

# The 149th Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 25 May 2021

**Martin Slumbers**

**Shane Lowry**

**Johnnie Cole-Hamilton**



MIKE WOODCOCK: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for joining us for the virtual media briefing for the 149th Open at Royal St George's. I'd like to begin this afternoon by introducing our speakers. We have our champion golfer of two years, Shane Lowry, who joins us fresh from an excellent performance at Kiawah Island. We have Martin Slumbers, Chief Executive of The R&A. And waiting in the wings, if that's possible on Zoom, is Johnnie Cole-Hamilton, our Executive Director of Championships. My name is Mike Woodcock and I'll be moderating the session this afternoon.

Turning to the format for today's session, I'm going to ask Martin to say a few opening words to set the scene and explain where we are with our preparations to The Open Championship, and then I'll turn it to Shane to give his thoughts on looking forward to defending the trophy. We have about 30 minutes with Shane, and once he drops off the call we're going to leave some time for you to ask any questions that you might have of Martin and Johnnie directly at the end.

Without further ado, I'll now ask Martin if he can give some opening remarks.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Good afternoon, everybody, from a reasonable spring at St Andrews. Before going any further, I would just like to say that this is the first media session since Jock McVicar died, and I think there is absolutely no doubt in all of our minds that he'll be sorely missed.

The primary objective for today is -- one is to update on our progress for The Open in July, and secondly to have an opportunity to hear from the current champion, as Mike said, of two years, Shane Lowry.

It's been a very difficult 14 months for all of us in society, and there's been many challenges that everybody has had to face, and I do think sport has a really important part to play in the way we come out of this, certainly over here in the UK.

I was thinking about this last night. Especially with Shane here,

2019 after probably 35 years of my professional life, working 2019 at Portrush was probably one of the best experiences I've ever had, and cancelling 2020 was probably one of the worst experiences I've ever had.

We are thoroughly excited about July. It's beginning to take shape.

Whilst we would really like to provide certainty to everybody on how The Open will work, the inevitable is that there remains great uncertainty. The one thing that I am clear about is that we will play the 149th Open at Royal St George's in the third week of July in not that many days from now.

Uncertainty is about what the environment will be that we will need to operate in. We've been working very closely with the UK government and Public Health to understand what we can do and what we can't do, and there is no doubt it is extremely complex and very challenging indeed.

There are multiple plans and multiple options. I feel very much for Johnnie and the team who not just have to plan one Open, they're probably planning three separate Opens.

But we are approaching the point in mid-June which we believe is the key date that we will have for a greater understanding of what rules will apply.

What we are optimistic, though, of is a significant attendance, and we are looking to have an attendance at Royal St George's of up to about 75 percent of capacity. And for those of you who do see some of our Twitter feeds and other social media feeds, you can see that we're already building the infrastructure, and that's moving forward at its usual rapid pace.

We are hoping for a significant media presence, but I think it's very important to say that we will not be at full capacity. We will not be allowed to be at full capacity. But we will have a significant presence and a virtual access to the media centre during the championship.

We have been, though, as everybody is who's trying to put on big sporting events, very careful and very responsible. We do not want to get ahead of Public Health and related government policy, and the safety of the players, officials, media,



spectators, is paramount as the way we're thinking this through.

We are retaining as much optionality as we can until the rules become clear, and as I said, that clarity will be provided from mid to late June, and then we will start to lock in and communicate exactly on which options we are going to go forward to.

I and all the team are greatly looking forward to The Open. The course is in great shape. It will benefit from some more rainfall, get a bit more grass growing.

But my thanks go to all the members and the team at Royal St George's who have been quite frankly terrific during this past year or so as the uncertainty for their course and the staging was continuing.

At the end of the day, as many of you know, I am a golf geek. I love our game. I love The Open. I'm looking forward to watching Shane defend his title finally after what was, as I said, one of the great experiences of my life in 2019 when he won.

The only thing I will ask Shane is can you please remember to bring back the Claret Jug. With that, I'll hand it back to Mike.

MIKE WOODCOCK: Thank you, Martin. And yes, turning to Shane, and Shane, thank you very much for taking the time and joining us this afternoon. It's great to see you again. As Martin says, I think the last time I saw you was at the Irish Golf Writers' dinner and the Claret Jug was looking a little more leaning at that point, so I'm sure it's in better shape now.

Coming off a great performance at the weekend, top 5 finish, looked as if you were having a great time with Pdraig there on Sunday. How much does that give you a lift and how much are you looking forward to now finally being able to defend at Royal St George's?

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, obviously I had a great weekend last weekend. I played really good, and it's great to do it in the big tournaments.

I feel like I've been doing that over the last couple of years where I arrive at those big events and manage to kind of find some sort of an "A" game or something towards my best game anyway.

Great to have a great week. I felt like I played great at the Masters. Obviously the U.S. Open is in a couple of weeks and then back to St George's to defend my title at The Open. That's going to be -- it's obviously going to be a new experience for me because I've never got to defend a major championship before, and it's going to be really exciting.

It's going to be -- I'm going to be disappointed to be giving back the Claret Jug, but hopefully I'm only giving it back for a few days. I can assure you that it is in good shape and it will be coming back nice and shiny.

But yeah, I'm looking forward to getting there. Just looking forward to -- it feels like it's a long time since Portrush. I'm sure you guys are all the same and everyone is just looking forward to going back and playing The Open Championship again, because as we all know it's, in my opinion -- it's one of our greatest championships, if not the greatest.

So just to get back there and play that will be great.

MIKE WOODCOCK: We're all looking forward to seeing that very much, Shane. With that, I'll now ask the media that are joining us on the call to indicate if they'd like to ask a question in the chat function and then we'll come over to you within a few seconds.

**Q. Shane, you're obviously in a run of pretty good form, very good form. You've also, I think, decided to have a base or move perhaps more permanently for the time being to America. Are the two connected? Specifically to what do you attribute this good run of form? What part of your game do you think has improved to enable you to play as well as you obviously are consistently now?**

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, well, yeah, I have -- we've actually just moved into a new house. We've just bought a house in America, so we're living here kind of -- we're still going to be a lot of time in Ireland. We're kind of 50/50 spending our time between here and Ireland. We're not really sure where our lives are going to end up just yet. It's great while I am playing in America over here to have a base and have somewhere to call home, but for me, like Ireland will always be home; do you know what I mean?

Being able to practice and play over here in these conditions helps me play on the PGA TOUR and the big events over here, so I would say just spending time over here, spending time in this climate, spending time playing on the PGA TOUR over the last number of years, my game has matured, I've matured as a person, and I feel like, yeah, most -- probably 90 percent of my game is quite consistent at the minute.

I'm just kind of struggling to find consistency with my putting. I really feel like if I do that, I can go ahead and win big tournaments again. But it's all about putting yourself there, and I put myself there last weekend, and it was really exciting. It was just exciting to be up there on the weekend of a major championship again. The buzz I get from that is the reason I get up every morning, it's the reason I go out and practice, and hopefully I can keep doing that and give myself a couple of chances over the next few years to maybe knock off another

one.

**Q. Just wanted to reflect obviously on last Sunday and just the implications. I know it's very early in the year to kind of introduce Ryder Cup into the conversation, but obviously you were playing with Padraig. You were on a Pete Dye links-style golf course and you performed extremely well. I just wondered in the Ryder Cup context how satisfied last Sunday was for you and how important you think it might be.**

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, look, obviously I play a lot of golf with Padraig anyway. I play a lot of practice rounds with him, spend a lot of time with him. But never do I get to play in that type of situation with him, so it was nice to kind of perform when you're kind of in the heat of the battle and out there back nine of a major championship.

I got off to a bit of an iffy start on Sunday and I manage to really fight hard and grind it out well and shoot 3-under for my last 12 holes, which I was really happy about. To do that in front of him was pretty nice. I have to say it was very satisfying because, look, Padraig knows what I can do. He knows what my game is about.

But just to be there -- and look, last Sunday was an absolute blast. Like it was probably one of the best -- like Padraig said afterwards, it was one of the best days I've ever had on the golf course. The holes were so difficult coming in that every time the two of us hit a good shot on the same hole, I'd go over and say, Well, that's that hole out of the way. We'd have a bit of a laugh about it.

It was great to see him -- obviously, look, I grew up admiring Pádraig Harrington and I watched him in The Open in 2007 and 2008, and to be there in the final round of a major playing with him, one of my golfing idols, was pretty cool, and also one of my friends.

You know, when I look back on it over the years, it's one of those rounds that we'll remember, that we'll talk about. It was just pretty cool to be there and to be there with him. But yes, it was quite satisfying to play good on that type of a golf course with him is all.

**Q. Shane, when we were speaking to you before the PGA Championship you said that you love big weeks. You were really looking forward to it because you love a big week. When did this level of comfort come back that you feel that you can produce your "A" game in major championships these days? Was there a watershed moment before Portrush or was it winning at Portrush that helped you get that?**

SHANE LOWRY: I don't really know. Obviously, look, standing on the 18th green at Portrush with the Claret Jug in

your hand kind of gives you a lot of confidence in yourself, and I feel like, look, I don't know what it is, but I just love major championships. I just love big weeks. I love the atmosphere.

To be honest, last year when we played the PGA and the U.S. Open and the Masters with no crowds I felt like I struggled. I felt like it was just hard to kind of get yourself to that level where the intensity that you really wanted to be at. So it was nice to have that back at the Masters somewhat this year, and then the PGA last week was really, really cool to have the crowds back. And even just seeing the scenes of Phil walking up 18, it's great to have that back in sport.

Like Martin said at the start, it's been an incredibly difficult kind of 14 months for everyone, and I think sport does have a huge part to play in everyone's kind of well-being and health, mental health. I think people are -- even just talking to my dad yesterday, him sitting at home watching that on TV kind of gives him a bit of a boost and stuff like that.

When did I feel like I got my game plan? I don't know. I feel like I'm 34 now. I feel like I'm maturing as a golfer, as a person. So I feel like when I get to those big weeks I kind of know what's going to happen. I kind of -- you're going to have ups and downs. You're going to have difficult times on the course and you're going to have good runs, and when you're having good runs you need to take advantage of that.

I did that last week, and to be honest, like I'm delighted I had a top-5 finish, a great week, but I was quite disappointed leaving the golf course on Sunday because I feel like that is a tournament that I could have won last week. A lot of my game was very good. I struggled a little bit on the greens, but I think a lot of people were. The greens were weird, quite hard to hole putts on.

Phil obviously holed a lot of putts the first couple of days, but I found them quite hard to hole putts on and quite hard to read personally. Even the putt I had on 18 on Sunday, I misread it by about a cup from 10 feet. It probably looked like one of the worst putts you could ever hit, but I actually felt like I hit a decent putt and I missed by a cup left.

So that was the type of week I had, yeah.

**Q. Shane, I was just hoping to get your take on Royal St George's and your experience around that place.**

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, I was just talking to the lads before we came on here. I played the Amateur Championship in 2006 there and I shot 81 in the one round that I played around there, and I haven't been back since.

No, I'm looking forward to it. Obviously I watched Darren win his Open there, and I know it's one of the trickiest venues we

have, especially if you get a good UK summer. It's so far south that it can get firm and fast and play like proper links golf. So it'll be a great test.

Just the whole experience of going there as defending champion, I'm really looking forward to it.

**Q. You spoke about thinking you could have won the U.S. Open. You also said that about Augusta. Three top 10s and your best Masters finish. Do you feel like if you can get a few more putts to drop you're really contending in the nitty-gritty part of the Sunday?**

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, I'm assuming you're talking about the U.S. PGA, not the U.S. Open?

**Q. Yeah, U.S. PGA.**

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, look, I've said it. My game is -- I think I led the field in driving last week, which is quite satisfying. Around the greens I was quite good. My chipping was pretty good. My approach play wasn't as good as it normally is, so that kind of let me down a little bit.

But yeah, I had a good day on the greens on Friday, but other than that I didn't really hole much.

To have a top-5 finish and finish tied fourth in a big tournament like that without putting -- with putting average is quite satisfying. But yeah, I did feel like it kind of -- look, ifs and buts, but yeah, I felt like I came away from the Masters in April really feeling like I should have contended there, and I felt like I should have been at the business end of the tournament last weekend.

A lot of positives to take from everything so far this year, and I'm quite happy where my game is at.

**Q. Martin, a question for you. The U.S. PGA, it seemed as though it was taking place in a COVID-free world. How do you envisage The Open Championship in a few weeks' time in Britain compared to what we saw at Kiawah Island?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Well, there's no doubt that different parts of the U.S. are working under different restrictions, and it's no different between South Carolina and the UK in terms of that sort of gap.

The big uncertainty for us is clarity with the government and health authorities around social distancing, and that will determine what the atmosphere will be like at The Open.

We are building the infrastructure as we would normally build for a normal year, so there's the big grandstands going around the 18th and around the 1st, and we're building them in a way

that we can adapt for social distancing depending on what the rules are going to be.

I'm cautiously optimistic, but I don't want to get ahead of Public Health. We need to just be patient, Martin, and just let the government and health authorities do what they've got to do. They will give us a clear indication middle of June, certainly for Royal St George's down in England, and we will take that and we will put on the best show we can and let the guys show us how good they are, as I've said many, many times.

I'm keen to get as many spectators in as possible because I do think that's what creates the atmosphere, and I think actually it's what makes the players play just a little bit better.

**Q. You said you hope to get up to 75 percent capacity. What would be the bottom figure on that, of the three options that you're working on?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Somewhere between 25 and 75. That shows you the uncertainty that we're having to work with.

**Q. Mr. Woodcock had kind of alluded to the Claret Jug having seen better days when he saw you at the Irish golf writers' dinner. I wonder if you could give us the highlights and low lights of that little jug over the last 22 months.**

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, to be honest -- look, we had an amazing time with it. It's funny, right, I did put a few drinks in it but not that much. We filled it a couple of times afterwards, and then we actually had a nice dinner with all my team that Christmas that we drink some nice wine out of it.

When you have the Claret Jug with you and somebody that's really interested in golf or somebody that really loves their golf, when you show them that piece of silverware -- there's one story I remember. I had the Claret Jug with me at the Race to Dubai at the end of 2019 and I was wheeling it through the hotel, and this guy was there and he stopped me, and he's like, Is that the Claret Jug? And I was like, Yeah, and we started to talk.

Next thing, he's like -- he begged me could he see it, so I opened up the box and I showed him and he held the Claret Jug and he started to cry because he was holding the Claret Jug. That's what that trophy actually means to people that love their golf.

Just to have it in my possession for that length of time and being able to kind of share it with all my friends and family and other people has been just incredible. Obviously I've got my replica now as well and I'll have that forevermore, but it'll be a sad time giving it back. But hopefully I get it back at some stage, whether it be St George's this year or maybe another time down the road.

**Q. Any dicey moments with it?**

SHANE LOWRY: It has been sent back to be straightened once, yes. We actually noticed going through the airport, and I noticed on the airport scanner that it was a little bit of a bend in it. It's not just me. I did talk to Zach Johnson about this and he told me that he bent it, as well, so it's not only me.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I'll give you an add-on to that. When Zach returned the trophy he said, I have to apologise. He said he did have to take it to be repaired. But as I took it into the shop in Florida, maybe near where you live, the silversmith who was behind the counter said, "Oh, I've seen this twice before."

SHANE LOWRY: Oh, okay.

**Q. Just to ask you again to go back to the Ryder Cup, it goes without saying obviously that you'd want to qualify automatically, but if it comes down to a pick, is there almost an element of a bit when your dad is your teacher at school and you have to try extra hard to get the grades? Because of your relationship with Padraig do you have to impress him even more?**

SHANE LOWRY: I don't know. Look, I can only put my best foot forward. I'm in a good position now to go ahead and make the team this year. I got some nice World Ranking points last week. I'm playing for plenty of World Ranking points over the next few months.

If I play good enough or play to the best of my ability over the next few months I could make that team. That's my main goal, to obviously go and make it. If I don't make it, to be so close that I kind of make his decision for him, because even though the whole rookie thing will be talked about, that I'm a rookie, but I don't feel like a rookie.

I can go -- I feel like I've not been there, done that, because I've never been there, but kind of -- I've won big tournaments. I've competed at the highest level. I feel like I definitely will add to the team if I'm there.

I feel like I can bring a lot to the team. That's just how I feel about it. Like I'm confident in my own self that if I'm put on the first tee against anyone that I'm confident that I can bring home a point for the team when I'm put out there.

It's just up to me to put my best foot forward this summer. Last Sunday and last week was a great start because I think when they are looking at picking the team, they do look at the big tournaments, they look at the majors, and if you have some good finishes in majors, it definitely helps your case.

**Q. The viral video that has everyone in the world of golf talking today, have you seen it, and what's your reaction to it?**

SHANE LOWRY: The Brooks and Bryson one?

**Q. Yeah.**

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, I mean, it's no -- I'm not sure they like each other, but that's kind of -- that's the way it is out here. I think people go wild for stuff like that, but at the end of the day there's 150 big egos there last week, and not everyone is going to like everyone. Yeah, they obviously don't really see eye to eye.

**Q. Shane, obviously it wasn't a true links course, but linksey style, gusting winds and winds that changed 180 degrees. How much confidence did you get from playing that well? And also, how early will you get to St George's, because you'll obviously have a lot of demands on your time.**

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, look, it was quite a linksey style course. It was right on the ocean last week and it was very windy. The course started to firm up as the week went on but they kept the greens quite soft, which made the course playable because if the greens got firm I don't think it would have been.

But yeah, look, it can only give you great confidence playing well in a big tournament like that, so I'm going to get great confidence out of that going forward. I feel like the three biggest events I've played this year so far I've played pretty good, THE PLAYERS, the Masters, and the PGA.

Going forward I'm obviously hoping I can be in that form.

And when am I going to get to St George's? To be honest I haven't even thought about it. Probably fly over on the Sunday because I've only played there once, and I need to get to know the course, and obviously there will be maybe a couple of things extra that I'll have to do that week.

So yeah, I don't know. I might even -- I was talking to my coach about maybe going over for a day trip the week before to try and play a round and get a round on my own in a more peaceful setting than what would be like the championship week.

I'll just have to wait and see. I'm quite busy this summer. I have a lot going on. I don't know when I'm going to go over.

I've been told I have to be there by Monday anyway. That's the first time I heard that. So I'll be flying Sunday.

**Q. Martin, can you tell us in terms of numbers if you get up to 75 percent how many people are we talking each day? What we saw on the 18th, in many ways it was joyous.**

**Brooks obviously had a few things to say about it. I wonder whether that's making you think again about your own marshalling?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Normal capacity would be somewhere around 40,000. That would be full capacity for St George's.

Yeah, no, we for The Open will absolutely be holding back behind the barriers that we have and let the players have the freedom to move and play the final hole. It's very important for us, especially as we might have to use it straight after if there's a playoff. So we're very conscious about keeping that space safe and clear.

I would say at Portrush when we got to the presentation ceremony it was quite difficult to control those fans who were sort of trying to get on to the 18th green, so it's a balance between getting the enthusiasm and the safety and making sure the camera pictures are all right, but the 18th fairway will be clean come July.

**Q. Martin, you'll be well aware of the size, shall we say, of Sandwich, the town of Sandwich, and in 2011 you had 180,000 people pass through Royal St George's. Obviously with the caveats you've already mentioned, what does it mean having 75 percent of capacity passing through what are very narrow streets, very narrow roads, and still albeit at the end of a pandemic?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Yeah, and therein lies the challenge of staging a major championship during a pandemic. That's one of the things that -- one of the many things we're trying to solve, how we do that safely.

We had originally before the pandemic started worked with Kent Council and Dover to build two new train platforms at Sandwich that do take 12 carriage trains down from London with the expectation that more people are going to come in on trains, and we bought land to be able to move the crowd through safely.

The expectation at the moment is that more people will want to drive as against come on the train, so we are working on additional park and rides and how we move people in.

The actual number, which is what I didn't really want to say -- we don't want to talk about an actual number because we've got to be able to move the crowds in safely and in accordance with Public Health.

**Q. Along those same lines, when you look back at Sunday or just last week in general, did that feel like a major championship?**

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah. Last week was incredible. I know

Brooks obviously didn't have a great time walking down 18, but I think he was probably a bit sore after not winning the tournament, as well.

You know, when you look at those scenes I think it's incredible. The scenes I have, the pictures I have at home and the pictures my mom has up in the house of me walking down the 18th green with the Irish people behind me, it's just incredible to have scenes like that.

So Phil, to watch that on Sunday was -- look, I was sitting in the clubhouse hoping he was going to make a few bogeys on the back nine, but to watch him walking down the 18th with all those crowds, it was just incredible, and it was a proper major feel.

Like I said -- I met Seth Waugh in the clubhouse afterwards, and I said to Seth, it was probably -- it was one of the best setups I've ever seen for a major championship. It was unbelievable the job they did last week. The golf course and everything about it was just incredible.

**Q. I'm just wondering, last year when it became apparent that you wouldn't be defending the Claret Jug because The Open couldn't be held, did you think, I've got another year to enjoy this or did you pack it away and think, Well, that's my year over? How did you approach it?**

SHANE LOWRY: Well, when I heard the news, first I was very disappointed obviously because I just was. I kind of selfishly for my own self I was just -- the way everything happened last year was -- I was disappointed not being able to go to the likes of the Irish Open and play in front of the crowds as The Open Champion, stuff like that.

Yeah, but I didn't pack it away in July last year. I didn't pack the trophy away in July and sort of say, That's my year over. I still had it there or whatever.

Like I think the decision was made -- when the decision was made in about May, I think, was it, around then?

**Q. April.**

SHANE LOWRY: April. So I knew from then I wasn't going to be defending and I was going to be defending this year. Everyone had to take tough decisions last year, and The R&A obviously and Martin had to make the decision.

Like he said, I'm sure it was probably one of the toughest decisions he's ever had to make. When we're back there at St George's this year with hopefully a few people watching and hopefully us top golfers performing to the best of our ability, it'll be all worthwhile.

So that's kind of -- I'm going to prefer going back defending my title with crowds as opposed to being there last July with no crowds.

You know, I was disappointed at the start, but obviously I'm going to get the upside of defending in front of a few people this year.

**Q. Having seen the winner last weekend, do you think it's possible that a 50-year-old can win The Open? You mentioned Darren Clarke. Of course he's going back to the scene of his triumph; of course Pádraig Harrington is 50 this summer.**

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, I think -- I mean, look, normally, I'm not sure many people thought Phil was going to win last week, even when he had the lead. Brooks was probably favourite going in on Sunday, even though Phil had the lead.

Yeah, I think you look back over the years at the Open, you look at Tom Watson, you look at Greg Norman leading, and you look at -- I think The Open does have the opportunity for the older players, the more experienced players, especially when links golf gets a bit tricky. You need to be more experienced to play that type of golf.

So yeah, down the road you could see someone in their 50s winning an Open Championship.

But they're incredibly hard to win, so you need to be playing your best golf and you need to have your best mental game and you need to -- you need a lot of things to go right.

Padraig obviously played brilliant last week and he'll fancy himself going to St George's this year. Phil will obviously fancy himself, as well. A lot of guys will fancy themselves, as well.

MIKE WOODCOCK: I'd just like to look slightly further ahead and turn our attention to the 150th Open at St Andrews next year which we're all looking forward to. Martin, can you just share your thoughts on how exciting and how much of a milestone that's going to be for the championship, please?

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I mean, I'm looking forward to getting the 149th played, but in the back of our minds is a piece of real history come next year with the 150th here on the Old Course in St Andrews.

We are not just trying to run one Open down in St George's, but very much working on this one here. I think the excitement is building. The anticipation is building. The demand for tickets and hospitality is extraordinary.

We will be putting out some announcements in the next couple of weeks around the 150th, and I've always thought The Open is

a real chance to celebrate golf, and I think the 150th will be a real opportunity for all of us to celebrate this great championship.

MIKE WOODCOCK: Shane, as obviously one of the top players, how exciting is it to be going to a place like St Andrews for such a big piece of history?

SHANE LOWRY: Yeah, so it's going to be amazing. Like I played my first Open Championship in 2010 in St Andrews, and I always say that was probably one of the best experiences of my life. Playing The Open Championship in St Andrews, I believe it doesn't get any better than that. Walking down that first fairway and walking up 18 in The Open Championship with the big crowds is just, like I said, it doesn't get much better.

To be a part of the 150th Open at St Andrews, I'm sure Martin and his team have some big ideas for it, and yeah, I'm looking forward to seeing what's going to be involved in it.

I believe there's a champions' dinner at the Open at St Andrews, so I'm really looking forward to that. So yeah, I'm grateful that I'm going to be a part of it and really looking forward to, like I said, The Open at St Andrews. For me as a professional golfer it doesn't get any bigger than that.

If you can manage winning The Open -- winning The Open in the Ireland for me, if you can manage to win one around St Andrews, it might just top that.

MIKE WOODCOCK: Shane, I'm sure I speak for everyone on the call when I say a very warm thank you for joining us this afternoon, and best of luck with a busy schedule between now and Royal St George's.

We'll look forward very much to seeing you there and competing and trying to take the Claret Jug home again.

SHANE LOWRY: Thanks for having me, and see you all at St George's.

MIKE WOODCOCK: As I mentioned earlier we've got some time left. We're very happy to take some questions for Martin, so I'm going to carry on working through the list of questions that have been put forward.

**Q. Mr. Slumbers, just wanted to ask you, everyone talks about the fans and obviously the players and all the people, but I just wanted to know from you what's been the reaction of your sponsors towards last year when you had to postpone it, when you had to cancel the event, and how are they looking forward to this year? What are the kind of talks that you've had with all your sponsors?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think if I go back to all those conversations we had with them, disappointment but understanding. If you go back to last April, certainly over here there was tremendous uncertainty about the situation, and there was a general acceptance that we had thought through why we'd made the decision, and there was tremendous support from all the sponsors, actually.

It was through some difficult dark days and evenings. It was actually quite heart warming to see the people who sponsor us were so supportive.

**Q. Martin, how many fans, how many spectators will come from the next Open Championship?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: As I mentioned earlier, we expect to have somewhere between 25 and 75 percent of what we would normally have for the championship, and hopefully by the time we get back here in St Andrews for the 150th, we'll be -- the world will be closer to normal and we'll be back up well over the 200,000 spectators in 2022.

**Q. There are a lot of differences between The R&A and the American circuit because during the PGA Championship we saw lots of fans, a lot of people without masks. What do you think about it?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think as we've all lived through this last 14 months, the important thing to me has been that every country has dealt with the situation in their own way. I actually have been to America fairly recently for the Walker Cup, and it is more advanced in terms of opening up restrictions. It felt rather unusual after what we've been used to here.

Hopefully we're all getting closer to the point where things are beginning to improve, and each country will do what it thinks is the right thing for them to get out of -- to move forward.

**Q. Martin, Irish golfers have been very successful at The Open Championship since 2007. I know you've had to push everything back a year, but how close is Portrush to staging an Open again, and is it in the frame for 2025?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I don't want to make any comment about 2025 or beyond what we've already announced. We've obviously got St Andrews in '22, then Hoylake and then Royal Troon. But I think it's safe to say that Portrush was something special. A lot of people think it was right up there amongst the finest Opens, and I am sure it will stage another Open in the not-too-distant future.

**Q. Just looking back, going back to 2020 seemed like The Open Championship was the only major championship that didn't get played. Do you look back with a bit of regret that the championship didn't get staged even behind closed**

**doors just for that sort of history element of the event, to keep an event every year and when you see the reaction from the general public that the other majors were being staged and opening them up to audiences when there wasn't much on sport-wise?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think I'll answer that in two parts. One is I have absolutely no regrets whatsoever that we cancelled The Open for the decisions that -- for the reasons that we did. It was a situation that we were in in this country at that time where we didn't have a choice.

Did I miss it? Yeah, I missed it a lot. Did everyone who worked on it? Yeah, they missed it, as well. And the players did.

But we made the right decision at that time.

**Q. Martin, there's so many wonderful images over the years of the soon-to-be Champion Golfer of the Year coming up the 18th fairway with thousands of fans literally marching behind him. I wondered your thoughts on the 18th at Kiawah, and with this changing excitable culture we have how you prevent something like that.**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Yeah, it was quite amazing, wasn't it? It was a bit like watching Tiger when he won at East Lake three years ago. We're very careful on how we move the crowds around, so we're going to -- we will continue to keep the crowds on the side of the 18th until it's all over and then allow them to move closer to the green.

As Shane said, we did allow the crowds at Portrush right back once he had gone through. It's a real balance between getting that -- the whole thing is a balance to getting the excitement but making sure the players are safe.

I'm old enough to remember when Faldo came up the 18th here in St Andrews and the police had to literally drag him from the middle of the crowd. I'm not sure we want to do that. It was okay given the situation he was in, but if it's still to be decided on the 18th green, that's probably not the right balance to have. But it was exciting to watch.

**Q. I just wondered in terms of the players at The Open, are you expecting to have them in a bubble environment as is the case with Wimbledon with the competitors having to stay in hotels? What are the implications, because obviously they're going to be travelling internationally for that week.**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Yeah, the players, they will be in a bubble of players and officials and the championship staff that will be looking after the players and the championship, and they will be kept separate and away from whatever crowds we're allowed to have.



That's just unfortunate the way it's got to work at the moment. But as you say, it is critical to manage the public health issues about bringing the players in internationally. We're very much monitoring where the players are and particularly those that may be coming from red countries and how we keep them very careful within the bubble and according to the guidance the government will give us.

It's what's making all of this very, very challenging, and it will feel different. As everyone who's been to a golf tournament in the last eight to nine months knows, it doesn't feel exactly the same, and that's entirely appropriate.

**Q. Do you have any concerns with American-based players who are used to, compared with the European Tour, a much more kind of lax bubble in an environment in which they've been operating?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think I'd have more concerns if we were not communicating with them and explaining the environment that we're in. That's part of playing internationally. Many of them wouldn't have played outside of America since the pandemic hit, and we're very conscious of that and we're talking to them and explaining how it will work here.

I think communication will lie at the centre of that.

**Q. Martin, just wondering on the distance measuring devices we saw in use at Kiawah Island, what's The R&A view on those in championship golf and then The Open Championship? Would you be proposing using them or relying on them?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: No, we will not. They will not be in use at The Open Championship or at the AIG Women's Open. They are allowed in regional qualifying but not after that.

**Q. Over the last year the participation numbers in Scotland have gone through the roof, membership at golf clubs in Scotland have gone through the roof. Looking ahead to the 150th next year at St Andrews, how can you use that event to ensure that, yes, it's a celebration of 150 years of Open Championships, but to try and ensure that the Scottish public get as much of it as possible because it is going to be an amazing event?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I mean, we will use all of our platforms, which are our championships, to keep promoting the game. One of the great benefits in my mind of Phil winning last week was showing longevity and managing your health. Golf is a great game to play and can be played at the very, very highest level. I am really enjoying the fact that golf is increasing participation at the moment, but I'm also extremely conscious that the vast majority of that has been driven because of the

impact of COVID on other sports that those people used to play.

The biggest responsibility we have is not to take that increase for granted, but to keep trying to reinforce why when you're able to go back and play football or play rugby or any other sport, why you want to keep being a member of a golf club and keep playing golf, and we will use all of our assets to be able to sell that -- sell the story about our sport.

**Q. It's been a tough year financially for everyone, so I'm just wondering what the implications of not holding The Open last year have maybe impacted on holding it this year?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: We were fortunate to have insurance in place against communicable diseases, so we were able to minimise some of the financial implications of the cancelling of The Open last year, but it also enabled us to provide additional 7 million funding to the game at the grass-roots level out of that.

I think that all sports have not only had to look very carefully at the economics of where they are but also the business model. It was a very sobering time for us when you realise that in the environment we just went through, costs became fixed and revenues went to zero.

That was something we think a lot about, and I'm sure a lot of people in sport really start to think about the business model of sport, and that's something that's going to take years and years and years of work to be able to evolve.

**Q. I may have missed it, but have we had an announcement on prize money for this year?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: No, we won't announce that until much closer to the time.

**Q. Martin, just a very quick one. For the spectators you have, masks were mentioned. Will they be required to wear masks this year?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I would expect so. We don't have the final definitive answer from government, but I'm fully expecting that we will be.

**Q. I just wanted to ask you, not just players but also staff, rules officials, and other people from Asian countries really look forward to The Open, to come there in capacity as, say, the officials, the rules officials, and things like that. Given the situation and that most countries are on the red list, have you had some kind of communication with them? What have you been telling them about coming to The Open?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Yeah, we've been in very active

dialogue for about three months with officials. I think the reality in the UK is that international travel is extremely difficult. It is only going to really be possible under the athlete exemption, which is how we'll get the players and the officials into the country and keep them safe.

And the reality is that The Open this year is going to be a much more domestic UK audience and officials. That's the reality of the world we're living in at the moment.

We would look to hopefully change that in 2022.

**Q. Martin, you've seen more than most of us of Shane in the past 22 months. Can you just tell me, please, what the attributes of him are that have struck you in that time?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Deep love of golf and a real sense of humility. I did smile when he said there are 150 egos last week. He's got that lovely balanced approach to life and golf. It's a real pleasure to hear from him and talk to him.

**Q. Martin, obviously a lot still to be finalised logistically as you've discussed, but just how excited are you personally that we're actually going to have an Open in a few weeks' time hopefully with a significant number of fans in attendance?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think I am, after 30 years of being in the city of London, I think I have -- and if you work in golf, one of the luckiest jobs in golf, and one of the privileges of this job is being able to walk out on the 18th green on the third week of July on Sunday and announce the Champion Golfer of the Year.

It's given me a huge pleasure in the last four or five years, and I'm really looking forward to doing that and seeing what The R&A does really, really well, which is put on world-class championships.

MIKE WOODCOCK: I'll just wrap things up and say a big thank you to Martin and to Johnnie, and of course to Shane Lowry for joining us earlier. To you, our friends in the media, for joining us and continuing to support the championship. We're well aware that this is a challenging year in so many ways, and we appreciate your patience and you bearing with us as we work through the various processes and procedures and guidelines that Martin has been describing today.

We'll certainly do our best to stay in touch with you and keep you informed as we work through the process. I'm going to look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at Royal St George's and in the future.

Just to close things today, we've got a nice video piece just to whet the appetite, and thank you again, and have a good day.