

# USGA Media Conference

Thursday, September 30, 2021

USA

## Mike Whan

### Press Conference



BETH MAJOR: Greetings, and welcome from USGA headquarters in Liberty Corner, New Jersey. My name is Beth Major. I'm senior director of communications at the USGA, and on behalf of everyone at the USGA, we thank you for joining us today. We also thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to the USGA through your membership.

It's a very exciting time at the USGA as we wrap up another wonderful championship season this week with the conclusion of the U.S. Mid-Am and the U.S. Women's Mid-Am championships. That excitement is clearly contagious as we have had more members sign up for today's Town Hall than ever before.

It's a clear sign that you all share our excitement about today's special guest, new USGA CEO, Mike Whan, who joined the USGA almost 90 days ago. Your excitement and enthusiasm is evident not only by the record attendance today, but also through the number of questions we received prior to today's Town Hall, more than double the number of questions we typically receive.

I've reviewed every one and have identified some clear themes and common themes that are of interest to our members and things we'll discuss with Mike today.

Please know that as a result of the number of questions we received, we won't be able to get to every one, but we will follow up with you following today's Town Hall, both to discuss questions that we might not have answered that we received prior to the event, but also for anyone who does submit a question via the chat today, we'll be sure to work with everyone to get your question answered.

Without further ado, I'd like to introduce today's special guest, Mike Whan.

MIKE WHAN: Thank you, Beth. Good to actually be physically together again.

BETH MAJOR: It is very nice to be together.

MIKE WHAN: On behalf of all of us at the USGA and myself personally, I just want to say thank you. Beth and I

have spent a lot of time in the last 90 days in front of the media. This is my first chance to really spend some time in front of the people that really make up the USGA, you as members. Thanks for being on this path with us and for us.

I know a lot of you have reached out with emails and letters. I want to say thank you for the good ones and the bad ones. I've had them both. But if you took the time to write or reach out or call me, it means you care, and with care and with passion, we're going to make a difference.

I'm excited to be with you today, I'm excited to be with you for years to come, and more important, I'm excited about leaving the game over the next 50 to 100 years even better than we got it when we were kids.

BETH MAJOR: Thanks, Mike. We'll go right to questions. First one we will call under the Mike Whan specific questions. As the LPGA commissioner -- and so that everyone knows, these are all a surprise to Mike. I did not share these with him ahead of time, so he is --

MIKE WHAN: My first grilling.

BETH MAJOR: His first grilling in front of our membership. First question: As the LPGA commissioner you left that Tour better than you found it. How can you have a similar impact at the USGA?

MIKE WHAN: Well, I appreciate you saying that. I think most people that know me know that from the day I started, I just wanted to make sure that the long-term was more important than the short-term.

I think you can get into these jobs, and today's issue, today's Tweet, tomorrow's news conference, the media on Friday can become the most important thing, and so important that you tend to forget about what you're really doing in these jobs.

I've said this many times: I didn't go to the LPGA to get to a number of tournaments or to a number of TV ratings or to get purses to a certain level. I wanted to make the game better for the future. And when I first met with the founders of the LPGA, what was incredibly clear to me is that they didn't start the LPGA to get rich. They didn't start the LPGA to get famous.



They started the LPGA because they thought if they stuck to it, they might just make the game better for their daughters and their daughters' daughters. When I heard that, it made me believe that that's really the only thing I had to do.

We had this term called Act Like a Founder. It was really all about making sure that we leave the game better for the next generation. When I started back in 2009 about 20 percent of junior golf was girls. Today it's almost 40 percent. That's what I'm most proud of.

When you say that I left the game better, I appreciate that, but what really happened at the LPGA is I built a team that was so fully committed to women's golf that they allowed me to go to the podium in places like this and look like I should take credit for it.

So how do we do that at the USGA? Same formula: Stay focused on the long-term. How do we leave this game better for our kids and our kids' kids? How do we build a team that's more passionate about that than I am? How do we institute members and partners and players around the world to become part of this, let them pull on the rope with us?

Because at the end of the day you don't get involved with the USGA. You don't write a check and become a member. You don't become a corporate partner unless you believe in the game and you believe in what the game means to life.

So I think it's up to us to make sure to focus on the Tuesday issue, focus on the October issue, but more importantly, focus on 2050, 2070, 2090, because quite frankly, the next generation is counting on us.

BETH MAJOR: We've already discussed a few times today, mentioned the excitement. Clearly there's a lot of excitement here at the USGA. There's a lot of excitement amongst our members. What excites you the most about the USGA looking over maybe the next three years?

MARK COSTANZA: Well, I said a long time ago, when I left Procter & Gamble at probably age 29, I told my wife at the time, I want to be surrounded by passionate and persistent people, probably in that order. I like people that are passionate about what they do. I don't know how to tone down my excitement for golf. I don't know how to tone down my excitement for the USGA and these championships, governance, opportunities that we provide.

I don't want to tone it down. I want to be surrounded by other people. Persistence is a tough one. In any

leadership job you're going to get knocked down a few times. You're going to step out of bounds. You're going to make some mistakes. And if that's the end of it, like if you can't take getting knocked to your knees, then you probably should get out of the way.

I can tell you as the commissioner of the LPGA, my wife used to say, Why do you look at Twitter before you go to work? Do you have to have 100 people tell you you're an idiot before you start your day?

I said, You know, it's just for me sometimes good to be grounded in what's important to the regular golfer because I've been the regular golfer and I am the regular golfer.

Yeah, I'm excited about being excited again. The learning curve is straight up. I know nothing. I'm walking into the building every day and realizing that everybody walking in with me is smarter at what they do than I am at what I do. I'm in a real rush to catch up, and I love that part.

I'm walking into meetings where I don't know that I'll ever be the smartest person in a room in any USGA meeting, and I think when I was 35 that would have scared me. At 55, 56, that excites me.

I'm excited about the upside and I'm excited about the -- if there is excitement, both on the other side of this video, and I can tell you here in the building, then what we can do with excitement is limitless.

BETH MAJOR: Fun question: Is it true that you took the lead job with the USGA just so you could move to New Jersey?

MIKE WHAN: Well, if I was being honest, when I got asked the question, how do you think about New Jersey, I said, I don't think about New Jersey. I was born in Chicago, so raised in the Midwest, went to school in Ohio, then moved out to California for 25 years, Florida for the last 13 or 14 years, and somehow in my career I've always avoided New York/New Jersey. I travel in but I travel out pretty quickly, too.

You know, I thought New Jersey was Newark Airport. Nothing wrong with Newark Airport, but that wasn't the countryside that I like to live in. But man, was I wrong.

I used to laugh at the Garden State license plate because I thought, Where is the garden? It's the rest of the state. It's unbelievable.

I drive through two stoplights and two stop signs to get here, probably six villages and boroughs. Each one by the way has its own fire department and police department and

mayor. It's kind of humorous. But it's really small town. It's really homey.

It was easy to become a member of this community because I walked into the post office and somebody said, Hey, Mike, the day I walked in. Like again, at 35, I don't know that I would have loved the quaintness of New Jersey, but at 56 it's unbelievable.

I'm really proud of being here. I could live here the rest of my life. I'm not sure if the USGA would agree with that, but I could certainly live here the rest of my life. It was a hidden gem of the assignment.

I came here not for New Jersey but for the USGA, but I would tell you that New Jersey for both my wife and I -- my wife said to me the other night sitting on our back patio, This is the prettiest place we've ever lived, which she loved California. And I said, It's the nicest people we've ever been around, and both of us laughed. Like we never would have said that out loud 10 years ago about New Jersey, and we're really excited to be New Jerseyans.

BETH MAJOR: This lifelong Jersey girl is thrilled to hear that. It is indeed a hidden gem, so glad to hear it's been such a positive experience.

Before we move on to some meatier topics, this might be a meaty topic for some of the folks with us today. Why don't you wear a blue blazer like past USGA executives?

MIKE WHAN: Hey, for all of you who have written the emails and letters about my blue blazer doubt, I apologize. I actually have more blue blazers than anybody else I know, and I'll wear them. I don't know why everyone gets so excited about that. I certainly was a blazer wearing LPGA commissioner.

But I also spend a lot of my life on an 18th green that's about 107 degrees, and as much as I want to make you proud, I also don't want to melt in front of you.

I really think the game of golf has got enough blazers. It's got enough blazers with a patch embroidered in it. That's great. That's your club. I'm a member of clubs that have the same thing. But I'm not just that USGA CEO, I'm all golf's CEO, and I don't want to take ourselves that serious all the time.

I understand there's a time and a place where uniform is right and the uniformity, and quite frankly the history of this game deserves it, and sometimes there's times where you just kind of unzip the quarter zip, tee it up and go play, and I'm much more of an unzip the quarter zip guy and go play than I am blue blazer and where is the dining hall.

BETH MAJOR: Terrific. There will be a time and place for that, no doubt.

Moving over, one of the core functions of the USGA is our governance role, the G within USGA is truly to govern. As you imagine, a lot of interest throughout our membership in terms of the distance project.

One question here: What are the USGA's immediate plans to restrict distance by placing limits on clubs and balls, and when will a decision be rendered?

MIKE WHAN: First off, I'm proud of you. It took 11 minutes to get the distance --

BETH MAJOR: Not bad, huh?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, that's the best in any an interview I've been a part of so far.

You talked about the many aspects of the USGA, and I promise I'll get to distance, but let me just say what comes to mind every time I'm sitting on a plane and someone is sitting next to me and I'm wearing USGA, and someone goes, Let me tell you about distance, which is great, and of course they usually have the magical answer that I've been waiting to hear.

But I find when I walk into the USGA, it's amazing how many roles the USGA plays. When I think of USGA in my mind, I go to a different U.S. and G.A. I think about the fact that we're here to unite the game. World handicapping system. Course ratings. Ways in which we can play this game together all over the world no matter what our backgrounds or our skill level.

That doesn't exist in hockey or in baseball or in tennis. You can't just show up and say, Well, you're a 12, I'm a 15; you serve your way, I'll serve mine.

It's really kind of cool the way we unite the game. I think we have the S in USGA for me is showcase or stage. We have a responsibility to provide a stage to showcase the best in the world no matter where you are in your world journey, whether you're a junior, an amateur, a mid-am, a professional.

We're going to provide the stages that allow you to compete at a high level and really enjoy the game.

Again, if you're a phenomenal 59-year-old baseball player I'm proud of you, but you're probably not going to be able to show that any time, and I think we have a responsibility to make that special about the game, and we do.

You're right, the G in USGA for me is governance. Every sport needs a traffic cop. You may not like being a traffic cop. You may not like us being a traffic cop. But somebody has to think about the rules and regulations long-term, not just to govern today, but to make sure the game is good 100 years from today.

The A is advance, and sometimes I think at the USGA we forget the final A. And again, that's my A, so in the Unite, Showcase, Govern, and Advance. But we've really got to be about making sure that we're leaving the game better for the next generation and the generation after that.

When it comes to governance, yes, I mean, I think we -- I think a lot of people want to talk to me about distance today: Their club, they're a 4 handicap, the time they hosted a Korn Ferry event or a college event. And that's great, and we want to make sure that the game can sort of stay on a platform today, as well.

We've got to think about it in terms of 2040, 2060, 2080. What I mean by that is if 25 years ago a PGA TOUR event was 6,600 and today it's 7,600, is there anybody that believes 10 or 15 years from now it won't be 8,600?

And if it has to be 8,600, and everybody who builds a new golf course wants to build a course good enough to host a top, elite event, that means we'll be building 9,000-yard golf courses, 9,500-yard golf courses.

You'll never see a golf course in an urban setting again. You'll probably never see the price you pay for a round of golf be the same again, because those are longer, more expensive, harder to play, longer to play, all the things that we're also trying to fight, and some of the great cathedrals of the game just won't be cathedrals of the game.

I view that the important part when we think through this distance challenge is we've got to do three things. One is we've got to make sure that we protect the game for the next 50 to 100 years, and not a lot of other people are thinking about 50 to 100 years, but that's our responsibility as the governance leader.

The other thing is we've got to make sure we keep this fun innovation and excitement that happens in our game. I've said this all the time, but there's not a million engineers working on bowling balls to make them lighter, faster, or croquet mallets or dart boards. We have that in golf. Literally thousands of engineers woke up this morning trying to make the game more fun, more exciting, more interesting.

When you wake up at Christmas and you see that long,

skinny package under the tree, it just might be the year, and I think that's one of the things that makes the game great, and I don't want to lose that. I don't want to take innovation and excitement out of the game.

So we've got to find the right balance between making sure we keep the game protected, if you will, long-term in terms of an every-person sport all around the world and not losing the fun, innovative breakthrough that quite frankly the game has benefitted from, not just in your play and my play, but watch a championship on TV. 30 percent of that advertising is coming from these brands that are investing millions of dollars back in our sport.

We probably take for granted how cool that is in our sport, but we shouldn't, because it's one of the things that make golf so special.

BETH MAJOR: It certainly does. What changes to the rules specifically within the governance function are being considered? Quite a few members wrote in to express their desire to see the rule related to playing out of a divot changed.

A lot of requests for it to be considered ground under repair. Can you just briefly talk about the rules and how that process is moving forward?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah. I mean, if I'm being honest with our listening audience, I'm in day 90, so I can promise you that I haven't walked into a room and somebody put on a big chart, Here's all the rule changes; what do you think, Mike?

For two reasons. One is I don't think I'm ready for that meeting, and two is they don't need Mike Whan's perspective just yet. I didn't get hired because of my incredible rules expertise.

I know for the past USGA CEOs have really been engrained in rules and in the organization. That's not my background, and so just like when I got to the LPGA, selling TV rights or running professional tournaments wasn't my expertise, but I built a team that does and will, and I'll do the same here.

Exactly where we are on the next round of rules, which is probably a couple years away, I'm probably the wrong one to fill in the blanks.

Listen, I've hit out of my share of divots and I've probably grumbled under my breath, too. But where we are in terms of changes in the rules, unfortunately for you in day 90, even if I had perspective, I probably wouldn't give it.

But I'm being honest with you. I'm not really into that at

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this point just yet.

BETH MAJOR: Fair enough. Fair enough. We'll switch over to -- let's switch over to championships. In particular Pinehurst and anchor sites. So a lot of questions and interest related to all three of those topics. What are your criteria? What are the USGA's criteria for selecting venues for any USGA championship, and how much does geography play a role in determining those site selections?

MIKE WHAN: Well, three things, and this is probably a broken record in terms of today's thing. Number one is I'm going to build a team that does that better than me. I'm not a selection expert. I didn't have the Mike Davis eye to walk on a par-4 and go, You know, I could see this as a par-5. I'm not that guy.

Or the David Fay's ability to say, Went to Pinehurst in 1967 and I saw what could be in 1987. I'm not going to lie to either the audience or the group in here. I'm going to build the team, which good news for me, already exists.

I think it's important -- I can tell you this coming from the other side of the coin, coming from professional athletes and watching amateurs become professionals. It's not all important that they play and compete in USGA championships, it's important where they compete. Some people even decide where and if they want to qualify based on where the qualifiers are. They love these grand cathedrals.

So I think it's a responsibility of us to make sure that we give them some of the greatest championship stages in the world. I do also feel the responsibility to make sure that we show different stages from time to time, so don't -- I've had plenty of emails about our anchor site agreements, is everything going to be a rota and will there be eight anchor sites agreement. No and no.

We have a couple or three anchor site agreements that you'll hear about. Those are really about places we know we'll go every 10 or 15 years, and since we know that, let's tell them that. Let's tell the city and the state that, and let's build on that to make sure those championships can be greater long-term.

A lot of times you finish a championship and you get together with the team and say, You know, if we had to do it over again, what we would have done is blank, blank and blank. And we don't go do any of those things because they don't know if we're going to be back the next year.

So by being able to say to a Merion or an Oakmont or a Pinehurst, you know we're going to be back, we know we're going to be back; let's go knock off some of those

things on the list that will make the next one even bigger and better than before.

We have a championship committee. We have a championship team. They're the ones selecting those sites. We don't get locked up too much on geography, to your point. We don't have a map in there and going, we've been there; next year we have to go there. We're more focused on is the stage big enough and exciting enough, and is it the right time in the rest of the sport's schedule.

But no, we're not trying to check off boxes how many states we've been in the last 25 years.

BETH MAJOR: And I think while I think folks are largely focused on the U.S. Open and the cathedrals of the game that we bring that championship to, there's certainly an opportunity from the women's perspective if you look at the U.S. Women's Open at the Olympic Club this year, to see the players' excitement and to see how much it meant to them to play at one of the true cathedrals of the game, somewhere that has such incredible history. Can you speak a little bit about being able to give women that same opportunity and juniors and amateurs, as well?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, so I'm excited about sharing with the general golfing audience a lot of things that I know and we've built in a short time. There's nothing I'm more excited about than telling people where the U.S. Women's Open is going to go over the next 10 to 15 years because it is the best of the best.

I'm excited because I know those players on Tour. More importantly I'm excited because I know those young girls in the USGA LPGA Girls Golf program are going to live for those things.

So yeah, I can tell you that when it comes to the cathedrals of the game and some of the greatest stages of the game, whether you're a young boy, young girl, amateur, professional, expect the USGA to take you to some of the best spots in this country because we're going to.

BETH MAJOR: It'll be an exciting ride, definitely.

One question related to finances around the U.S. Open. How much money does the USGA -- if you look at the U.S. Open and being the driver for the USGA's revenue, how much does the U.S. Open really support all of the other championships that the USGA conducts?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I don't think the USGA is any different than the PGA of America or Augusta for that matter. There is a championship that quite frankly through TV rights -- that's really the -- through TV rights alone -- it's obviously

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good in terms of merchandising and onsite tickets, but at the end of the day the TV rights of our major substantiate a big chunk of the rest of our business, not just other championships.

We have championships that make a little money, lose a little money, but generally speaking, the U.S. Open not only gives us other professional championships, but gives us a whole list of amateur championships, things like Curtis Cup, Walker Cup and U.S. Junior Girls' and U.S. Junior Boys'. These championships are propped up by the funding we can get behind one major.

I don't think that's any different than PGA of America running all their different major championships coming from the sponsorship of some big events. I'm neither concerned by that or problematic.

I think the good news is we started looking at championships on a national level in 1895 and started before the rest of the U.S. thought, and I think by getting started and creating these championships that are not only important, valuable but meaningful, that they can actually spread that wealth and others.

How we govern the game, to our museum, to our green section that we do for golf courses, yeah, all of that comes from funding behind a couple of few big events.

Like I said, coming from the LPGA I wouldn't say that's a whole lot different there, either. There's a few big events that give you the ability to prop up the rest of your schedule, and the same is true at the USGA.

BETH MAJOR: Makes sense. Specific question related to Pinehurst from one of our members. While the decision and the announcement related to building a second headquarters and developing more of a relationship with Pinehurst was made prior to your arrival, curious as to your thoughts about Pinehurst and the additional headquarters down there, and also just any details you can provide in terms of what the team down there will ultimately focus on.

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I think the good news is I'm really excited to have Pinehurst part of the USGA family in a much bigger and more physical way in terms of both people and buildings.

I do think there's some misnomers in the world. I'll tell somebody I work for the USGA and they'll say, Oh, do you live in Pinehurst, or, I heard you're moving the whole thing to Pinehurst. That's not really true. We'll have about 50 to 60 people in Pinehurst a long time once we get to 2023. We already have a pretty significant staff down there. A lot of our championship people, some of our communication

people are located in the village of Pinehurst and have been for a while.

But building a test center down there, building a welcome center and kind of what I'd call almost a customer interaction museum experience, it'll all be part of the USGA family in 2023.

Think about 400 people here in New Jersey but 50 or 60 in Pinehurst, and a regular diet of Pinehurst stops in terms of USGA championships.

We'll be there more often physically with our own people in our own buildings, and we'll be there fairly often in our championships. So think of Pinehurst as a home away from home, but we'll still be based in New Jersey with the majority of our office operations here in Liberty Corner.

BETH MAJOR: Makes sense, and certainly I think everyone here is very excited to be able to visit Pinehurst more often with such an incredible place in both the golf courses and the community overall. A wonderful opportunity and something we're all very excited about.

To shift gears a little bit, I have a few questions around growing the game. Obviously you've already mentioned LPGA USGA Girls Golf, something that we've been fortunate to partner with for many, many years. Can you talk about the amazing progress bringing women and kids into the game? How do you take it to the next level? How do you not only continue to engage those girls and more girls, but how do you potentially look at keeping them involved once they're collegiate, post-collegiate? Of particular interest to a few of our members is the Mid-Am going on right now. How do we continue to sustain the success we've seen at that junior level?

MIKE WHAN: Well, the first thing that's really exciting is so for the last 10 to 15 years we've seen this incredible growth in young girls joining the game through the junior programs. I think if you look at the last two years, really year and a half of pandemic time, it's been amazing to see more juniors joining the game than ever before, rounds up 16, 17 percent.

It's an amazing time right now where a lot of the world said, I wish I could play more golf back in 2019, to 2020 and 2021 where I've played a lot of golf, so now we've gone from I wish I could play more to I've played a lot.

It's up to us throughout the entire industry to make sure we keep that audience engaged. I've said this many times: I don't know what the future of office work is going to look like, but it's going to be some hybrid of a little bit more at home and a little bit less in the office because everybody is

set up to do it that way, and you've found a balance that probably works better for your life.

I think golf has got to do the same thing. I don't want to go back to 2019 with 10 million people saying, Gosh, I wish I could play more golf, and I think it's unrealistic to think that 2023 is going to feel just like 2020 where everybody played golf.

But I think there's a hybrid in the middle there where we've got to be more welcoming to people to play nine holes, just chip and putt afterwards, bring your family out after work hours or whatever it's going to be.

I think we've all learned to be a little bit more accepting in the game of golf. I can speak for myself that when your 8:32 tee time that you counted on every Saturday is gone, your first direction is I can't believe -- I've always played at 8:32, to look at what's happening to my golf course.

We've got diversity and age and coming from all over. I think we've got to embrace that and make sure we keep it here. We've got this other incredible asset going on right now called off-course activity. What's going on with the Top Golfs of the world is really exciting. You're talking four, five, six million people a year swinging a golf club that have never stepped on a golf course. That audience is going to be good whether they migrate and become regular golfers, which I think a good chunk of them will, or just love the game enough to watch it, vacation around it, buy things, come to our events.

That makes the game stronger because we just have a greater following. I've said this many times: I'll never play football again. I grew up as a football player. I'll never -- because I played it at one point in my life; I've followed it the rest of my life. I travel for it, I watch it on TV, I buy sweatshirts that say it. I think we've got an audience right now coming to golf that could be that audience 20 years from now.

They may not play it as much as they did in the pandemic, but I think they'll follow it more than they ever did because of the activity they've had in the last year and a half.

BETH MAJOR: And to your point earlier, golf being truly a game for a lifetime, whether you start, whether you're in a junior program or you pick it up later in life, it's something that you can enjoy from a playing perspective but all the others that you mentioned, as well.

Specific to girls' golf, can you talk a little bit about sort of the mindset behind your years at the LPGA and really focusing on what you saw as an opportunity related to girls' golf and how to bring that program to the next level?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah. I mean, listen, if you want to grow a sport like the game of golf that at the time was about 80/20 male-female, you could talk about all the different things we could do for the male initiatives, but at the end of the day the sport wasn't going to be the sport that I wanted or the sport that I loved, and I wasn't going to leave the game better unless I made it for both genders.

That was just the biggest opportunity -- the biggest funnel of unused potential was right there.

And the good news for me is I sat in every meeting surrounded by a bunch of the greatest female athletes in the world. The fact that they were golfers were great, but they are the greatest golfers, and so it was fun to watch them engage and grow in the game. It's fun to watch young girls join the game together as girls.

Sometimes when you put boys and girls together in a beginning program, about a half an hour into the program the boys are going, I hit my 9-iron 70 yards; how far do you hit yours, and the girls don't care yet.

So by putting girls together, we move at their pace. If they don't want to hit a golf ball this time, we don't hit a golf ball. If we want to talk about phone covers or TikTok, we'll talk about TikTok.

We just make sure that the golf course is their place and not just their father's place or their brother's place. That's really been the difference maker.

To watch people like Augusta National, the PGA, the PGA TOUR, the PGA of America get involved and bring girls' golf in so many different ways, it's been great. We haven't had to be the only ones pulling on the rope. Others have pulled it, as well.

BETH MAJOR: Within that, obviously our member base has been wonderful in terms of identifying opportunities, whether it is through giving or other ways that they engage with the program, but are there ways folks can get involved on a local level in terms of supporting a program like girls' golf?

MIKE WHAN: I can tell I'm getting excited because -- I love this topic, and I love the -- listen, if you want to get involved, reach out to us at the USGA.org, reach out to the LPGA at LPGA.com. Find a program -- if you can't find a program, reach out to us so we can find a program for you.

Listen, I don't care if it's young girls or young boys, we need the future of this game to be junior driven, and it will be. We're going to continue to invest in a significant way

not just in the programs that have our names on it but the programs that have other names, as well.

The thing I'm probably most surprised by, and I don't know why, but at the same time I'm most proud of, is I consider the USGA like a role player in a basketball game. If you need them to set picks today, they'll set picks. If you need them to be a rebounder, if you need them to be a scorer, if you need them to cover the other guy's best player, the USGA does whatever it takes.

Sometimes we're a check writer, sometimes we're at the front of the parade holding the flag, and sometimes we're not in the parade, we're behind making sure everyone moves forward. I'm excited about the fact that we take whatever initiative we can to make them go forward.

You're going to hear about, and I can promise you in the next six months, you're going to hear about five or six what I call big, bold initiatives, some things that the USGA has to say, hang on the wall and say to ourselves over the next 15 years, we're committed to these things, and no matter what it takes, we're going to figure out how to get there.

I think the game needs us to take big bold steps for the future of the game, and while we're doing that, we're going to commit to also be a great partner to the other people that are taking their own big bold initiatives.

But I'm excited to put the weight of the USGA behind some really big game-changing initiatives, not for today, not for 2025, but for 2045 and 2075.

BETH MAJOR: Not to ask you to preemptively share any of those five to six big ideas, but one of our members did reference the interview that you did with Golf Digest earlier this year in which you referenced the concept of a USA development team.

Without making any commitments, can you just talk a little bit more about the philosophy behind such a concept?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, as a guy who's watched a lot of young athletes become professional athletes and reach the peak of their career, I realize that no matter where you come from and around the world, generally in any other country, if you end up showing some pretty good interest and skill at a young age, you tend to become part of a country team, and that country team helps you get ready for greater good, whether that's get ready to make you into a college program, become a pro, how to hire a caddie, how to work with a nutritionist, how to understand flexibility, what's it like to be a professional, what's it like to try to get into a college golf program.

Those things start happening at age 11, 12, 13, 14 in other countries. The only place you really don't get that is America. Now, people would argue that in America there's a lot of opportunities and a lot of ways to go, but I find it almost a disadvantage that a young American wouldn't have those same kind of learning opportunities, that somebody wouldn't kind of take you under their wing, and whether you end up becoming that great professional golfer or you go play golf at a superstar college or you have an incredible pro career or you just embrace the game in such a way that you become a PGA professional, you work in the golf retail space, you run golf vacations, those kind of great young athletes tend to stay in that sport.

We need a development program in the U.S. It's time. In fact, it's way past time, and I think the USGA is the right group to do that.

Yeah, I can't tell you when, but sometime in the next year, hopefully we'll be sitting on a stage like this and I'll be telling you about Team USA, and we're going to launch it -- we'll probably start it for women because I think there's probably a greater need immediately for women.

But we'll do it with the idea that it will quickly expand to boys quickly after. I think every young athlete when they start to find that this is a sport that they can really pursue needs a home to go to, and I see Tour players today on the LPGA finish their season and go spend a week at Team Sweden if they're Swedish, even now at age 30 or 35, because it's home for them.

It's where they can go and get grounded and get some expertise that maybe they can't get on their own. I think Americans should have that same opportunity, and we can fix that.

BETH MAJOR: That actually leads to another opportunity. You obviously have the unique experience of being at the helm of the LPGA and now the USGA, so I think there's a sense and an understanding from our members that you have a different pursue in terms of what partnership and the USGA's relationship related to other organizations in the game is.

Can you talk a little bit about where you see the USGA and how that really comes to life?

MIKE WHAN: I really think the USGA is and needs to be golf's greatest trusted partner. Partners, as my wife reminds me all the time, you do what it takes for the greater good of the team.

I think the good news is that's in the USGA's DNA already. Like I said, whether -- if Drive, Chip & Putt is a really good





idea from Augusta but they need our help, we get involved.

If junior league is a great idea from the PGA of America but they need our help, we get involved.

At the same time, if LPGA USGA Girls Golf has got upside and we can really double down on it and really invest in it, then we do.

There's other areas where quite frankly we have to take the lead and maybe others aren't as -- I wouldn't say as interested but as engaged. We'll spend a couple of million dollars a year on water research through grant research because we're trying to figure out how to make sure that water doesn't limit this game long-term, and how do we make sure that courses west of the Mississippi aren't struggling to stay open because of water needs.

I mean, one of the big initiatives you'll hear from me in the not-too-distant future is a dramatic and significant investment by this organization over the next 10 to 15 years to fundamentally change the water needs of a golf course. I'm not exactly sure how we're going to do that, but that's what makes it big and bold. But by gosh, we're going to be fully invested in it, we're going to go at it full speed, and over the next 15 years, we're going to give golf courses a reason to believe that water is not going to be the thing that gets in our way of mega success in the future.

I realize that not every other organization can spend their time thinking about water, but we can, we should, and most importantly, we will.

BETH MAJOR: One other question related to growing the game and juniors. We've obviously been very focused on girls and women, but more broadly, can you talk a little bit about the strategy of the USGA to provide DEI? I know our members received yesterday notification of a survey that we've recently deployed to some 20,000 young people within the game who compete in our championships. Can you talk a little bit about the USGA's strategy and why it's so important?

MIKE WHAN: I'm going to talk a little bit personally first and then I'll pivot to USGA. On a personal level, in the middle of 2020 I realized I was a tireless believer in the future of this game being more female. When I talked about changing the face of the game, what I meant was we were going to make this game more female.

In the middle of a lot of social awareness I realized that when I talked about changing the face of the game, I wasn't really talking about changing the face of the game. I was talking about changing the female of the game. I was a little bit embarrassed. I was a lot embarrassed.

When I get a lot embarrassed, two things happen. I get quiet for a minute, which is as you know rare for me, and then I try to come back harder than before. And really what we realized pretty quickly is we've got to be both at the LPGA and then more importantly as an industry, we've got to be about changing the face of this game across the board, and that means we've got to be more welcoming across the board.

We've got to understand the journey to get to golf, whether that's get to golf and play in a USGA championship, get to golf and just play golf, get to golf and play Top Golf, get to golf and try to work in the sport.

I can just tell you not necessarily just for the USGA, but on behalf of the entire industry, the USGA, the PGA of America, the PGA TOUR, the LPGA, and quite frankly manufacturers and golf courses around the industry here in the U.S. have come together with what we kind of call Golf, Inc., and you've seen some of the Make Golf Your Thing advertising.

And that's just a campaign, I get it, but what's behind that is so much more. We've got six different platforms all about breaking down and expanding what golf is and who can be part of golf in the future.

It's all the -- it's from things as outside-the-box thinking as together we all spend about a billion dollars in how we spend money on championships and everything else. How do we make sure we spend a good chunk of that money in minority owned and run businesses? If we all come together, we can do that.

We have a significant amount of funds that are funding grass-roots diversity golf efforts that exist today and are trying to get existed for tomorrow. We really want to make sure we're thinking about not only 10 years from now, but we're thinking about 10 days from now and how do we get money into these programs to keep them going.

We obviously had a lot of awareness training across the board. We have recruiting and on-boarding and internship programs that are coming out of this program. But the best part of that program is it's not a USGA program, it's not a PGA TOUR program, it's not a PGA of America, it's not a TaylorMade, Titleist, or Callaway program. It's Golf, Inc., and in my long tenure, and I am old, in my long tenure in this game, I've never seen the industry come together so well and so fast about something that quite frankly is so important.

Because I felt like when we all got together I realized that my embarrassment in being so singularly focused on one

aspect was shared by others, and I think when we put that embarrassment and that frustration together, great things have come of it.

I don't know if the average golfer senses it or feels it yet, but you will, because it's coming and it's coming across the board in six different mega platforms.

BETH MAJOR: Yeah, it's been very exciting to see the Make Golf Your Thing advertisements run over broadcasts the last few months. It's certainly powerful and sends a great message on behalf of the industry.

I am going to completely change course now, and I'm going to throw a few handicapping questions at you.

MIKE WHAN: Oh, geez.

BETH MAJOR: Yes. This will be a 90-day test for you.

MIKE WHAN: Somebody is getting really nervous upstairs.

BETH MAJOR: I hear footsteps.

In your future plans, do you plan to put more emphasis on USGA handicaps and the need for them?

MIKE WHAN: I don't know the need for them is the right way to angle that. I would just say that there's a benefit that comes from this equalization, normalization of players across the world really, which is really cool, because really in the world handicapping system we're talking about people having this benefit all around the world.

I wanted people to know that now, but I think sometimes people think that handicapping is only for the core golfer who plays every week and plays all the time or only plays 18 holes, and that's just simply not true. If you play seven holes you can get a handicap. If you play nine holes you can get a handicap. It gives you the ability to play with your brother, your sister, your mom, your dad, or your neighbor, no matter how much golf experience you've had.

I think it's one of those unique things that golf has that other sports doesn't, and I think it's in our best interest to make sure we're at least creating a greater awareness of that.

You know, do I have some number on my chalkboard on my desk that we're going to get to in terms of handicapping the next five years? I don't, because quite frankly it's a benefit we offer to courses and clubs. It's up to them to take our use.

I don't feel like I need to cough that down people's throat if

it's not something they want to do, but I do think it's an important benefit. I think it's really unique to the game, and I think for people who love the game, you'll love that aspect of the game if we introduce you to that.

BETH MAJOR: Perfect. This one is really specific. How is a course handicapped for each hole?

MIKE WHAN: Oh, gosh, okay. So appropriate asterisk next to -- this is not Mike Whan's strength, but I do remember this in a conversation actually way before I became USGA CEO, I might have asked David Fay this or somebody in my own tenure, because I used to say we've got a reachable par-5 on my course, and it's like the No. 2 rated hole on the course, and that's crazy.

I don't remember if it was him, but somebody said to me, when you really get into hole ratings, it really isn't about how easy the hole is or isn't, it's about the greatest dispersion of scores on that hole from low handicap to high handicap.

So in other words, you might have an easy par-3, but whether you're a low handicap or high handicap you get between 2 and 4 are the average scores. But a lot of times when you get to a long par-4 or a par-5, the range between 4 on a par-5 and 11 on a par-5 is what really makes a hole lower in terms of its hole ranking in terms of handicapping.

It's the greater dispersion of scores on a golf hole between ranges of golf quality that gets you harder holes.

Don't think of a hole of -- this is a pretty easy par-5 and you're a 5 handicap and you think of an easy par-5. The next time you play that with a bunch of golfers, finish that hole and think of when I wrote down all the scores, how far apart were the highest and lowest scores, and look at that versus some hole you thought was easier.

My bet is that low handicap hole has got a broader range of scores than another one, and that's really what lower handicapped holes are.

If I'm wrong, Thomas Pagel or Craig Winter, please feel free to send a note out to our members and say, Sorry, Mike is clueless. But that's my 90-day answer with asterisk.

BETH MAJOR: That's pretty good for 90 days, better than I could do probably after 9,000 days, so well done.

A question specific to membership. There's interest in increasing the number of members within the program. Obviously it's a very strong, avid, committed group of people and they'd like to see that number increase. Many

years ago there was a push to a million members quite a few years ago.

Can you talk about the power of membership and any intentions around numbers or further developing the program?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I'm not sure if this is politically correct, and you'll tell me after the camera goes off if this was a bad answer, but I'll be honest with you. I feel like when you're talking about memberships or clubs or data, I think people get way too focused on the number and way less focused on what's more important, which is the engagement.

I would rather have 1,000 people that are really engaged in moving the game forward than a million people who don't really care and it's just a bag tag.

For me, it's about creating value. It's about creating a voice. It's about creating a movement in the game, and much less about what number of people we have doing what number of things.

I really -- I couldn't tell you how many members we have, and if you told me, I would work hard to forget it the next day.

What I'm going to push for is is there value in being a member of the USGA? And if there isn't, why not? As somebody who really loves the game, if I want to be a member of the USGA, how can I have a voice? How can I be involved?

I love the fact that this exists, that we're doing this. That you can be a little bit closer to the decisions being made at the USGA than just some other guy hitting balls next to you on the range.

I really think that -- I really think if we focus on value, on movement, and on engagement and enthusiasm, it'll be so much better than being focused on some number. Who cares how many members there are at the USGA if golf isn't getting better? And nobody will care how many members of the USGA we have if golf continues to move forward in a real positive path.

I'd rather have a bunch of people, and I feel the same way about the company. I'd rather have seven people in the meeting that are so passionate and so persistent that they're not going to fail than 70 people in the meeting that are kind of lukewarm on why we're even here in the first place.

I'm going to work hard to make sure that being a USGA member is valuable. I don't just mean what do you get for

the dollar. I mean, that you feel like you're part of the game, that you're part of the movement, that you're hearing the feedback, and that your voice is being heard back here.

I love the fact that you had more questions than ever before. I love the fact that we're not going to answer all of them, but I'm pretty sure you're going to share the rest of them with me.

I think that's how you get better. Before I ever became an executive in the game of golf I was a fanatic of the game of golf. Before I was a fanatic of the game of golf, I was an employee of the game of golf.

That progression brought me here, to a place where I believe in my heart of hearts I'm doing this to leave the game better than I found it.

What will be true 10 years from now is that the USGA will have done more good for me than I will done for them. But I didn't come in for that purpose. When I went to the LPGA I thought I was educate everybody and be this great professor and teach everybody.

When I left the LPGA I realized that the LPGA taught me everything and I was the actual beneficiary of 12 years at the LPGA.

I'm pretty sure the same is going to be true at the USGA, but I'm going to work hard to make that balance more equal this time, that I give back just as much as I get.

BETH MAJOR: Of the many things that you're learning in your first 90 days, many of our members are also either representatives or volunteers for Allied Golf Associations, and there are some questions in terms of future of the USGA, AGA relationship and partnership.

Can you just talk about what you've learned thus far about the AGAs and the role they play, the important role they play related to the USGA.

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, at the end of the day, we really view our members, if you will, not only the people that are engaged in our membership, but our courses all over the United States that are trying hard to give these golfers the venue.

Our voice into those courses is the Allied Golf Associations. They're the ones that have the local knowledge. They're the ones putting on the local qualifiers. They're the ones giving the local playing opportunities. And quite frankly, thank goodness for them, because sitting here in Liberty Corner is great, but we don't have the eyes and ears of the local golf course, of the local golfer.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

By getting together with them on a regular basis, no different than if you're Merck and you're trying to sell a product, you've got to understand what the doctors and nurses are going through. If you don't understand what the doctors and nurses are dealing with at the local level, you're never going to make products that really solve real problems.

With us, the AGA is our eyes and ears to what's really happening at the point of sale, at the point of tee in ground. I'm excited because of the AGAs I've met, I know that they'll all probably roll their eyes when I say this, but they remind me of me. I know somebody probably just threw up in their mouth watching this who's an AGA member, but what I mean by that is they love the game for the game's purposes. They ended up pursuing a career in the game because they loved the game so much.

There was a lot of things I could have done as a 14-year-old kid in Chicago or Cincinnati, but I chose to work on a golf course because I loved the game. I chose to leave Procter & Gamble and go to Wilson, then Taylor Made, because I loved the game. It was certainly not better money, better opportunity, better town. It was about pursuing something that I'm really passionate about.

When I talk to AGA members, they have a passion for this game that's special. I wouldn't want to lose that. Quite frankly, I want to tap into that, and I just want to be a better partner with and for them.

BETH MAJOR: A few other questions. I think I have two more on my list before we wrap up. Continuing that theme of things you've learned over the first 90 days, you've mentioned that you have spent at least, I think, a day a week or a few hours a week over in the USGA Museum. Can you talk about some of the things that you've gleaned and perhaps a better sense of the history of the game, the organization, et cetera, through your visits over at the museum.

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, that's not something I usually talk about, but I'm a big believer in roots. What I mean by that is when I got to the LPGA I wanted to know the root system of the LPGA. Luckily for me there was living founders that I could go meet with and talk about why did you start this? What was the original mission? What are you most proud of in terms of what the LPGA is doing today? And what are you most disappointed in?

The roots of the USGA and of American golf are 100 yards away from me in the museum. What I gleaned from that is 1894. In my office now, I had a copy made of the Constitution's first page and framed, and it sits as close to

me as that TV monitor is. I see it virtually every day. When I'm on the phone and I turned away from my desk, I'm looking at the Constitution.

I want to remember why. What was the logic that made the United States Golf Association happen? It was pretty simple: Golf courses and golfers in America needed a governing body to create championships that we could all get around as our national championships.

We needed a governing body to create rules and regulations that we would all play by, so whether you were in Chicago, Massachusetts, Philadelphia, you could play by the same rules, under the same plans.

And they needed somebody to care more about the future of the game than the current state of the game, because clubs and golfers were really worried about the 10th hole and next week's member-guest and next year's course changes, but nobody was thinking about 1910 in 1894.

We were the group that was formed to think about 1910 and then 1940 and then 1970. I never want to forget those three things: Create national championships that all golfers and venues can be proud of, govern this game so that we not only can give everybody the same game to play by but to make sure that that governance provides a great game in the future, and then make sure every day I drive into work I'm thinking more about 2050 than I'm thinking about 2025.

There's a lot of great stakeholders in the game. Some of them will be my best friends the rest of my life. But I used to be one of them as a commissioner, and I had to really spend most of my day thinking about my members and opportunities for them to make money and TV and sponsorship. It was a today thing, this quarter, this week, next year.

At the USGA I have to flip out of the constant desire to talk about today and spend much more time talking about tomorrow. As Mike Davis said to me in a letter he left me that sits on my shelf today, When in doubt, Mike, and you'll be in doubt a few times, and he's right, ask yourself what's better for the game 50 years from now and have zero doubts when you make that decision.

No matter how much pain that might cause today, be committed to 50 years from now, and your kids' kids will have a better game.

It was great advice, and it's advice I'm going to stick with the whole time I'm in this job.

BETH MAJOR: I think it's perfect words of advice for us to





end on today. Thank you so much for this exciting Town Hall. I'm personally more excited every time I walk out of a room with you, and I am sure that our members today have gotten a sense of that excitement and are eager to learn over the coming weeks and months how they can get even more involved than they are right now.

I thank you very much. To all of you, thank you again for joining us. Thrilled to have you with us. I hope you enjoyed today's Town Hall. Thank you for your membership and your support of the USGA, and we'll look forward to seeing you again soon.

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