

The Amundi Evian Championship

Wednesday, 10 July 2024

Evian-les-Bains, France

Evian Resort Golf Club

Frank Riboud

Jacques Bungert

Mollie Marcoux Samaan

Natacha Andermahr

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you everyone for joining us here today at the Amundi Evian Championship; 30 years of this championship, and we are pleased begin it with the following panel here. From Amundi we have Natacha Andermahr; we have Jacques Bungert, we have LPGA commissioner Mollie Marcoux Samaan, and chairman of the Amundi Evian Championship, Franck Riboud.

Franck, the Amundi Evian Championship has a rich history, celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. What your vision 30 years ago when you started and how has this championship evolved since?

FRANCK RIBOUD: How will do we have? I think honestly we have no vision. Even when I was in the business and I was doing road shows, Franck, what is your vision? I'm not working like this. It's blah, blah, blah, the vision.

When we start at the beginning, the only vision we have was to year after year deliver the best tournament we can with the money we have every year. The thing is we process this working because when you have a golf tournament, you have the press, players, spectators, you have the (indiscernible), so you have a lot of the families around you you have to take care, and you have the sponsors obviously.

Every year with Jacques we have a meeting together, and we decide what we are going to do to improve the relation we have with all these groups of people, including the LPGA and the LET at the beginning.

But you have to imagine that this tournament -- and you saw some image yesterday -- was around the green. I think 80% of the people were part of my family. The other two or three people are looking for going back to



their home.

So that was a vision we have.

But it's true that we decide to do a ladies golf tournament 30 years ago, and trust me, 30 years ago when you explain to the golf community we are going to be -- to do a ladies golf tournament in Evian, which means in the middle of nowhere, everybody think you are crazy.

The guy who ask us to do that was my father, he was the chairman and CEO of Danone at this time. But the idea was why a ladies golf tournament, because this brand, because the Evian brand, because you don't know, but in France or Europe, Evian is the water you give to your baby.

The familiarity around this brand is incredibly strong. That was the idea as usual. One brick and another brick and you build your story like this. So it's not a question of vision, it's a question of what do you want to build.

As I said yesterday, it's now really something. It's not we have an idea like this. Don't think that. It's really what could we bring to the different party, but we have to respect three things: We must impact ladies golf or ladies sport, not only through the prize money; we must impact the young generation, the Kids Cup, Junior Cup. We have some things like 20 boys, girls going to Las Vegas in December playing in AJGA tournament called the Evian Showcase. So we sponsor the AJGA somewhere.

We have the Junior Cup. Everybody is saying, oh, it's wonderful. We have a picture of Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas eating a burger behind the 18 green. No, it's not by luck. It's something we built.

That's the reason why 30 years is long and short, but during this 30 years with Jacques we really build our marketing story. And I don't like to say marketing story because it's really something we trust in. It's really coming from what do we want to build.

The third thing very important for us, which is a subject we will have to discuss I think very quickly, especially since Sunday, election, French election, which is the protection of the ecology, the transition ecology. Because if you look at the rough today, everybody is



saying the course is beautiful. And it's true. It's incredible. Especially in this period of time now in France.

You see all these small flowers, the white one. Normally you can't see because the rough are lower. We can't do anything to deal with this. Don't ask for example to make it more green with the same color, no flower, because it's forbidden. The chemical product are forbidden, and they are going to be forbidden totally 2025, which is tomorrow.

No chemical. So we will try to have an authorization, bah, bah, but whatever. It going to be tough, but it's going to be like this all across Europe and perhaps in California.

So this is the three pillars we are building the tournament. This year that was the lake, because we need water. Sadly we will have water on Friday. It's always the same. You build lake and it's raining. You don't build the lake and it's sun shining.

THE MODERATOR: Jacques, you've also have been instrumental to this championship's success. What have been some of the key highlights to get to this milestone here?

JACQUES BUNGERT: Well, of course the first one was when Franck asked me to join him and asking me if I knew anything about golf. I said no. 30 years ago. He said that's precisely why I want you to join me. That was for me the beginning of a fantastic adventure.

Then the tournament had few milestones. Obviously aside from the LET, which was our partner for long time at the beginning of the tournament, 2000 was a key milestone when we joined the LPGA. Really we became let's say a European tournament and became really an international tournament.

Thanks to the players who were talking about the tournament all around the place and over the year to the LPGA, we managed -- and I have to thank (indiscernible) for that, which was the moment LPGA was thinking a little more global not only U.S. domestic.

We were able to take that train and really thanks to the players, because all the European players, Annika, were great at that time. And being European, were also playing greatly in America and they were really saying this is our tournament there and you should go and pick it up.

We have a lot of -- we had a lot of adventure with Franck being interviewed by Mecham and all the people at the LPGA. I remember British Open we were coming back. We had our spikes because we were coming directly late from the course, and I remember trying to go through the parking lot and being very discreet, and then we entered

directly into the interview room and they thought we were crazy.

Actually we were; but that was a great moment.

The second moment was when Mike Whan started to discuss with us about the possibility of becoming a major. It was the moment of, you remember 2008, Lehman brothers, the difficulties in the U.S., and this was the moment where Franck, also discussing with the sponsor's club, was wondering what would be the next steps for us. We had reached kind of a level.

And obviously I still when I see the film and the moment when Mike announced to us that we became a major, really I still have goosebumps.

Then the third moment, and I have also to insist, and Franck does it very often, on the importance, because it's tough to be a major, a women's major by yourselves. We don't have any men's major to kind of balance the economical sheet.

So the sponsors and partners are key. 2000 Rolex joined us and that was a key moment, and then Amundi joined us as a title sponsor. That was a key moment which was a moment to enable us to really grow the tournament, grow the prize money.

And really as Franck said, it's a fight every day to be able to follow the pace and give the best showcase possible for women's sports here.

Actually, where the media are really needed, because it's an everyday fight against the world and the competition.

Q. Mollie, for you, the LPGA has seen significant growth in development over the years with major championships like this. Over the championship's 30 years, how has the Amundi Evian Championship helped elevate the LPGA Tour?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAAN: Yeah, obviously being a major championship is a critical part of our schedule. In 2013 I think when it became a major we were playing for 3.25 million; in 2021 we were playing for 4.5; and now this year to be playing for \$8 million is really remarkable and hugely important.

The major championships on the LPGA have grown 100% to 47 million in the last few years, so that's important. Obviously it's important because of the money, but it's also important as Jacques said, to show the world how valuable women's sports are and how good our athletes are and that they deserve to be compensated commensurate with their talent.

That, on top of when you turn on the television from around the world and see the fans now -- it used to be

your family -- but now thousands of people sitting, cheering with their arms up in the air for the best athletes in the world, that matters to us, having great events that look fantastic for our fans in person and also on television.

The hospitality is tremendous. The way these guys focus on getting better every year and improving the tournament. It's an inspiration to other tournaments.

So I think that's just sort a little more broadly, but specific to this tournament is really important because we are a global tour. We have athletes from all over the world; 8 out of 50 top players in the world come from Europe.

It's really important we have a major championship like in this continental Europe. We really believe in the opportunity to use our platform to elevate girls and women around the world both on the golf course on and off.

So having this championship here where young girls can see the very best athletes in the world is bigger than golf. It's critical. It's the other thing you said, Jacques, is that the Amundi Evian Championship doesn't have a governing body that supports it.

So it's had to show that with the support of great partners, Amundi and Rolex and now Porsche this year and many others, that it can be a sustainable and really successful big major championship on its own.

And as Jacques said, it's not easy and takes a tremendous amount of work. Honestly, the way that this works is because of the leadership of these guys, the consistent 30 year leadership of digging in and saying, we're going to make this great and every year we are going to make it better and every year try to improve and inspire not only girls, but other tournaments to inspire golfers around the world and then give opportunities to women and girls and women not just here.

I think it's those three things. One, just being a major championship and really digging into this idea that it's big and important. And then the global nature of our tour and having a championship here in continental Europe.

And really doing it alone and showing the commercial viability with great leadership and commitment in the same location every year for 30 years, that makes a big difference. You can build on it. There is tradition, history, fans that come back year after year.

It is really important to us, and I'm so thrilled to have the partnership with you guys. It's been really terrific. We look forward it just continuing to grow every year.

THE MODERATOR: Squeaking of continuing, Natacha, Amundi recently announced the renewals of this

partnership of the Evian Championship. How does that partnership in general align with Amundi's values as a corporation.

NATACHA ANDERMAHR: Before I answer your question, let me give you some words about Amundi for who don't know yet us. So Amundi provides investment solutions for more than 100 million clients around the world.

Since 2011, we have chosen golf to do our sponsoring because this is the most popular individual sport in the world, and this sport demands precision, performance, and consistency. In fact, the three skills are very similar to those required also to manage an investment portfolio.

Since 2021, we partnered with several women tournament around the world because it resonates a lot with our values promoting opportunities but also diversity. We consider at Amundi that diversity in general in terms of nationality, in terms of social origin or gender, diversity, it's a wealth, it can enrich the society in general, and also a source of performance for corporates.

So among them, our favorite of course is Amundi Evian Championship which attracts many, many international golfers, players, very famous, and increases a lot our profile in Europe and Asia and also in U.S.

And then we have also Amundi German Masters in Germany and the Amundi Czech Ladies in Czech Republic. As you may know, in fact, beyond our sponsorship, our sponsorship goes beyond simply displaying our name at tournaments by creating an Amundi talent woman program.

We support around 11 young female players, very promising and Europe, in Asia, and in U.S. too. In addition our financial support, we bring them new sporting opportunities, higher visibility from social media of who are our advert campaign. It's very important for us.

And this year at Evian we will have the pleasure to watch Morgane Metraux, you won recently play the tournament. She will also take part to the Paris Olympic Games. Big rendezvous, too.

Gianna Clemente should have to be there too, but unfortunately she can't. No, it's pity.

And Sara Kouskova who is also one golfer we support will be there at the Paris Olympic Games, too. So all this elements make us very proud of what we do. It's very, very encouraging, and that's why we decided also because it's a big anniversary for the tournament, to renew our partnership with Evian.

So we will remain the sponsor title until 2030. We are

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

very, very happy of that. We love this tournament. The atmosphere we can have here, it's very important. We have a real pleasure to work with the team, to work with Franck, with Jacques, and also with Emily's team. Honestly, every year it's a real pleasure.

We would like also to continue promoting equality and gender diversity. As Jacques said, progress is being made, but we must continue. It's a daily fight as you said. It's very, very important in sports in the society in general for us incorporates, and honestly for us it's an important thing.

So this means we will continue of course our women talent program with new teams after 2025, and we will be also redistribute resources towards the younger generation being more involved in the Galaxy. For example, we aim to increase the number of young players who will be there at the Amundi Showcase from 10 to 15.

And in addition, we would like also to set up charity starting in 2026, and for each birdie, we plan to do a donation to a charity who we will find later. So once again, we are very happy to (indiscernible) and we hope to look forward to and see you for the next six years.

JACQUES BUNGERT: Thank you. We are very happy, too, Natacha. Very happy.

Q. Couple of questions. One for Natacha and Mollie. This is something that we been talking in every major I think now. With the growth of women's golf and from a business perspective, and I know you have experience of business intelligence, what is the return on investment of women's golf?

NATACHA ANDERMAHR: (Indiscernible.) No, no, the main return is in term of visibility for us, as I said. In particular, in Europe, Asia, our main markets where we develop a lot.

And as I said, the teams listen us regularly to increase our visibility in particular in countries where our development is important. I have in mind for example Germany, something which increased a lot in recent years.

For us, it's important.

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Yeah, again, our sponsors, we believe there is a significant commercial return on investment. Obviously building your brand through our platform is a great way to do so. The visibility and exposure is growing every year. We look at the full media consumption, so how many people are engaging with the LPGA on a weekly basis, and those numbers are through the roof compared to where they were two or three years ago.

So the actual commercial value continues to grow, and also gives companies a great opportunity, as Natacha talked about, to say, how do we talk about our values? How do we talk about the things we care about and put our money where our mouth is?

You get this great benefit of building your brand and getting that opportunity to do so across the world. We are a global tour. We have athletes all over the world. We have visibility all over the world; 175 countries we are viewed in.

So there is great commercial value. But the companies also get to dive in and say, we care about women and care about elevating women in leadership positions. We care about equity, diversity. So we think those two are really important.

And the other thing, there is not a better sport or opportunity to entertain clients, you know, bringing your clients to an environment like this. Every single person who comes to Evian says, I want to come back with my family and have a vacation here.

To be able to be here and see and see the best athletes in the world with your clients, there is really no better way to do it. LPGA and women's sports provides a really unique access to athletes, to the very best in the world.

So those are really the three things we focus on: Build your brand, talk about your values and what you care about, and then entertain your customers and clients better than in any sport.

Q. Jacques and Franck, I talk to caddies who been here for 25 years. We have Amy Yang who is playing the 19th time here. It becomes like there is two majors in women's golf where players come back every year and feels like family in a way I suppose. Do you feel like you have created a family, a galaxy like you call it?

FRANCK RIBOUD: In fact, I will come back to your previous question. The return is something you decide, and honestly I don't like to look at the tournament or any sport or any culture event or music event or whatever through the return.

Obviously we have to discuss about return with our sponsor. From our point of view, we bring a global return. Not only the number of people. Not only the television. The ambience we try to create here is part of the return.

If you invite for example or customer on an event where nobody take care of you or take care of you classic as everywhere, the return change. It will be less than what we try to do with, as you said, this family ambience.

When we know we became major, the only thing we trust in and we fight with Jacques was to try to keep the ambience we had at the beginning with family and friends around the green.

And in some part with success and some other part it's tougher. In the same time we have the Jabra Open, which is qualification tournament for Evian, which helps -- help us to keep this, to remind us what was the story at the beginning, the simplicity.

This is part of the return.

Now, on top of that about the return, a lot of people -- I will tell what you I am doing, and Natacha will know if I am sure. What I am doing when I go to negotiate with Amundi or Rolex. Rolex it's a little bit more difficult for me as Danone, because I have two caps. I am on the board of Rolex.

But the idea for me is everybody is talking about ladies sport. I confirm to everybody here that the economics of ladies sports is not aligned on the prize of the cost you have to do an event like this one.

That is the reason why I convince my sponsor to help us, and sometimes as we said in in French to put the cheval before the --

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Cart before the horse.

FRANCK RIBOUD: Yes, and we need you, all of you. Because it's the same negotiation with the media. We are not going to give you television because nobody -- the audience is very small. But if you don't start together to do some things it will stay like this.

As you know, we increase the prize money \$8 million. To find the return, it's going to be tough. Now, I don't know. So that is the economic games we have to deal with with Jacques.

I tell you that very honestly. The thing you have to understand, that this tournament is -- and Mollie knows this -- we are alone. Same than the American one.

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Chevron.

FRANCK RIBOUD: How you say that?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Chevron.

FRANCK RIBOUD: Chevron. When Jacques and myself, we look back, there is nobody. When you have -- KPMGs is another story. But the other one, the British for example. You look at that, is oh, it's there. And they have the key because they decide to split between male and female. I know how much Rolex is giving.

And I look at the prize money and say, I can't do that. If I do that, I lose my shirt. But we don't have a male tournament. In tennis it's exactly the same for Wimbledon and Roland Garros. The economics for the ladies tournament is not working with such prize money.

But we don't care about that. We try to continue to build and help. That's the reason we increase our prize money with the authorization or Rolex and Danone and Amundi and now Porsche coming. We distribute that for the young generation.

When I propose to Amundi, we are going to call everything Amundi Kids Cup, Amundi -- the first reaction was no, no, no. Because they were afraid I ask them money.

Okay, I ask them money for the new contract just few months.

And now I'm sure I'm speaking about your control, under your control. That the CEO and chairman of Amundi will never stop to take care of the children, the young generation, to take care of that. That's why your question about the return is too much financial question.

I think emotion is part of return.

THE MODERATOR: I will say I know our defending champion is waiting here, so I will wrap it with a question from Sarah.

Q. Mollie, I know you talk about the continued commitment of the partners in all our events and the Amundi Evian Championship as well. What is it about their commitment to the next generation and helping grow the game in the way the LPGA does with LPGA-USGA Girls Golf? That partnership is obviously going to continue. Does that make it more deep and more important, the significance?

MOLLIE MARCOUX SAMAAN: Yeah, absolutely. Our mission is to be the leader in women's professional golf and very intentionally to use our platform to elevate girls and women's on and off the golf course. We're all committed to that, and I think that's what we do.

I think in sport I think the world has opened up to the idea, and I think it is changing and the numbers are changing and commercial value is really changing. I think the world has seen if you put it on at the right time, market it properly, talk about it properly, then fans will be very, very engaged and all of it will grow.

So it's really critical that this is a joint effort, that we understand and value the product that we're putting out there. And I think because that shows girls -- to your question, that shows girls really importantly that they can

do anything. That they're just as talented, just as important in society.

If we can get closer to equity in women's sports, we can show girls they can do anything, and that's really critical at the LPGA and I know it's critical for Frank and Jacques as well.

JACQUES BUNGERT: Yeah, I can see that Celine is waiting, so I guess we going to wrap it up. But to your point and as a last message, but I think you got it, it's a joint effort. It's not by chance we have this panel.

This panel represents the joint forces to makes women's golf a better place, especially we all know it meets a lot of struggle, and we need you. I wouldn't take the U.S. Army type of posture, but we do need you, the media, to be positive about it to help us find space and talk about TV space because the audience, everything is linked.

That's super key. And then our job is to be creative and to invent. It was invented here, the prize for a better tomorrow. That helps also bring the CSR brick to the system. If everybody here is happy, it's going to be fine.

But it's a struggle. Let me tell you it's a struggle.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports