

Mizuho Americas Open

Tuesday, May 14, 2024

Jersey City, New Jersey, USA

Liberty National Golf Club

Paul Fireman

Dan Fireman

Stephen Hamblin

Greg McLaughlin

Press Conference



overall greater New Jersey and New York community.

The Firemans have contributed nearly \$20 million over a ten-year period, and that contribution has reached 500,000 young people in this overall area.

Extraordinary. (Applause.)

I looked at the number. I said how many kids in the ten-year period have been reached? 500,000, which, again, it's extraordinary.

In recognition that significant contribution, I'm here today to announce that Paul Fireman will receive the First Tee Lifetime Achievement Award, which will be presented to Paul at our annual meeting in November where 1000 of the First Tee gather together.

In our 25 year history of the First Tee, it's only been given to one other person, so it's my privilege and honor to be here.

Paul, thank you for your contribution.

(Applause.)

PAUL FIREMAN: Thank you, Greg. It's quite an honor to receive this award from an incredible organization, First Tee. I can't imagine anything better in the world. Or maybe AJGA is coming.

However, I would say the only thing -- I can tell you when you receive a lifetime achievement award, which is quite honorable, it also means you're quite old. I'll take that with a grain of salt.

I'm very thankful and appreciate everything. You guys are doing incredible work and changing people's lives, which is the most important thing. Thank you.

(Applause.)

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Paul. You've been a massive supporter of junior golf over the golf course of your career. Why has this been so important to you? Can you share a few words about what this recognition means

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon everyone, welcome and thank you for joining us today here at the Liberty National Golf Club as we get ready for the Mizuho Americas Open. We have a very special presentation today to celebrate a momentous occasion. It is my honor to welcome four special guests to the stage.

In front of me from right to left I have Greg McLaughlin, president of the First Tee; Paul Fireman, founder the Liberty National Golf Club; Dan Fireman, executive chairman of Liberty National Golf Club; and Stephen Hamblin, executive director of the AJGA.

We are thrilled to have you all with us today as we celebrate remarkable achievements and contributions within the golf community.

With that, I would like to introduce Greg first, who will be presenting Paul Fireman with a special award.

GREG McLAUGHLIN: Thank you very much. It's my privilege to be back here at Liberty National, which is a wonderful place that has hosted great championships over the years, including obviously this week, the Mizuho.

So this area of the United States has been a great, great foothold for the First Tee. We have five chapters, several of my colleagues and CEOs are with us today. We have First Tee chapters at Jersey Shore, Trenton, Newark, Raritan Valley, as well as Met New York.

None of the success that we've had through these five chapters in this marketplace really wouldn't be possible without the Paul & Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation.

Dan Fireman sits on my board, so it's the entire Fireman Family that have really helped lift the First Tee in this



to you?

PAUL FIREMAN: Well, junior golf -- when I grew up there was no such thing as junior golf. At least I didn't know it. I lived in a city that was pretty blue dollar. We had a couple golf courses, one public and one private, and I used to caddie at the private golf course mostly. It was just wonderful. It was an experience I never forgot.

Out it taught me how to be a human being, how to be a man, how to grow into being somebody worthwhile. The members were incredible. They shared and let you do things. I got good at it so that made them want to pick you, which meant I got an extra -- believe it or not, in those days it was a dollar for the entire round. They give a tip. Sometimes ten cents, sometimes 25 cents. That just shows you how old I am.

I eventually caddied for a really good player who was a two-time state amateur champion in Massachusetts, Smiley "Ed" Cornell. He was a phenomenal player. He not only let me caddie for him and he paid me of course, but he picked me up once in a while and we would go to a driving range. There were no driving ranges at the course I played. They were build elsewhere, the ones where you hit the bells at the end of the tower with the ring and everything.

So he helped me learn how to play golf. Between those issues, and I just love kids to begin with, so I'll start there. I just think it's a wonderful opportunity. Anything you can do with first tee or AJGA, I think it's just incredible. I think it improves the lives of not only the golfing community, but the lives -- many of people playing even early in the tournament today are not going to end up golfers for the rest of their lives. They will be golfers, but won't be Tour golfers or AJGA qualify type, but they will go on to take golf into the communities they play. They are probably going to be doctors, lawyers, bankers, teachers, all these thing that make the life worthwhile.

Golf is just underrated in how much it's improved the lives of people, and these two gentlemen especially. Thank you both.

THE MODERATOR: Now, we aren't quite done with the flowers for the Fireman Family. Last year was the inaugural Mizuho Americas Open, and it's a groundbreaking new format that features 24 of the best junior golfers in the world teeing it up right here alongside the top LPGA players. Pleased to welcome Mr. Hamblin who has another prestigious honor to present.

STEPHEN HAMBLIN: Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate it. I'm a little biased. I have four daughters, so

my interest in women's athletics is very, very high.

Last year being a part of this event was like a Cinderella story. To see 24 young girls get the opportunity to play 72 holes inside the ropes with their heros shoulder to shoulder was just fantastic. For Rose to do what she did was just an unbelievable story. I was so glad to be a part of it.

With our organization, if you look at our mission stage it reads: The AJGA is dedicated to the overall growth and development of young men and women who aspire to earn a college golf scholarship through competitive junior golf.

And that's what these tournaments are all about, giving them that platform so they can get exposure, go to a college of their choice, get an education, and have a great life.

The event that we had here last year was so special and unique and such a team effort. When you think about the LPGA and the players embracing our players, Liberty National Golf Club, this iconic venue, to open their arms to the junior golfers, for the Fireman Family to support this, just Excel, Kayla, Kevin, AJGA staff being here, it was just a phenomenal experience.

There is nothing like it in the world. It's very special, very unique. We're going to give the Fireman Family the Invitational Award of the year for all the uniqueness that you give these girls and for giving them an opportunity to showcase their skills. Thank you so much, Paul and Dan.

PAUL FIREMAN: Thank you. (Applause.)

THE MODERATOR: Paul and Dan, as we're coming up here in a few years on the 20th anniversary of Liberty National Golf Club, you guys have hosted some of the biggest events in golf, including this one of course. Can you talk about what it means to win this award for the Mizuho Americas Open and the importance of including juniors in this event?

DAN FIREMAN: Sure. Well, it's been a journey over the 20 years building this brand and this golf course. We've hosted PGA TOUR events, men's events, amateur events; we've hosted junior events.

I think all of it means something to us in terms of how we want it project what Liberty is. As we all recognize, it's a very special location, and we honor it by having juniors, women, men, amateurs play here, because most people don't get the opportunity to play here.

The only opportunity they get to see it is on TV or through social media, so we want to celebrate what we built here.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

We want to share it with the world. We also want to share it with our membership. We have a very distinguished membership of individuals and corporations that truly love the game of golf.

We honor it by having these events, by sharing it with juniors, and as a result of these wonderful events like we had last year and we're about to have, it just fills the memories and all the things we want celebrate over the years.

So we see the future many more of these events. We want to not just be with one organization but partner with a lot of different organizations in golf.

Because at the end of the day, we didn't build this just to have another golf course. We built it to make a difference, to mean something long-term for the game. We think we're growing the game through philanthropy, through hosting and partnering with all these different organizations and not being siloed into one or another.

That's what we're committed to.

THE MODERATOR: Amazing. Paul, anything you would like to add?

PAUL FIREMAN: I would like to add one thing. When I first opened the course people asked me, well, what age do you have to be to play on the golf course? When can the -- can kids come on board? I don't want them around when we're teeing off, all that gobbley gook I've heard all my life.

I said no, kids have a priority here. Kids are going to come and they're going to be able to learn how to play golf and also learn how to have manners and respect for the game and respect for others.

You can come out here any Sunday, sometimes during the week in the afternoon after school, and you will find young kids in clinics learning the game by professionals. It's not just stick a club and say, go ahead, do your best.

They're allowed to play the golf course. Clearly has to be a maneuvering of which times they can go on, but they come out here and play. They're respected for themselves. They're not respected just because we're adults and we'll tell them what to do.

I love kids and young golfers, and we're going to encourage that for the rest of my life and Dan's and onward.

Okay, that's good. I like that.

THE MODERATOR: Fabulous. Congratulations to you all. Are there any questions from the group here?

PAUL FIREMAN: Let me just ask -- say something. First of all, I don't think it came out here. We want to thank Michelle Wie. She's phenomenal. Without her this wouldn't make sense.

(Applause.)

All of the people that work so hard to build this course into a credible place to play a tournament, as well as -- is Tom Kite here in the room? Where are you, Tom? Stand up, Tom.

(Applause.)

Tom and his partner at the time, Bob -- they built the course. I never saw two people work so hard to go forward and backwards, build platforms. This was all 50 feet below here. They brought in all this -- did they bring in close to six million cubic feet of earth. It's incredible.

Tom, every year he came here, and he came here last year and he's here today, we're talking about a multiple -- a U.S. Open winner, one of the top -- a Hall of Famer. He's one of the great players in the world, and now he's one of the great architects.

Unfortunately his partner at the time is no longer with us, but he was a wonderful man, too, Bob. So I want to thank them in front of everybody. So thank you.

(Applause.)

Q. Paul and Dan, you just talked about the affiliation with the AJGA and how that's helped grow the game, especially with our mission and also Liberty National's mission. From last year and a little bit of this year, have you seen anything that's impressed you from the AJGA juniors?

PAUL FIREMAN: Have you been outside and watched them? (Laughter.) I didn't know which ones you are pros and which ones were the juniors. It was unbelievable. I've been watching different holes they're playing. Incredible. And they are wonderful kids, wonderful people.

So I'm highly impressed. I don't know about Dan, but they're phenomenal.

DAN FIREMAN: Well, we have Yana back, which is exciting. So past champion's playing again. There is a few that are coming back. There is also some new players I

am looking forward to seeing.

But it's going to be a great event. They're going to have a great time.

Q. Not so much of a question but a comment. Back here with my colleagues from the First Tee, the local chapter. We would extend our gratitude for what the Fireman Family has done for us over the past ten years or so, the commitment that you've done. And our kids have had the opportunity of playing up here as well.

The only other comment I would like to make is the combination of two organizations. We have a young lady who been in our program since the age of six, and she's playing in this event Megan Meng.

So she will be playing in this event. She grew up in the First Tee family out of Greater Trenton and she's had a tremendous experience. Just had our fundraiser last week and she was able to talk about her experience with the First Tee. She's going to be matriculating to Northwestern University in the fall as a result of her academic achievement as well as what she's been able to do on the golf course.

So we can extend our congratulations to the organizations that are up there.

PAUL FIREMAN: Thank you. Good testament.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. I would like to extend another congratulations to the Fireman Family. Anything I missed here? Thank you for coming out.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports