

ANA Inspiration

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Rancho Mirage, California, USA

Mission Hills Country Club



Commissioner Mike

Whan

Press Conference

CHRISTINA LANCE: Thank you, everyone, for joining us at the virtual media center here at the ANA Inspiration.

This is Christina Lance.

On behalf of all of us out here, thank you very much for your support and coverage. Mike, we'll start right in and go to you. I know you've been looking forward to joining us here in Rancho Mirage later on this week; starting out your week in Florida there.

But it's been a busy few weeks as we've returned to play. What are your thoughts on our resumption of play and now looking ahead to the remainder of the 2020 season?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, it's exciting to think there's five under our belt and a bunch more to come.

The restart has been, thanks to some incredible partners, and you know the names of the tournaments, from AIG to Wal-Mart to Marathon and even ProMedica and Inverness getting us started, Aberdeen, and now ANA. It would have been easy 2020, so I'm impressed and honored that they're making this reality.

I would say that we've definitely been the leader in things in the golf industry, whether that's the first group to do traveling day care or the first group to figure out retirement programs, but we've been comfortable being second or third in the restart.

And I really want to thank the PGA TOUR, European Tour, R&A, and the USGA and PGA of America for giving us so much guidance coming back. I'm excited to think that we'll play four of our five majors. That's took a bunch of people to really be involved, and really it would have been almost impossible to do this without any guidance, without anybody else, because there was no book to follow. So I'm glad we were able to follow some guidance from the others, not only other sports, but our own sport.

I think our players are definitely doing their part as it relates

to the restart. We're seeing incredible golf and some incredible stories, whether that's Danielle Kang back-to-back or Stacy as a first mom and Austin, and of course Sophia doing what she did at AIG.

It's not exactly an exciting and enjoyable life on Tour, which is why I won't be there until Saturday because I don't know what to do with myself. When you don't have a role in the back-to-play protocols, you just become a commissioner that's in the way, and I found that the hard way that I can't go to dinner with any of the sponsors. Players are happy to talk to me as long as I'm nine feet away.

So it's really just not the same, and so I'm trying to give them the space to do what they do.

Looking ahead, I think you all know our Asian swing in the fall is certainly doubtful. Two of those events, Taiwan and China we've already announced, and the other two waiting to hear back a final government perspective. I would be surprised if either Korea or Japan were to get the green light this week.

And given that, we could kind ourselves in a four-week off that we didn't plan when we started talking about a restart back in April and May.

We'll definitely add at least one new event, another LPGA Drive On generative event in October, maybe two, but certainly one to be announced here in the next week and with an outside chance of a second.

But we'll add another full-field domestic-based event here in the States in the middle of October to kind of fill in some of that slack that would have been otherwise been time in Asia. I'm really proud to say that all of our title sponsors that were scheduled for '21 are still with us in '21, so there's nobody stepping off the official event schedule. So I feel good about what you'll see from us in '21.

Initially Heather and I talked about announcing our '21 schedule in September just to prove how good it was and to get excited. I think back when we said that in May we thought we though come January everything will be just back to normal.

So now we're currently working on what we call the COVID plan, which is how do we avoid crossing international



borders at least through Q1 of 2021 so that we can still get all our events in and not have these quarantine border crossings, if in fact we're still dealing with COVID issues even into April and May.

In the process of doing that we're really shaking everybody up and creating some different schedules, so we're probably going to be more like November than the September I hoped for, because we're going to try to create a schedule that maybe is abnormal relative to our regular flow of events but enables us to play virtually all of our events regardless of what vaccine timing that you believe or follow, because I'm not sure anybody really knows.

Last couple things I'll say is from a Rolex awards perspective, we don't plan to give a Rolex Rookie of the Year award or a Rolex Annika Major Award. From the rookies' perspective, we're going to give them a full rookie season in '21, and knowing that we're not repopulating any Tour, we wanted to give them a full season to be Rookie of the Year candidates.

And for the Rolex Annika Major Award, obviously that was an award decided to tie five majors together, so we want to wait until we can bring all those back together.

We will have a Rolex Player of the Year Award. We will have a Vare Trophy for the lowest scoring average, and we will celebrate our Rolex first-time winners.

No matter how much we play, and we certainly plan to play plenty as it relates to rounds, we think it's more than fitting to crown who is the best player of 2020, address who has the lowest scoring average for 2020, and certainly address all those first-time winners like we would.

This week here in the desert is an important week for us and probably an important week for other reasons than people just saying that all the time. But in the LPGA, as most of you know, there are very few events that Juli Inkster grew up watching and Haley Moore grew up watching and both dreaming of the same event.

Every player playing in this event, and even the ones who didn't get into this event, grew up as a kid watching people cross that bridge and going past either Dinah Shore or the Dinah Shore Trophy onto that 18th green, jumping in Poppies Pond.

So this is an important tradition to keep alive, not just for the LPGA, but for the generations of kids that sitting home watching this in their own COVID challenges and being house-bound and still keep those dreams alive.

Obviously we're going to be challenged by the heat. We didn't expect to be challenged by both heat and air quality, but looks like we'll be challenged by both. We'll keep an open mind how we can address that to make sure that in the year 2020 where health has been a priority, that we're not going to take a backseat on health as it relates to this year.

I asked Heather Daly-Donofrio to join us on this call because I feel fairly confident saying this, no matter what other Tour would refute me: Heather has been the business west person in golf since March 15th of 2020.

And the reason I say that is there's a lot of Tours doing what she's doing, but most of them have a 30- to 40-person team doing what Heather does with about a 7-person team.

And so Heather to get us playing again, to get our testing figured out, to do what you've done to keep us healthy and keep us moving has been amazing. And just in case anybody asks me anything about testing protocol for the fear that I would actually answer that, I invited you on just to make sure I don't screw up and say what isn't true.

Maybe Heather, before we go to questions, you can give the group a little update where we are on testing, not just this week, but where we are on testing year to date and as it relates to our protocols.

HEATHER DALY-DONOFRIO: Sure. Thanks, Mike, and thanks to everybody for being on the call.

To date as it relates to player and caddie tests, we've undergone about 3300 tests across players and caddies, across both tours, LPGA and Symetra, and that's a combination of at-home tests and on-site tests.

We've had eight positives total across those 3300 tests: Three caddies on LPGA, two players on the LPGA, and two players on Symetra. They're good numbers, they're low numbers, and I think that's a testament to our players and caddies adhering to the protocols and really taking the responsibility for themselves and the responsibility to the whole very seriously.

From a statistical standpoint we're obviously doing really well, but that doesn't mean we want to get too far ahead of ourselves. We can't get ahead of ourselves. We've got a lot of golf left, a lot of tournaments left. We don't want to get complacent, and we need to stay vigilant and committed to our processes and protocols. Mike mentioned great partners.

We've had two great partners involved in the Eurofins, who

we're using this week and next week at Cambia for our testing who have really helped us solidify our testing programs and given us all confidence in our testing policies and procedures.

But I'll say that players and caddies have been doing a tremendous job. We've put a lot on them. We've put a lot of different protocols and things they're not used to in front of them, but they've all been terrific. And again, they feel the responsibility for the whole to keep us all playing, and we're hoping to continue to trend in a positive direction.

CHRISTINA LANCE: Thanks, Mike. Thank you very much, Heather. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Mike, you say it was an important week here in the desert. Obviously when this restart happened you had to know that there were going to be ups and downs. Obviously we had news of a positive test today with Charley Hull leaving the field. You've lost a couple of tournaments here. Did you go into this thinking this was going to be the hardest restart or that things had been set up to be easier than they've been?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, if I was being totally honest, and that usually gets me in trouble, but I thought this was going to be harder than it's been through six weeks. That doesn't mean -- as Heather and I talk about all the time, that doesn't mean the hard part hasn't hit yet.

And I think if you're one of those players or caddies that's tested positive, or probably just as bad, which sounds terrible to say from a health perspective, been hit with close contact quarantine, which means you actually tested negative but we'll see you again in 14 days, you may disagree on how easy or not this has been.

Yeah, I mean, like I said, it's not an enjoyable life on Tour. We talked a lot about it last week with a bunch of players and caddies at Wal-Mart. Part of the Tour life is the social part. It's getting to know the sponsors and the fans. It's the interactions you didn't expect to have in the parking lot with somebody who has got a poster that said something.

In my case it's a sponsor at a pro-am who I never expected to meet who really has got something going on in their business that we could help amplify through our business, and a lot of those kind of pieces aren't falling together in this year.

I was concerned on two fronts. I was concerned about overwhelming our team, which I still am. We've got a tired team. It's a lot of work when you're on-site. You could tell somebody you're in charge of temperature scanning today and then they realize about 15 minutes later that they have

to start at 5:30 in the morning and end at 7:00 at night because any time anybody walks in or out that's when they're scanning.

And I was concerned about leaving people behind. We could have gone to Scotland and hopped on that charter with 10 less people, and you're not coming home until you test two negatives, or in the case of Charley, flying here to be a part of a major that I know is a big deal to her and have to sit there and not play. That hurts.

I think I've told you guys this before, but the one thing that brought me peace in this thing was when Heather quite frankly brought me the idea of us not really allowing the 2020 to change somebody's status, so that in 2021 they can return to the Tour where they were at the beginning of 2020.

That was like a relief valve in the COVID year for me because I was concerned about messing up people's career and their health, and I think in this case they've got a choice. Health-wise if they don't want to play they don't have to play, and career-wise whether they play or not they're really not putting next year or their Tour status in jeopardy.

Q. I'm not sure how much players are blowing up your phone these days, but what is the most common concern that you're getting now from players about life on Tour and beyond?

MIKE WHAN: I mean, the most common one for me is always the same for me. Do you have an update on the two events in Asia, if we're going to play a new event, because I gave them the sort of the update I did you guys. Don't know if we'll play the four Asian events. Probably will add a new one. When is the new one? Where is it? What day do I have to fly? They live a constant life of travel agent.

So I would say the most constant is that. The second most, which aligns to it, is can you show me the first half of '21? Mostly it's life stuff. Got a friend getting married, my parents' anniversary. Everyone is trying to figure out their life. Typically about this time I've already given them a pretty good handle of '21.

Because we're trying out, essentially reshuffle '21 and move some of our international border crossing to later in the year, everything kind of got jumbled in the last 45 days.

Yeah, when we first started playing, as Heather can relate, a ton of protocol questions. They knew they'd heard it and I'd been to a Zoom meeting, you said something about, but where do I go again to register my caddie? Can my coach

come to Portland? Can he not come to Portland?

Is ANA's different than -- every one of these communities is slightly different in terms of how the local community's limitations are. Those I think have really died down, or at least maybe Heather, you can tell me. Maybe they've stopped coming to me and they've started going to you.

I get primarily the, Can you help me with my life over the next six to 12 months?

Q. Another question that's part of the national conversation right now is the vaccine and if we'll see one of those in the next few months. Do you think players would take a vaccine, and what are your conversations like amongst yourselves about how that will work, if some do, some don't?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I'd be surprised if we would have a large percentage of people not taking a vaccine. Certainly to your point, if it was available sooner and we were talking really probably about '21 and a greater deal. Because at the end of the day I think two things are true: Players don't want to be sick, and I think most importantly, we live, like I said, in a pretty social environment. Whether that's in planes, hotels, rental cars, we're just not the same as people who tell me they're playing a lot of golf today and they're really at home doing that.

I think if we can get to ourselves -- we can get through our situation where we can get a vaccine and we're not putting any volunteers at risk, ourselves at risk, or the community we're going to, I think that will be an easy take.

I think the people concerned of vaccines now is were any shortcuts made in trying to get to a vaccine. But at least in the conversations I'm having with our medical advisors, the shortcuts aren't about the testing process. The shortcuts are about not putting space in between the approvals to the next stage.

What I mean by that is that the big difference -- again, I'm not Fauci, so I'm just going to tell you what I've heard from the folks on our medical crew. The big difference is that typically you would have a vaccine go to stage 3 and it would go to its full stage 3, and then you would find out if it got approved. If it gets approved, and nobody would do this beforehand, then you go build millions of vaccines.

In the case of COVID virus certainly as it relates to the U.S. and a couple other countries and well, vaccine stockpiling are happening during stage 3. So if the vaccine doesn't work or doesn't get approved for whatever reason, those will be landfilled and thrown away. They're just dead bacteria, so it's not risking anybody.

But should those get approved, we would have millions, and I think in this case tens of millions, of vaccines available at approval, and that difference is about six to eight months.

So when people say a vaccine has never been approved this fast, it's not really the approval, it's the from approval to available. What they're doing right now is by building all these -- with government support, building all these vaccine supplies, if something does get approved, we won't be waiting six months to build up.

I think that's the real difference. It's not a shortcut in process. At least the way I'm being told by our medical team, it's a shortcut in the amount of time between the stages.

Q. Have many players asked you those questions yet?

MIKE WHAN: A couple, yeah. A couple. I mean, as I always tell people, Mike Whan answering your questions about a vaccine would be like Bethann Nichols answering questions about living in South Africa. I'll give you my thoughts, but I'm not really sure I'm an expert on the topic.

The good news is we have been given that exposure to some quality medical individuals, and I think that story and that positioning have been pretty consistent. As they said, if we have a positive vaccine, the pace in which positive vaccine becomes available vaccine will be like something we've never seen before.

Not the actual testing process. That won't be something we haven't seen before, but the process between that and availability will be quicker than we've ever seen just because we're taking financial risk to get there.

Q. Did you talk to Charley Hull today?

MIKE WHAN: No, I have not talked to Charley Hull. I did talk to Charlie Meacham. No, I haven't talked to her yet. I've found in this process the first five or six hours is probably better for them to be talking to people that can give them real answers, because in the beginning of course I was calling every caddie -- and Heather will be rolling her eyes or turning off her camera now, because I calling everybody right in the beginning and they were asking me all the questions that quite frankly Heather and our medical team should be answering. Because I couldn't help myself I'd start answering them, so now I make sure they get the expertise they want and we can have a separate conversation later when she's got what she needs there.

Q. Mike, this is a medical question, but hopefully you can answer it. At 112 degrees with smoke in the air, I don't know what that feels like, but is there a point at which it becomes too dangerous to play in terms of temperature and air quality, and do we know what that is?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, you want to take that, Heather? I know you're working on it.

HEATHER DALY-DONOFRIO: Sure, I'd love to take it. So I know last week everybody is aware that we made a decision to allow carts in practice rounds due to the high temperature for both players and caddies, and then to allow the caddies push carts or carts during tournament rounds.

Again, something that's unusual, but nothing is typical this year in 2020, but we felt like it was the best decision to keep our caddies healthy.

I think since then two things have changed. One, the air quality due to the California wildfires, and we're tracking that air quality, those AQI levels very closely; and two, higher forecasted temperatures for the weekend.

I think we mentioned right now we just got our forecast from our meteorologist, and we're looking at for tournament days one 100, 108, 110, and 113 right now.

We're continuing to monitor both the AQI and the temperature very closely. While we're not out there yet, if it becomes clear from our medical team, and we're also going to be working with the medical team at Eisenhower Medical, who's a partner this week at the ANA Inspiration, if the high temperatures and the AQI converge to a point where we feel that's unhealthy for walking, while we haven't -- again, we're not there yet. We have not ruled out carts for players on tournament days.

In general we've heard from our players that they want to walk, that it's a major championship, and of course in major championships you want to walk. But what's most important right now is the health and safety of our athletes and our caddies.

So we're talking to our medical director. We're watching the levels very highly. But with the AQI you really can't forecast out too far. So while the AQI level's terrible now, for later in the week really can only do that current day and the next day, because a lot can change between now and then.

We're watching both very carefully and watching how they combine very carefully for the health and safety of the

athletes and the caddies.

Q. Mike, you had such great response from the Drive On Championship at Inverness and great television numbers. Is there a chance we might see some of those in the future in non-COVID years?

MIKE WHAN: Possibly, yeah. In fairness, I would tell you that the majority of these events have been funded by tournaments who couldn't play their event this year, for a whole host of reasons, all generally COVID related, obviously.

You know, listen, if I could write a check and just put on more LPGA events, I would. I don't have that freedom and wish I did.

Yeah, I think the good news is providing players opportunities when we lose one or two, I think we've learned a formula now that's potentially repeatable, and I think Drive On I was great. I think we gave it an incredible venue and everybody wanted to get started. I think the next Drive On that we'll announce will be similar. It's a place you'd want to be on a golf course you'd want to play and a little bit remote so we can sort of get away from cities and congestion and bars and restaurants and just be able to just focus on golf and hopefully be good to us and be good to the community.

That formula I think works pretty good, and I'm excited about being able to put another one of those on.

It's not the same. I wish we could be going over to Asia for four weeks and really electrifying our brand over in Asia, which is what happens when we go over there. It's good for our business, not just when we're playing but all the other business that gets to know us.

But we'll be back we know we'll be back, and none of those sponsors want to go anywhere. They're more frustrated by us not being able to come and play than we are. It's just 2020, and we'll all kind of hopefully look back and roll our eyes at this year someday.

Q. I just wanted to ask about fans and sort of -- I know you're looking ahead to 2021. I'm assuming probably no fans for the rest of this year, but I don't know, what are the conversations like about when you're hopeful that you might be able to see fans again?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I mean, I don't really think that -- we really haven't got into those deep conversations with people in November and December yet. Trying to make COVID decisions in August or September about December, we've learned kind of that becomes sort of

humorous in terms of how things can change pretty quickly. Don't want to rule anything out for later in the year, but also realize it's probably unlikely, and if it is likely, it's going to be a pretty reduced number.

And we're hoping, just like the question on vaccine, in the beginning, that we're hoping that if there's some health options for us in Q1 of 2021 that we could be back by late Q1 of '21 into the tournaments the way we want to play them: Pro-ams, fans and everything else the way that we normally do.

Meantime we realize the biggest challenge we've had with our schedule in 2020 is border crossing because we've had some tournaments that would play without fans, with or without fans. We just can't get the Tour there and back without border crossing. We're going to try to at a minimum in 2021 build a schedule that lessens the up-front pain of border crossing, and almost all of our sponsors realize and already have in Q1 that they'll have to have a fan/no-fan contingency. Hoping you don't have to use it but hard to predict in the meantime. Like I said, I haven't given up hope on November and December, but maybe I should.

Q. Which tournaments were specifically border crossing cancellations?

MIKE WHAN: Couldn't go to Canada, couldn't go to China, couldn't go to Taiwan, and I'm expecting to hear that from Korea and Japan. Meaning you could cross the border but you'd have to come, quarantine for 14 days, and quarantine as I think you know over there is different than sometimes the quarantine that Americans think of. You literally are not outside for 14 days.

It would be difficult to hold any kind of series of tournaments, not to mention one, under those criteria.

Given that, like we would have been at CP last week. We could have played it, could have played it without fans, but couldn't have played it without quarantine.

CHRISTINA LANCE: I think that's going to wrap it up for us, but I do want to end on a light note. Mike, I've got a question for you that we've been asking all of our players, players who have been able to make the jump into Poppies Pond, players who have dreamed about making the jump into Poppies Pond. If you were ever to get the chance to jump, what would your form be?

MIKE WHAN: I would go like the Michelin man body suit. I would get the floaty built all around me and jump in there and just bob on top of the water because I feel like that would get me in the highlight reel for the next 50 years

because it would be different enough. So I would surround myself in floaties and noodles and I would just bob out there on top of the thing.

I have no air -- I don't know what they call it, like air conscience. Like I tried gymnastics as a kid, and when I'm in the air and flipping, the whole world comes to a stop, so there would be no aerobic kind of moves in the air for me. So yeah, Michelin man, full body suit, filled up with air, floating in the pond.

CHRISTINA LANCE: Mike, great way to end this. Thank you so much, everyone.

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