

Diamond Resorts Tournament of Champions

Wednesday, January 20, 2021

Lake Buena Vista, Florida, USA

Tranquilo Golf Course

Aaron Stewart

Press Conference

Q. Aaron, talk about the field. Who are the new celebrities this year? Who do you think has a really good shot at winning the celebrity field this year?

AARON STEWART: Yeah, I think one of our most notable additions has been in the news a lot recently with her promotion to president of the International Golf Federation, but Annika Sorenstam. I don't think there is any way you can count her out of the tournament.

The cool thing about this event is that it continues to grow, and we have been capturing more interest from a lot of people. And so each year one of the hardest things we have to do is go through and send out those celebrity invites.

So we did have a tournament committee that kind of discusses who is interested in playing, and then we go down the list and determine who we're going to invite for this year.

A lot of returning friends of the program that have been here for a long time. Each year we get some new blood in the field and try and mix it up and have their shot at the title.

Q. What have you heard from this celebrities that they learn from the LPGA players playing alongside them?

AARON STEWART: Well, I think that's probably one of the biggest draws for them is being able to play alongside the LPGA pros. They're so impressed just how consistent they are. And the fact that you can get someone like Brian Urlacher, right, one of the most feared linebackers in the NFL playing alongside one of our LPGA professionals who may be half his size and a third of his weight, and she's knocking it 30 yards by them every hole.

When comes down to it, it's just the mechanics and how good they are and consistent they are. It goes both ways, because I know that a lot of the LPGA players, in speaking



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with them, they've been able to pick the brains of some of these guys and see how they've been able to deal with the pressure or how would you respond in this type of situation in your sport, whether it be baseball or basketball or football, whatever it is.

So I think there is a lot of give and take on both sides, and it's that combination that really makes this tournament special.

Q. Lastly, Smoltz is back-to-back defending champion. Have you talked to him? Do you think a three-peat is tough?

AARON STEWART: A three-peat would be quite impressive. I did get a chance to play with him about a month ago when he was down in town for our media day press conference.

He's playing great, so I think there is no way that you can really count him out. He's always going to be in there.

I think guys like Mardy Fish and Mark Mulder, will be there. Annika. You got to expect her to be somewhere around the top.

It's going to be really exciting.

Q. So we just want some info on the production value. Walk us through the process a little. How long does it take to plan and execute this tournament?

AARON STEWART: Oh, man. This year has been especially challenging. You know, after last year's event prior to the COVID pandemic we thought we had it pretty well wired. The layout of the course, we've been doing this since 2013. This now our third year partnering with the LPGA, so we thought we had it pretty much down.

And then throw in a global pandemic and we're right back to square one. So we have gone through about a dozen different contingency plans, everything from the layout on the course to whether or not we're going to be able to have fans in attendance this year, all the way down to the safety procedures we're enforcing this year.

The biggest thing for us was for everyone to come out, be

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able to have a good time, and for us to be able to keep everyone safe doing it.

Q. Last question. What can viewers at home expect to see different this year from last year if they tune in to NBC or the Golf Channel?

AARON STEWART: I think what the viewers at home will see is just a lot more engagement. It is going to be a little bit different in the celebrations. You know, we encouraging the players, although everyone has been COVID-19 tested, we are encouraging the social distancing.

So you won't probably see as many hugs and selfies ease being taken, but it's still going to be the exciting, electric atmosphere that is the Diamond Resorts Tournament of Champions.

There is still going to be that great relationship between the LPGA pros and our celebrity participants, so it's going to be really exciting and I hope that the viewers tune in.

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