, sponsorship, purses, all these kind of things, soccer, WNBA, for example. How do you plan to take the LPGA forward and ride that wave of this resurgence of women's sports?

CRAIG KESSLER: The resurgence in women's sports is something that ought to be celebrated, and it's wonderful that you and others recognize it. I also think it's wonderful that there actually is quite a bit within the LPGA to celebrate. 75 years of history, an organization that frankly transformed women's sports more broadly, and by the way, you're right to note that even in golf, the purses have risen dramatically over the last year and change.

So those are things worth celebrating.

In terms of your question, how do we take it to the next level, it's right back to the vision and the four pillars I was describing before, and if we're successful at building trust, building visibility, building real fans and solidifying the financial foundation, I'm very bullish on the future for the LPGA.

Q. Is there a player that your sons are most excited to meet?

CRAIG KESSLER: Well, I'll tell you, our boys, as I mentioned, are five, seven and nine. Our LEGO collection is extensive to say the least, and they've already picked out the LEGO set they plan to bring Nelly at the KPMG in just a few weeks.

Q. Which one is that?

CRAIG KESSLER: I can't tell you. It's a surprise.

Q. My question is about one of those four pillars that you mentioned, which is visibility, and when it comes to improving the actual product of the LPGA Tour from an entertainment perspective, what are some specific actionable items that you plan to implement in the next couple of months or the next year? Is there anything specific that you are wanting to put in place immediately now that you're commissioner of the LPGA to improve the LPGA product?



CRAIG KESSLER: I think it's such an important question because product is critical, and if the product is optimized, amazing things will follow. In the spirit of being vulnerable, I haven't even started yet.

So one of the first things I want to do when I begin is sit down with the team and learn from their experiences. I'd like to understand what have they tried, what are the experiments they've run, what works and what doesn't, and once I have a sense for the landscape, I think I'll be able to give a much, much more detailed sort of roadmap for how we make sure the product continues to improve for years to come.

Q. I wanted to touch on the global aspect, the global reach of the LPGA. We have Lorena this week, very involved in the event in Mexico. Annika is always involved. I think they're good examples of women -- countries that follow their women golfers and follow women's golf sometimes more than they follow men's golf or men golfers. I wonder how can you leverage that?

CRAIG KESSLER: The global nature of the LPGA Tour is arguably one of our most valuable assets. The fact that we're already in Asia, we're already in Europe and we're not starting from scratch is a massive opportunity for us, and the more we can lean into fans.

And I love that you are using the word "fans," this is so important, the more we can lean into fans around the globe who are rooting for these incredible athletes week in and week out and the more we can lean on sponsors who care deeply about the LPGA's mission, the stronger we will be.

You said it well, and I can't wait to get going around the world, not just in the United States.

Q. You mentioned the fans and you mentioned the sponsors. It looks like the growth of the LPGA has been mainly on global sponsors, on international partners, no? And then you have an opportunity with the LET to create a strong partnership. Is that something that is in your mind? Is that something that you're planning to do?

CRAIG KESSLER: Again, as I mentioned earlier, I haven't started yet, and I've got a long list of topics and themes to explore with the team, and that one is certainly on the list.

But here's what I will say. Anybody who's willing to have a conversation with the LPGA about elevating our athletes, elevating the sport and elevating the LPGA, they will be welcomed with open arms, and I can't wait to begin those discussions.

Q. You touched a little bit on this, but a lot of C-suite executives when they start they go on these 100-day listening tours. 100 days from July takes us into October, which is almost the end of the LPGA Tour season. Obviously the LPGA Tour is more than just the sum of individual players. There's tournaments and sponsors and there's growing the game and there's so many other things. Is that kind of your plan, as well, once you step into the office, or what does your first 100 days look like do you think?

CRAIG KESSLER: Great to meet you, and likewise look forward to meeting you in person hopefully very soon. Let me start by saying this: I have an unbelievable amount of respect, administration and appreciation for the search committee that Vicki was on, that John Veihmeyer led, that all the player directors were a part of.

And the beauty of the process that led is that it gave me a chance to listen and learn over a pretty lengthy period of time.

In addition to that, I've had, as I mentioned, dozens and dozens of phone calls, not just with folks inside the golf world, and there have been a lot of those conversations, but also with folks across the sports landscape, the WNBA, Major League Baseball, the NFL, and, and, and. The beauty of that is that some very clear patterns have emerged.

Respectfully, there really isn't time to go on a 100-day listening tour. We have to come out of the blocks strong, and because of the several-month-long process I've been through, a lot of those patterns that have emerged will lead us down a path, and that path links back to the pillars described earlier.

I'm going to say them again: It's building trust, building visibility, building fans, and building a solid financial foundation, and everything we do is going to link back to those four things.

Last thing I'll say, one of the characteristics of leadership that is absolutely critical is the ability to be vulnerable, and as a part of vulnerability it means approaching every situation with an open heart and an open mind.

So while we won't necessarily go on a formal "listening tour" for 100 days, we will always be listening, we will always be learning, and we will always have conversations with folks who can help us further our mission.

Q. Just to follow that, speaking of all the people that you've been able to connect with, did you have a

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

preexisting relationship with Jay Monahan of the PGA TOUR or is that going to be a new thing that you'll start with when you start in July?

CRAIG KESSLER: The beauty of having spent a lot of time in golf starting at TopGolf in 2016 is that I've had a chance to meet virtually every major stakeholder within the golf landscape and build real authentic relationships with many of those folks.

Q. I appreciate you sharing those four pillars. I'm mostly just curious to understand how you measure them, like how very literally you measure watching versus rooting and things like that.

CRAIG KESSLER: Yeah, it's a great question. Part of what we need to do as a leadership team once I join on July 15, which is my first official day, is to take a step back and say, okay, recognizing what we're trying to do is create an organization that everybody wants to be a part of and support now, and recognizing these four pillars are critical, there's two major questions to ask.

One is what are the initiatives underneath each of those that we're going to be laser focused on, and two, how are we going to measure success. That is a wildly collaborative exercise that takes a team to answer. It's far bigger than just one person.

I will tell you I've used a very similar framework to figuring out kind of what an organization is going to focus on and how it will measure success at other places, and it works.

But it takes a team, and it is far bigger than just one person, and as soon as we've got more detail once I'm in the role, we'll report back.

Q. Just wanted to ask, is there any specific area or aspects of the Tour in which you perhaps see room for improvement, and how do you perhaps plan to implement those initiatives?

CRAIG KESSLER: It's a great question. Let me tell you what I learned from the players as I went through the process. I think the number one theme is making sure that the players have a remarkable relationship with their commissioner and the staff. That is priority number one, and there are examples of where that's happening in spades. I plan to come in and continue the momentum.

I want to actually give a special shout-out to Liz Moore, who I think has done a remarkably graceful job as the interim commissioner, and the way the players talk about her is inspiring. So that's one area.

I'll tell you another theme that's come up quite a bit is around schedule and optimizing the schedule so that it makes sense. It's rational. It allows our athletes to perform at the highest levels and to recover as opposed to zigzagging the country or the world.

Again, I mentioned I'm not even on day one and I've got a long list of things to approach with our landscape team when I start. That will certainly make it to the top of the list.

Q. If I could just ask a quick follow-up. Obviously Saudi Arabia and the Public Investment Fund has made a large commitment to golf on the men's side of the game. For the women's aspect of the game, is that something you'd perhaps be open to having discussions about or exploring?

CRAIG KESSLER: Any organization that wants to elevate our athletes in the LPGA, I can't wait to have a discussion with folks who are willing to do it.

Q. Just to localize this a little bit, how long have you lived in Dallas?

CRAIG KESSLER: Since 2016.

Q. You came for TopGolf, okay. And will you relocate to Florida now? Or will you be based out of Dallas?

CRAIG KESSLER: Yeah, our family is settled in Dallas. That's where we plan to be, at least for the foreseeable future.

And I will be wherever the job is. I will be out on Tour with the players. I will be all over the world with our sponsors. I'll be in Daytona Beach with our team. That's our game plan.

Q. As you know, Dallas is a very travel-friendly place; you can get anywhere from here. To follow up, outside of this conversation request Derek Sprague recently, there's been a lot of leadership change in golf globally. What do you feel like you -- and you have preexisting relationships. What do you feel like you bring to the table specifically from your point of view? Again, I know you have preexisting relationships.

CRAIG KESSLER: Well, let me -- appreciate the question, and getting to be talking to somebody who's a fellow Dallas fan. Let me start with this. I want to express my appreciation to Derek and to the PGA of America. They've been incredibly graceful throughout this process. I've known to have an amazing amount of respect for Derek Sprague.



The passion and care that he brings to the PGA of America will make a difference for that organization, and that is a relationship and friendship that will endure for many, many years to come.

In terms of what I can bring to the LPGA, I think there are a couple things. One are all of the preexisting relationships inside and outside of golf, and I can't tell you the 700 messages I've received since this morning with people saying, what can we do to help, we can't wait to get involved, we're massive fans of the LPGA, let us know what we can do to support you. So that's one thing.

I think two is a deep, deep respect and appreciation for our players.

Three is a sense of positive energy and teamwork, and I think -- I'll say it time and time again, this job is so much bigger than what one person can accomplish. It's going to require the players to lean in, our staff to come together, and folks who have megaphones to do their part in telling the amazing stories of our athletes, and my hope is that I can help facilitate that process gracefully and elevate the organization to the next level.

J.D. STERBA: Thank you, Vicki and Craig, for the time. I want to give you the chance to offer any closing comments.

VICKI GOETZE-ACKERMAN: I just wanted to say thank you to all the candidates that put their name in the hat for this position. We were overwhelmed and humbled by the number of people that wanted to be a part of the organization and are passionate about the LPGA.

I also want to thank Liz Moore. She did an amazing job and is doing an amazing job and will continue doing an amazing job side by side with Craig, and our team has really stepped over during this time of interim between commissioners and we have not stood still and we are continuing to move forward, and without the great leadership of Liz and all of our team, we wouldn't be here today in this situation.

To Craig, again, welcome to our organization. It's going to be a great run, and we are super excited. Thank you to all of you again for being here and telling our story to the world, which we are very much excited about and looking forward to the future.

CRAIG KESSLER: Vicki, thanks. Just to add on to your wonderful comments throughout this entire conversation, let me start by thanking Vicki, John Veihmeyer, the entire search committee for putting their faith and trust in me. I take this opportunity incredibly seriously, and I'm just really fired up to be a part of it.

I'd also say my wife, our three boys and I were over the moon and we're all in, and you won't just see me on the road. I can't wait for you to meet them and for you to feel how excited we as a family are for this opportunity.

Then finally to the players, I hope they know they have a commissioner who cares deeply who's going to work his tail off to take this organization to the next level and to tell their stories because they deserve to be told, and I think when the world hears them, they will fall even more in love with the LPGA.

J.D. STERBA: Thank you for making the time to join us today. The video and transcript will be available shortly on the online media center. Thanks, everybody.

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