

JM Eagle LA Championship

Monday, March 25, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

Walter Wang

CEO, JM Eagle

Shirley Wang

CEO, Plastpro

Casey Ceman

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Lizette Salas

Hannah Green

Press Conference

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: Good morning, everybody. Thank you for joining us here today at TopGolf Los Angeles El Segundo for media day for the JM Eagle LA Championship presented by Plastpro. We've got some really good news we're going to be revealing today, but a couple before we get going, a couple quick thank yous.

First off, hi, everybody, I'm Jeremy Friedman, I'm the VP of PR from Outlyr and the media director for the JM Eagle LA Championship, so looking forward to working with all of you. I worked with a lot of you this past week, so looking forward to working with you going forward for the JM Eagle LA Championship.

A quick thank you to our friends at TopGolf and Callaway for hosting us today. They've been great with this venue, and here we've got some fun TopGolf activities that are going to be right outside in the hitting bays right after this and lunch will be right next door, so thank you to TopGolf. We also have a couple of great panel sessions coming up.

Our panelists are to my right, Walter Wang, chairman and CEO of JM Eagle. To his right, Shirley Wang, CEO of Plastpro, and to her right, Casey Ceman, VP of tournament business affairs for the LPGA Tour. That will be the first panel with me.

Second panel, LPGA winner and local and Azusa resident Lizette Salas, our defending champion who won this trophy last year and major champion Hannah Green, and the second panel will be emceed by my tag team partner at Golf Channel, Tom Abbott. We've got a couple of good panel sessions.



A couple of quick tournament tidbits before we open up for the panel. The tournament field, we've got a really strong tournament field. It's going to be -- placing to be the strongest in the six years of this tournament headlined by the top 4 in the world including the brand new World No. 1, Nelly Korda, as of an hour ago, courtesy of her winning yesterday's tournament. Lilia Vu, world No. 2; Celine Boutier, No. 3, and Ronni Yin, No. 4. Of course these two are in the field as well. We also have multiple former World No. 1s, major champions. It's going to be a tremendous, tremendous field.

So the news release that's probably hit your inboxes probably 10 minutes ago has our initial commitments. We will be announcing additional commitments in the coming weeks as well as our sponsor exemptions. So more to come on the tournament field front.

Also for all of you that are local here to Los Angeles, we have a lot of LA-based residents, including Lizette, who is committed to the tournament coming up next month. Lizette, Lilia, Alison Lee, Andrea Lee, Lucy Li, Angel Yin, Jenny Coleman.

I take pride in kind of channeling how many UCLA alums and how many USC alums are playing in the field because I know they always have like little internal competitions, like okay, is USC or UCLA going to play better at these tournaments.

We've got a really, really good field.

Also, like I said, more commitments will be coming in the coming weeks with this tournament, so stay tuned for that from me.

Last year, 2023, it was the dawning of a new era for this tournament with JM Eagle and Plastpro coming in as title and presenting sponsor. I'm going to let Walter and Shirley talk through the background a little bit on how this all came about and where we are now, but last year when we announced this in 2022, Walter and Shirley's first announcement for this tournament was doubling the purse from \$1.5 million to \$3 million for 2023. It was a



tremendous announcement. We have more coming shortly from Walter and Shirley.

What Walter and Shirley -- they're dedicated to elevating and growing women's golf and elevating these great players, and that's what -- and this tournament is essentially being a trendsetter for that. This tournament last year was the first tournament to be contested with a \$3 million purse in April of 2023.

This year there are 11 tournaments that have a \$3 million purse. So a lot of the tournaments they saw what is happening here, and they have followed suit. That's an all boats rises. That's kind of what we want to do with the LPGA Tour. It's all boats rises.

We have a little more pieces of news coming shortly.

Walter and Shirley, the first question that I'd like you to share with the audience is take us back to when we first made this announcement in 2022 and partnered with the LPGA Tour. Why did you guys want to partner with the LPGA Tour, and why is it so important here in Los Angeles to partner with the LPGA Tour?

WALTER WANG: Well, it's definitely not a coincidence. It was actually the beginning of the story was two years ago, we had a board meeting. It's a DEA foundation board meeting at Wilshire Country Club. I'm a board member there, so we got invited to play at the pro-am of the tournament.

I think maybe Tim did this on purpose, but one of my playing partners was David back there, and then we started to talk about the LPGA, and Dave gave me some statistics, and I went home and I did some research myself. I discovered that the total purse of LPGA is just a little bit over 20 percent of PGA.

I'm saying, why is that, because I watch golf, I love to watch golf. I'm a terrible player, yes, but I love to watch golf. I watch the PGA, I watch the LPGA. I said, oh, my goodness, every time I watch golf, you know these ladies, professionals, put so much effort and time into the same.

It's not easy out there. It must be hard. It's a hard way to make a living. But the joy of the game is fantastic.

I thought about it, spoke to my boss here, and then I said, well, I'm going to do this. We're going to do this. We're going to do it right. I found out the purse was \$1½ million, and I said, let's double the purse. Shirley said, are you sure? I said, yeah, let's just do this and have a longer commitment of five years minimum.

So that's just the start of it, spark of it.

My heart is we want the ladies who work so hard, that are so fun to watch, to make a good living basically. At the end of the day, make a good living, and then also inspire others, especially kids, to come into the game.

So our long-term thinking is that I know there's quite a few kids golf programs all over the country, but we want to have programs for kids that have not even touched a club yet. This is much different this year.

SHIRLEY WANG: So I guess -- I said this last year. Walter asked me to sponsor this LPGA golf tournament, and I said -- they asked me why do I do it. And I said, my husband told me so. But more than that, it's really because when we had the opportunity to help women, I was saying yes. I own a business, Plastpro, my plug-in. But I know how hard women work. How hard women work, their diligence, and also the fact that they have to provide for the family and also the responsibilities of taking care of their family beyond just money but all the care that they have to put into it.

I really want to increase their pay, their livelihood.

Another thing that I think is also important is their exposure -- well, one is to raise the talent, get more talent into the field so it's more fun for everyone to watch, but also the exposure of women's sports. I think that's one other thing that I think I hope we can all help out, which is the time that is allotted for men's sports versus women's sports, I think there needs to be more time for women's sports so that everyone can see how well women play and get more fans and get more talent.

I hope that's one of the goals that we can provide in the future or help for the future.

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: A couple of the enhancements last year in addition to the purse was the pro-am VIP party, which they attended and thoroughly enjoyed. On the LPGA Tour, and Hannah and Lizette can attest to this, we had over 100 players attend the pro-am party. That doesn't happen hardly at all on the LPGA Tour in terms of that many. It was a party. It was a VIP party.

If y'all can kind of share a little bit about that, about the party and the experience of the party last year and kind of looking ahead to this year a little bit, too.

WALTER WANG: You're the party planner.

SHIRLEY WANG: Yes, I'm the big party girl of the family. I have to give credit to Outlyr because they're the ones who

really planned out the party, with people dancing, and then with Walter having prizes out, I think it enhanced the party, and I think, you know what, that's what it should be. A party should be a party and it should be fun.

I think with all the players there, I think they all enjoyed it because they were like, oh, I got this, you got that? Then some people said, I didn't get anything.

But you know what, it was all good and fun and play. I think we're just happy that everyone came out and had a good time.

To kick off this wonderful championship, I hope.

WALTER WANG: I agree with everything Shirley said.

Life there's ups and downs, and sometimes you've just got to have some fun. If you're going to have some fun, have a party, do it right.

I came up with actually the prizes, and I know the players will enjoy it. It's a little bit competitive, what I get, what you get, and it's great.

We gave out prizes like certificates, gift certificates to airline tickets and shopping and so forth. It's just a lot of fun.

When you see the players, they got their prize, and you can see the smile on their faces. It's just wonderful. It warms my heart.

This year we're going to have a bit of a bigger party and hopefully more players will come. Hopefully 90 percent will show hopefully. But we're going to have more fun. The food Kim promised me will be even better and more prizes. I have worked with my team to enhance the prizes and give out more. I think it is 70 percent of the players will get a prize.

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: That's awesome. I'm just going to say that. That's awesome.

That takes us to this year's tournament. We previously announced, and Walter and Shirley, I'd like for you to talk about this, too, but we previously announced that the entire 144-player field are going to receive complimentary lodging and accommodations courtesy of Walter and Shirley Wang, which is almost -- they can talk about this a little bit more, but as y'all know, it's tough out there on the LPGA Tour. Expenses, hotel expenses, travel expenses. This is one of those where it's just -- it's one of those gestures that Walter and Shirley want to do for the LPGA Tour and for the players of the game. That was previously announced.

That was kind of just the -- I'll say that was the appetizer for today's announcement. Walter and Shirley, if y'all wouldn't mind just announcing to everybody what today's big announcement is for the 2024 JM Eagle LA Championship.

WALTER WANG: I think for the accommodations, we want to take just a little bit of pressure off the players, and we're very, very happy that now this season is 11 tournaments with purses of \$3 million or more. It's just great to be able to influence other tournaments to be able to increase the purse.

So last year was \$3, we doubled the purse. This year Shirley and I talked about it, we thought about it and said, you know, we need to be a little bit better, elevate it a little bit more, so we increased our purse this year to \$3.75 million. I believe we'll be the largest purse outside of the majors. Just hopefully that will contribute to the game of golf, of ladies golf. Hopefully that will do.

SHIRLEY WANG: I guess I'm going to be a little bit more crass in the sense that women players, they probably have to make \$150,000 for their expenses with all their travel, with all their training and everything like that, and that's hard. It's hard to make \$150,000 on the Tour. I don't think a majority of them do make that.

My heart goes out to them because they need that livelihood to support themselves and support their families.

For us, we wanted to elevate -- I don't know, increase the purse so that more people can make a good living out of this. So that's why we want to do it, and we're just so happy that other people also follow -- I don't know about follow, but they also raised their purse so that more and more people can play and more and more people can have a good livelihood playing golf on the LPGA.

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: To summarize the 2024 JM Eagle LA Championship presented by Plastpro we'll have a \$3.75 million purse, largest on the LPGA Tour outside of the major championships and the season-ending tournament. All the 144 players will receive hotel accommodations for tournament week.

This is not the end of the news for our tournament this year. We're going to keep trickling out more news and more enhancements to elevate this great championship.

We have also a special guest that wants to offer their congratulations and thank you. So if y'all could turn to the TVs.

(Video shown.)

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: Now I'm going to ask Casey Ceman with the LPGA Tour to almost react to this with the tournament purse increase, the hotel accommodations. For the LPGA Tour as a league, how much does it mean to have partners like Walter and Shirley who are doing what they've done just in two short years to elevate these players and your great Tour?

CASEY CEMAN: Well, thanks to you both. We're so incredibly grateful to have the two of you as partners. This announcement today is actually going to take our season-long purses, over 120 million, which is just incredible.

When you look back just three short years ago, we were under \$70 million in total purse in 2021, so the dedication that the two of you have put into this event really has inspired, and I think to Jeremy's point at the beginning, you've really been trailblazers for what we're trying to accomplish as a Tour.

We talk about the hotel accommodations, this is going to be one of 21 events on Tour this year that has some sort of minimum payout or accommodations covered for our players. Shirley, to your point, we're doing everything we can to really give our athletes the best opportunity to succeed, and those are the little things that really mean a lot. We're just so incredibly grateful to the two of you for everything you're doing for us.

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: Casey, with announcements like this, and we have several of these tournaments that are wanting to -- this tournament did this, we want to do this. Internally with the LPGA Tour, how is that with you, with Mollie, with Rick at the LPGA Tour, how does that excitement level grow within the LPGA Tour as this tour moves forward?

CASEY CEMAN: Yeah, every week it feels like there's some new news like this coming out thanks to some of the inspiration that you guys are providing. It's a new energy that I feel like the Tour hasn't felt in a long time, and I know our players are really excited about a lot of these new initiatives that are coming out.

We're laser focused on being one of the preeminent sports properties in the world, and we can't do it without this type of support.

Shirley, I was reading kind of the transcript from one of the previous media days we had, and I think you said you were so passionate about not only supporting women's sports like you were talking about but bringing world-class sporting events to the LA area, and I think you guys can be really proud of what you've built here.

SHIRLEY WANG: We hope we can do our little part.

TOM ABBOTT: It was a really good week and it was an even better week for Hannah Green as our defending champion. It's wonderful to be here with you today. Just briefly on the announcement about the purse, I think it's so true that this resonates throughout the LPGA Tour. It gets other sponsors thinking, wow, maybe we need to keep up with Walter. That makes a real difference in the macro level, not only on the LPGA but in women's sports in general because from this room here at TopGolf, the news will go out throughout the world, and other sporting organizations will think, wow, that's a big move. Other sponsors will think that's a big move. They'll begin to look at their purse. That's how the dominos begin to fall and how the purses increase and move in the right direction. It's a really big announcement today, and I commend you both for what you've done and your commitment.

At golf Channel and NBC Sports, we're really looking forward to our live coverage, which will be on East Coast primetime for the LA Championship, and that will be obviously Thursday through Sunday.

We have our two LPGA players with us. I know most of you know them both, but just a little bit background. Hannah is a four-time winner on the LPGA Tour, including a major championship at the KPMG Women's PGA. She got married earlier this year, so congratulations. She also won a tournament earlier this year in Singapore, so four-time winner and in really good position in her career, obviously the defending champion, she won last year at Wilshire in a playoff, having made a big putt on 18 to get into that playoff.

Then Lizette Salas, can I say a veteran of the LPGA? This is your 13th season on the LPGA. One of my favorite stories, her parents came from Mexico for a better life in the United States, and they settled here in Azusa, California. Her father was a mechanic by trade, and he got a job at a golf course, and he traded his services fixing the professional at this golf course, fixing his car in return teaching Lizette golf.

To cut a long story short, she's here 13 years into her career, and like many families that have come to America, that second generation really moves forward and pushes the boundaries, and Lizette has really done that.

She's had a little bit of a back step in a sense because you've been injured for the last nine months, but you've come back last week from those injuries, made the cut, played all four rounds, so you're back to full fitness we hope.



First I want to ask you both about your reaction to the news on the purse increase. I think you might have said a cuss word when you heard the news, Lizette. It was a real raw reaction. I'll give with the defending champion on this news.

HANNAH GREEN: It sounds more like me, I think.

No, it's an amazing announcement that you guys have made and also with the accommodation, it really does make a big difference being able to go to an event and have everything sorted and not have to worry about those little things. It makes a huge difference. I feel very honored to be the defending champion and I look forward to getting back to Wilshire and defending.

TOM ABBOTT: Liz he had, when you were a rookie on the LPGA Tour 12 years ago, the biggest purse of any event was \$3.25 million, and now this is half a million more than that, and that was the major championships.

Just give us some context of someone who's been on Tour for a long time what this means.

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, it's an incredible feeling just to witness the growth of the game, the involvement of the sponsors who really -- just really value how hard we work and how much we love this game and really just want to -- they pay attention to details like Shirley and Walter here and really just try to take some stress off of our plate for the week.

For myself to be an LA native, to play at Wilshire where I played a lot of collegiate golf and the club itself values women's golf, I think the Tour gets to see that for a whole week. Just to see the numbers keep rising in purses from when I was a rookie, it's life changing. It can make a difference in a family's life. I think both Hannah and I are going to be extra excited and extra motivated to perform that week and play some good golf.

TOM ABBOTT: I want to know if you won anything in the pro-am party.

LIZETTE SALAS: We just talked about that. I won nothing. So hopefully my luck will change that night and I can get an extra little incentive.

But I think the fact that, one, I'll be there healthy and back on Tour full time and play in one of my home courses per se, be back in full swing, yeah, I wouldn't mind a little extra gift card during that pro-am party.

Who do I need to talk to?

Even the little things like the pro-am party. Hopefully we'll get every single player there. I think it's a win-win situation for us and the participants and the sponsors, and just to say thank you for all that you do in creating those little details that mean so much to us.

TOM ABBOTT: It was a draw, like a raffle, and every player got a number and they're all standing there watching like please be my number. It was fantastic, and I can't wait to see what happens this year with the prizes.

Hannah, this golf course, why did it suit you, and tell us a little bit about the keys to winning at Wilshire.

HANNAH GREEN: Yeah, I've played some of my best golf there. Obviously last year I was able to hoist the trophy, but the previous year I came runner-up and the previous year to that I came tied third. I must really like it there.

I don't typically hit a lot of fairways when you look at my statistics when I play other golf courses, but at Wilshire, I don't know what it is, but I've actually managed to hit all fairways in a round.

I just feel really comfortable there. It's a really good course. A little bit quirky, greens can be somewhat tricky if you have a downhill putt. But I have a really nice host family there, a lot of good food in the LA area, definitely go to K-town and have some Korean food. It's just a really good atmosphere, and obviously when we get to play really good courses and play for good money, that also kind of incentivizes you to want to play well.

But again, Lizette and I are obviously really looking forward to getting back there and trying to play for that big trophy or maybe an upgraded trophy.

TOM ABBOTT: They actually sent a trophy this size to your house?

HANNAH GREEN: I do, yeah. Besides the base I have the top, so it's actually the biggest trophy I have won. It's very cool mantelpiece.

TOM ABBOTT: Lizette, what were the injuries that you had and how difficult has it been to come back? I know there were some thoughts that you might retire from competition.

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, I mean, right after the U.S. Women's Open I suffered a back injury and took a while to get the proper diagnosis, but got to work with some great doctors who are actually members at Wilshire who took great care of me. I'm not as young as I used to be, so the

recovery is a little bit longer, but again, I had a really great support system, a community that was pushing me the entire way, and yeah, the "R" word did come into play, but I don't think it's going to happen anytime soon, and to make my debut at home at PV last week and next month coming back to LA where I have played a lot of collegiate golf at Wilshire, a lot of support, it's been a tough up-and-down roller coaster for nine months, but I'm super excited, and it's almost kind of like a rebirth of excitement to get back.

Just to hear where the Tour has gotten to at this point, and again, the increase in purses, the involvement with the sponsors, and Shirley and Walter kind of elevating that sponsor involvement and kind of acknowledging what we go through on a day-to-day basis and wanting to help, that means a lot to us.

TOM ABBOTT: What's it like to play golf close to home, tournament golf?

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, no, it's a little weird. It kind of throws you -- you're so used to your own routine away from home. So to add family into your routine is kind of a little interesting situation. With having will call tickets and having a lot of support, I really enjoy it. I love seeing my family out. A lot of familiar faces, a lot of members at Wilshire, either USC or the other one -- sorry, you're my favorite Bruin right now. But it's a really cool environment. I love playing in front of my family. Last week I had my coach who was the director of golf at PV and my trainer who caddied for me that week.

I love it. It's not added pressure or anything, it just gives me that incentive to perform better.

TOM ABBOTT: Walter, can you give us a sense of how important it is for you as a sponsor and the club to host these players right in your backyard?

WALTER WANG: After the tournament, Wilshire was gracious enough to make us lifetime honorary members. It's very gracious. They're just wonderful people there. People is what make the golf course alive and beautiful, and the leadership at Wilshire is just good people, wise, and just so passionate about the game, especially the ladies' golf.

It's just a fantastic historical course. It was founded in 1919, and so much history. It's just wonderful to have this tournament at Wilshire. Just wonderful.

TOM ABBOTT: I think it's one of my favorite golf courses to visit on the Tour. It's just a special place to play golf. I know we're really looking forward to what this event is going to hold this year.

Hannah, when you look at your life on Tour, we were just talking about it, you live in Australia and you just got married. You come to the U.S. to have great success as you have already. Tell us about how difficult it is for you on Tour.

HANNAH GREEN: Yeah, it's a bit of a juggling act. I am very much a home body, and I do live in the furthest place from LA in Australia. I'm all the way on the West Coast. So it does make things a little bit more difficult. I plan to go back to Australia in June sometime, so I'll be on the road until then. I don't actually have my own place here in America, so I live out of a suitcase for those weeks while I'm on the road.

But LA is kind of a second home, as I do have a host family that have allowed me to stay there and also practice at Wilshire many a times, even when we're not playing in the LA area.

It's difficult, but it also makes the job more enjoyable when you do have the success, I think. I'm sure -- Lizette is coming back from injury, and I feel like she's probably more hungry to come back out because she's missed that time.

Not everything goes to plan, but when it does, it is really rewarding. Yeah, I'm really excited for this year. It's been a big year off the course, getting married, buying a house. I'm kind of just ready to get back into the golf routine.

TOM ABBOTT: Of course at Wilshire you'll be even more comfortable with that victory and the great results you've had.

Lizette, tell us what you're looking forward to the most for this season. I know that Wilshire will be part of that, but it's a big year for the LPGA.

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, I'm excited to be back in full form. Not sure what my schedule will look like, but regardless, it's going to be a big year for the LPGA Tour, all the major championships. The U.S. Women's Open this year also has increased their purse. It's just a great year for women's golf.

I think, like we said earlier, the LA Championship will encourage other non-major events to kind of step up their game a little bit, and I'm excited to get to be in those fields and kind of get back into my full grinding mode. But Wilshire will be a big highlight for me in April, and it also is a Solheim Cup year, so we'll see, maybe a new and improved Lizette will come out and I'll get to represent my country again.

At the same time, I am grateful for every single opportunity.
You guys that support women's golf, it means a lot to us.
We'll see you in a month or so.

TOM ABBOTT: Five Solheim Cups you've played. You actually watched the last one even though it was tough being on the sidelines?

LIZETTE SALAS: So I enjoy watching women's golf, as well. Yeah.

TOM ABBOTT: We have a little presentation to make for you, Walter, today. As a thank you from TopGolf and Callaway for your efforts, just a little something, and Jeremy is going to come back up to wrap things up and move us to the next stage of our media day. But this is a little thank you for you. And Shirley, as well. You can take the head cover off. You can use it today if you'd like. That is courtesy of our friends here at TopGolf and at Callaway. It's just a small token of appreciation from them for everything that you two are doing to elevate the LPGA Tour and elevate this great championship.

Okay, we are going to transition to our next part of the program today, so right outside here, right outside the chairman's suite we have TopGolf hitting bays that are open and available. Also for media breakout interviews and photo opportunities and Hannah and Lizette are going to do a couple of competitions out there with the TopGolf hitting bays.

We're going to do some group photos here. We'll transition everybody outside to the TopGolf hitting bays for the next part of the program and then in about 15 minutes or so lunch will be served right next door.

Again, the JM Eagle LA Championship provided by Plastpro April 25 through 28. Media credentialing is now open.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

