

CPKC Women's Open

Wednesday, August 23, 2023

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Shaughnessy Golf & Country Club

Golf Canada CEO Laurence

Applebaum

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the media center at the CPKC Women's Open. Pleased to be joined by Laurence Applebaum. Laurence, you had a chance to see the property, see the golf course, visit with the host committee. Just some general thoughts to start the week as we look ahead.

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, thank you, Dan, and everyone for making the time to come to this event. CPKC Women's Open here at Shaughnessy has been three years in the making. Obviously many of you know we had originally planned to be here in 2020 following up on a pretty epic CPKC Women's Open in Magna Golf Club in Aurora. We didn't know as we planned it would be a three-year gestation to get back out west.

It's incredible to be in this community. I have spent time at most of golf courses in the lower mainland the past few days with some of our programs. We had a really incredible event at the Musqueam Golf and Learning Academy yesterday with Rose Zhang, who was here just before me.

It was quite a joy, I would say joyous moment to see the integration between a lot of young kids from the Musqueam Nation, our First Tee program, all brought together by the LPGA Tour.

So when the LPGA Tour comes to town, it brings this energy and this force, and we could not be more grateful for the Tour coming back to Canada. We just think we're just going to have a wonderful week ahead. The golf course was more challenging than I expected for your recreational golfer like myself, but it was fun to see all the players back in Canada, and especially our young Canadians.

We have a 16 year old in Luna Lu who qualified on Monday so we're just so pleased to see. I think the number was 15 that we got to, so 15 Canadians playing.



I think you've all seen the tee times. I have to give a shoutout to the Szeryk family, for Ellie and Maddie to be playing together and seeing the dad -- the dad was on the bag for at least one of the pro-ams. Pretty special moment for a dad to see his two daughters playing LPGA Tour golf in Canada.

So really wonderful moment.

THE MODERATOR: Certainly the tournament has experienced a really nice success trajectory over the last couple years. How important is this community to bring major professional golf back to Vancouver?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, I have to give a real credit to Sport Hosting Vancouver and our partners here, not only at Shaughnessy, but at Point Grey and the whole community.

It's an incredible golf province, incredible golf locale, one of the special ones in our country. The 2023 CPKC Women's Open will be our greatest commercial success in the history of Canadian Women's Opens. For us to have a title sponsor like CPKC, a new elite partner like BDO and our other vast partnerships, everyone from Audi to Levelwear, we will have our greatest commercial success.

And as many of you know, as the National Sport Federation we take everything we do and drive it back into our performance program, participation program, and our membership services, so we're thrilled that we could have such an amazing result here in Shaughnessy.

Q. You mentioned this is going to be the most commercial successful CPKC Women's Open. What are some of the benchmarks you're looking for in terms of commercial success? How do you qualify that?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, so we look at things in a variety of factors. We have some real formal metrics. On the attendance side, if this really lovely weather that we've had for the last two days continues, we will have a nice bump up on the walk-up attendance.



We weigh hope to get close to 70,000 people that will be here. Ottawa always sets a really high bar. I don't know if anyone is here from Ottawa, but Vancouver is gonna come real close. Our partnerships, we've tripled our number of partnerships in four years. Obviously two of the years we didn't have CPKC Women's Open, but we have a vast number of partnerships.

At the end of the day, this collaboration between the host club, which we try and drive a lot of eyeballs, business, promotion towards the club and the whole area, and the golf business I would say has met all of our metrics so far.

So the last thing we look at in terms of success is a super engaged volunteer group. Our tournament director, Ryan Paul, has done a really great job. We have a volunteer group that has had three years to prepare they joke, but it's really a fantastic group here.

Yeah, just probably hitting on all cylinders is the way to say it.

Q. The three-year delay, what were some of the benefits that came out of that and also some of the challenges? Like you did have to be really nimble in that response.

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah. I think that a lot of people will say that our sport has been very fortunate coming through COVID or getting through COVID in way and coming out and having this balance of participation.

This year, 2023, more Canadians will play more golf than ever in the history of the sport, and that's an amazing thing. Within our score center we are registering handicaps, we will reach ten million scores put in our handicap system.

So we know people are tracking how they're playing, they're coming into the game, finding their way through the game, and they've gotten behind it.

I think what's also been nice is we have had exceptional support from our government partner at the provincial level and the federal level in getting big events back on our feet.

It wasn't easy. The support has allowed us to invest in infrastructure like on 18 that was quite famous from the RBC Canadian Open. Every time you see a picture the Nick Taylor sinking the putt you see these people in the double decker.

So that's been exciting. It's just been nice. The feeling and the vibe is people are just so thrilled to be out watching world class sport. We pride ourselves -- with all due respect to so many great events in Canada, we think we

host -- we work on the greatest women's sport in our country, the CPKC Women's Open. We're back and it's been fantastic.

Q. I'm just curious about your thought on the women's professional golf pipeline in this country. I'm pretty sure that the majority of the Canadians in the field this week are actually amateurs. So just curious about how you think the next generation is coming up and just how excited maybe are you for that?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, I really listen a lot of what Brooke's perspective is on it. And then maybe Alena. I had a chance to chat with Alena at length. They're really happy to see Maddie Szeryk with her card and getting on. Probably disappointed that Maude Aimee LeBlanc has had some injuries, just as she was getting her legs under her. Same with Jaclyn Lee from a Calgary.

But if you see, there is a handful of young female amateurs I would almost call them on the cusp of being professional that we have super high hopes for. And our High Performance team, Kevin Blue and Salimah Mussani, who's a local BC woman who is our women's national team head coach.

People like Katie Cranston who hits it a mile. People like Lauren Kim who won the Canadian Women's Am and played at the U.S. Open. Sarah Rheume also making her way through the Tour.

So we have this exceptional group coming on. I keep trying to say to Brooke, more people are going to be joining you. I promise you, more people are coming. Our goal that we set often is we want to have 30 Canadians on the PGA and LPGA Tour by 2032, and Kevin Blue has said he's going to beat this goal. We want to find out that's numbers.

Q. I'm also a little curious about the 2025 CPKC Women's Open. I hate to ask because obviously it's been three years we have been waiting for this one and then next year at Earl Grey. From what I understand things are going great out there in Calgary, but what's the status on the conversations for 2025? Obviously you want to go on the east-west rotation.

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, so maybe first I'll comment on 2024. We are going to be in Earl Grey Golf Club in Calgary, and there is a delegations here from that club. Usually the clubs send a few folks out a year or two ahead. They get to see what clubs do good and bad.

They brought 15 people. They have the greatest advance sales in the history of the CPKC Women's Open. A lot you

maybe have heard of Earl Grey or haven't played it. They just did a big clubhouse renovation. The GM, Richard Arnold, has been at some wonderful clubs in his career in the GTA.

He's brought this culture and this excitement. It's really going to be great to have the LPGA Tour back in the Alberta marketplace and our friends over at the Shaw Charity Classic do an amazing job with PGA Tour Champions, but we're going to be in the marketplace, and it's already proven to be great.

I wanted to make a joke about 2025. I wanted to say we're going to go to Smiths Falls Golf Club, but we're not. We would love to be there. We have probably a list of about a half dozen clubs that we're looking at. Ryan Paul probably spends the majority of time -- when he's not doing 18-hour shifts he's thinking about what amazing clubs can we bring, how can we bring the whole tour to an existing marketplace or one we haven't been at.

I don't want to let the cat out of the bag too early, but there are some historic clubs on this list, some newer clubs on that list. What we know is we need to continue to make it about sports and entertainment and fun and family and food, and maybe even music one day at the CPKC Women's Open.

So we're going to keep looking.

Q. You talk about the program and how it's growing. The young ladies here are going to put on a exceptional show for everybody. You see the crowds outside today and how they continue to grow, and only wish nothing but success for what you're doing. How and what are you working with to develop the young girls that are coming through the program at a really young age? Do you have any special programs in place? They look up to some of the young players playing today and they really want to aspire to be No. 1 in the world. How and what programs do we have in place coming forward to follow what we've got now?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, so we were very lucky. We found a chief support officer in this guy called Kevin Blue. Kevin has been a member of Team Canada and had come up through our program himself and had gone on to a pretty great junior career and college career at Stanford. Wasn't the same vintage as the young Rose Zhang, but he has seen what world-class programs in the U.S. have done.

We've probably tripled the amount of resources we put behind the High-Performance Program. That's not only hands-on coaching, but we put a new person in place, a

national talent identification, so Tristan Mullally, who has got a world class coaching reputation spends -- I don't want to say the number wrong -- but 150 days is probably the number of days he spends on the road finding the talent, working with our provincial coaches and the local coaches. It's pretty fragmented in our country as you all know.

The infrastructure of coaches, assistant coaches, physios, we have a amazing sports psychologist who is on our staff now. She is based out of Winnipeg, but she is also on the road, Adrienne Toogood Leslie. So I would say Kevin has brought some of the infrastructure and rigor of big programs that you might know of in college throughout the U.S. and has put some of that rigor into our development program.

Training camps, combines, and just having more coaching hours for all these young athletes. So it's in a great place. We're trying to figure out weather. That's one thing we're working on right now.

One of the things we have done is put a training camp or facility in Arizona. A housing development or -- I shouldn't say a housing development, but a housing complex for the kids to be at. So a lot of things we're doing to create infrastructure for our young players.

Q. Many of the golf courses in this part of Vancouver are on First Nations land. You mentioned playing at one yesterday. What are you doing and what's it like partnering with indigenous communities to promote the sport among First Nations in Canada?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, so Shaughnessy is one of the many golf courses referred to on Musqueam Band land. The partnership that has been created is one we'll use as a model. So this event yesterday Chief Wayne Sparrow talked about the Musqueam Golf and Learning Center was one the first properties that they purchased, and they own that infrastructure as well.

They have partnered with people who are experts in some of the teaching learning space like us, through our program and through First Tee, to do some things that are really integrated. He said a saying that struck me yesterday, which was the Musqueam Nation are really thinking about progress and the way forward. That is the way we look at golf in this community.

So we have so many First Nations communities across the country involved in golf. We have one program that is specifically targeted that group. It's RBC Community Junior Golf Program. It focuses not only on First Nations communities, but underrepresented communities in general. Golf is a perfect sport that bridges so many

things.

Maybe a little bit you've heard it from my side before, but First Tee program is not a golf program. It's a life skills program that uses golf as a medium. It's been superb as a way of putting golf clubs in people's hands and life skills into the rest of the whole milieu.

Q. On a more serious note, obviously there is wildfires in the interior of BC right now. The air quality advisory was lifted here in Vancouver, but it's still an ongoing concern in this province. Golf is an outdoor sport. What can Golf Canada do or maybe what are some of your concerns about how climate change is affecting golf in Canada?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: In this situation I probably should have started here, is that we're watching what's going on very closely in the Okanogan Valley and the surrounding communities dealing with this. We're very pleased that we're seeing -- in areas like this it seems to be evolving in a good way. We're definitely thinking about all the folks, but in particular some of the golf operations and golf staff we know are dealing with some tough stuff.

We're going to continue to watch very closely. We've spoken as a team, and me personally to a couple experts about air quality and what's going on. Again, it's been pleasing how it's evolved over the last couple days. I think the air quality index number was below 2; might have got to 1 yesterday.

It looks good out there as well. So we're on a smaller level operationally, tournament-wise, feels like we're -- fingers crossed -- in a good place.

Our operation will be part of helping these golf clubs get back into place, will allow them to recover to where they were. That whole Okanogan Valley is one of the gems of our country in terms of golf destinations, so we're going to be following it really closely.

Q. As you are aware, British Columbia and I think Ontario have both introduced indigenous championships. Is there any plan for a national event in the future?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, I think we have been talking about it. We talked about it for a couple years. Very similar to some of the other championships that have evolved. We run about 30 national amateur championships now. Five years ago it was 24.

So we continue to evolve, and we have adjusted some of them as well. It would be a goal of ours to run a national

indigenous golf championship. At the moment, we're probably working with more on the provincial level to get a bit of scale and participation.

It's really interesting that on some of the gender side there is more boys and some there is more girls involved. So I think I would likely hope in the next three to five years we'll have a national indigenous championship.

Q. One other question, unrelated. I think I heard you mention you played with Lauren Kim today in the pro-am. She's had quite the summer, as you know. In addition to winning the Canadian Amateur, she played at the U.S. Open, played in the U.S. Junior Girls, one other big event. What have you seen from her that makes you believe that she's going to be one of the young women who has a really good chance to turn the success she's had into a pro career?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, in British Columbia you have a expansive group of young players coming through, and Lauren is probably leading that pack. We had a little like sort of luncheon with all the players. Our amateur team were playing in an LPGA Tour for the first time and that's one of the great successes of this championship, that we're able to allow amateur players their first starts on the LPGA Tour.

So I started to talk about how great this is, your first LPGA Tour experience. She said, you know, I did play the U.S. Open. So that was kind of like, yeah...

Q. Twice.

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, twice, exactly? Salimah Mussani, our head coach, was saying Lauren just goes about her business in a really methodical professional way and just figures out how to get it done. She is not the biggest hitter. She might not have the physical stature of some of the other players.

She just seems really just in tune with her game. She seemed in tune with the surroundings. She's seen Shaughnessy a couple time but she hasn't played here a whole bunch.

But I think that seeing her win the Canadian Am and the pedigree of players who have won before, I'm really excited for what Lauren is going to do. Very excited.

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