

Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

Tuesday, January 16, 2024

Orlando, Florida, USA

Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

Aaron Stewart

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thank you Aaron Stewart for joining us, executive director of the Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions. Tell us a little bit about this week. It's the third year the LPGA has done this, the second year or third year at Lake Nona.

Tell us about what you're looking forward to this week and also some of the new faces we'll see.

AARON STEWART: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks, Liz. As you mentioned, this is our third year out here at beautiful Lake Nona Golf and Country Club. We previously had a three-year partnership with the LPGA, so this will be our sixth year total with them.

We couldn't be prouder about our relationship and our partnership with the LPGA. This event is a little bit different than the events that you'll see throughout the season, but it's a really fun way that we like to kick off the year and recognize the accomplishments of the players and what they have done to qualify to be here.

That's why you'll see some things a little bit out of the norm, such as the celebrity golfers, there is a wide range of ability on that side.

Music on the golf course with the DJ on the 18th hole and some of the other fun things that really kind of make this a little bit more relaxed and fun way to start the season.

Q. Tell us about the LPGA and the celebrity field. Obviously winners from the past two seasons and our defending champion Brooke Henderson is here, and Mardy Fish on the celebrity side with some new faces.

AARON STEWART: Yeah, absolutely. So we are really, really excited. This year we have the highest number of LPGA professionals in the field that we've ever had. Previously that number was 29 and we have 35 registered professionals as we stand today.



Thrilled to be able to have the tour represented in a little bit deeper field, but that means that there has also been a lot more first-time winners for the tour. I think last year set a record.

For those players that are here for the first time, we hope that we can put on a great experience for them and keep them coming back year after year.

Q. Aaron, it really is a cool event. Landon Donovan is playing for the first time and he said one of his dreams was to play with Annika, and Liz broke the news she got an early look at the pairings and he's playing with Annika. That's the cool part about this. What kind of reaction do you get from some celebrities when they play in these things?

AARON STEWART: That's a great question, and it really is one of the coolest aspects of this event, right? In our celebrity field we have athletes and entertainers. When you bring some of these former and current athletes that maybe we've got a lot of active MLB baseball players, NFL guys, obviously in-season for the NBA and NHL so limited there.

Put together some of these Hall of Fame professionals, the coolest aspect every year because they're literally blown away at the incredible talents that these women possess.

So for them to be kind of in a sense awestruck or starstruck so to speak when they themselves have accomplished so much in their career, it really helps to shine a light on just how skilled these players are out on the LPGA Tour.

Q. You talked about the LPGA players. A number of them, growing, but I know we talked to you in December how it's so hard for the celebrities to get in. Just the growth of this tournament, what have you seen over the last few years on the LPGA and also the celebrity field now?

AARON STEWART: That is definitely one of the hardest aspects. I mentioned this is your sixth year with the LPGA Tour but the tournament got started back in 2013, so we've had a lot of support from the celebrities over the years, have helped to grow the tournament into what it is today.



You know, it's kind of a double-edged sword so to speak. As the tournament continues to grow and get bigger, more people will want to get involved, and that's going to be less and less spots for some of those that have returned and competed for many years.

That's not something we take lightly. Definitely one of the hardest aspects of my job is having to go through that with our tournament committee and kind of finalize the last coveted celebrity spots.

That's kind of the burden of success, right? So that's something that we certainly appreciate and don't take lightly, but we hope that more and more celebrities will want to get involved in the future, and we hope that the LPGA Tour players continue to have a great experience this week and want to come back.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports