

HSBC Women's World Championship

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Republic of Singapore

Sentosa Golf Club

Commissioner Mollie Marcoux Samaan

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the Media Center at the HSBC Women's World Championship. I'm happy to be joined by LPGA Commissioner Mollie Marcoux Samaan. Mollie is about six months into the job now. Excited to get the opportunity to work with Mollie.

Mollie, welcome to Singapore. I know you said this is your first time on this side of the globe at all. How do you feel about visiting Singapore, this lovely country? Are you finally getting some sleep?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Well, first of all, thank you, everyone, for joining us this morning. It's a real pleasure to be here. Singapore has been amazing, despite the fact that sleep is a little more difficult, and doing work back with the folks in the U.S. has been a little challenging on the time frames, but otherwise it's absolutely beautiful.

The people have been amazingly hospitable, and just enjoying every bit of it.

THE MODERATOR: So let's go back to this time last year. You were still in discussions to becoming the LPGA commissioner, going through that process. What was it that interested you in this opportunity as commissioner of the LPGA?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Yeah, listen, I had a job that I absolutely loved, but when this opportunity presented itself to me, it felt like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity because I think there's so much momentum in women's golf, first of all, and I believe in golf and the power of golf, and I believe in our athletes. I've been a big fan of the LPGA since I was a little girl.

And I saw this as this moment in time to really change mindsets around women's golf, around women's sports, and to really inspire the next generation of young girls and women through our game and through our amazing athletes.

I think there is tremendous, as I said, tremendous



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interest in women's sports right now, and there's this fundamental shift in how people are viewing our athletes. No longer, I think, particularly in this part of the world, our athletes are not the other. They're the main show in many, many forums.

So I'm just really excited to be a part of that and to be able to showcase and highlight the talent and the opportunity for growth and change.

THE MODERATOR: We truly are growing, but like all sports, like so many businesses had the struggles over the last two years, during the pandemic. How do you feel we've been able to manage these last two years, and where do you see us now as we're coming out hopefully on the other side of this difficulty?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Obviously, goes without saying, COVID has been extremely challenging for every organization, let alone every sports organization. In my role as athletic director at Princeton, we were working very hard every day to manage through the challenges.

I've been blown away by the way the LPGA and all of its partners, and partners very broadly, both our sponsors and our media partners and the golf courses that we've played with and our vendors, and really the industry as a whole, how people have come together with the good of the team at hand.

And so surprisingly and shockingly, we entered the pandemic at something around low \$70 million in purses. I think in 2019 we had \$67 million in purses. And now, in 2022, through the pandemic, we're in 90.2 million in purses and 34 events that are really thriving.

And that's a tribute to the staff, as I said, the partners, but also the players. I mean, the way that they have handled the need to be flexible, the need to be a part of a team and to just do what they need to do to be able to provide this honestly inspiration to the world, to be able to see the women play, to get back to some semblance of order, not in the way that they normally do it, has been really remarkable.

And I will say there's a tremendous amount of gratitude from our players. There's a tremendous amount of optimism for the future. They're just an amazing group. It feels much more to me like a full team than it is women



completing against each other.

I always say it feels like a college athletic department. Even though every day they're going out and trying to be the very best in the world, there's a sense of community, there's a sense of belonging, there's a sense of passion for acting like a founder. That's the phrase that we use.

I think, despite the many challenges in the world and the hardship of all of COVID, the LPGA has come out really ready to take that next step.

THE MODERATOR: So now you're six-plus months under the job, been able to meet so many people over here, meeting the executives from HSBC and Aon and various other people, where do you hope to take the LPGA Tour in the next few years? What's your vision for the beginning of your commissioner'ship?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAN: As I said, the partners that we have, including HSBC, I mean, it's been amazing being here. The way that they -- the golf course and obviously HSBC and all the other sponsors have really embraced and the way they embrace our athletes is remarkable.

They realize that providing the right environment will allow our athletes to reach their peak performance. So I think that the way that the athletes have been treated are sort commensurate with their world-class talent.

And I think that's something we're seeing across the board. We're seeing not only that, but we're seeing that many, many partners are seeing the LPGA as an opportunity not just to have a return on their actual investment but to change the world through this platform and to talk about their own company values.

And I know that's really near and dear to what HSBC is doing, is to use this platform to talk about their goals in sustainability, their goals in diversity, equity, and inclusion, and to inspire the world through this, talking about the pay equity conversation.

So obviously our partners are really important. We have six pillars that we're working off of. One is to provide the very best schedule with the highest possible purses where our women can make the best living, commensurate with their world-class talent, but also where our partners are able to use our platform to push their company values and their agendas and their ways of thinking about changing the world.

I think we also are really in tune to this idea of player excellence and player performance, and actually LPGA professional experience, the staff experience. So how do we create an environment for everyone within our ecosystem to reach their own peak performance.

And that goes to the things I just talked about, making it as easy as possible for our women to get the most sleep that they need, to eat properly when they come to tournaments, to have the administration taking care of them so they can focus on being the best that they can be.

So performance excellence is really important. We're really focused on getting the world to know our athletes better. I think many on this call, you obviously have gotten to know our women, and they're not only best in the world on the golf course, but the work that they do off the golf course to inspire young girls, to provide help in various charities, whatever it is they're passionate about, and to just be role models to so many people.

So I think our goal is to focus on marketing, communications, media, technology, how do we do as good of a job as we possibly can do to bring our athletes to the world. And that's not just in one part of the world, but all over the world. Because I think we've seen, as we go into communities, we inspire people. We inspire people young and old.

And so that's really important for us to focus on that technology and the data and marketing and getting our fans to know our players better.

We're also really in tune to this idea that golf is a gift, and so how do you give this game to more people? We call it changing the face of the game. And the industry as a whole is sort of calling this make golf your thing, and we're trying to work very intentionally to give the game to people who might not otherwise feel comfortable playing the game or might not have the financial resources to play.

So we're really intentional about that through our work in the foundation, through the inspiration that our LPGA and Epson players provide and LET players.

And the other thing, the fifth goal is this integration of all parts of the LPGA. The LPGA is driven by the LPGA Tour, but we also have this really impactful foundation which focuses on our USGA LPGA girls golf program where we're bringing the game to hundreds and thousands of kids a year through the girls golf program, through our leadership academies.

We also have a very robust women's amateur program. And again, sports build leaders and build community, and they're really important to society, particularly in times that are tough.

And then we have this remarkable LPGA professionals. We have over 1,800 women, largely women, in our LPGA professional program who are teaching the game to, as I said, tens of thousands of people.

So how do we integrate all parts of that? So we have this kind of all parts of the women's golf and girls golf ecosystem, and how do we make 1 plus 1 equal 3 and using our assets in all ways.

So an example of that is bringing our LPGA professionals onto our broadcast and having them analyze our players' swings and give our audience and our fans an opportunity to learn more about the golf swing, because we all know that's something we're constantly trying to tackle, myself included.

And then the sixth pillar is how do we continue to build a sustainable future for the LPGA, how do we think about this as thriving rather than just surviving. And I think over the last few years, that's what the LPGA has seen, getting to some of these remarkable numbers: \$10 million for the U.S. Open, I think 12 tournaments increased their purse this year, CME going to \$2 million for the winner and \$40,000 if you make the CME Championship.

So things like that, the Aon Risk Reward, which is a phenomenal program, and then just continuing to have more sponsors like HSBC, honestly, who see the value in our players.

So thinking creatively about how we build that overall sustainable infrastructure for the LPGA.

THE MODERATOR: So we've had -- we've kicked off the season in Florida. We're now here in Asia, the first of our two swings. I wanted to ask you about the tournaments in Asia. Do you see a change maybe there to the number of times we come over here? What are the state of things here with our partnerships across Asia?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAN: We're a global Tour, and we're really proud of that. And so we are constantly looking, going back to one of my fundamental pillars that I talked about at the beginning, we're sort looking about how we move around the world so it's good for the communities where we go and the partners that we work with, but it also makes sense for our players.

You can imagine traveling and then going into different time zones, and you need to be able to get the right rest. And so we're working very intentionally on how to give them tips to do that. They're working on their own with their team around the team to do that.

So right now we're talking to partners around the globe. And we love playing in Asia. It's something that the players look forward to. They've been raving about this week. I know they're looking forward to next week as well. Obviously we go through Europe, and then we come back to Asia again.

So we're a global Tour, and we're really proud of that, and we're going to continue to work with partners all over the world.

THE MODERATOR: We've talked now about Asia. How about our relationship with the Ladies European Tour, the joint venture about two years ago, great partnership. How is that partnership going on with the LET?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAN: It's been a phenomenal partnership. They have tremendous leadership there in Alex Armas and her team. They're a small but mighty team. But our team has been digging in with them and sharing best practices and supporting them along the way.

And we're really excited because we're thinking about how you provide a global pathway to the LPGA, the LPGA being the very best women's golf tour in the world that we're really proud of.

So the LET, like the LPGA, has grown significantly since the joint venture occurred. I think they were at somewhere around \$11 million in purses in 2019, and I think they're going to be at over 20 million this year, 23 million in 2022. Which is a remarkable number. I think there are 30 events on the Tour.

So I think we've helped them grow and get better, and I think they've helped us in the way that they approach things and the attitudes that they have. And the players from Europe are phenomenal. Obviously we have great players in Europe, we have great players in Asia, we have great U.S. players, we have great players from other parts of the world.

I think this idea of global golf is really important, and the partnership has been tremendous so far. And we're just in this joint venture now, and we'll see what the future holds.

Q. Do you see the LPGA Tour perhaps returning to Asia any time soon or any other venues, tournaments that may be of interest?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAN: Like I said, we're constantly evaluating the flow, the geographic flow of our entire Tour. And we have a tremendous team working in Korea, and obviously our team in the U.S., constantly looking at various opportunities. We work really closely with IMG internationally.

So we are always exploring different opportunities, nothing that I can announce right now, but we certainly are fully engaged in those conversations, and we love playing all over the world.

THE MODERATOR: Mollie, overall, as you're looking back over the first six months, what have been some of

the biggest takeaways for you that perhaps were surprises as you look at the beginning of your tenure?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Well, I've always known how talented our athletes are, but when you see them up front and when you get to know them, you just become that much more inspired by their talent, which is enormous. I think our KPMG Performance Insight program has allowed us to get some more data that just shows what we've always known and just how accurate they are, how talented they are, how really good they are.

And so that's been really fun to see up close and personal, but it's also been great to see how much they care about the LPGA. And honestly how much so many people care about the LPGA.

It really does feel like a community and a team like I said before. Our partners are some of the most passionate people about what we do, and we're grateful for what they provide for us, and hopefully they're grateful for the opportunity they have to engage with the best athletes in the world.

It's always about people, for me, and I think seeing how committed everyone is -- I call it the team around the team, how committed everyone is to our growth path. And not just to allow the women to live their dreams through golf, which is really what our overall mission is, but to inspire the world and empower people to see what greatness can look like and to see how the world can change, particularly around women's sports and this mindset shift that women's sports are not just the other, but they're a real formidable force of good in the world.

Q. Your thoughts on the Thai players on the LPGA Tour and how incredibly impressive they are? Looking at our leaderboard right now, Atthaya Thitikul is 3-under on her round through five holes. And as we look to next week at the Honda LPGA Thailand, can you talk about our Thai players and the excitement they bring to the Tour?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Yeah, I've had the opportunity to get to know a lot of the women, and I've actually played with Moriya, and we had a great time. She did capture my swing on social media, which maybe wasn't the greatest, but actually it was very funny, she asked permission post the swing.

But their energy, their passion is phenomenal, and their talent is indisputable. So I really -- again, I think that's one of the most fun parts of this job, is that you get to know people from all over the world that come from different backgrounds who are just passionate and talented and devoted and committed to being great.

I think Thailand is producing some amazing golfers right

now.

Q. The Epson Tour and the recent announcement that Epson is taking over the developmental tour, what are your plans for that? Do you see perhaps any co-sanctioning or continued growth of opportunities like that on this side of the world and continuing to grow that developmental path?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Yeah, and, again, talking about the Epson Tour, and Epson has, similar to HSBC and other partners, they see this as a tremendous business opportunity for them to talk about their brand and to build brand awareness.

And their CEO has made it very clear the decision they made was a very sound business decision, but also they saw it as a real opportunity to talk about their values, talk about their commitment to women's leadership, talk about their commitment to pay equity.

So the way they've structured the relationship with us really gives our women that opportunity to live their dreams, which is ultimately what we're doing.

This idea that they have ten ambassadors when you graduate from the Epson Tour and you come onto the LPGA Tour, they will provide a little bit of a roadway for you from a financial standpoint. It's expensive to play out here.

So they're creative with how they're approaching it. They're thinking about the registration fees or the entry fees for all of the Epson events and trying to work with us to get a few more partners to reduce the entry fees to make it more feasible for women to be out there on the Epson Tour playing and trying to get to the LPGA.

So it's partnerships like that that are creative and thoughtful and thinking about ways that we can make the experience for our players that much better.

And again, there's a great pathway. I think we're talking to the LET about various pathways to get to the LPGA from the LET, or just continuing to build up their Tour like they've done to have 30 events and \$23 million in purses. If that's the path that women want to play, then that's a terrific opportunity there too.

So I think it's about the global golf approach.

THE MODERATOR: What has this experience been like the last three days? I know it's been a whirlwind, quick trip in, quick trip out. But your first opportunity to come over here and see the Asia swing in action, what are your biggest takeaways from these two days?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: What I said before, people love the LPGA. I think Singapore loves the

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

LPGA. Obviously HSBC and Lexus and the other partners here love the LPGA. And our women love being here. I've heard so many compliments and positive experiences so far.

So I'm thrilled that I made the trip. Excited to be here. I'm excited to watch some amazing golf today. I know you guys are all watching. And the leaderboard is pretty packed at the top, and everybody is playing pretty well, and so anything can happen.

Our athletes are remarkable, what they do consistently week in and week out, and they're playing great.

Q. Wanted to ask about the emergence of young stars in the region. We talked about Atthaya a little bit, but this question is particularly about Yuka Saso. Grew up in the Philippines, plays under the Japanese flag now. Clearly a young player of the world. But what she's been able to do the last year since she won that U.S. Women's Open and gained her LPGA membership?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: I remember as I was watching that, I was thinking I have an 18-year-old daughter and a 16-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son, and seeing the way that -- and they're great athletes and great kids and work really hard, but seeing her on that world stage for the first time during the U.S. Open, I was blown away by her kind of calmness and her ability to handle the pressure.

And then she just has come out and been a huge part of the LPGA since that moment. Her smile is infectious. She's very popular out here. She's just another example of a young star that is inspiring people through her on-the-course work and her off-the-course personality.

It's great to see her in some commercials. I think that's the other that's happening in the industry is you'll see some of our partners or manufacturers highlighting our women in really important ways through their own international, national commercials. Yuka is just an example of the young talent that's out there.

THE MODERATOR: And speaking of young talent, we've got another name, Xi Yu Janet Lin from China, who's making a little run this morning, playing well. Do you think about Janet and what she's doing for China? And I know Janet specifically graduated from a HSBC junior program. So seeing that footprint there in China continuing to grow as well.

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Again, there's opportunities to advance to this level, and our job is to make it so when they get here, they are truly operating with the best in the world.

And I think that's what makes the LPGA so amazing, it's

not the best in the this region, it's truly the best in the world. And that's exciting. And that's a platform that we're really proud of.

Q. Are there any key markets that you would specifically target, maybe both in Asia, but in Europe, around the world? Any specific areas you're looking at?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: I think golf the growing everywhere. I think that's the beauty of the game. And women's golf is so powerful in different parts of the world.

We're looking at all markets. So I can't pinpoint one specifically. But we do want to think about, as I said before, kind of how that works for our players, how we take them through at a geographic flow, both domestically and internationally, a flow that works for them so they can be the very best that they can be.

So I think we always have be aware of their travel schedules, the time changes differences, how we have a series on the West Coast, East Coast, in the Midwest, how we come to Asia and clump the events so as easy as possible for them to travel and as inexpensive as it is for them to travel.

So we're really grateful for the way that a lot of our partners help them with that. But there's not really a market that we're not looking there.

THE MODERATOR: I can answer this question directly. We have 34 events on our 2022 LPGA calendar with two new events, one being the JTBC Championship at Palos Verdes in Los Angeles and the other being the Kroger Queen City Championship presented by P&G in Cincinnati.

Q. We're seeing big success in Japanese golfers, men and women, Nasa, Yuka playing under the flag now, Hinako winning AIG a few years ago, and now here this week. What are your thoughts on Japanese golf, seeing such success, that coming up in the country of Japan?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: I was planning on going to Japan in the fall, I was hoping to be able to make that trip, and we'll look forward to going back this coming fall.

But it's the same in a lot of regions, the talent. And that's why it's so fun looking down or leaderboard. It's not one country dominating. The Korean players still remain unbelievable, and the Japanese players are coming on, we've got some great talent in the U.S.

So I think you nailed it, but I do think the sport's growing everywhere. We're so proud of that. And I think we have a part in that. When you can put the women from different regions on the world stage, then it just inspires

young girls to play, it inspires sponsors and people to get involved and to support what we're doing.

So it is truly one of the most global if not the most global organization out there, and we're very proud of that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much, Mollie. We appreciate your time. Safe travels going home, and we will see you down the road at the next event.

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAN: Thank you, guys. Thanks for your support of the LPGA. It's truly amazing.

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