

PGA Championship

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Quail Hollow Club

Don Rea

Derek Sprague

Kerry Haigh

Press Conference



We can talk about Michael Block. He's amazing. This is his seventh one. Bob Sowards, this is his 12th. I thought he was old until I found out I'm older than him. He's 56 and I'm 58.

Eric Steger I think is a great story about his dad. I'm sure you guys have seen that. But Golf Digest did something about Rip Taylor. Rip Taylor is the essence of a PGA golf professional. He had a horrible situation happen to him, but he turned it around. He's married. He's got a young family, and he's playing in a major championship. If that isn't the essence of a PGA Championship, I don't know what is.

By the way, this is still the strongest field in golf. 99 out of the top 100 players are here. If you're going to be the best, you have to beat the best.

Everyone is asking who we are and what we do; I know what the 31,000 do, but rest assured, when you have 99 out of the top 100, when you have the variety of golf courses that we provide on a yearly basis, and then knowing that we have the strongest field and you have to be the best to beat the best, I think we're in a perfect spot. That's why I love this championship.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks. We'll come back to you in a second. Derek, you made the big move to Texas, and you've been on the job for about six months. There's been a lot of news in the golf industry just simply in 2025. What are you spending most of your time on now?

DEREK SPRAGUE: Well, everything's bigger in Dallas, in Frisco where our headquarters is, and glad to be out there.

I hit the ground running at the PGA Show, which really was incredible, just the amount of momentum that we saw at the show, just the buzz from 2024, our PGA professionals in the center of the surge in this game since the pandemic.

Then to look forward and we had all our PGA member championships just coming off our PPC, as Don just referenced, and our amateur events, like our PGA Works that we just had at Kohler, Wisconsin, and now we're focused on our spectator championships.

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being with us at the PGA Championship. Before they tee off Thursday morning at 7:00, we want to make sure you get quality time with PGA of America leadership. Which would be PGA of America president, Don Rea, PGA of America CEO, Derek Sprague, and chief championships officer, Kerry Haigh.

Don, let's begin with you. You were here at Quail Hollow eight years ago as a PGA of America board member at the time. What do you remember about that moment?

DON REA: Well, one, it's a big world. I'm at a little golf course in Mesa, Arizona, and all of a sudden I'm at a major championship as a board member.

I also learned how close the family is. When JT is the son and a grandson of a PGA professional, that just means something. It just all of a sudden made a major championship all about community and the PGA of America, which I thought was amazing.

No doubt the hug from Mike after JT won, it was a memory I'll never forget, and the fist bump. By the way, my phone was blowing up because everybody was texting me, did you just really fist bump JT when he was done winning the championship? I said, I did. So that was cool.

THE MODERATOR: Speaking of PGA of America golf professionals, there are 20 individuals in this field, which makes this championship rather unique.

DON REA: Well, I think our Corebridge Financial Team of 20 is unique for the right reasons. We've got 20 PGA professionals here who love to play this game, and they play it at a high level. Tyler Collet, it's amazing, he wins the PPC, and now he's here playing in a major championship.



So this week the PGA Championship, and then we go right up to Congressional for the Seniors, and then our women's right at our home in Frisco, Texas, our KPMG Women's PGA Championship, and then the Ryder Cup this fall.

Been focusing on our PGA members and all the great work they're doing around the country, but also focusing on our spectator championships that brings joy to millions of fans across the world.

THE MODERATOR: We've had tremendous support here locally from our friends at Quail Hollow, haven't we.

DEREK SPRAGUE: Yes, we sure have. When we look at championship sites - you referenced some, Don - we look for great partnerships. I think everyone here knows Johnny Harris and the Quail Hollow family. Johnny and John as the general chair this year, his son does a great job, and Tom DeLozier, the GM we've known for years, and then Scott Davenport. I've known Scott a long time, great PGA professional here at Quail Hollow for a long time.

Those are the people that we want to partner with, people - and you'll hear in Kerry's comments - that really want to improve everything that they do here day in and day out, championship after championship. After our 17th PGA Championship, they made renovations here to just get better, right?

We're going to see that on display, full display this week, and we couldn't do it without Johnny Harris and the Quail Hollow family.

I just want to touch on the business community here in Charlotte. They come out in droves here for major golf. We're seeing that here with our corporate sales have been off the charts here, which is excellent, and we're going to have fairways filled with fans out there just watching the big-time golf here.

We've got the best setup guy in the game, Kerry Haigh here, who's going to create drama for us coming down the stretch.

THE MODERATOR: Derek, I think you might want to share some news, speaking of future PGA Championships.

DEREK SPRAGUE: Talking about certain venues, if you will, and certain communities, we're going to be going to Southern Hills Country Club in 2032. The Tulsa community loves the PGA of America and PGA Championships, and we're excited to bring it back there in 2032.

As you know, we played there five other times. This will be the sixth time that we've been at Southern Hills Country Club. It's just a great venue to contest the strongest field in golf, as you mentioned, Don, and we're looking forward to coming back there.

Q. Thank you, Derek. Kerry, you are back for your second PGA Championship at Quail Hollow. A few questions for you, if you don't mind. How does the course look right now after the rain? When was the last time you remember having to say no to spectators on a Monday of a PGA Championship week, and what's in store for the players?

KERRY HAIGH: Lots of questions there, Julius. Quail Hollow, what can I say? It's great to be back. It is a stunning venue. As Derek mentioned, Johnny and John have the same pride and ethics that we do at the PGA of America. We want this to be the very best golf course, the very best championship to help identify the very best player here this week.

I'm so proud of what our team have built out here. It looks stunning. Now the sun is shining on it. In particular, Keith Wood, the superintendent, and his team have done an incredible job to prepare. The playing surfaces here are as good as any I think we've ever been on and played on. The greens are beautiful.

Three-plus inches of rain, and Keith's out there already. We're trying to get on the fairways to be able to mow them. Obviously we haven't been able to mow since the rain started on Friday, but Keith's out there, his team are out there. They're doing an incredible job.

If weather permits, we're hoping Thursday will be stunning. As Derek said, full of people. The golf course is a wonderful golf course that will test the best players, and I can't wait for that to happen.

Q. Don, before we go to Q&A, I know you wanted to recognize a special anniversary that we're celebrating.

DON REA: Absolutely. PGA Reach Foundation, that's our (c)3. Everybody asks about what the money is; we want to talk about what the money does. That's what PGA Reach Foundation is.

Yesterday was the 10th anniversary of PGA Hope. That's a program we have with the VA where golf turns from something that's recreational to rehabilitative. We're getting veterans on the golf course. The suicide rate is 26 a day. PGA Hope, we do a lot of things to change lives, but this something that saves lives.



Yesterday, you might not know this, but the Governor proclaimed that May 12th would be PGA Hope day in the state of North Carolina. We're very grateful for that, and it brings some light to what PGA Hope does. 50,000 veterans we've served over the last 10 years.

Yesterday was the veterans major. You might not know that. At Carmel Country Club, the Secretary's Cup, with 12 teams from across this nation of veterans playing in the scramble format, they competed in the Secretary's Cup, and north Florida won.

Those veterans celebrated being the winning team, but all 40 celebrated being part of PGA Hope, and we're very proud of that.

Q. This is probably for Don and Derek. Both having a lot of involvement over the years with the PGA TOUR, and they're armed with a whole bunch of money. Have there been any discussions, or would you entertain discussions about their investment with their new private equity money into the Ryder Cup or the PGA Championship?

DEREK SPRAGUE: First of all, Jeff, we talk to the Tour all the time. We're great partners with them. They partner with our sections, our qualifiers. We do ShotLink here.

In regards to the Ryder Cup and the PGA Championship, we haven't had any specific conversations about investment or sales or any of that.

We work with them closely on the Ryder Cup, as you probably know. We share media rights with them, and their players are playing here this week. So we want to make sure we're good partners with them.

DON REA: Can I follow up just a little bit? What they do for our 41 sections, right? Where the rubber meets the road with PGA of America and our 31,000 are the 41 sections. The Tour helps us provide money down to those sections so we can grow the game and serve the members.

Don't forget, every PGA TOUR member is a member of PGA of America, so I'm their president too. Why wouldn't we talk to them on a daily basis? We're all trying to grow the game together.

Q. Kerry, two questions about today and September. What exactly -- when you come to a PGA Championship site, what are you trying to accomplish when you set up the course?

KERRY HAIGH: Every PGA Championship, we challenge all of our staff to make this one the greatest championship we've ever held.

Q. By doing what?

KERRY HAIGH: Making it so that you, the media, enjoy it, the players enjoy it, the caddies enjoy it, spectators enjoy it, and the TV viewers enjoy it.

Q. I need to be more clear. I wasn't talking about our parking. I was thinking more about the golf course. Exactly what kind of test are you trying to present, and how do you go about it?

KERRY HAIGH: We look at each golf course. Obviously each has a different architect. So two or three years prior, we look at the golf course and see how it is we would like it to play and test the best players in the world.

In this case, there has been some history with the number of events in 2017 when we played. So we do know what took place then, but now we're playing it in May versus August. So the overseed has sort of changed a little bit of how it will play.

It's a beautiful golf course. It's a great challenge. We try and set the rough up so that players can play, but you've got to -- there's a penalty if you do go in there.

Set it up, the tees, and there's some wonderful short par-4s that you have opportunity, some long par-3s, and that is what setting up a golf course is. There's so many aspects to it. Let's try and bring out the very best in all of those on a magnificent golf course.

Q. Lastly, is the rough dense enough to be a real penalty?

KERRY HAIGH: The rough was cut on Saturday at 2-3/4 inches. We've had 2 inches of rain since Saturday, and it likely won't be cut again because of the rain.

Q. Derek, back in January, you mentioned that golf should pause on the rollback and bring the key stakeholders and the governing bodies together to the table to have conversations. Just wondering if your stance is still the same and if there's been any progress on any meetings?

DEREK SPRAGUE: There's no change in our stance. We're certainly vehemently against the ball rollback. We've had great conversations with the governing bodies since that point. We've had several constructive and collaborative meetings probably a number of times, three,



four times.

I feel really good about where we are with them, and we're going to continue to collaborate on the proposed rollbacks.

Q. Have there been any additional meetings since your conversations with the governing bodies on kind of where the PGA stands on the rollback versus --

DEREK SPRAGUE: They're clear where I stand, where we stand for sure. I talk really almost monthly now with the governing bodies, and we're working to really take a deep dive on the rollback and make sure it's the right thing.

We're really concerned about the 28 million golfers in this country, and since I took that stance back in January, a number of people have reached out, a number of amateur golfers, recreational golfers have reached out and have the same concerns that we do. They're thanking us for pushing this issue to make sure it's well thought out, and if we can hit the pause button or change it altogether, that's our goal.

DON REA: If I can follow up a little bit, being at a small course, it's all about the recreational golfer, right? There's 28.1 million, as you said, 47.2 on and off the golf course. The thing I'm most excited about of what's happening now is this collaborative approach. The recreational game is closer now than ever before. The owners, the superintendents, the club managers, the architects, the builders, like we're all meeting now and talking about what's the impact on recreational golf for this?

I think we have an obligation to talk to everybody who's involved in golf -- the Tour, USGA, R&A, all of them -- and this is what we're hearing. We're hearing people are a little worried. And this game is booming. Families are playing together like never before. I'm telling you, if there's one print on this, it's that we are leading the most collaborative approach on this discussion that's ever started before that I can ever remember.

The meetings are happening all the time. At Augusta, that's all we talked about with Fred Perrell and Mike and Jay and everybody else who's a stakeholder in this game, Guy Kinnings. It's just a global matter on this.

It's really cool. I've been on the board for four years, and I've been an officer for four, and this collaborative approach is amazing. It makes me -- it fills my heart to know that we are rallying around recreational golf, which is really what drives the engine of everything that we're sitting in right now.

Q. One basic update question. Do you expect or have

Thursday and Sunday already sold out? I know those were the last two days where tickets remained. Then for Kerry, since you were obviously here in 2017, I'm curious about the rest of Quail Hollow, the hospitality, the back of house. How does everything set up and work together now compared to when you were first here in 2017?

DEREK SPRAGUE: I'll take the ticket one. We have very limited tickets. Don't make it sound like the fairways are going to be empty here. The business community, Johnny rallied the business community here in Charlotte, and his son did as well. Corporate hospitality here is really thriving and robust. Like I said, limited tickets on Wednesday and Sunday, and the fairways will be full of fans out there. Nothing to be concerned about.

KERRY HAIGH: With regards to the infrastructure and the hospitality, to my point earlier, Quail Hollow, Johnny Harris and the club continue to invest in their golf course and build more roads, wider roads, they can service the hospitality. They're a venue that want to host major championship golf, and they do it in a first-class manner.

We're proud to be part of it and work with them, and it allows us to build some of the most dramatic hospitality units than we have ever built. There are more double-decker units here than we have ever built. We're proud of that, and those people in them will have the greatest view of golf.

The spectators, it's a wonderful viewing golf course. A lot of great views, panoramic views across the lake. I'm so excited, I wish it was starting tomorrow.

Q. Kerry, how would a golf ball rollback change the way you would set up the golf course?

KERRY HAIGH: What's it going to be? We don't know. We will adapt to whatever the rules are.

Q. They said what they want it to be.

KERRY HAIGH: Sorry?

Q. They have said what they plan for it to be as of now.

KERRY HAIGH: We would set the golf course up as fairly and to test the best players in the world just as we always do.

Q. Don, what's your vision for what should happen with equipment?



DON REA: I just want golf to win. Everybody sometimes says, what's the PGA win in this? It's not a PGA win. It's the win for the golfer. Once again, it's the game.

We're representing the 31,000 that talk to the 28.1 million. Now, whatever happens to this collaborative approach, it's going to happen over the next six to eight to a year. I don't know what's going to happen, but I assure you, when this is all done, we're going to stand arm in arm and say this is what is the decision and this is where we're moving forward. It might change from what it is now. I don't know yet.

I don't want to damage the future discussions. The relationships now are stronger than they've ever been. Let's see what happens when we get down there, but what I like is the spirit of the conversation now. No one's telling us. We're talking together.

People are now listening, not to respond; they're listening to learn. And I think that's the most encouraging aspect of all the discussions are going right now. So we'll see what happens.

Q. Derek and Don, you mentioned the 30,000 PGA professionals and the 28.1 people that are playing, 42-point-whatever, a lot of numbers. You advocate representing those players and those members. So my question is considering our business, meaning the golf business, is mostly where manufacturing is done outside the United States, where is the PGA of America on tariffs, and how are you advocating for that?

DEREK SPRAGUE: I'd say we have no official stance on tariffs, but we did hear that loudly and clearly at the Masters. That's when sort of all of the news broke, and a lot of the manufacturers were coming up to us and saying that's going to impact the consumers because, one, there may be supply chain issues, there's going to be increase in costs and whatnot. I think that question, Alex, is more for the manufacturers than us.

DON REA: A lot of our golf professionals own shops, but we don't get into legislation. We just pivot and make the best of it. That's what PGA professionals have been doing for a hundred years.

I don't know what's going to happen, but I do know, you might not see it in a press release, but we call Titleist, we call TaylorMade, we call Acushnet and Srixon, we call them all and say how you doing and what's this impact going to be on our golf professionals? What can we do to help? That's what we've always been about.

I don't know what's going to happen with the tariffs, but I do

know it is bringing us closer to the manufacturers and those that run the golf shops across the nation.

Q. I guess the question is what can you do to help?

DON REA: I think educate our golf professionals, which we do on a daily basis, talk to the manufacturers. After that, we have to encourage them to state their case. Like I said, we're not a political association. We're a trade association of 31,000 men and women. We'll pivot, and we'll make the most of it, whatever happens. I think that will be for the good of the game.

Q. Derek, you mentioned in January that you had had some early discussions with Scott O'Neill, LIV's new CEO. I'm curious what those discussions have been like over the last four months and if there are any plans - I know he's on site this week - to meet with him this week and kind of talk about what the future of the game might look like?

DEREK SPRAGUE: Those were just more of an introduction to meet him. I had heard and read about him from many of you folks in this room. So I met with him for the first time at Augusta just to introduce myself. Certainly he's still looking, it's been reported lately, in Official World Golf Rankings. I sit on that board. He's encouraged to submit an application for the board to review.

Other than that, I have nothing else to report.

Q. Kerry, what's your biggest challenge for the rest of the week?

KERRY HAIGH: The weather. Hopefully we can get some dry weather. It's always a challenge. You always want good weather for your championships. It sounds like we have some warmer weather coming, 85, high 80s Thursday, Friday is currently projected. And hopefully avoid the isolated thunderstorms that could potentially come when you have that kind of heat.

Q. Just a quick followup. Over the years with players, with the competitors, have you noticed an increase in their interest in how you should be doing your job? Have your conversations with players over the years changed?

KERRY HAIGH: To be honest, I don't see that much of the players during the week at all. I'm always out ahead of when they play and after they've finished. It's not my job to be talking with them. They've got their job to do, I've got my job to do, and that's how I've worked for 35 years.

Certainly if I pass by and say hi, that's great, but my job is



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focused on the golf course.

Q. Derek, what's the different perspective from being president to being CEO? Then I have two other questions for the other two gentlemen.

DEREK SPRAGUE: I think it's been an interesting viewpoint. I find myself with the officers, sometimes I say I'm putting on a past president hat here, and this is some historical perspective of our organization. Then sometimes I'm reining them in and saying, hey, as your CEO, I think we've got to go this way or that way.

I really have enjoyed it. We're a complex organization, right? 30-plus thousand members across this country and some around the world. We've got a few hundred that work outside the boundaries of the United States. Making sure that I build their trust as well as the trust of the officers, and we've got a 22-person board, and then 300-plus employees. Right now, across the country really, we have career consultants and player engagement folks and recruiting folks around the country.

That's my CEO role, but then I get in the boardroom, sometimes I catch myself making a motion. Oh, I'm not the board member anymore. I'm the CEO. It's been a great start, I believe. That would probably be a better question for Don and the officers here.

Q. Kerry, just a question. What's the difference between a Tour setup and a PGA Championship setup?

KERRY HAIGH: I can only speak for the PGA Championship setup, and I do what I do and don't want to be part of the story other than just set up a great test for the best players in the world. That's what I hope to continue to try and do.

Q. Last question to the president: As you see the golf ball debate evolving, what's the biggest challenge now on the radar screen?

DON REA: The challenge -- you know, one I didn't mention is the PGA World Alliance. That's a whole bunch of PGAs globally, PGA Sweden, PGA Great Britain & Ireland, representing 56,000 PGA professionals globally. I don't see anything as a challenge.

To be honest with you, the way that the conversations are going, if I approached any of those conversations like, oh, this is going to be a challenge, that would be an unfair way to do it because I don't see that.

I'm telling you from my heart, all of these conversations

we've had over the past three months have been nothing but productive, nothing but collaborative, and we're all listening to each other learn. Once again, I fall back on that.

There's no really challenges here. I think it's all of us just understanding the impact of any decision that's made that's going to affect all 100 percent of the golfers, whether it's the 1 percent that play professionally or the 99 percent that just play recreationally.

I'm excited for those discussions, I really am. There's no challenges there. It's just about us understanding our blind spots and then moving forward and making sure for the good of the game we make a decision that makes everybody happy.

Q. Derek, can you just share a little bit more detail about what went into the decision to offer special invitations to the several LIV Golf members that weren't otherwise qualified for the PGA Championship?

DEREK SPRAGUE: Again, that's probably more for Kerry to handle, but again, it's about having the strongest field in golf.

KERRY HAIGH: I'm happy to answer it. Just as we have for many years, we look at every tour that's playing worldwide golf and try and identify the best players from those respective tours. When we do that, we certainly look at points list or money lists or rankings and identify who we think are the better players.

The committee meets and talks about whether or not we should offer them invites, which is why I think through that process we were able to get worldwide players from various tours. We use the Federation rankings, the top four from the Federation rankings are playing this week, as well as LIV, as well as the other countries.

It's a worldwide field. That's why we feel it's the strongest field in golf because of that process where we look at all the different tours and try and include and invite those best players.

Q. Over the last few years and looking into the future, we see the PGA Championship growing every year in terms of hospitality, in terms of audience, spectators, and we're looking at Aronimink next year, I think, and it's looking like that. How much is due to the general growth of golf, and how much is due to the work of the PGA of America?

DEREK SPRAGUE: That's a good question. I think it's a

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combination, right? There's more people playing the game today than there were six years ago, pre-pandemic. That seems to be the dividing line.

As Don has always eloquently said, it's that we're creating fans for the sport. So I think, as you have more people playing the game, participating in the game, you get more people attending majors like the PGA Championship, and really I think that's where the fans are today.

DON REA: I think golf was always about swing, stance, and score. Now it's about who you're playing golf with and getting off the grid and a grandfather and a grandson or granddaughter spending time together.

When we talk about the 47.2 million that play on and off a golf course, that's powerful because those are all potential golfers. Screen golf, TopGolf, Top Tracer, whatever it might be, what it's doing is introducing our game -- I think we invented social distancing, right? Basically four people play every nine minutes.

Now it's good for your mental health, it's good for your physical health, it's good for your family health. I think people are starting to discover that, and that's the hook now.

I think we were just kind of packaging golf the wrong way, as a time to get away from people, but it's actually the best thing to do with people. I think that's why you see a lot of people -- walk around. You'll see all the families, and they've got their kids' hands. They're pushing strollers at a golf tournament. That's a good thing.

That's absolutely, on behalf of the 31,000 -- we're basically the first responders of golf. We're out there every day on those tee boxes, pushing tees in the ground, planting the seeds of golf with people. That's a culmination of our efforts, everything you see out there, and we're very proud of that.

DEREK SPRAGUE: I just want to add, the growth of the game -- our mission is to serve our members and grow the game. When you look at programs like Drive, Chip, & Putt we're coming off last month, and thousands of kids participate in that around the country. Then when you look at our PGA Junior League that we started over 10 years ago, we've got over 77,000 of those kids now playing the game in a social setting.

I remember when I was president back then, saying it's not going to be too long in the distant future that we're going to have Ryder Cup participants that played in a PGA Junior League. That will be a great story for everybody here to see how that team concept has grown.

We're just coming off the PGA Works at Kohler, Wisconsin, where we're making the game more like America and getting those folks from diverse backgrounds into the sport. That all has contributed to more eyeballs on the PGA of America and the PGA Championship.

Q. Don, what is your personal opinion on bifurcation?

DON REA: What's my personal opinion? There is no personal opinion. I'm the president of the PGA of America, right? I've got 31,000 members that are listening to my every word, and I'm proud to represent them.

You know what I think? It's all part of -- I know where you're going, but these conversations we're having, bifurcation was taken off the table. So I'm not talking about that now. What we're talking about is 2028 and 2030 and the impact on recreational golf.

I don't think that's --

Q. You said you want it to be a win for everybody. Wouldn't it work that way?

DON REA: Bifurcation?

Q. Yeah.

DON REA: In my opinion, as president of the PGA of America, you know one of the cool things is when a PGA professional is teaching a young man or a young woman who wants a D-I scholarship, and it's really vital that they're playing with the same ball they're going to play with in D-I or maybe on the Tour someday.

When I think about what I've done on the range at Augusta Ranch Golf Club when I'm training up these kids, I want to make sure that the range ball they're hitting is close to the ball that they're going to play, which is close to the ball they're going to play in D-I and on the Tour someday.

For that reason, it's hard for me to understand bifurcation, how it's good for something only our game features, which is the ability to say I'm going to play that golf course with this ball just like my heroes, just like my dad. That, I think, is the coolness of our game right now, and I don't want to see that taken away.

I was very happy when the USGA took that off the table. I thought that was a great win for the PGA of America. We expressed that that would be a little difficult, and what did they do? They answered our request and took it off the table. I thought that was an initial win years ago, and to bring it back now, why? We already talked about that.



In the future discussions, we're not talking about that at all.
We're talking about the impact on the game that everyone
in this room plays, and that's what excites us.

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