

Mizuho Americas Open

Tuesday, May 30, 2023

Jersey City, New Jersey, USA

Liberty National Golf Club

Stephen Hamblin

Paul Fireman

Dan Fireman

Michelle Wie West

Rose Zhang

Press Conference



But they're going to come. You teach someone the game, give them access, they're going to work hard, catch the golf bug, and they're going to want to play competitively.

We wanted to be ready for them, so we created the ACE Grant. I remember going to Tiger Woods for the initial grant and he loved it and gave us the seed money to put a pilot program together in 2003.

Since then, we've served over 3,000 young men and women. We have given over \$7 million in reimbursement. Just a fantastic program.

I'm really proud and just honored to announce that we're going to create a partnership with the Fireman Family, Paul, Phyllis, Stephanie, and Dan, and we've got a 12-year partnership for us to re-brand the ACE Grant into the Liberty National ACE Grant. Couldn't be happier.

We're going to be able to expand the program, elevate the program to junior golf, get a lot more kids in, give a lot more support.

So to the Fireman Family, I thank you so much for your support of the ACE Grant. Thank you. (Applause.)

Q. First question is for Paul. This is a substantial agreement for both Liberty National Golf Club and for the AJGA. Can you give us some insight into what motivated Liberty National to enter into this partnership and what your goals are?

PAUL FIREMAN: My goals are simple: to support AJGA and all their endeavors with children and young people growing up to become interested in golf, better at golf, and eventually get to a level of high school, college, or professional.

So that's my first goal.

I've been into young people's golf for a long time. I was a caddie when I was ten years old, and that's where I learned life, where it became evident that golf was synonymous with a lot of things in life.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the media center at Mizuho Americas Open. I would first like to introduce the panel. Starting on the left we have Stephen Hamblin, AJGA executive director.

Rose Zhang, former ACE Grant recipient making her professional debut this week.

We have Michelle Wie West, the Mizuho Americas Open tournament host.

Dan Fireman, co-founder and president of Liberty National Golf Club.

And Paul Fireman, co-founder of Liberty National Golf Club.

First like to give Stephen Hamblin the floor for an announcement.

STEPHEN HAMBLIN: Thank you, Amanda. Appreciate it. We're here to talk about the AJGA's ACE Grant today. For those of you that don't know, the ACE Grant is a financial assistance program that gives support to young men and women who have the talent to play on a national scale but may not have the financial wherewithal.

We started this in 2003. I attended the announcement of the First Tee in Central Park. Joe Barrow is with us today. Thanks for being here, Joe.

I came back after hearing what the First Tee was all about, I came back to our board and said, the First Tee is an amazing program that it's not their goal or mission to generate national caliber junior golfers.



That's why we're doing it. We're very proud of it. My family are going to continue to follow up with the AJGA and the ACE Grant program for I hope years to come.

Dan?

DAN FIREMAN: Absolutely.

Q. Stephen, can you talk about the impact the Liberty National ACE Grant will have on future generations of golfers?

STEPHEN HAMBLIN: It's going to be very significant. We're going to be immediately able to expand. Right now it's a \$6,000 grant. We're going to be able to expand that.

There is an equipment component within that. We're going to expand that as well. It's just elevating and expanding the existing program, but it's going to touch a lot more young men and women and give opportunities to them.

Q. Dan, this contribution is the latest effort by the Fireman family to support junior golfers around the country. Why is it so important to increase opportunities in access to the sport?

DAN FIREMAN: Having grown up playing golf my whole life, we wanted to make golf available for everyone. As exemplified by Rose and others who have become champions, this ACE Grant has done tremendous things to expand the game and grow with not just young people, but if you think about the AJGA, the best players in the world have played in it.

So to be a part of 10 to 18 year old kids who are doing incredible things in golf and help them accelerate their careers and get them into better programs, colleges so they can continue on, I think is a wonderful thing.

We're just super excited to use Liberty National and what we built here to elevate it, and as well as the Mizuho Americas Open and the LPGA.

Q. Michelle, what do contributions like the Liberty National ACE Grant mean for young golfers and the future of the sport?

MICHELLE WIE: Yeah, the commitment that Liberty National has made to the AJGA is huge. Golf requires a lot of resources to get good. With the support like Liberty National and other corporations and good people -- it can be very difficult for kids, even no matter what their talent level is if they don't have access or resources. They can never get to the level they want to achieve.

So the ACE Grant, Liberty National Grant now, is huge. The AJGA fosters a great community of junior golfers. The talent here this week is incredible, as we're going to see, and I think grants like this just give more opportunity to young golfers to achieve their dreams.

Q. Rose, obviously this is an exciting week for you. Can you tell us the impact the AJGA and the ACE Grant had on your life as you pursue your dreams of becoming a professional golfer?

ROSE ZHANG: Really, so much of what I experienced and so much of what I ever wanted to do goes back to AJGA and the ACE Grant. I started AJGA when I was 12 years old. I met so many of my incredible friends from the entire association, and we play on a weekly, monthly basis.

I'm just exposed to many incredible talents. I certainly wouldn't be have been able to play these events without the help of ACE Grant, just because growing up my family financially had a couple hardships with my family being immigrants from China.

So I wouldn't be able to travel as much or play in invitationals as much without the funding and the support from ACE Grant. Without playing these events as well I wouldn't be able to go to college just because I wouldn't be exposed to different college coaches watching me in these national events, and certainly wouldn't have been able to have the talks that I've had with other coaches and Coach Walker that I played for eventually.

Q. Paul, the Mizuho Americas Open is the latest world-class event hosted by Liberty National. Can you talk about the vision you have for the club and its place not only in golf, but the broader sports landscape?

PAUL FIREMAN: Broader landscape, I'm not interested. I was there once; did that for 30 years. For liberty, we're really proud to have this event. It's at the standard -- we only allow like FedExCups; Presidents Cups have been here. This is where we are.

This event with the ladies is just on parallel to anything we've done and will do in the future, so we're very proud of that and we want liberty to be shown off. It's a beautiful course. We think it plays fair but tough, and I hope the ladies and girls do the best they can. I'm sure they'll kill it, but good luck. (Smiling.)

Q. Dan, Liberty National has played home to PGA TOUR events and the Presidents Cup. Talk about the process and motivation behind expanding to host a unique event for the top LPGA and AJGA players?



DAN FIREMAN: I think it's the right time for women's golf, and Michelle said it best earlier, that the venue can make a huge impact on the event itself.

So if you play these great venues like Pebble Beach, Augusta, people know the holes, they know the players, and the shots. The same thing is true here. Liberty National is very recognizable on TV because of its location, but also because we've hosted great events here.

So to be able to use what we built here in a way to elevate women's golf as well as the AJGA and the junior golf, I think is an exceptional opportunity for us, and we're just thrilled to be a part of it. We want to continue to do these things.

Q. I was hoping you could tell us a little bit about how you think relationships will be fostered, what you're doing to facilitate relationships between LPGA players and the juniors this week?

MICHELLE WIE: Yes, we're very excited that we've already had players volunteer to become big sisters to the junior golfers this week. At the pairings party we matched them up, every junior with their pro. They exchanged phone numbers and are playing a practice round today and having a meal today.

Those exchange of phone numbers are everything, because moving forward if they have a question they can text each other. I remember the first time I got Meg Mallon's phone number. I played with her and got her phone number. Obviously still have her phone number.

Just being able to have access to such a great player. I mean, all these junior golfers are so smart and great, and every player that is on the range right now was a junior golfer. They played in the AJGA or some junior golf. They've been the player.

So I think there is a lot of relatability between the pros and all the juniors. But all the pros have had such a positive reaction to having the juniors in the field. They are super excited to play with them. I told the juniors yesterday at the welcome part, ask questions. The pros are going to so happy answering the questions. I bet they're waiting for the juniors to ask them questions. We love talking to juniors and all that.

Yeah, we're having big sister program this week. I told the players to grab more numbers and text on the range, so hopefully a lot of emails will be exchanged, phone numbers. That's how it begins.

Q. And then if I could ask Rose, Rose, do you remember the first player you met or first time you met somebody that you looked up to at a professional event?

ROSE ZHANG: Oh, wow. I just remember somewhat of a similar event that I played in that was kind of similar to this format, but it was with LPGA Hall of Famers. It was at the ANA Junior Inspiration where in the final round we played in Rancho Mirage, and got paired up with one Hall of Famer. Patty Sheehan was absolutely amazing.

She is the one that jumped into the lake with me. Even though I fell and tripped into the lake, it was still a memory of a lifetime. And she like still is in contact. She would text me and be like, hey, congrats. If you need anything, just let me know.

And people of that high caliber and success of a career that can reach out to a junior and be like, hey, congrats on an AJGA Invitational win, it just means the world. Really let's you feel inspired to do better, and later on it certainly inspires me to be somewhat of a role model for younger players as well.

So, yeah, that's one person that I'll never really forget.

Q. For Michelle, a quick question. You mentioned there you encourage the younger players to ask questions this week. Any questions you wish you would have asked at their age or things that you should've done differently or would've done differently if you could do it over again?

MICHELLE WIE: Yeah, I talked to Meg Mallon a lot when I was younger. I was definitely intimidated. I wish I went up to like every single player and was like, how do you hit this shot? Oh, my God, how do you hit a fade? How do you hit a draw? That boldness didn't come until later.

But even so, when I was talking to Meg Mallon we had a lot of conversations about should I go to college, should I be turning pro, what should I be doing. I was having those conversations when I was 13, 14. She really guided me through it and it made a big difference.

It's one thing to ask your parents. Obviously always asked my parents for advice. Ask high school friends for advice. But to have, like Rose is saying, a Hall of Famer, someone of that successful of a career to be texting you and to tell you, someone you can bank ideas off, that was instrumental in my junior golf year.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for your time everyone. Super excited about this partnership and to see

how it grows over the next however many years.

MICHELLE WIE: Thank you.

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