

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Wednesday, June 7, 2023

Dan Hicks
Paul Azinger
Brad Faxon
John Wood
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. Thank you for joining our NBC Sports 2023 U.S. Open media conference call. In a moment we're going to be joined by our lead play-by-play commentator, our analysts Paul Azinger and Brad Faxon and our on-course reporter John Wood.

NBC Sports is going to present more than 200 total hours of coverage from the Los Angeles Country Club next week, including our live Thursday through Sunday linear coverage, our feature groups, featured holes and U.S. Open all-access coverage on Peacock, as well as our critically acclaimed Live From the U.S. Open live studio coverage on Golf Channel.

NBC alone is going to have 25 total hours of live coverage. That's including live Thursday through Sunday night in primetime, and 10 straight hours of live coverage on Saturday from 1:00 to 11:00 p.m. The 25 hours mark the most ever in U.S. Open history on NBC.

As I mentioned at the top of this call, this is our U.S. Open media conference call, and we're going to keep all comments and questions to the U.S. Open. If you'd like to address another topic, please reach out to me afterwards and we can handle those requests on a case-by-case basis.

We'll start with opening comments from our speakers and head over to France to our lead play-by-play commentator Dan Hicks.

DAN HICKS: Thank you, Jamie. Appreciate everybody on. I am at the French Open. I've been watching tennis, which has been a nice departure from some of the golf news out there. I will be brief.

I think it's about time that one of the great sports cities hosted another U.S. Open golf championship. A lot of you know that 1948 is the only other year that Los Angeles hosted the U.S. Open. They had a pretty good champion at Riviera back in the day in Ben Hogan.

I am really rooting for this U.S. Open to kind of rescue us all, even for a few days, from the story that I think everybody knows has been so divisive.

I think that LACC, the North Course, is just the kind of place to do that. Most people watching have never seen it in person, much less on TV. I know it's been covered on TV a little bit, and we'll get Paul Azinger and Brad Faxon here in a moment who had a chance to be there and broadcast it. But I don't think it's ever been seen and will not be seen on TV until the U.S. Open.

The way it will be presented will be really cool, primetime, East Coast. West Coast U.S. Opens are always some of my favorite ones to do because I just think the eyeballs on it and the audience just gets bigger because of the primetime audience out east.

As Jamie said, I had a chance to play it earlier this year, and I think it represents a totally different feel than the rotation of all the U.S. Open courses. Not knocking a great, great rotation of U.S. Open courses, which everybody is familiar with, but this is different. It's got so much going on. Smack dab in the middle of the city, Beverly Hills, and I just think it's going to really translate incredibly well on television.

I'll just end by saying that I think sports has a way of winning the day, and I think that golf needs it more now than ever, and I'm feeling that the North Course is really going to deliver that in spades.

With that, I send it over to my partner Paul Azinger. Zing?

PAUL AZINGER: Thank you, Dan. Well said. I hope you're enjoying France. Our ears will be on the finals here coming up for sure, eyes and ears.

I love LACC. I actually tried to qualify there in 1982 my rookie year. I think there was 130 guys for six spots, and we weren't even allowed to play a practice round.



I went in there blind and shot 73 and qualified as one of the six players. It's not an easy course. I think it's going to be some people looking at it thinking it may be easy, but I don't believe it's going to be. It's not going to be overly long, and it is truly a George Thomas masterpiece that is just so pleasing to the eye.

We're going to have historic photographs of what LA looked like when this was first built and what it looks like now. It's just going to be a fascinating tournament, and primetime on the West Coast, you're right, primetime on the East Coast, it just makes it all that much better. It always does.

It's going to be a thrill ride, and look, the news that broke yesterday, I think we're all just stunned about it, but there's really no information other than hearsay, so we want to not even discuss it.

LA North is going to be a masterpiece for all the viewers to see. It is a masterpiece, but I think the viewers will catch hold. Bradley?

BRAD FAXON: Can't wait to see you next week. I'm in the Philadelphia airport heading south. I grew up in Rhode Island, and I was steeped in architectural history with Donald Ross and so many of the great architects that were up in that area. I was lucky enough to be brought up at a course on the Cape called Eastward Ho which was designed by an architect by Herbert Fowler. Nobody knows that name really over in America, but Fowler helped George Thomas to design LA Country Club.

Herbert Fowler was an architect that made the 18th hole at Pebble Beach a par-5. It was originally designed to be a par-4, and Fowler helped with the routing at LACC, and like Dan and Paul said, having this in downtown, Century City, Beverly Hills will be spectacular.

Gil Hanse, Dan has played with him so many times. Like Zing said they took so many historical photographs they had from back in the '20s when the course was built, and I don't think the players are ever going to see a U.S. Open course like this, the way this barranca winds through the property, there's going to be so many hazards on so many holes that when you get up there there's going to be hope.

You're going to have this phrase we've always used in the game called "rub of the green" and players are going to have lies they've probably never seen before. Some are going to be good and some are going to be bad, and I think there's going to be a real excitement out there, the smaller crowds because of the smaller property and what's going on there, I think it's going to be a real throwback.

We have five par-3s. You never see that anymore. You see three par-4 finishing holes over 500 yards with a little par-3 on 15 that is going to be heckling to these players.

I think it's going to be one of the most exciting U.S. Opens we're ever going to see.

JOHN WOOD: Dan alluded to West Coast U.S. Opens, and I love them, obviously for different reasons, being from Sacramento. I can drive to them, don't have to get on a plane, which is always nice.

I always feel like U.S. Opens, especially recently, have really taken on the personality of the city that they're played. At Brookline in Boston, you had those Boston fans so raucous and so passionate, and you go to Bethpage in New York and you get obviously the New York crowd is different from any other.

I think we're going to get the same thing at LACC. It's Hollywood. You guys have talked about it. I think there's going to be a shine to this U.S. Open that we may not be used to.

The other thing I'm looking forward to is the course setup. I think USGA has done an incredible job recently with varying the setup. When I grew up, the prototype U.S. Open player, not long, very straight, very accurate, and par was always good.

Par is still very good, but the way they're setting up courses, it opens it up to different kinds of players. We've seen that with Bryson just hitting driver everywhere.

I think it's going to be interesting, the setup. I don't think it's going to favor anybody. I think you need all the shots, and U.S. Opens are always to me much more about being tough and having a gut check than it is the physical. Something I always look forward to, and I can't wait to get down there with you guys.

Q. Dan, you are a really, really good golfer. Most people, I think, know that. With that said, when you got to play LACC this year, what were your impressions of it, coming from a guy who has loved this game for as long as you have?

DAN HICKS: Well, first of all, my game -- I wouldn't call myself a really good golfer. I love to play. Paul Azinger and Brad Faxon have played with me and I think will attest to that. I do love it. I love going to new places. I'd been to LACC years ago just after the redo by Gil Hanse.

I will say this: I think Fax, who's a real architectural kind of nerd, if that's an okay way to say it, Brad, I think that this --

BRAD FAXON: Not offended. Not offended.

DAN HICKS: I think this is the most -- what's the word I'm looking for? This is the most intense restoration and transformative restoration that I think I've ever heard of.

I had a chance to talk to Gil Hanse before the Senior PGA Championship a couple weeks ago, and that's the design -- he designed the home of PGA of America's new course out there, and he told me that -- he wasn't even on the map as an architect before this design, so this was a huge deal for him to get this right, knowing that the club was interested in hosting U.S. Open Championships down the road.

I just think the job he did, and he made some really dramatic changes. Normally Gil's mantra is I'm there to just restore it like the original architect would like it, in this case George Thomas and all the other people that had a hand in it, and I think that's true here, as well. But I think this particular piece of work by Gil was amazing, and we'll get into that more as the championship goes on.

But my first impression of it was I was just blown away by just what Gil did to it, how he improved it, and I think those -- the one thing -- I'll end by saying, as Brad mentioned, those three par-4s to end it, you may hear me say in the telecast, now go out and win the U.S. Open, as they get to 16. Go out and tackle three of the toughest par-4s under U.S. Open pressure that you've ever seen and see if you can be a U.S. Open champion.

I'm thrilled with the course, and this is one of the most -- we've been doing this a long time. This is one of the most anticipated U.S. Opens that I can remember in a long, long time. Personally, at least.

Q. For Zinger and Fax, Max Homa obviously has a history at this golf course, albeit in very different circumstances. How much do you think that carries over into next week?

PAUL AZINGER: It always carries over. If you're the local guy and know the course at all, that's a confidence that you just bring in there. There's going to be a lot of players that pull in the parking lot and they don't even know where to go. Max won't have to deal with that.

I'd like to talk about the course for just a second and back just a little bit what Dan said. Gil Hans really takes these golf courses into his heart, and he has really helped restore and bring back a masterpiece. Of course he'll say that humbly, but the reality is it never looked like this in the beginning. This is spectacular what we're about to see.

And always the anticipation of the U.S. Open, a big part of it is how will the course play. This is the big unknown. Will it be hard? Will it be easy?

There's so much study that goes into how this golf course, how they want this course to play. They say they don't think about score, but I'll promise you they're trying to protect par the best they can.

I'll just say this. If No. 1 at Oakmont is the rudest starting hole in all of championship golf, I would say the polar opposite of that is going to be No. 1 at LA North. That probably is going to be the sweetest, softest start in U.S. Open history. There might come a little stress with that knowing that you have to hit a good tee shot, but these players will be hitting short irons or mid irons to that green if the wind is favorable.

BRAD FAXON: You're going to get sick and tired of hearing about George Thomas and his easy starting hole par-5s and second holes that are bears.

But I know the original question was about Max Homa, and that came up today when I was playing with some guys. Is Homa a favorite? It's always nice to have course knowledge, but I had a caddie named Gypsy Grillo, and Gypsy always said, I'll take execution over knowledge anytime.

I think there's a little added pressure sometimes when you're the local guy, and it's how you handle it. Max Homa is a guy that's on a nice trajectory right now. It's a smooth trajectory upward in every direction with all parts of his game, and a big part of that, he's winning big tournaments on good golf courses and good fields.

This next step would be a giant step, a leap more than just a little glide up the hill for him to win.

I still think that the story right here is this golf course and how it plays. My friends that are members there have told me that the weather has been great out there. They actually had to cut the rough down in certain areas because it had gotten too high and that it's on a good path towards being right where I think, like Paul said, having par being said that they're trying to protect.

You're going to see unusually two par-3s that potentially could be longer than the par-4 6th hole, and I'm talking about the 7th and the 11th that could be 280-yard holes. We might see the top players in the world hitting 3-woods and drivers into a par-3, which you never see in this world, and then you're going to see a shot on the little 15th hole where you're going to see guys be able to flick it on to the green, maybe throw it on to the green.

You know, there's so many unknowns that we're talking about, and I think that's what makes this so, so exciting, Los Angeles, George Thomas, two of the great courses, Riviera and Bel Air, the design there. I think there's going to be more excitement at this U.S. Open than anything we've seen recently.

Q. You talked about the par-3s; this course is an amazing course throughout, but tell us about the par-3s and the challenges they provide, and also, being so close to the ocean, are you going to get any issues with the wind and that sort of thing? Does that play at all into it?

JOHN WOOD: I don't think the weather is going to have a ton to do with it. I look at the long-term forecast, we're never going to get anything over 15. I think it's far enough away from the ocean where you don't get those occasion breezes and they're not as intense.

Cool mornings in the 70s is going to top out all week, so I don't think weather is going to have any impact on this tournament at all.

I think the fact that the USGA can plan for no rain means they can get it exactly what kind of firmness they want, and that's the key to hard golf is how firm are the greens, how firm are the fairways, can we keep the ball in those slanted fairways.

The weather I don't think will be an issue at all.

The par-3s, I think there's such a great variety to them already, and the USGA has really taken it upon themselves in recent years to use different tees, different angles, and so the players have to be ready for so much more, especially with five of them next week. I think players are going to have to do a lot of preparation on those par-3s knowing what tees they'll potentially use to different pins. Zinger and Faxon know the course better than I do, so jump in there.

PAUL AZINGER: You make a great point because it creates like 20 different possible shots on those five holes over four days. They really can manipulate where the hole is cut, where they want to move the tee around. It creates tremendous variety.

Gil Hanse was really just bragging on George Thomas's ability to create that variety. Did three courses pretty much all at once, Bel Air, Riv, and LACC, and they're all masterpieces and all completely different. That's like the par-3s. They're all masterpieces and they're all completely different.

BRAD FAXON: I think some of the exciting parts of being in LA and Hollywood, was mentioned you're going to see Lionel Richie's house, you're going to see the Playboy Mansion. You're going to see so many cool varieties there, the elevation changes from the low point in the course maybe by 2 tee, 17 green all the way back up to 13, 14. These players are going to have just an incredible opportunity to see things they'll never see in a U.S. Open setup.

Q. I'm curious to ask, as you approach doing a major championship, given all of the stories happening in the golf world, how do you focus in on the event when there's just so much going on outside of it?

DAN HICKS: I'll chime in on that because we've all been immersed in this story, and frankly it's been pretty exhausting. Speculation and -- I don't think anybody knows how it's all going to go. That's what I said at the top. I really think -- I really believe that this golf course and this U.S. Open come at the right time for us to kind of be distracted by everything that's going on and just really enjoy the game.

I was even thinking about that in this week's event, the Canadian Open. Whoever wins the U.S. Open, it's going to take some focus.

But I think when you get these guys in, and I think back, obviously, and Zing can speak to this, you get in that cocoon as an athlete and a player, I really don't think that these guys, when they have a chance to win a championship like this, are going to be thinking anything other than how am I going to lift that big trophy.

It'll be interesting. The vibe will be different. There's no doubt about it. The players will be coming to town. They'll be asked about it.

But I think when the gun goes off on Thursday, I think that's going to be a relief for everyone. I really do.

BRAD FAXON: Zing, let me say one thing because I think about what Dan just said and think about when Fred Ridley, who's obviously the host of the Masters, had all these players from LIV come in to compete against the PGA TOUR players the first time, he basically said, look, we're going to all get along. There's going to be no distractions here.

I think the USGA has the ability to do that, as well, say hey, let's make this the U.S. Open, let's not make this two different tours, let's not make this about the what-if, because as many questions as we all have, there's no

answers to this yet.

I don't even think the governing bodies, the PGA TOUR and the Public Investment Fund, they don't know the answers to the questions we all want because they're still working on this. This is not a done deal. There's a letter of intent out there, there's a lot of stuff to go on, and I think the message is going to be the same as what Ridley did at the Masters. It's going to be hey, let's play golf, let's all get along.

PAUL AZINGER: Let me also just remind everybody that Tommy Roy is our boss, so when we show up, trust me, it is all business and it is live golf, and everything that Tommy Roy and Tommy Randolph and his entire crew, there's too many people to name, the preparation and the scouting that has gone into this golf tournament and the way that they want to present and showcase this golf tournament, Thursday is when that all clicks into gear, boys and girls, men and women. That's when it all starts to happen.

When we get there on Monday or Tuesday, the second all of us see Tommy Roy's face, we're going to know what our priority is, and it's live golf. Not opinions and not innuendo. We don't know what's coming, like Brad said. But we know one thing; we've got the two best producers in the world getting ready to try to produce a U.S. Open to the best of their ability, and we're going to try to call it. That's going to be a relief to everybody because it's live golf, and we're going to know the second we set on property, aren't we, guys, that we're going to work to call a live U.S. Open.

JOHN WOOD: Yeah, especially majors, but anytime you're competing at any level -- this was like this for me as a caddie and now as an announcer, but once you get inside the ropes, all that outside noise just goes away. You don't even have to make an effort to get it out of your head, especially as a player. You know at a U.S. Open if your mind is wandering for a second on something else, you've got a double bogey on your card.

It's not a difficult thing to get out all that outside noise; once you're inside the ropes, hitting shots, calling shots all that noise just goes away.

Q. I was wondering have you any theory as to why Rory McIlroy has never won a tournament where the winning score has been in the single digits under par, they've always been double digits under par, which is not typically a U.S. Open winning score? I know he did win a U.S. Open by a considerable margin, but apart from that, any theories on that, and do you think we'll get a very high winning score at LA Country Club?

BRAD FAXON: Look, I don't think Rory cares at all what the winning score is going to be. He just wants to win. Here's a competitive player that's won 23, now 24 PGA TOUR events, he's won around the world. He's won the U.S. Open. He's won three other major championships. I don't think Rory cares if he wins if it's 5-under par, 5-over par or 15-under par. He's capable of doing any of those.

I think like Zinger said, we can have a very compelling U.S. Open, so it's particularly to Tommy Roy, if it's the U.S. Open at Erin Hills that was 17-, 18-under par with Koepka winning, or if it's 1-over like Justin Rose winning at Merion, who cares, as long as you have a top field battling it out down the stretch, we're going to make that thing and bring it out to the best of our abilities.

PAUL AZINGER: Also, you take what your game is giving you that week. Boy, when Rory gets it going, I think that's the real message that he capitalizes when it's going like that a lot to create an eight-shot victory. Those don't come around all that often.

Then the way that he can kind of manhandle a course, I think he should be able to manhandle golf courses now more so than ever before, watching him play. But there's going to be a lot going on in his head. That's always going to be the thing with Rory, whether what just happened happened or not.

This just adds to the things that must be running through his head. I'm sure that physically Rory is just one of those guys. When it's happening and it clicks and he's doing it, it might be 15-under, and like Brad said, he doesn't care, but it's clutch to get that second putt to go to two shots ahead, and it's clutch to go to three ahead and four ahead and five ahead, and that's what it is, and that's what he did. I'll close with that.

JOHN WOOD: If I had to put my finger on one thing in his game that maybe he hasn't been successful in single-number events is he's an explosive player. His game is predicated on making a ton of birdies, and he can do that. But at a U.S. Open, I don't care how good you're playing, birdies are hard to come by.

I think maybe when the scores get more birdie fest or in the 8, 10, 12 area I think he's more successful because he can make birdies. But at a U.S. Open, like I said, I don't care how good you're playing, birdies are tough to come by.

Rory can make a ton of birdies most weeks. U.S. Open, it's a different story.

Q. Paul, Brad and John, this is a golf course that truly no one in the general public has really seen. In terms



of its layout, do you think it favors any style or type of player compared to another?

BRAD FAXON: It's a little bit of a different setup. The fairways are wider than typical on most of the holes out there. I think the unknown for us is how the players are able to play out of rough because everybody is going to miss a few fairways, and is that going to be important.

When we're asked, I think the most difficult question we're asked is can you predict the winning score because that a lot of times would enable us to maybe pick the winning player, but without knowing what the weather will be like, are the greens going to be impossible to hold, are they going to be bouncy, are they going to be maybe like last week at the Memorial Tournament where Jack had them very firm, fairways were firm -- when the firmness is at its greatest, the fairways become half their width even if they're wide, and I think players saw that at Memorial and Muirfield with the firm setup.

I think the easiest answer is hey, the best player. Hey, we keep it continuing to marvel at Scottie Scheffler and how he's hitting it from tee to green and how does he continue to do that, and then the tenacity of a player like Jon Rahm when he gets going.

I always call Rory, I always say he's the greatest grinder I've ever seen, where when he has to make the cut or finish off in certain situations, there's nothing quite like it.

I'll finish by say what I started. I'm a terrible predictor. I think the easy way is we have to see what the course conditions are going to be like. Thick rough, will you be able to play out of the rough. I like the challenge players have when they have a lie that's unpredictable and how do you manage that because I think one of the greatest un-talked-about skills players have is how can hit shots from the fairway, out of rough and manage the spin and land it where they need to.

PAUL AZINGER: The USGA made a statement years ago that they said they weren't out to embarrass the best players but to identify them. I think that's going to hold true here.

The way the greens are built and shaped, I'm not sure that it favors any player, but the most accurate, just like they always demand at the U.S. Open. You're going to run out of room here on some holes. You're going to have to take chances. There's holes you can't go straight and wide, right and left like maybe you could get away with at Winged Foot a little bit because they removed some trees.

So it's impossible to predict, other than I always say after

the first couple days to all of us guys when we get in the trailer, who do we trust most with the putter. That's the way I look at it, and that's kind of what we get really down to the nitty-gritty.

It's like four different tournaments when you get to the U.S. Open. Day one is its own entity. Day two, three and four, they all exist uniquely on their own. John Wood knows what that's all about.

It's a wait-and-see what kind of game it's going to take. You're just going to have to be really accurate, and the putter better show up.

JOHN WOOD: Yeah, I would echo both what you guys said. Like I said in my opening comments, I don't think the USGA -- I think they have done a very good job at opening up the course to really who plays the best, not a specific style of play.

Back in the day, it was Tom Kite and Curtis Strange and Scott Simpson, those short plotters who seemingly always won the U.S. Open. Now it's about like what Brad said, execution. I don't care what the strengths are in your game; if you're on that week, you're going to have a chance.

To me, the one thing in U.S. Opens you need more than anything is just mental fortitude. Those greens, if they can get them firm like they should be able to, you're going to hit good shots that you don't get rewarded for. You have to hit great shots at a U.S. Open. Good will only go so far at a U.S. Open. You have to be great.

I don't think it favors anybody, long story short. I think whoever is playing the best will be there at the end on Sunday.

Q. Zinger, I'm not sure if you watched the Netflix documentary, but Brooks looked really fragile at that point. He's figured things out and come back. What did you take away from watching him win that PGA, and what do you think he's still capable of the rest of his career?

PAUL AZINGER: Well, talk about a 180. Brooks Koepka made a 180, because you're right, you described it perfectly. He was injured, and it just didn't look like we would ever see what we saw. But I think everybody has so much respect for his ability now and swagger. It's hard to have anything negative to say about a guy that can win five major championships and be injured a lot, and back it up.

I remember when he said he was the most confident player in the field going into the U.S. Open, the first one he won, I



think. It might have been at Oakmont. But either way, it was like, how did he feel that way because he wasn't playing that way coming in, but he backs it up.

You've got to have a lot of respect for that guy. You have to earn your respect sometimes, and I think when you get in the mindset that he was in on camera for all the world to see and then turn it around to become the champion that he's become is just the kind of stuff you should write books about.

DAN HICKS: I came away with the same thing watching the Netflix and Koepka. He was just a totally different guy than we were exposed to in his public life as a golfer, and that really told you, I think, of how much Koepka missed the limelight. I think he missed the electricity of being in the hunt.

No matter how low key Koepka seems to be with his persona on the outside because he's always like -- he's got this kind of monotone response. I think no one enjoys it more than he does, even though he seems to be the most low-key guy out there. It's not like a bunch of big fist pumps and jumping around, but I think he missed that, and I think Zinger nailed it where once he got healthy he was able to be the guy that he once was.

We always talk about how different guys are wired for different tournaments and the big ones. He's wired for it. He's got the "it" factor for it all, and some guys do, and some guys don't, especially at the highest level of the sport.

JOHN WOOD: Yeah, I think there's a fine line at this point between fragility and honesty. I think Brooks was being honest. I think a lot of guys out there when they get in those slumps or get injured feel and think the exact same thing, but they're afraid to say it. They're afraid to talk about it to make it too real.

I think Brooks was saying that outside to be honest, to know that is something he had to deal with. He had to confront it and get past it. I think he was being extremely honest, and it came off as fragile, I agree, but I think that was his way of saying, yes, I am struggling, yes, I'm not the same person right now, but I'm fighting it and I'm going to get back to it.

Q. What is going on with Scottie's putting because it's incredible he's been so competitive down to almost making Playoffs the last couple weeks, but he's definitely struggling with the short stick.

PAUL AZINGER: It's a psychological battle. His technique is very repeatable. If he's missing the sweet spot, then he

might have a problem. But look, it's a psychological battle. Sometimes it can be physical, don't get me wrong. All of a sudden maybe you'll be talking on the cell phone and hitting putts with one hand and making everything and then you change your head position. It's so minute that it's --

Look, putting is the ghost. If you're a player and you talk about your putting, it's going to haunt you. That's what I believe. If you talk about your putting when you're putting great, it's going to haunt you. It's going to ruin you. If you talk about it when you're putting bad, it's going to ruin you. My advice to everyone who ever plays golf: First things first, never talk about your putting. How come? It's the ghost, bud; you don't want to do it. That's what I would say.

Same with Scheffler. It's just like, let it go, you had a bad week, you should have won by five, but it didn't happen. But sometimes those greens and the way your eye is, it's just you're just off, and you want to make it mechanical, but it's just a little psychological battle or it's just something just minuscule.

He's fine.

JOHN WOOD: And you know it all quickly turns around if he gets out there next week and makes a 12-footer on 1 and a 15-footer on 2, all that is forgotten, all that is gone out of his head, I'm making putts this week. Zinger, I think you're exactly right. It's a ghost.

Q. Could you describe the course in a word?

JOHN WOOD: You got us three to shut up. That's impressive.

DAN HICKS: There's so many different words you could use for it in my opinion. If you're talking U.S. Open subject, it's different. But in a great way.

You know what, I'll say "stunning." I'll say stunning in every way. Stunning.

JOHN WOOD: I'll go with "varied." No two holes are alike. I'm going with varied.

PAUL AZINGER: Well, I think it flows -- I'll say "natural." It looks natural. Like the land was just meant for the grass to be short with a cut in it. The ravines or what do they call them?

Q. Barranca?

PAUL AZINGER: Yeah, those are beautiful in their own unkempt way. Maybe I'll switch to "beautiful." Maybe it's

beautiful. I love it. I think, you guys, "intriguing." I'm switching my -- I'm going with three words. I'm going with intriguing.

JOHN WOOD: What about ghostlike?

PAUL AZINGER: I'll say "intriguing." I'm switching.

JOHN WOOD: Zinger, I've got new respect for your caddies over the years with all this indecision you're showing right now.

PAUL AZINGER: I know. I used to be more decisive, but when it gets to vocabulary, we need Peter Alliss in here.

Q. Second year in a row, a lot going on in golf as we head into the U.S. Open. You'd think people might look at it as kind of what's happening with the Canadian Open, news overshadowing it. It seems to me the U.S. Open comes at the perfect time. It maybe just restores a little sanity, gets people thinking about what we should be talking about, which is a great golf championship. Thoughts?

DAN HICKS: Yeah, that's pretty much what I said at the top of the call. I don't know if you were on for that, but that's okay.

I think sports -- hey, that's the reason I got into sports. It's fantasy. It's the best reality show on television.

I think it comes at the perfect time. I really do. I think that sports has a way of winning the day, and I think our game needs it now more than ever.

I also said that the North Course is the perfect -- I think the perfect venue to deliver all of that. I mean, we've got -- let's hope for that -- not to be too Pollyannaish about the whole thing, but we're right in the middle of Hollywood; let's write a good Hollywood script, and this is the best way, I think, to counter everything we've seen in golf. I think it's the perfect place, the perfect championship, and the right time, because we need it.

PAUL AZINGER: Well, let the U.S. Open pools begin. Live golf starts on Thursday next week. For us, of course, it starts tomorrow in Canada. Once the live golf happens, the opinion count is going to settle down for us, and we'll just let the players do the talking. They're the ones that are dealing with the big unknown. That's all we can say. We don't know what's going on. None of us do.

JOHN WOOD: Yeah, I think Dan said it perfectly. Like I said, once you get inside the ropes, all that stuff goes away, especially at a major championship. Like Dan said,

it is coming at the exact right time for the game.

Q. Are you guys going to do any Hollywood sightseeing?

DAN HICKS: Probably not a lot of time for that, but I think that some of the vignettes, maybe some of the bumpers that you see during the course of the show will definitely -- Los Angeles is a great sports town. It is just an incredible sports town. Look at all the great history you've got there, all the iconic moments.

We start it off, this is only the second U.S. Open there. Ben Hogan won at Riviera. It's about time it came back.

It's a city that deserves big-time championship like this. Los Angeles is going to be -- it's hosted Olympics, it's hosted the first Super Bowl, from the Kirk Gibson moment. It's had a lot of things, but it really has been too long since the U.S. Open has been there.

The national championship coming back to California, it was meant to be.

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