

Gainbridge LPGA at Boca Rio

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Boca Raton, Florida, USA

Boca Rio Golf Club



Mollie Marcoux Samaan

Kendra Jones

Keith Kratzberg

Mike Nichols

Fatima Fernandez Cano

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Epson Tour executives Keith Kratzberg on the left, president and CEO, VP of legal counsel Kendra Jones, LPGA commissioner Mollie Marcoux Samaan.

We'll start with you, Mollie. Obviously a monumental day for the LPGA Tour partnering with a global technology company and brand in Epson and their title sponsorship of the LPGA Tour.

Epson is partnering globally to expand the Epson brand and how core values align with the LPGA and Epson Tour worldwide. By joining forces with Epson what does this mean for the future of women's professional golf?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Yeah, it's a gigantic day for us. We couldn't be more grateful for our partnership with Epson. I that they're another company stepping up and saying our values align with the LPGA, and we want to help, we want to change the dialogue, we want to change women's golf for the better, we want to empower women to reach their dreams in the sport of golf, which their goals and our goal is to empower women around the world to reach whatever their goals are.

I think for us, this is something our team has been working on for a long time, and I think we've found the absolute perfect partner, and as I said, the value alignment is exactly what we're looking for in our partners. We believe this will not only elevate the Epson Tour and the opportunities and the road to the LPGA, but will clearly elevate the LPGA in every single way.

The creativity the team has shown to be able to reach into all aspects of our organization and make it better, and

that's what we're trying to do every day that we wake up.

We couldn't be more grateful for our partnership, and we know that this is going to change what we do both on the Epson Tour and on the LPGA.

THE MODERATOR: We'll shift over to Keith. The Epson Tour annually attracts players from more than 40 countries, has graduated 65 players from 21 nations over the last seven years.

During the 2021 LPGA Tour season, nine former graduates were Epson Tour alumni claimed 12 LPGA Tour wins, led by World No. 1 Nelly Korda who captured four titles and a gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics.

Other notable LPGA players who got their start on the Epson Tour include major champions Inbee Park from the Republic of Korea, Lorena Ochoa of Mexico, and Australia's Hannah Green.

Keith, how important was the global impact of this Tour and Epson being involved with the LPGA?

KEITH KRATZBERG: Well, the global nature of the Tour was absolutely critical in this partnership for Epson. The Epson Tour sponsorship was commissioned and signed by Epson's global CEO, Ogawa-san, and one of the key reasons is because of the way that the values of the LPGA and the Epson Tour really aligned with Epson's values.

Epson is envisioning our future in an enriching society in sustainability, and we just see a lot of alignment of the LPGA.

Epson is a global company, and so having players from all over the world, Americas, Asia, Europe, absolutely critical to tying in the activity of the Tour to our business and our customers.

We're really excited about it.

THE MODERATOR: Mike, we'll shift over to you. You and your team have worked so diligently to find the next partner to lead the Road to the LPGA into the future. Epson is that

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partner and all they've done from the start of the partnership really raises the bar.

How did the relationship begin and what did the process look like to reach this day?

MIKE NICHOLS: Well, in my 30 years of selling sports sponsorships, it was truly a first. I've never gotten into sort of a discussion where it doesn't start with, What do I get, how does this work, what are the assets. It really started, Before we get into that discussion, we want to know how we're going to impact the players, because we have no interest in putting our name on this Tour unless we can find a way to impact the players.

So they said come back to me with three big ideas of what we can do. I said, Three big ideas? I'll bring some big ideas.

We came back with three big ideas, one of which was to make sure we had sort of a minimum threshold of purses of \$200,000, making sure the players, when they graduate to the Tour, have sort of a little bit of some seed money to get started, their first sort of sponsorship as they graduate on to the Tour.

And then lastly, one of the things, the way our model of the Tour is built is on entry fees, and I said if we can find a way to start working on entry fees, that would be big. Sort of had an expectation that they would pick one of those and that would be what we'd build the partnership around, and they said, We want to do all three of these.

It was just incredible that so many companies talk about wanting to do the right thing and impact these athletes, and frankly it takes investment in real dollars. The fact that they started the discussion from the players and worked back is why I think this partnership is going to work and be so effective.

The players that we've spoken to already are just absolutely over the moon. Can't believe there's a partner who is saying what can we do to make the lives of these players better, not only when they play the Epson Tour but when they graduate onto the LPGA Tour.

THE MODERATOR: We'll shift to Kendra. Epson has a great vision for this partnership and the organization as a whole. What values does Epson showcase that will see this relationship with the LPGA grow and perhaps already even align with the LPGA?

KENDRA JONES: Well, I think it certainly showcases Epson's commitment to empowering women and enhancing equity in women's sports, which I think closely

aligns with the LPGA.

We really also value enriching communities, and we think golf does that. So we really hope with the growth of golf, we inspire more women and young girls to be interested in golf, which in the spirit of competition we think also enriches.

THE MODERATOR: You've really established a new standard. As Mike touched on, so many companies with the title sponsorship and the Epson Tour and some of the great initiatives that are a part of the partnership with the LPGA, the Epson Tour Ambassador Program, no purse under \$200,000, and the Epson Tour-DEI partnership to lower player entry fees, that's all just a start. What made the LPGA a good fit specifically at this time right now?

KEITH KRATZBERG: Well, I think all those things that have already been mentioned, and I think one of the things that we were particularly excited about is the nature of being the title sponsor of the qualifying Tour.

I think for the sponsors who run a particular event, that's an amazing experience, but I think for Epson to be able to be a part of the Tour for the entire season and then support the players even on to the next level as they graduate up to the LPGA, I think that was particularly exciting for Epson and a really good fit for us.

KENDRA JONES: It really gave us the opportunity to have a lasting impact on the sport and these women's lives and their growth.

THE MODERATOR: Mollie, I'd like to ask a question about the global reach of this Tour, and not only the amount of countries represented on the Epson Tour, but on the LPGA, as well. Kendra and Keith both touched on the graduates and making their way in their LPGA Tour journey, but how much of an impact have you seen with Drive On since you've established yourself in the commissioner role?

How much of the stories on the LPGA and the graduates of the Epson Tour can not only play a national reach, but an international feel?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Yeah, the stories are truly remarkable. We had the best and most fun dinner last night with two of our graduates from the Epson Tour who are now playing here this weekend, and hearing their life journey to get to this point in their career was -- I was mesmerized by it.

There are 150 of those stories. There are hundreds on the Epson Tour and on the LPGA Tour. To see the amount of

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effort and work that goes into achieving these goals, you don't do it alone, and that's the theme that all of our players talk about.

Everyone's journey is different and it's not easy. It's not easy to find the pros that you need to get you to the next level, to have the physiological, the psychological behaviors, to have the environment so you can reach your peak potential.

A sponsorship like this is actually digging directly into that and saying, Hey, let us start you off on your LPGA Tour with a little boost. Let's put Epson on your shoulder and represent our brand. But more importantly, let us help you with the travel expenses and with all the things that it takes to reach your goals.

It's women from all over the world doing this, coming from very different circumstances, very diverse backgrounds, but coming together in this goal of something that they love and they've worked their whole lives for.

I just think the stories, you can learn a different one every minute out here on the Tour, and I've gotten to know a lot of them, but I think you guys experienced last night just two or three of some of the more interesting and diverse remarkable stories of people doing it without others around them doing the same thing and always needing that little helping hand, and that's what these guys have provided.

Q. Keith or Kendra, I know some of the things you already discussed, your appeal to being a part of this Tour was enriching communities, the lasting impact, and having the opportunity to be the title sponsor for a long-term partnership. But with so many opportunities in women's sports across the board, what made golf the right place for all of those things?

KEITH KRATZBERG: Oh, my gosh, there's just so many reasons. I think golf is the greatest sport with such a long history. I think that we are really excited about the growth of women's golf in particular. Hundreds of thousands of new women joined the game in the last couple years.

I think the technical aspect of golf, the physical aspect of golf, the mental element, the aspect of continuous improvement and dedication, these are all such incredible values, and I think the level of play on the Epson Tour now is just really stunning. It's at the highest level in the game, and I'm really excited to have Epson partners be able to witness this firsthand out at the Epson Tour events, and I think that it's a great inspiration to all of Epson's customers and also to our 80,000 employees around the world.

There's just so many reasons why golf is a great fit for

Epson.

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Now you get to hear some of these fun stories from a real star.

MIKE NICHOLS: I want to brag on Fati a little bit. Fati has been a member of the Epson Tour actually for two years. It was sort of an interesting thing during COVID where she was a top-5 player and graduated per se, but not necessarily having the good status that a No. 2 player would normally have; had a couple tournaments that she had to withdraw from that maybe kept her from being the No. 1 player, but came back last year again and finished No. 2 on the Money List again without winning.

I know that's probably the thing that sticks in her side, but to do that is almost impossible, to finish No. 2 on our Money List is almost impossible.

The real thing I wanted to say is what's bittersweet about this Tour and graduating players is you sort of get your favorites and players that you know are going to always represent the Tour in the most positive way, and the way that you have represented the Epson Tour as you've played on it the last two years we're super grateful and super grateful for you to be wearing the Epson Tour logo on your sleeve now on the LPGA Tour.

So congratulations.

FATIMA FERNANDEZ CANO: Thank you very much.

THE MODERATOR: The founding member of the Epson Tour ambassador program. Fati, take us through your journey not only here to the LPGA Tour, but how you got here to America.

You have kind of a unique twist, story filled with twists and turns all along the way. Just take us through some of the moments that maybe make you smile and chuckle from your memory of coming here.

FATIMA FERNANDEZ CANO: Yeah, it's I guess a little bit unique. I grew up in the north of Spain where golf is not really that big or popular. So I would play some tournaments but play national championships and that's about it, but I knew that I wanted to come to the States to college just because I knew about college sports over here and how big they were.

But my resume and my scores were not that great. Somehow I got an offer from Troy University to come here on a full scholarship. Called me on the phone and say, Hey, we've got a scholarship for you at Troy University. It's in Alabama. I look them up. They were a real place. I did



not go on a visit or anything. I said, Sure, let's do it.

17 years old, you know, got shipped over here and finished my career over there. And then after that I took a job in Birmingham, Alabama, Shoal Creek. Worked for a little bit, made some money to be out here, tried to be out here.

Got a status to play on the Epson Tour, played there for four years. The last two have been really, really good years for me, and like Mike said, got to graduate on to the LPGA now.

THE MODERATOR: The Epson Tour ambassador program will provide Epson Tour graduates \$10,000 each to launch their LPGA Tour journey.

When you first heard of the program and that Mike Nichols was interested and that Epson was funding this, what were your initial thoughts and to be part of it? What does it mean to you?

FATIMA FERNANDEZ CANO: I thought it was incredible that a global brand like Epson was kind of putting the money into the Tour, and not only just saying, here's some money, now you're on the Tour, go on with your life.

They're actually supporting us, supporting women's golf. And like you said, you graduate, you get that sponsor or the option to get that sponsorship, that's huge for us. Somebody like me, I'm just new to the Tour. There's so many expenses, everything is new, and for them to kind of have their support for me, to have their support and have a company like Epson behind us supporting us the whole way through, not just through the Epson Tour but also on to the next level, that's just huge.

MIKE NICHOLS: If I can sort of add on to that, the thing that happens on the Epson Tour is the players will graduate typically around the first week of October. Playing on Tour is their primary sort of earning, and this is the next tournament that Fati has played in since then within the LPGA Tour family.

So they have four months off but the expenses don't stop coming, and then it rolls to the new season. You've got to buy plane tickets and do all that kind of stuff. Rachel Rohanna, who's one of the other players, when I talked to her about it, I think a lot of folks know she's a mother out on Tour, the first mother to graduate.

When I first introduced the program to her she said, Oh, my gosh, that's great. Kids aren't cheap. It's just incredible.

The other thing I wanted to add, again, with Epson from the

beginning wanting this to be about the players, and we talked about the ambassador program and I said, That's great. Let's put this program in place and we'll put the Epson logo on the players' sleeve.

They corrected me and said, No, no, we want it to be Epson Tour logo on the players' sleeve, because representing the Tour. We want these players to raise the profile of the Tour. I mean, obviously as Keith talked about, it's about Epson at a higher level. But in terms of having that logo on the sleeve and calling attention to everything that Fati did the last couple years to make it on to the LPGA, but the hope is that by raising the profile of the Epson Tour when these players are playing on the LPGA, that it attracts other businesses to what we're trying to achieve out here.

THE MODERATOR: For Keith and Kendra, in addition to Fati, you also have Rachel Rohanna, a part of the initial ambassador program from the United States. Ruixin Liu from China, and Ana Belac from Slovenia.

Talk about the global reach and being for the players. It almost seems too good to be true to match those two up in one program as quickly as you did with this partnership.

KENDRA JONES: Yeah, we're really excited to get to know these women. We had a fabulous dinner last night and really enjoyed learning about their journey and their story, and we're thrilled about the international reach of it. These women have come -- many of these women have come from far away and really starting their journey here, and we're excited to be able to support them in their growth.

Reflective of the Epson Tour itself, we recognize that maybe not every woman who goes through the Epson Tour may ultimately play on the LPGA, but we think everything they're learning on their journey through the Epson Tour is preparing them for leadership positions and other roles and other careers.

We're excited about representing them with that journey.

THE MODERATOR: Keith, if you don't mind expanding on that and maybe touching on what Mike said about the logo on the sleeve, but no we want the Epson Tour. Maybe some of that selfless attitude that that reflects and some of the values that really Epson is showing right off the bat.

KEITH KRATZBERG: Well, I think that our approach is that -- Epson is in this business for reasons. There have to be good ROI on this investment for Epson Corporation. I think that the best thing for Epson is the success of the game and the success of the Tour.



That's what we want to support. Of course we care about the women, the players, and their stories are absolutely amazing. For them to come to the United States from all over the globe at such a young age and compete, learn the game, advance the game, change their swing, whatever they might need to do to get to the top level of the sport -- and to do that, obviously they had a team -- but the amount of independence and drive that it took for them to do that, it's just really inspiring.

I think to be part of their team for the rest of their career is really exciting for Epson. I wish Fati and all the Epson Tour alums all the best.

THE MODERATOR: Fati, if you could, you talked with me a little bit about laying in bed at Troy and dreaming of days like this, and now it's a reality. Take me through some of those moments, whether it was at Troy or just growing up back in Spain on the golf course, learning the game, of some of those dreams you had, and to not only earn your way on to the LPGA Tour but then to have Epson join forces with the LPGA and to establish this program. What you would tell yourself?

FATIMA FERNANDEZ CANO: Yeah, like you said, it's been a dream of mine always to be out here on the LPGA Tour and something I finally achieved, but also to have that support, to have a company like Epson, Epson Tour kind of believe in me or trust me with basically their logo on me, which means me representing them as a company, that's huge.

That speaks about of course I guess my golf game in a way, but I guess they believe me as a person I'm a good fit into the way they go about things, and to me that's huge.

Like I would say, it's about golf, absolutely, but in a way it's a little bit -- it's about a little bit more than that. Yeah, when I first got to Troy and I didn't know what I was getting into I didn't know what the next four years would have in store for me, let alone the next four on the Epson Tour. When I first started on the Epson Tour I almost lost all my money and had to go home. That's a reality for me. That was a reality, and it was a reality for many players out there.

There was times that a day like today on which I would have a logo on my sleeve and the support of a company, like that just seemed very, very far away; but luckily it's here now.

THE MODERATOR: The Troy coaching staff looks genius right now. Mike, if you can talk a little more from your perspective on the ambassador program. You've been at the helm for quite some time now as the chief business

officer of the Epson Tour.

What's it mean to see not only the Epson Tour come to fruition, but some awesome endeavors outside of that?

MIKE NICHOLS: Yeah, so for us, obviously as -- well, we're in the pressroom, but there's no cheering in the pressroom, right? But we on the Epson Tour, we cheer for our graduates. That happens. But we've had a lot of success with graduates recently. Obviously Nelly is talked about quite a bit, but Hannah Green has won a major championship, Patty Tavatanakit has won a major championship, although she didn't graduate from the Tour; Sophia Popov was an Epson Tour member, not even an LPGA Tour member when she won the AIG Women's Open.

To know that -- for us, it's very important that these players find success. We like them winning championships, and I think as we've raised the bar, purses, and attract higher quality players the competition is stronger than it's ever been. It's only going to get stronger with these sort of investments from Epson.

But ultimately that's what we're all about is creating the challenge -- the challenge to force them to play at a very competitive high level, but also the opportunity. So sort of the confluence of those, that's what Epson is committed to investing in.

But to know that these players where maybe having this ambassador program to start is just one less thing they have to worry about when they arrive at a tournament here in Boca, to know that they have a financial head start and all the plane tickets and whatever it took to sort of get their season started is already covered. So we're certainly grateful for that investment.

Q. Kendra, from my understanding you have a son that's pretty good at golf. Can you share your background in the game and how unique maybe of a connection this is for you?

KENDRA JONES: Yeah, my family lives and breathes golf. I have a son who's a competitive golfer. His name is Brayden and he's 13. I've had a lot of fun the last few years traveling with him to competitions, which enabled me to learn a lot about golf, and it just made me even more excited to be participating with Epson in this opportunity.

I love golf and I see how hard these kids work, and I'm excited to see these women work hard and kind of achieve their dreams.

Q. There are Native American tribes and their resorts

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and businesses that sponsor multiple Epson Road to the LPGA Tour events. What, if any, consideration was given to tournament sponsors that exist and how they may or may not align with goals and values of Epson via its Tour title sponsorship?

KEITH KRATZBERG: So the question was was there any consideration to the fact that a number of the Epson Tour events are on Native American properties? Is that right, in conjunction with casinos?

Q. Right.

KEITH KRATZBERG: Well, you know, as we worked through the details of the Epson Tour sponsorship, what we learned is that the LPGA has been continuously upgrading the quality of the courses that the events are staged at, and also working very hard to locate them geographically around the country so that it works for the Tour and that it works for the players.

Actually the travel between all the different events is a major consideration for the players, and a lot of the players actually drive from one event to another. I think that a number of the courses are located on those types of properties, and they have to be absolutely the highest quality of courses to be a part of the Epson Tour, and I think we're thrilled to have events there.

MIKE NICHOLS: Yeah, so the one thing that we've really focused on over the last number of years is elevating the caliber of golf course that we go to. As the Tour has grown and there's been more interest in attracting the Tour, we always are looking for the best venues for the players to go to.

So a couple of other Native American properties, there's the Sweetgrass course at the Island Resort Championship that was just named the top golf course in Michigan; they won an award at the PGA show this last week.

The golf course we play in Idaho, Circling Raven, is the No. 1 golf course in Idaho. Some of the golf courses that we're going to on these Native American properties are some of the best in their states, and so we're certainly grateful for the investment that the tribes and the casinos are making at these events, and they've got some great golf courses. It's been a great partnership.

THE MODERATOR: Fati, just from a player perspective we've touched on the ambassador program, but you won't be on the Epson Tour, but having been on the Epson Tour and seeing now what they are doing with purses and lowering entry fees and a DEI partnership calling, from a player perspective what does that mean to you?

FATIMA FERNANDEZ CANO: Yeah, I've done my time there, so I hope I don't have to come back. (Laughter.)

I mean, it's huge. We talked about it, when I first started out there, the purses were way lower. They were actually the minimum purse was actually half of what they are going to make it this year. It's a struggle when you're out there, you're getting a top-20 finish in a Tour that has a lot of talent. We had a lot of really good players, and getting a top-20 finish, that's pretty solid. You're not even breaking even.

I think them raising that bar a little bit and getting those purses to \$200,000, that's huge, because you might actually break even now when you get a top-20 finish. Little things like that that some people don't see because many people think about professional golf and they think about all the luxury of it; it must be really fun.

It is, and I'm very grateful that I got to live it and experience it, but it's tough. For them to do that, it's huge. Like we said, I'm not going to be there to experience it, but I'm a firm believer of just leaving things better than you found them in a way, and even though I don't have much to do with this deal, hopefully me representing them in the right way will help that and continue their partnership for many years.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Fati, Keith, Kendra, Mike. Thank you all so much for the time. Congratulations on the great announcement.

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