

Aberdeen Standard Investments Ladies Scottish Open

Tuesday, August 11, 2020

North Berwick, Scotland, UK

The Renaissance Club

Martin Gilbert

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon and welcome to the Aberdeen Standard Investments Ladies Scottish Open, and as you can see this afternoon's media conference with the ASI chairman, Martin Gilbert.

Martin, thanks, as always, for your time here. It's been a difficult year for everybody, we know that. How proud, how pleased are you that Aberdeen Standard Investments and VisitScotland have been able to keep this event on the calendar, and here we are this week.

MARTIN GILBERT: It's great, isn't it. It's great, not just for us and the players, especially, who have had such a long time off, actually. It will be great, especially for the European players I think who are making up part of the field, as you know, because it's now a joint event.

It's great. It's great to have it back. A great start, really, more than anything else of playing golf here in Scotland. So we've got this. We've got the men's, obviously, in about three or four weeks and I think this is the first tournament in Scotland the ladies have had since the tournament at Gleneagles, I think, since Solheim.

It's important for golf I think.

THE MODERATOR: We know that you're also the outgoing chairman of Aberdeen Standard Investments, but the company have been such a massive sponsor supporter of golf, both men's and women's. What do you feel has been your proudest achievement within the role and relation to golf?

MARTIN GILBERT: Well, clearly, the grass roots stuff has really helped both men's and ladies, and it's great to see players coming through that.

But I suppose establishing these two tournaments, both the men's and the ladies the week before the relevant Opens has really been transformational to the two tournaments



because these are the two best dates of the year in the calendar.

So to secure them for Scottish events I think has been really, really good for golf in Scotland. So pleased with that. I would say, look, it's been great to see a lot of the youngsters coming through.

It's great to see Colin Montgomerie who we have sponsored continuing to do well in the Senior Tour, and good to see Marc Warren again winning, that was really special I thought because he was really in danger of just not recovering back to playing again on the Tour. So that was great.

And of course, still Paul Lawrie continues to do his bit for golf, especially junior golf in Scotland. It's great. The whole thing has been great for the business.

Q. And why is golf so good for Aberdeen Standard Investments?

MARTIN GILBERT: I think although we might all enjoy golf or playing it, whatever, or watching it, I think that you have to look at the business case of why we do sponsor these two tournaments, and why we sponsor the players, and really at the end of the day, the biggest value comes from television for us.

So for instance, the men's event, focused on the U.S., which is a massive market for us, and the ladies, which ironically is more popular in Asia than perhaps in the US, is also vitally important. So really, the business case is really the name awareness in these key markets for us.

Hence, the reason it makes sense, people might often say, why does it make sense to go ahead with a tournament with no spectators, and although we miss the spectators and so on, it actually still makes huge sense for us to continue with just the TV coverage. Anyone watching the PGA at the weekend would have seen that you don't actually need the spectators to make it -- to get the excitement that you saw on television there on Sunday, which was amazing.

THE MODERATOR: This year, in such a delicate climate when it comes to travel, another fantastic field competing for this year's Ladies Scottish Open.



MARTIN GILBERT: Bigger field. This is the strongest field I think we've had. It's great. It really is. It really is a great field. Seven Scottish players, as well, which is always nice. I think three of the world's Top-10 are playing.

You know, as I said on the television, this event is broadcast in over a hundred countries around the world. So anyone that asks, why do you do this, it's purely that. This event will go all around the world live, and be on live TV, as well, which is great.

It's great to see it going from strength-to-strength, even in a year like this.

THE MODERATOR: What do you think you're going to miss most about these events when you're no longer the chairman?

MARTIN GILBERT: I'll still go along to them. I've told Jill I'm coming to the men's; she has no choice. So I don't know, what will I miss -- yeah, I'll miss attending, probably, but I'll still attend because I'm on the Board of The European Tour, so that means I can -- I've still got a big involvement in golf, and I'm involved with Wentworth, so I'm still involved in that tournament, as well, which is another tournament that's gone from strength-to-strength.

THE MODERATOR: This is obviously the 11th tournament within 12 years that you've been involved, as well as ASI, but when you look back, can you pick out some favourite memories? It's obviously been played at a number of different golf courses here and there's been some really, really fantastic winners.

MARTIN GILBERT: Yeah, I think it's always nice to see the Scottish winners, and Catriona I think has won twice, I think, and Carly I think has won once. Jill will correct me if I'm wrong in those statistics. So playing with both of them has been really, really -- really, really good.

I think in a funny way, it's more enjoyable playing in the Pro-Ams at this event than, say, a men's event or whatever, because you feel -- you just feel that they are actually playing the same -- much the same type of golf as yourself, and what strikes you is just how accurate they are and how steady they are as players.

THE MODERATOR: We've got some questions coming in.

Q. We were wondering what you were going to do with your retirement. Seems like golf administration is going to be a big part of it. Is the involvement with the European something new?

MARTIN GILBERT: Yeah, it's relatively new, but it's sort of almost an extension of what we were doing at Aberdeen. The Tour is very interesting. I've got a lot of non-executive roles, jobs. I'm on various boards. So a bit of that, a bit more skiing, a bit more golf. I think I'll find plenty to do.

Q. What exactly is your input for The European Tour as somebody who has been so heavily hands on in a major tournament and you've obviously had lots of dealings with the your even pure. Was it almost an organic thing, almost like it made sense?

MARTIN GILBERT: Yeah, I think so. They asked me to go on the board. Yeah, I said I would be delighted to. You almost answered the question; it's almost an extension of knowing a bit about golf. I think they are also keen to have people on the board who are -- have a business background, as well. And I knew the chairman, clearly. I know Eric Nicoli, who is the senior independent director. So it wasn't a difficult appointment to accept, put it that way.

Q. I think anecdotally, at least, it seems as though golf is really booming at the moment in the current circumstances, whether it's in terms of the interest in the professional game or at grass roots level with people playing in vast numbers. I just wonder wearing your business hat what you might advocate to make sure that golf makes the most of this unique circumstance?

MARTIN GILBERT: I think you're right. There has been a real resurgence in outdoor activities, which are deemed to be safer. I don't think the problems have changed. I think they have just got to make golf more accessible. Make it less exclusive. Make it -- perception-wise, less exclusive.

I think you've just got to -- I remember meeting the guy from the company who runs -- I've forgot the name of them, but they run a thousand golf courses in America, whatever, and he said one rule is one rule too many at golf. Meaning the clubs, the club rules. That's always stuck with me. I think there are just too many rules that put youngsters off playing.

I think, also, nine holes, got to get -- and this doesn't lend itself to a lot of the more traditional courses clearly, but a lot of people just want to play nine holes. So I go to the Paul Lawrie Golf Centre in Aberdeen, and it's got a nine-hole par 3 course. It's fantastic. You get around in an hour. Absolutely brilliant and improves your golf, as well.

So I think it's a mixture of those, just make it more accessible. Make it less time consuming and less rules, basically.

Q. And just to follow up, are you optimistic for the game going forward; that it can weather this storm at the professional level and flourish again?

MARTIN GILBERT: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I think we've got to get more people participating. Participation levels have gone down, and we've seen waiting lists at golf courses go down to zero in a lot of them. So yeah, I am optimistic. I think people want to join. I think they do want to play golf now. It's been proven to be good outdoor exercise during this lockdown. But we've got to make it more accessible.

Q. Obviously Nicola Sturgeon's just handed a yellow card to football for the behaviour by the players the last few days. Do you feel that's put this event -- the work that's gone in to put the safety protocols in place, do you feel it's put this event and next week more pressure with the focus that's going to be on things?

MARTIN GILBERT: I think it will definitely reinforce the message that we're getting. Every day there's another e-mail that comes through about what you can and can't do, reinforcing the message.

So I mean, I'm hoping the golfers will be more responsible than the footballers. Let's hope so. And I suspect they will. I really don't foresee it being a problem but let's hope so.

Q. Golf was one of the first sports back in Scotland, and the players and clubs have led by example. That can only be encouraging in terms of what golf is delivering at the moment.

MARTIN GILBERT: Yeah, I think so. You know, clearly, all the golf clubs that we are all members of, as soon as there's any rule change or anything, they send out e-mails. I think the communication has been really good from the golf clubs, what you can and can't do. You know, don't take the pin out; all of these sort of things have been really reinforced by the clubs.

I think they have been ultra responsible, actually, and really adhere to the rules.

THE MODERATOR: You touched on it there about making golf available to all and inclusivity and I know there's a lot going on to make it as inclusive and available to everyone as possible. We have the first Nigerian player taking part here on an invite, Georgia Oboh, which is fantastic, as well. But from your own perspective, what message does it send out that a tournament like this is taking strides like that to try to make it inclusive for all?

MARTIN GILBERT: The fact we are sponsoring this tournament shows how important inclusivity is to us as a company, and you know, Jill and the rest of the team are in no doubt that this is a very, very important event for us because what it signifies, as you quite rightly say.

I mean, yeah, you know, at the risk of repeating myself, I think golf has become more inclusive. I think it has become less exclusive, and by that, I also mean male, female, whatever, whatever it might be, as well. It's got to become much, much more inclusive, and it is. You can see it. That's why sponsoring an event like this is so important to us as a business.

THE MODERATOR: I think you're coming down on Friday, right? No Pro-Am this year, so you'll miss that.

MARTIN GILBERT: It obviously it won't be as good without Pro-Ams, spectators, but for us in a business sense, it's important the event goes ahead and important for us that people in over a hundred countries can see the event. It's going to be great. I'm looking forward to watching the players again. It's how we should play the game.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for your time.

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