

Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

Tuesday, January 16, 2024

Orlando, Florida, USA

Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

Landon Donovan

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us, Landon Donovan, to the Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions. This is your first time playing. How did you learn about the tournament? Who talked you into it? Tell us a bit about how you got here.

LANDON DONOVAN: Well, starts about a year ago in the little down we live in in San Diego. I joined a country club not knowing my life was about to get ruined from then on. I started playing much more golf than I ever have. We have a really cool Friday golf group that golfs every Friday, and one of the people who golfs in it is a Brian Baumgartner, who is also known as Kevin from The Office to some people. I had never seen the show so I didn't know who he was.

We started talking, getting to know each other. He's an amazing human being. He likes to travel and play in different tournaments. He said, Landon, the one tournament you have to play is the HGV tournament in Orlando. I'm like, okay, what's that? He said, it's the LPGA Tournament of Champions. It's really fun. They have events every night. You hang out with people. Get to play golf. It's a great party.

Okay, if you can get me in, I'm there. He was able to help facilitate it, so happy to be here.

Q. Have you ever played Lake Nona or played Florida golf at all?

LANDON DONOVAN: Probably played Florida golf twice in my teens. Live in Sarasota when I was with the under-17 National Team, so we played a little bit at that time. Never properly played Florida golf. Been on the website for weeks looking at the course trying to figure out how I'm going to play it even though it doesn't matter, I'm still going to be bad.

But it's a beautiful course. Being here in the flesh, seeing 18, it's stunning and going to be a really fun week.



Q. Any LPGA players or celebrities that you kind of hope you can play with? I don't know. We can look at your Thursday group.

LANDON DONOVAN: Sure. I would be happy to play with any of them. There are a few of the girls that come around our club from time to time and work with people and take lessons. Just watching them strike the ball the way they -- just the way they visualize and plan out before they hit a shot and then the actual technique is really fun to watch.

I grew up watching Annika and admiring everything she did. If I just get the chance to meet her it will be a true honor for me. That's probably the one person I'm most hopeful to see.

Q. I think we can make that happen. Did you prepare for this like an MLS World Cup?

LANDON DONOVAN: Probably more, because when you play a sport for a long time you know how to do it. You've been doing it in my case since I was five years old. You can prepare physically, but when the games starts what is going to happen.

It's an unknown territory for a lot of people, especially for myself playing in a really organized event like this, so I'm really excited about it.

I'm not putting too much stress on it. I want to enjoy the week. I want to get invited back. I don't want to mess up any of the girls who are playing for something real. Mostly just watch the women play, enjoy that, and then have fun playing golf as well.

Q. Did you follow Reno in June, understand the vibe of this whole thing? Steph Curry is not here so maybe the celebrity field is a little open.

LANDON DONOVAN: Yeah, I get it. I talked to Brian Baumgartner a lot about the format, but really it's just a week, on our side, to have a lot of fun and kind of make sure you stay out of the way of the women who are competing for something real.

This is their livelihood, so you don't want to get in the way of that. If there is any way to enhance that and make that



more enjoyable for them, that's great. Otherwise, we just want to have fun, enjoy playing golf with a lot of really cool people, and then watch literally the best players in the world, best people in the world, do what they do.

It will be really special.

Q. I know you haven't played next to these ladies side by side yet, but hearing about this event, how unique it is that celebrities get to play with the ladies at the same time, how unique is that for you?

LANDON DONOVAN: I was trying to think if there was an equivalent in the soccer world, and is there is just not, because you're on the field in this intense environment, and having other people around would've thrown me for a total loop.

Tells you how much they are able to block everything out and just focus. The beauty of golf is that you have this really intense 10, 15, 20 second moment and then you get to walk for a couple minutes and just take it all in.

I'm sure every player, professional is different. Some probably like to chat a little; some probably want to focus on what they're doing. We'll feel that out. It's pretty cool -- will be pretty cool to see that up close. I geek out watching people who are really good at what they do perform.

I'm going to love that part of it.

Q. Come into this how would you say your golf or your confidence in your golf level is?

LANDON DONOVAN: It's getting there. I've only really started playing for about a year, so I'm still a work in progress.

But I love playing. I play three or four times a week. I practice a lot. I can't get enough of it, and it's probably going to be that way the rest of my life because there is no way of perfecting golf. You're always going to hit a bad shot. I'm certainly not going to make par on every hole the rest of my life. It makes it really fun because it's really a challenge.

For people who were near the top of their sport, it's really good to be really bad at something. It just keeps you driving all the time.

Q. Good luck this week.

LANDON DONOVAN: Thank you.

Q. I just like to ask you, I think you answered some of

this, but if you could expand a little bit more please about what you really enjoy most about being up close with the pro players and how does that have a positive affect on your game?

LANDON DONOVAN: Yeah, so Charlie Hoffman plays at our club. We get to play with him sometimes. Phil as well. Even when you're on the range -- Xander was there a few weeks back. It's really interesting to watch how effortless it is for them. Just tells you that it's years and years and years of practice.

But for them, a bad shot is three or four yards either side of the line they were hitting. For us it's 30 or 40 yards. So it's really the sound that they make and then being around the course with Charlie a few times you start to understand their mentality and how they view first of all the hole from the tee box, so they're thinking all the way into the hole from the tee box, whereas we're thinking hit a straight drive.

And how they look at the whole course in general and how they play it. That's really interesting. That's a much further down the line thought process for me. It's really cool to see how they process and implement that.

Q. I know you're new to the game of golf, but what goals have you set for yourself for this tournament? Do you see yourself playing in a lot more of these celebrity pro-am type tournaments in the future?

LANDON DONOVAN: Yeah, good question. I don't have any goals this week except to have fun, stay out of the way, get invited back, and hopefully make a few good shots.

This format is unique. I've tried to play a lot more stroke play at home because it just makes you a better player, but this format is unique. If you have a double, triple, quad, bogey, doesn't matter. You just move on to the next hole.

My goals, I have a standing bet with a guy, Sammy at our club in Rancho Santa Fe that I'll be a 1.7 index by the end of the year. I'm nowhere near that and I know I'm not going to reach it. I'm in in the 8s now. If you set goals like that and ends up four or five that's good and that's how you get better.

Ultimate goal one day is to break par, and not sure I'll get there, but I'll have fun trying.

Q. We just had Mardy in here who listed off the growth of how he's been able to be a fan now of the LPGA Tour through an event like this. What do you hope to gain from learning from the pros, and did you look up

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**any players in the field? Excited to meet anyone?
Anyone that really sticks out to you?**

LANDON DONOVAN: Well, first of all, anyone who's a champion I want to meet in anything they do. Like I said earlier though, Annika for me was such a legend. In my opinion, she transformed women's golf. At that time, the PGA TOUR was thriving, and then all of a sudden every week you would hear about this women, Annika, Annika, Annika, winning again, winning again, winning again, and it turned me onto the PGA TOUR (sic) so I started watching.

I have no doubt that this week I'm going to come out of this week being a fan of probably three, four, five of these women I get to play with. I will end up following the rest of my life. Just whether you meet them or talk to them, when you have a real connection then you can start to really root for people.

That's the fun part about sports. That connection of an amateur to a pro is unique, and grateful to be here.

Q. I think it's really interesting how we have seen this incredible boom of women's sports in general, including the LPGA Tour. What does mean to be a part of an event like this? Like you said, you'll be focused on having fun. But just to see the growth of what you heard from Brian about this event, what does that mean to you?

LANDON DONOVAN: I have a five-year-old daughter at home, and so the stories alone I will get to tell from this week will be inspiring to her. I was on FaceTime with her this morning. We were looking out from the hotel balcony and she said, daddy, when does the golf start? She knows I'm here on a golf trip. She plays golf a little bit with us. My wife and I go out and play.

When I come home and have stories and maybe some pictures and she gets to see some of that, it will inspire her. That's beautiful for me.

Q. Soccer has been a huge part of your life. The MLS training camp started this week. Orlando City is not very far from here. Oscar Pareja has a new contract. Give the locals here that are going to be following you this week a nutshell of what you think?

LANDON DONOVAN: Oscar has been a fantastic coach in this league for a long time, first with FC Dallas and now with Orlando. Fully deserving of being renewed. Without crazy superstar power in the last few years, they've been extremely successful.

It tells you everything you need to know about Oscar. He

did the same thing in Dallas. My guess would be that it's only a matter of time until they're winning another trophy. I know they won The Open Cup. Until they win an MLS Cup. He's done a fantastic job.

THE MODERATOR: Breaking news. I did get Thursday's pairings, and you're playing with Annika. And Cheyenne Knight.

LANDON DONOVAN: Did you just manipulate that?

THE MODERATOR: No. I promise you I did not.

LANDON DONOVAN: And Cheyenne? So no joke, id there were two I was probably going to want to be with it would probably be those two, so...

Let's go. All right. That's good news.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Landon.

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