



Chairman Fred S. Ridley

Augusta National Golf Club and the Masters Tournament

Press Conference

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Good morning. Seems like we've just been here. I guess we have. I'd like to start by thanking everyone who was here on Monday for the announcement of the TGR Learning Lab Augusta and the exciting news that Tiger Woods will design The Loop at The Patch short course.

For those of you who were not able to attend, and there may be a couple of you, my name is Fred Ridley. I have the honor of serving as chairman of Augusta National Golf Club and the Masters Tournament. On behalf of all of our membership, I would like to welcome you officially to the 2025 Masters Tournament, the 89th playing of the tournament.

Joining me this morning are two fellow members who serve important roles in the support of the tournament. To my right is Jim Hyler, chairman of the Competition committees, and to my left is Tom Nelson, chairman of our Media committee.

Jim and Tom, thank you, as always, for your dedication throughout the year and especially during this week.

I hope all of you will agree that our golf course and grounds are in magnificent condition. A colder-than-normal January has been conducive to a near-perfect early spring bloom of Azaleas and other flowering ornamentals. One of our guests last week referred to the course as a beautiful painting, and I could not agree more.

We've celebrated the natural beauty of this property for many years, but it is a commitment of our horticulture and agronomy teams and our entire Augusta National staff that we will never take for granted. As we are here today, only six months after Hurricane Helene swept through our community, that sentiment has never meant more than it does at this moment.

The spirit of our entire Augusta National family throughout the challenges of the months that followed Helene will be a signature of the 89th Masters Tournament. For weeks, water, power, food, fuel and other basic necessities were either difficult or impossible to access. Nevertheless, our employees were out in the community distributing food, cleaning up debris and donating food and money to help others in their time of need.

I thank each and every one of them, and to everyone in Augusta who made sacrifices to assist others, even when you were impacted yourself, we are deeply appreciative, and we will continue to do our best to support you and our community.

Prior to the hurricane, we completed two projects I would like to note. First, I'm pleased to share that the hospitality offering across Washington Road that we've named Map & Flag is now fully open. The popularity of this venue inspires us to consider what else may be possible in future years.

Additionally, we completed an important infrastructure project last summer. Phase I of our Players Services project, a private underground parking structure supporting this project, is now complete.

Phase II, as you see on the screens, which is a players services building itself, will feature state-of-the-art fitness, physio and locker rooms, as well as a dining room where a player can enjoy meals with their families and support teams.

This improvement is on pace for a full opening in 2026 and will offer the competitors in the Masters facilities from arrival until departure, unlike anything in sports.

The Player Services Project underscores our continuing commitment to do all we can to serve the participants in the Masters during their time here.

As we all know, the Augusta National Women's Amateur and the Drive, Chip & Putt national finals are now annual traditions that continue to underline the club's commitment to developing the game of golf.

Congratulations to Carla Bernat Escuder for her well-earned victory on Saturday. This year we saw 47 of the top 50 amateurs in the world representing 22 countries and 32 U.S. colleges. Carla's win was against the very best and is an incredible achievement.

Congratulations also to our eight Drive, Chip & Putt national champions who won their divisions on Sunday. I hope all the competitors will treasure and share their memories, which I know will be an inspiration to others.

Moving on to the Masters, our defending and two-time Masters champion, Scottie Scheffler, arrives determined to become the fourth champion to win green jackets in consecutive years and the ninth to win three times. Scottie was a wonderful host at last night's Masters Club dinner, and we all look forward to seeing him on the first tee tomorrow. He will be challenged this week by an outstanding field represented by 26 countries, including 90 professionals and 5 amateurs.

Among our amateurs this week is Justin Hastings, the winner of the 2025 Latin America Amateur Championship held in January at Pilar Golf Club in Buenos Aires. Thanks to Chairman Emeritus Billy Payne's vision and our partners at the R&A and the USGA, the positive impact of this event creating heroes and shaping the future of the amateur game has been significant. The same can be said of our partnership with the R&A in conducting the Asia-Pacific Amateur Championship.

Two-time Masters champion Bernhard Langer is playing in his final Masters Tournament this week on the 40th anniversary of winning his first of two green jackets. Bernhard has achieved success and longevity, and we look forward to welcoming him each year at the Masters Club Dinner for many, many years. We thank him for all he has done to represent the Masters Tournament and also the example that he has set for all who play the game of golf.

I hope all of you will note that we celebrate a significant milestone this week. It was 50 years ago tomorrow, Thursday, April 10, 1975, that Lee Elder became the first Black man to compete in the Masters. Jack Nicklaus would ultimately go on to win his fifth green jacket that week, but by then, history of another dimension had been made when Lee hit his first shot as a Masters competitor.

50 years later, Lee's inspiration, his courage and spirit remain truly an inspiration for all of us. We never will forget his enduring legacy that made golf a better game for everyone.

Today I want to congratulate and thank CBS for its 70th consecutive year televising the Masters. Earlier this year, we announced extended broadcast coverage with our partners at CBS to debut an additional five hours of live coverage of the third and final rounds. The broadcast will extend by one hour on Saturday, and Paramount+ will add an additional two hours of live coverage of both the third and final rounds.

We're proud to be able to deliver more live coverage across multiple platforms as part of an ongoing effort to grow and reach more fans. We want to deliver the best possible experience to our patrons and fans by making the tournament free to watch on Masters.com and the Masters app.

These platforms also will continue to offer unique viewing experiences through On the Range, Featured Groups, Amen

Corner, and other live streams as well as the My Group feature. Beyond the live broadcast, in our own digital platforms, we also reach a growing number of fans around the world on social media, delivering content across 15 different social platforms.

We want to make the Masters digital content innovative and best in class, allowing us to reach the next generation of enthusiastic golf fans and remain consistent with the values and traditions of the Masters.

As we all know, there are several issues facing the game. I've spoken previously about several of them. I would like to comment on two of these today.

Once again, I am here reaffirming our support of the governing bodies and their efforts to address the issue of distance. Together, the R&A and the USGA have been deliberative and collaborative on their efforts on this topic to arrive at a decision which was, in fact, announced in 2023.

Implementation is the next challenge, as we all knew it would be. It is critical for the good of the game that all stakeholders work together as this issue evolves. I'm encouraged by the constructive and positive discussions that are aimed at successfully implementing this important change.

Because of the size of our field this year and also because of the commentary in recent weeks, the subject of pace of play is top of mind. Playing without undue delay, as the rules and the game's traditions dictate, is an essential skill of golf at all levels. Recognizing the challenges professionals face each week, I also believe pace of play is an important element of the examination of the world's best players.

Golf is a special game because it requires us to be considerate while also being competitive. Respecting other people's time, including, importantly, the fans who support the game, is a fundamental courtesy. Therefore, I want to encourage continued dialogue on this topic, especially at the professional levels which serve as the most visible representation of our sport.

All of us at Augusta National want to celebrate one of our own who has been dedicated to our mission to be the finest golf club in the world. Jim James has served Augusta National for 30 years, most recently as chief club and hospitality officer. He has had many roles over his tenure at the club, one being overseeing all food and beverage, including Bartlett Lounge right here in the press building.

Jim has served under four chairmen, and he has decided to retire later this year.

Jim, we want to thank you sincerely for everything you've meant to Augusta National, and we wish you the best.

[Applause.]

Before I close, I want to acknowledge three profound losses within the press community since we last gathered. We are saddened by the passing of Ron Green, Sr., Jeff Babineau, and Steve DiMeglio. Ron lived to be 95 years old and covered 60 Masters Tournaments for the Charlotte news and Observer. We were fortunate that Ron lived such a long life, dedicating much of it to the game of golf.

In December we lost Jeff at age 62, and a few short weeks later, Steve at age 63. Both far too soon.

Jeff served as president of the GWAA and covered the tournament with the Orlando Sentinel, Golfweek, and most recently the Masters Annual, for a total of 25 years. Steve covered 15 Masters for USA Today and Golfweek, missing the last couple of tournaments as he fought courageously to return to health.

Our co-founders, Bobby Jones and Clifford Roberts, always expressed genuine gratitude and respect for all of you, the press covering the Masters. I echo that sentiment, and I hope and trust that you will honor the memories and share stories of Ron, Jeff and Steve throughout the week.

Tom, with that, I'm happy to take a few questions.

Q. I've talked to a lot of patrons this week who have been amazed by impressed with the club's efforts to get this property Masters ready. My question is can you give us a glimpse into what that undertaking looked like going back to September 27th and how you were able to coordinate and execute all that work in such a short time?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, thank you. I suppose I think it was about 48 hours when I arrived at the club after the storm finally subsided, and that was because it took that long for us to clear all the internal roadways so we could just begin the process of cleaning up.

It was a monumental effort. I think at times we had well over 200, 250 people on the property. But what I think is more important and what really was something that had an impact on me was the way our employees went into the community and really started focusing their efforts in addition to the work they had to do here, but how they could help their fellow citizens of Augusta.

Many of those people were impacted themselves. They had trees fall on their houses, on their cars. Their properties were littered with debris and trees. But it was really amazing what they did to help others.

Also, I'm very proud organizationally of what we were able to do to help the community, both down at the HUB and also at our north campus operations center just across Washington Road, which really was set up as a distribution center for the entire city to distribute food, water, clothing, et cetera.

Our people really reacted. They did a great job here, obviously, but we expected that. But what they did in the community was something that I'll always remember.

Q. I'm wondering what your reaction was on Sunday afternoon when you saw a little mite of a golfer use the AimPoint aim and take some time to do it. And then having lined up her putt like that, she then went on a tour of the putt and calling in at every compass point on the way around and taking perhaps as much as two minutes. I'm wondering what your reaction to that was. Secondly, in view of your comments now about pace of play, I'm wondering whether in the spirit of the great founder, who said so much about etiquette and so on and so forth, there's even the thought that you might lead the way in trying to encourage these young players to get a bloody move on. (Laughter.)

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, I think that example really illustrates the problem, and unfortunately, these young people are looking to their heroes who play the game each week for a living as to how they're going to approach competitively playing the game.

I think it's been very -- a good thing that knowledgeable people such as Dottie Pepper have commented on this recently, and I hope that -- she made the point, which I alluded to in my comments, about respect for others, including most particularly the people who watch the game, the fans.

So I think maybe this might be a call to action that perhaps we haven't seen in the past. I've spoken about it a number of times. We will be dealing with that issue this week. I'm not going to tell you that I'm going to be happy with the results, but I think I am encouraged that the PGA TOUR is doing some things, experimenting with some timing procedures that might be a little bit more aggressive than we've seen in the past.

As it relates to the Drive, Chip & Putt, I too noticed exactly what you noticed. It's interesting, but every phase of the competition has the same length chip and the same length putt, so it's really not necessary to pace that off. They know how many yards that is. But nevertheless that's what they were doing.

I think it's safe to assume that next year at the Drive, Chip & Putt you will see some sort of time limitations placed on the competition.

Thank you for that question.

Q. As it relates to the field, was any consideration given to create a category for a LIV player as the USGA and the R&A has done? And along those lines, the PGA TOUR had some relatively weak fields in the fall that all received an invitation to the

Masters. Were you comfortable with that, and has there been any consideration to the BMW PGA Championship winner on the DP World Tour and other strong tournaments?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: I think as it relates to the first question, I think that the -- some of the issues that have been raised in connection with world golf rankings, and that is pathways for players to come and go on the LIV Tour as well as the team aspect of the LIV Golf, certainly creates some concern in that regard.

As it relates to the USGA and the R&A, they certainly act independently. We respect their decisions. We are an invitational tournament. We have historically considered special cases for invitations for international players, which is how Joaquin Niemann was invited, or why he was invited, the last couple years.

We feel we can deal with that issue, whether it's a LIV player or a player on some other tour that might not otherwise be eligible for an invitation, that we can handle that with a special invitation.

As it relates to the fall tournaments, I think that's a really good question. It's really a balance. We think it's important to win a PGA TOUR tournament, and we have for many years recognized that by granting an invitation to the winner of each tournament.

But like we do every year, and I've said this I think every year in this press conference, we will have a thorough examination of our qualifications at the end of the year -- or after the tournament this year, and we may make some changes. Not necessarily that, but some years we do make changes, some years we don't. I think your comment about a couple of international tournaments is well-founded, and that will be part of our examination.

Q. You have a couple years now of results with the new tee construction on 13. The data, just the raw data of eagles and birdies, is the least number of eagles last year in a decade, and in the last three years the least number of birdies made in over a decade. What are the advanced metrics telling you about the way that hole is being played?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, I don't think the current design of the hole goes back three years, if I'm not mistaken, but I think we'd probably need to look at a little more data before we drew any conclusions. Weather has a lot to do with it. I believe it was last year that there were two days that we didn't even assemble data because the weather was so bad.

But it's something that we'll continue to look at.

There is one bit of data, and again, I'm being anecdotal myself because it's only one year, but we actually had more players last year go for the green in two, in the two days that we took data, than we did the previous year when the hole was shorter. The reason for that makes a lot of sense when you look at it.

If you look at drives that were hit too far to the right, two years ago many of those went into the trees. Now a shot like that doesn't reach the trees. So players actually in the fairway a long way from the green, 250, 260 yards, but as we all know, that is not a big problem for these players. So we actually had more players going for the green.

Now, correspondingly, we may have had a few more hit it in Rae's Creek, and maybe that's the reason that the scores were up a little bit. But I think what our motivation was in making that change, in adding that distance, was to create more excitement and to have more players go for the green. One year's data tells us what happened. We'll have to see what happens this year.

Q. Fred, can you address the reason for the earlier tee time starts on Thursday and Friday?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, we have more players. Our average field the last few years has been around 90 players, and we have 95 players this year. So that extra two groups just adds a little time. So we'd rather do it on the front end than the back end.

Q. Is that a pace-of-play issue?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, it might be. We're starting out with a twosome, which always kind of helps get things moving. And that'll put a little more pressure, I think, on the groups that follow because as long as you keep up with the group ahead of you, then you're going to be okay, and that group is obviously going to be playing quicker.

Q. You mentioned obviously honoring past champions. I just wondered if you wanted to respond to some of the women's rights groups who have criticized Cabrera's appearance at the Masters this year.

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, we certainly abhor domestic violence of any type. As it relates to Angel, Angel has served the sentence that was prescribed by the Argentine courts, and he is the past champion, and so he was invited.

Q. In light of the aftermath of the hurricane here, what advice and counsel might you be offering Riviera as they try and recover the Palisades from the devastating fire as they prepare for the Olympics and rebuild that community?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, I think as it relates to what happened here, and I would also add in western Carolina, North Carolina, I don't think I've ever seen anything that horrific in my life until the LA fires. As big of a tragedy or as large a scale of a tragedy as it was here, it was even much larger in Los Angeles.

I guess what I would say as to what encouragement I would give is for the public and private sector to work together. That really is the only way that things are going to move as quickly as they need to, not only in connection with the Olympics, but more importantly, just getting people back in their homes.

So that to me is the key to some level of success is for people pulling together and working together.

Q. You noted the -- you were asked a question earlier about the LIV Golf league players and their access to the Masters. I'm curious your thoughts on where the game is right now with the divide and the seeming lack of movement on a deal. And while obviously all the best players are now coming together this week, and that's great for the Masters, what do you think of it in general for the game?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, we talk about reunification all the time. And when I think about reunification, I think about the issue that you've just raised, and that is having more players -- having all of the great players of the game playing against each other more than just a few times a year.

I'm not really in a position to say what form that should take as far as how the two organizations should come together, what legal structure that may be or what the financial aspects of that may be, but what I would do and what I am doing is just encouraging again -- sometimes if you start kind of at eye level, and that is to encourage cooperation and trying to figure out a way to get something done, regardless of what the structure of it is, to where everyone can play together again.

So I'm going to continue to be saying that and encouraging the leaders of the organizations involved to try to work together to come up with a solution. But I think we all agree that four times a year is not enough to have the great players of the game together.

Q. Scott, their new CEO, was invited this week. Was that at your behest, and was that an outreach in that regard?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, all the invitations were at our behest. Scott is here, and we're pleased to have him as our guest. Although I don't have any specific plans to meet with him, I know that we will have some discussions with him, and we're happy that he's here.

Q. You mentioned Lee Elder's anniversary. This year is also an anniversary for you of your U.S. Amateur victory. I'm wondering, as you reflect on the last 50 or so years, how do you think Augusta National has changed in that time?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: 50 years is a long time. Well, we have a lot more buildings than we did back then.

There obviously have been a lot of physical changes, and that really only makes sense when you think about what you hear over and over again is our core values and continuous improvement. It drives what we do every year.

So I think everything is really better than it was 50 years ago. But the underpinning values of the club, the notion of respecting tradition and continuing to move forward and improve and innovate while still respecting tradition is really what drives us every day.

But I'm proud of what the club has done over the last 50 years.

Q. As a great amateur player yourself, what are your thoughts on how name, image and likeness has impacted the amateur game in golf?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Change is a constant in life. Would I prefer that sort of the amateur world that I remember was still kind of how the game was being played at that level? Yeah, I would. But I don't think that's realistic.

And, plus, it's not fair to some people, frankly. There are young people that couldn't afford to play the game, and I'm not talking about NIL so much as I am just about the ability to be assisted in expenses. When I was a young player, you couldn't take any help to go to a golf tournament. You couldn't take a sleeve of golf balls. It was pretty strict.

I guess what I worry a little bit is about what does that do to what I would call the spirit of amateurism. That doesn't necessarily -- it's not necessarily dictated by whether or not you're paid to do something or not, but at our Amateur Dinner on Monday night, I was encouraged by what I heard and by all the speakers, including our amateur who spoke that night, Hiroshi Tai. A very impressive young man. He spoke from the heart. Amateur means love, and his love for the game was very clear.

I think it presents some challenges, but I think it's just all part of the evolution of sports. It's happening in every sport. We're just going to have to deal with it.

Q. You mentioned what the club did for the community, some of it organic, some of it strategic, to help those in need. How would you describe the responsibility that you and the membership have for the people of Augusta in tragic times?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, I think I said not only in tragic times but in all times. I think what I said on Monday was Augusta, Georgia, has been very good to this club and to the Masters Tournament, and I look at our involvement with our community as being a relationship. It's not a transaction. It's not a series of transactions.

I think if you look at it that way, it explains why we do what we do. We are a part of this community. I hope the people feel that we're an important and productive part.

We have been supportive for many, many years. Until recently, that was sort of done in a cloak of secrecy almost. I have felt that we can be more intentional and more outward-facing in that support while still presenting the right tone, I guess is what I'm saying, as to what we're doing.

It's amazing once you start giving what happens and how many more opportunities are presented. I mean, I could spend the next 30 or 40 minutes talking about things that we have in the pipeline that hopefully we'll be talking about over the next five years.

It's a responsibility we have. It's one that we accept and that we appreciate the opportunity to have, and we're going to continue to do more.

Q. Mr. Chairman, and maybe even Mr. Hyler, it seemed to me on Saturday that the women were hitting it even further down the fairways. Does the club now have to consider the length of the golf course for the women?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, I can tell you we don't have to consider the length of the golf course for the members, but that wasn't your question. (Laughter.)

No, I think actually -- I'll go back a little bit for a little bit of history. I remember in 2019 when we had our first Women's

Amateur, I foolishly was concerned about the length of the course from the member tees because although the course -- the member tees are about 64, a little bit under, yards long, normally it's a long 6400 because of the hills and sometimes you're hitting into the hill.

Recently that's been mitigated somewhat by the sand capping we've done, so you get a lot more roll, and that may be part of the underlying reason for your question -- not reason, but the factual background of your question.

But I'm not concerned about it being too long. Golly, a lot of these ladies are going for the green on 13 and 15, but that's what we want them to do.

I was a little shocked when I asked Carla what she hit into the 18th green, and she said, I hit a 50. And I said, A 50? You mean a 50-degree gap wedge? She goes, Yes. I thought to myself I hit a good drive the day before and hit a 6-iron. So you may have a point.

But no, I think it plays just about right. But what I was referring to, though, I didn't finish my thought, was five years ago I was concerned about it being too long. I went out to Champions Retreat, watched about 15 minutes of practice, and quickly that concern went away when I saw the power and the technical ability of these young ladies.

I don't think we're going to have to lengthen the golf course.

Q. I'm interested in the tension between leaning into emerging technologies and maintaining and not compromising the tradition of the Masters, and I wonder where you draw that line.

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: Well, I assume you're talking about sort of the -- how we approach content now and that type of thing.

I think the way I look at it is, again, it is a balance, as you've said, and if we go back to the basics, if we go back to the fact that we have to continue to get better, we have an obligation under our mission to promote the values and the virtues of the game, and we have an obligation to respect tradition.

So when you sort of put all that together, the way I look at it is we are using technology to tell the story of who we are, to tell the story of the Masters, to explain to people maybe that -- particularly younger people, what the Masters is all about and why it matters to the game of golf.

I don't see those at all as being inconsistent.

I mentioned our social platforms a little while ago as well as our other digital platforms. Last month, it was about the middle of the month, on the Masters app, there was an anthem, we call it. Some of you may have seen it. It was something to the effect, if the course could talk, and it was a narrative where the speaker was actually the voice of the course, and it talked about the magical moments that had happened over the years with some of our great champions. You could probably visualize some of the images that were on that post. And the voice said, I thought I'd seen it all, I think I've seen it all, or something to that effect. Then it ended by saying, until April each year.

That really was impactful because I get chills just talking about it. But I think it goes to the point of your question, and that is we're using technology, we're actually reaching out to a different audience who would have seen that. I suspect a lot of you haven't seen that. I saw it because my daughter sent it to me.

But we're reaching a different audience, but we're telling them, we're talking to them about the history and the tradition of the Masters and the great champions that have come down through the years.

We're very pleased that when you look at the number of impressions, our social media impressions are rising rapidly. I think we're touching a different demographic by doing that, but yet we're not just on the edge with it. We did another one on Instagram just last week where it was a picture of a sculptor carving the Augusta National clubhouse on the end of a pencil. Now, that was about a 20-second presentation, and I thought it was pretty clever. But that in a way was about tradition, as well. It's one of the most iconic buildings in all of golf.

So I think we can do that. We can be consistent to our values. But yeah, touch a different audience, which is getting bigger all the time.

Q. At the risk of veering very off topic, as a proud alum of the University of Florida, I'm curious your thoughts on Monday's national championship win by the Gators?

CHAIRMAN FRED S. RIDLEY: What win was that? Oh, Monday night. (Laughter.)

Well, I wasn't very effective yesterday because I was up late Monday night. I kind of remembered what we did in 2020 at the November Masters when our partner, ESPN, was very creative in working with us to have "College GameDay" down for the par-3.

But as far as the Gators go, we obviously were happy. I know there's going to be quite a few of them here this week, and they'll be following the alums that are in the field. There are at least a couple of them. So I hope they behave themselves and we don't hear too many "go Gators" or any chomps or anything like that. But it was a lot of fun to watch. I'm very proud of the team.