

# AIG Women's Open

Press Conference

Wednesday, 9 August 2023

**Martin Slumbers**

**Peter Zaffino**



KAREN MYERS: Good afternoon, everyone, this is the joint R&A and AIG press conference with Martin Slumbers, the CEO of the R&A, and Peter Zaffino, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of AIG.

Before taking questions, Martin and Peter will make opening remarks, and a press release and announcements will be issued at the end of the press conference.

I'll start by turning it over to Martin.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Thank you, Karen. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the AIG Women's Open and to Walton Heath, whose members have been so supportive for this week's championship. I'd also like to welcome Peter Zaffino, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of AIG who will speak shortly, and then we will both be very happy to take any questions.

This is the fifth staging of the championship with AIG as our title sponsor, and in that time, we have built a strong partnership with shared goals and values. That's why I'm delighted today to announce that AIG has reaffirmed its commitment to women's golf by extending its partnership with the R&A in the naming rights to the AIG Women's Open through 2030.

When I look at what we have achieved in the last five years, I personally am incredibly proud. But even more so, I'm inspired by what we can still do. The future of women's golf so bright and it's up to us with the support of the wider industry to take bold steps in a way that is financially sustainable to ensure our aspirations become reality.

I'm very pleased to let you know that for this week's championship, together with AIG, we are raising the total prize fund to \$9 million which is a 23 per cent increase on the 2022 7.3 million with the champion earning 1.35 million come Sunday evening.

Part of the elevation of the AIG Women's Open is to stage it on the best courses that present the greatest challenge, as is evident this week here at Walton Heath. I'm thus also

pleased to announce that the 2026 Championship will be hosted by Royal Lytham and St Annes where Georgia Hall, now an AIG ambassador, was victorious back in 2018.

We have a fantastic partner in AIG. We are hosted by great courses and we are showcasing the world's greatest women's golfers at a truly international championship. And to ensure that our fans have great experience, both avid fans and those who are discovering our sport for the first time, we have also elevated the fan experience here this week, and I would encourage you all to go and take a look at it.

Peter and I are excited about it and totally committed to the opportunities we are creating for women's golf, and I would now like to ask Peter to make some comments.

PETER ZAFFINO: Thank you, Martin, and thank all of you for being here today. It's great to be at Walton Heath for the 2023 AIG Women's Open.

This is AIG's fifth year as title sponsor of the Championship. We could not be more pleased with our partnership with The R&A and with Martin and the progress that we have made to advance the women's game of golf. Today's announcement is very exciting for us. It demonstrates our long-term commitment to the partnership of The R&A and our allyship with women athletes.

While the last five years have had a strong positive impact on the game, we still have work to do, and the extension provides us with the opportunity to be deliberate about the next several years and how we continue to make progress.

As Martin noted, this extension allows us to invest with a long-term view, both in terms of selecting world-class venues for future tournaments and increasing the prize fund. Our title sponsorship of the AIG Women's Open has allowed us to accelerate and to align with AIG's corporate values in terms of creating inclusive environments, being allies to women in business and society, and demonstrating long-term commitments to issues that really matter to us as an organisation.

The R&A shares our values, and particularly our allyship and dedication to having a meaningful and lasting impact on women's golf. We are excited for this week's



Championship at Walton Heath.

The way you cover this Championship really matters, and these women athletes matter to us, and it's critical for the continued growth and success of the women's game.

So on behalf of all of my colleagues at AIG, we wish all of the athletes competing this year the best of luck, and with that Martin, I'll turn it back to you.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Thank you, and before I hand it back to Karen, I would like to ask once again that you help us build the important profile of women's golf and of this Championship, and that you do make sure that you refer correctly to the title of the Championship as the AIG Women's Open.

KAREN MYERS: Thank you, Martin, thank you, Peter. I'll now open up the floor to questions.

While you're gathering your thoughts, I'll ask a brief question of Peter. You touched on this, but we are in 2023 now. The current contract only runs until 2025. Why announce now that we are going through to 2030?

PETER ZAFFINO: Well, Martin and I have been speaking about this for the better part of a year. We are so pleased with the progress that we have made through the first five years, but in order to make the type of changes that need to continue to be made to be a leader in the sport, we felt a long-term commitment was going to be very important.

As I mentioned in my prepared remarks, for AIG we talk about being allies, so supporting the women professionals here in the Championship, but also in business and society, become a big part of our purpose and values, and being an ally in dealing with the issues of gender equity and gender pay equity have been big for us.

You know, to our position that we've taken in doing the last five years, so far it's had a profound impact on our own organisation, so we wanted to recommit and make that commitment long term.

**Q. Obviously an amazing amount of effort is going into the fan experience this week, really setting a new bar for professional golf with the Fan Festival, the Ellie Goulding concert with the session stage, all fantastic, and I'm sure will bring in a new audience. I guess two-part question: Are there any plans to do similar types of fan experiences for the men's Open, and if not, why not, because it seems like a fantastic innovation that we have got going.**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Yeah, thank you for raising that.

We have talked in this Championship a lot in the fast few years about how do we get more fans to come and watch, and I think it is a challenge for all women's golf to be honest to get people to come and watch.

So we did a lot of research, and what we tried to find out was how do we get people who don't currently play golf to come and watch this Championship? It's not usually a challenge you have with the men's open. I mean, we had 265,000 two weeks ago and 290,000 a year ago, but we had 30,000 at Muirfield for the Women's Open.

What came back with the research is if you want to attract different people, and we wanted to attract families, and we wanted to attract young girls who not necessarily play golf but who want to come and have a good evening, good day, and spend time here, what we needed to do is create that family-centered environment, and that's what we've tried to do here.

And the ticket sales are showing. We are going to be around 50,000 for the week, which is up from just over 30,00 last year, so that's a fantastic achievement. It's a credit to that. It's a credit to being near London. It's a credit to this wonderful golf course.

And I think it's really important, and part of your last question is, I think women's golf needs to differentiate itself from men's golf and not just be a smaller version of men's golf.

What we are trying to do here is we created a different identity, and we hope that it's one that will really allow these great players to show us how good they are and a lot of people have a really good time.

**Q. To both of you, really, but would you really want the Women's Open to be that much bigger? I think the figures at the men's tournament, I know they are terrific, but I did see parties of young children who looked slightly overwhelmed. I think in something I wrote, I suggested that to prepare for next year, they should go and spend a day at a Black Friday sale to get used to all the people.**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think the answer to that question, Lewine, is, yes, I would love this event to have a quarter of a million people watching. I think it would be fantastic and it's exactly what the players deserve. It's what women's golf deserves, and I think Peter and I would open a very large bottle of champagne if we achieve that, so it would be fantastic.

**Q. But if you're wanting a lot of children, girls and**

**boys, to come and watch, they are going to need to be 6-foot tall, aren't they, to see much.**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: There's lots of other ways of doing it. There's lots of technology around the place that we'll use.

I picked 250,000 as sort of a number out of the sky. But yes, we do need to have bigger crowds. It is the single most important piece of making women's professional golf financially sustainable, both for event day and for media values and rights fees, to have more people watching, more people attending, and that's what we're going to drive towards.

**Q. The other thing, you mentioned how much -- the things you want to improve over the coming years with your excellent input for another five years until 2030, but I think it was about when you, five years ago what you introduced a gym, was it, to Carnoustie, or when was that?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Yeah, about five years ago.

**Q. I mean, that was very welcomed, wasn't it, and timely, maybe?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Yeah, we have the same facilities at The Open, and while it's not so much about facilities, it's about treating golf at this level as a sport where athletes need all the right environment in which to perform their best.

And if you go to the AIG Women's Open Clubhouse, just next door, that way is intended to allow the players to have everything they need and perform at their best, whether that's a quiet space, whether that's the right nutrition, or whether it's the right gym facilities, the right physio facilities. And I think that's what makes it world class.

**Q. Apart from adding to the crowd figures, what else do you want? You've got the gym. What do you feel the girls haven't got that maybe the men have got?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Media coverage. I would love to get to a point where I show opening tee shot to final shot in the afternoon. That's what I would like to show, and that's the goal long term.

We will have seven hours a day here. That's the biggest we've ever had, through Sunday, and obviously Sunday right through to the final putt when we have the Champion. But the next big gap to close after that would be the media coverage to be opening tee shot to final putt on Sunday.

KAREN MYERS: One question to close. Lewine asked you about crowds. How many are you we expecting including today's practise day and the Championship days?

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Well, this is the first time ever we've opened the gates on Wednesday. So we have got the general public watching the Pro-Am this morning, and I understand the right team won; all the players practising this afternoon, we will have around 50,000 people this week.

KAREN MYERS: Thank you, everybody. With that, that closes the press conference. Thank you to Martin and to Peter.

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