

# Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship

Press Conference

Thursday, 3 November 2022

## Martin Slumbers Taimur Hassan Amin



MIKE WOODCOCK: Thank you for joining us for the partners' press conference for the 2022 Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific championship. I'll begin by introducing our panel this morning. To my far right is Mr. Taimur Hassan Amin, Chairman of the Asia Pacific Golf Confederation, and then to my immediate right is Mr. Martin Slumbers, the chief executive of the R&A.

We'll get to questions shortly, but before we begin I'd like to ask Martin to give a few opening remarks.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Good afternoon, everybody. It's fantastic to be here at the Women's Amateur Asia Pacific championship and the beautiful surroundings of Siam Country Club. We're very grateful to Dr Phornthep for all he and his team have done for this championship and for helping us make this a truly memorable week. So thank you very much.

It's hard to believe this is only the fourth edition of the WAAP. A lot has happened in a short space of time, and the championship has progressed more rapidly than we could ever have hoped.

We couldn't have scripted it any better to have our inaugural WAAP champion, Atthaya Thitikul, reach No. 1 in the world this week as we bring the championship to her home country of Thailand for the first time. It's a phenomenal achievement for Atthaya, and we could not be more proud of all she has achieved and the example she has set for all of the other players to follow.

When you factor in the success of other previous competitors such as Yuka Saso in winning the U.S. Women's Open and Patty Tavatanakit in winning the ANA Inspiration, you can just see how huge the potential for women's golf is here in Asia-Pacific.

That brings me back to why we started the WAAP. I like to describe the twin goals of this championship as attainment and aspiration. Attainment in that the very top players

have the opportunity to get into two major championships and compete at the very highest level, but aspiration in what the rest of the field can learn and improve by competing with the very best in their region.

The positive cycle this creates is powerful. When we have a World No. 1 and two major champions within three or four years of competing in WAAP, it is clear that the potential for women's golf here is almost limitless.

Once again this year we can look forward to a wonderful championship, and I have no doubt we will find another worthy champion come Sunday.

As you know, WAAP will return to its normal calendar spot in 2023 and will be played in March, and we will announce where that's going to be played on Sunday afternoon after the closure of this week's championship.

With that, I would like to hand back to Mike.

MIKE WOODCOCK: Taimur, I wonder if you'd like to say something about the nations that we are seeing represented in the field for the first time this week.

TAIMUR HASSAN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We already have about 21 countries, which is more than there were last year, and I'd personally like to thank Martin and the R&A for creating this tournament to give the opportunities to our ladies to promote and play at a much higher level. The three new countries in Pakistan, Macau and Nepal, it's wonderful to see them come into this event, and as we progress and as people understand how to qualify for this event and how we get the World Ranking points, so I'm sure this tournament will go from strength to strength.

MIKE WOODCOCK: Thank you, Taimur.

**Q. I have a question that I'd like to ask both Mr. Slumbers and Mr. Taimur about the three new nations. It must be really pleasing for you to find there are three new countries coming in, and is there any effort now to increase that number by getting more WAGR points events and things like that for other countries? I'd like to have a special comment from Taimur because one girl is from his own country. He has lived up to his**



**word that he told me last time that he will have a Pakistani girl over here this year.**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Yes, it is wonderful to see. I mean, I've often said with these championships, that I'm as interested in the players who are struggling to make the cut as I am in the players who are trying to win. In trying to get those players who are learning their craft or learning the level they've got to play at is really, really important to this championship, and it's probably more important than even the winner.

Alongside that, we are developing and working on academies to be able to bring world-class coaching and facilities to those countries which don't have access to it today, and the byproduct of that is we will see more countries with players beginning to get good enough to be in the field here.

Yes, it is terrific to see, and good luck to them this week.

TAIMUR HASSAN: The important thing is that we provide the opportunity at both levels. One is at entry level for the developing countries, and I'm delighted that there's a girl from Pakistan who's here, and I'm sure we'll have more tournaments and more opportunities because then the associations understand how to get in.

This tournament is still in its infancy. As it becomes a stepping-stone for the players as a "must" event, before they decide to turn professional or to gauge themselves against the other players. I just want to encourage all the other developing nations to have more WAAP tournaments, to develop their opportunities, and the R&A is helping them develop the basics at their grass-roots level to give them more opportunities to play more tournaments, and I'm sure that this number will grow, and it's going to grow every year. I'm quite positive of that.

**Q. If I can ask Mr. Slumbers, you briefly referred to the academies. Are there any plans to include the girls as well into the brilliant thing that you guys have started, called the AAC academies? Can there be a WAAP academy running side by side?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: The AAC Academy is now in its third year, and it's certainly showing promise. To me it's proven that we can help through that mechanism. I absolutely would like to see more of the girls have access to that capability.

I think it's one of the things you might see the R&A do in partnership here in Asia-Pacific in a much bigger way in the coming years.

**Q. Mr. Slumbers, I also wanted to ask you about the academies, if you do have any academies planned, if you could share that with us.**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I'm sorry, we're not in a position to announce anything. Certainly things are under discussion, things are being thought about. But as I said, I think the idea of the academy and being able to bring world-class instruction, and instruction is far more than just hitting golf balls, it's the whole concept and what you need to get to the very top, is proven to work.

We are very proud of the players that have come through the AAC Academy, and we will continue to invest in that.

Who knows, it might be wonderful to see one of these countries win it in the years to come.

**Q. Taimur, I want to ask you, there are two sets of countries here in these championships. There is one set like say Australia, Japan, Korea, Thailand and a couple of others, who are actually coming here and they actually go back with their podium positions, and then what Martin said earlier, there are many others trying to make the cut. Is there a possibility, or is there a plan in your mind, to have say a tier 2 kind of tournament for countries which are still kind of growing and would hopefully be in the next three to five years be able to contend at the WAAP?**

TAIMUR HASSAN: You know, we haven't got any plans to create a tier 2 event, but I think the basic way of looking at things is that the R&A and us, we develop the tier 2 -- we develop their standard by providing coaching, by providing equipment, by bringing them to more tournaments, and you just look at it, just by playing here, you go back with an experience that you remember. You create friendships. You create opportunities where you said, oh, I met this one in this place and look at her, then you give incentives. You see the facilities, the fabulous golf courses. They play at a very high level. They see what they can do, what they have to do to get there.

This is an education for them, and then for the better players obviously it's a stepping-stone to go into the professional side of things because those are developed.

It's being developed at both levels.

**Q. I'm sure you're in touch with the various federations across the region. This is one week where they play a very high-quality international event, but for the other 51 weeks, it's back to the kind of tournaments which really are still kind of growing, as I would say, looking at it more positively. Would you**

**encourage them to raise the standards and invite players from other countries so that the level of competition can go up and there's greater interaction?**

TAIMUR HASSAN: I think that's the basic of the whole opportunity because you meet the associations - their presidents, their managers, their coaches, and you try and help them, and the R&A has done a wonderful job of keeping in touch with them, with us. They can help them. They have development programs in their countries. We're now trying to create from our website, we want them to have the tournament schedule so that you already know which events to play, and then you can go and play those events and keep testing yourself.

The basic thing is to help the associations develop these programs, and they're working on it themselves, and we're helping them out, and I'm sure that it will have a great effect. Look at the standard, how it's gone up in only four years, so we must be doing something right for it to happen. We have two major champions right from the graduation from the WAAP. We are on the right track.

**Q. There's a lot of talk at the moment about equality and inclusiveness. I wonder, Mr. Slumbers, if I could ask you about the R&A Women in Golf Charter and particularly how that's developing.**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: So I think the whole concept of promoting women and girls' golf is central to what the R&A is trying to achieve in the last five years and what we're trying to achieve in the next five years.

We're expanding it in multiple, multiple ways, whether it's supporting behind championships or in skills and working in golf.

I do feel there's a lot of people who get too hung up on the only way you can make a living in golf is by playing it. Actually there's lots of other ways to make a living in golf, and we want to expose those opportunities.

The Women in Golf Charter was created with a mindset of saying, okay, let's have everybody have a call to arms about wanting to support the women playing golf and working in the game of golf, and we are well past a thousand people that have signed up for it, and that's golf clubs, federations, corporate partners, and I think it is really slowly gathering a head of steam, and I think that whilst I would like to say that women's golf is growing, we still have an awful lot of work to do to be able to elevate championships, drive commercial opportunities, and in the professional grain, drive up prize money.

But it is something that frankly we all who work in this sport

have a responsibility to do and to do our part and to say I'm proud to be part of the Women in Golf Charter that the R&A is driving.

**Q. Maybe on a similarly related question, COVID has presented golf with a fantastic opportunity. We've seen a huge growth in numbers. Generally are there any figures that you at the R&A can share with us about that, and maybe also how tournaments, elite tournaments such as this can help spread the word with the aspiration to get more people coming in?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Yeah, so our website has got all the detailed numbers on it, that although I'm a numbers person, I don't recall them straight off the top of my head.

Golf is in a really good place for two reasons. One, is COVID has fundamentally changed society. But secondly, there is a growing understanding that golf is good for your mental health and your physical health, and if that's one really good thing that's come out of COVID, and there's not many, it's that people are more conscious about their health.

So this opportunity to play golf because it's good for your health is driving up numbers. I can tell you the numbers in the UK were something like up 150 percent. It's falling back a bit. It'll take a couple of years to settle down, but I think golf is probably one of the biggest winners from a sporting point of view of the game, and it's a dividend we intend to take maximum advantage of.

**Q. Mr. Slumbers, in Shanghai you very proudly told us about one new thing that you had introduced, about the equipment testing. You had gotten your team and how important it was for these amateur players to realize about their equipment, to understand about their equipment. Have you tried anything like that with WAAP this year, or is that one of the plans of doing in the coming years?**

MARTIN SLUMBERS: No, there's nothing on that, and as you know, I do quite enjoy talking about equipment and learning more about it. I think that's one of the benefits of the academy idea, is that players start to understand what equipment can do for them, and that's part of the education process.

But the players must be doing something right because the scoring is pretty good, and I'm led to believe that the course record was set this morning, as well, of 66. They've obviously learnt an awful lot about how the game can be played and how to play it.

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