

PGA Championship

Tuesday, May 16, 2023

Rochester, New York, USA

Oak Hill Country Club

John Lindert, PGA

Seth Waugh

Kerry Haigh

Press Conference



weeks ago at Twin Warriors in New Mexico.

We've got one New Yorker, Chris Sanger from Red Hook, New York.

So really excited to see how they perform. Usually we get a few of them to make the cut, and I think we've got some quality, quality players they are this week.

THE MODERATOR: Seth, can you tell us about a very special investment the PGA of America is making right here in the Rochester community?

SETH WAUGH: First of all, thanks everybody for coming. Appreciate your support not only this week, but all year.

Yeah, a couple years ago we decided we really wanted to leave a legacy everywhere we go. We kind of come in and have a great party and then we leave, and we thought we should leave something to the community to thank them for being so gracious and hospitable to us.

We use our Place to Play -- pillar on our foundation called A Place to Play, which is the idea of restoring public golf in municipal form or other ways.

If we create all these new golfers and there's no place to play, we've sort of defeated the purpose.

We worked with a local community to come up with something, and in this case we're going to make a \$250,000 donation to the Genesee Valley Golf Course. We're going to build a practice facility there, short game facility. It'll be welcoming and inviting to all, and then will serve all our programming through there.

We want to thank western New York and Tori Schiro, who's our executive director; Tim Fries is our district director in western New York; Kennie Sims, who runs our foundation; and Adam Bellow, who's the county executor, for all their help in getting this done. We're excited to do that.

Look, we are all about growing the game everywhere we go, and every day if we can make 28,000 lives better, we can make millions of lives better through the game.

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone, and thank you very much for being with us this week for the 2023 PGA Championship before the strongest field in golf tees off Thursday morning at 7:00 a.m. we want to make sure you have some quality time with the PGA of America president John Lindert, Seth Waugh, and PGA of America's chief championships officer, Kerry Haigh.

John, let's kick things off with you. The PGA of America has a long, proud history with Oak Hill and this area, doesn't it.

JOHN LINDERT: Yeah, it does. This is the fourth PGA Championship we've hosted here. The last time I was on property was in 2019 for the KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship so I haven't been able to see the redo, but drove out yesterday afternoon, saw a little bit of the golf course.

It looks absolutely fantastic. The club has always been really supportive. We've got a couple of people that we'd like to thank, Jason Ballard, who's the PGA professional here, and Chad Ellis, who's the GM here. They've been really instrumental in helping us succeed with our PGA Championship.

THE MODERATOR: John, as usual, the PGA Championship, one of the strongest fields in golf, but uniquely our own with a fine twist.

JOHN LINDERT: Yeah, every year we have 20 PGA professionals that qualify for this. This is the first year we have the Corebridge Financial PGA team. 11 of those individuals are playing for the very first time.

When I played it was an event I always tried to qualify for, and unfortunately I was never quite good enough to make it here. But we've got 20 really good PGA professionals here this week, led by Braden Shattuck who won a few



If you think about where the game is right now, it's never been in better shape. It continues to grow. We thought we'd see a downturn post-COVID. It's really leveled off. It's over 41 million players now. That's on course and off course. The off course and how -- you know, so many ways to consume the game now that's terrific.

And the way that it's growing is really terrific, as well, which is every cohort, whether that's juniors, first-timers, avids, are growing, and the two fastest growing cohorts are women are girls.

We're up to about now -- the new juniors is almost 40 percent girls that are playing, which is really exciting, and it's almost 30 percent kids of color. So it's growing not only in an absolute way, but it's growing in all the interesting ways we hoped it would.

I think for the first time we can really think that golf is cool, as opposed to just interesting, if you will.

I'll give you one last stat before I give up the mic, and that is that if you can think about what percentage of golfers today are under the age of 35, and the number is 48 percent, I would reckon to say that it was 75 percent over 50 not so long ago.

When we think about where the growth is coming from, that's the most exciting stat that I've seen in a long time about the growth of the game.

THE MODERATOR: Kerry Haigh, you are back here at Oak Hill for your third PGA Championship but first one in May. Let's not mention the two Senior PGAs and the Ryder Cup that you had in your back pocket, as well.

Can you tell us a little bit about what the course is looking like this week and maybe what you think the players are expecting?

KERRY HAIGH: Sure, thanks, Julius, and good morning. Yeah, it's wonderful to return to Oak Hill, a treasure of a golf course, and the work that Andrew Green, who I think one or two of the players have spoken about, the redesign, the transformation of the course is -- I personally really think the world of.

I think it's provided a lot more variety for the golf course, more hole locations, deeper, tougher bunkering, new tees, rollofs around the greens, and less trees. That combination has certainly made it a visually spectacular golf course. Not that it wasn't before, but it's a great golf course.

Then tie that together with one of the best superintendents in the country, Jeff Corcoran and his entire team, as you can see what he has presented is unbelievable. The playing surfaces I think are second to none, putting greens are beautiful, the rough is consistent, and the fairways are magnificent, and the bunkers are great.

All that couldn't have happened without the club and the membership, the board, the executive committee, and the members of Oak Hill, who have not played the east golf course this year. The six weeks of spring that they've had, they haven't played a round of golf.

Those factors produce what we see out there as a truly great golf course, and I can't wait for the best players in the world to show how great it is and how good they are.

THE MODERATOR: I noticed you have a TV or two in your trailer. Is one of them tuned into the weather channel, and do you have any thoughts about what we're expecting this week?

KERRY HAIGH: Well, May in Rochester, May wherever the championship is appears as though it will bring some more variety to the weather than we're used to having when we played in August.

There is the possibility of a frost again on Thursday morning. We had a frost Tuesday morning. We had a couple of frosts last week. That may delay the start. Hopefully it won't. But if it does, we'll adapt.

The wind right now, we've got different direction winds, northeast I think day one and warming up, chance of rain on Saturday and hopefully clear on Sunday. That's sort of the fun of golf. It's an outdoor game, and we can't wait to see what Mother Nature brings, as well.

Q. Kerry, about the banks leading down to the rollofs, what went into the decision to leave that as like a first/intermediate cut of rough as opposed to shaving it down or just leaving it as rough?

KERRY HAIGH: You're referring to hole 15?

Q. 15 and 14, yeah.

KERRY HAIGH: That was the architect's design. We did not get involved with Andrew's design of it, but certainly supportive of it. Certainly it's a pretty steep slope. I think growing bentgrass on that slope would be pretty tough at the height down at the bottom there.

But no, it's fun. It adds a different dimension to how you play your approach there.

Q. For whoever would like to take it, you've had some time now to review the proposed model local rule on distance. Do you have a thought on whether the PGA Championship would adopt it as proposed?

KERRY HAIGH: As we know, the model local rule that's been proposed, it's a notice period right now, and we and others can make comments about it, so I think it's too early to speculate what we would do in that it wouldn't even come into effect until 2026.

We're not rushing to make a decision until we know what actually is going to take place.

Q. The comment period is up in August. Will you be making a comment?

KERRY HAIGH: We're encouraging anyone. I think the USGA and the R&A are encouraging everyone to make comments. Yes.

SETH WAUGH: We've commented all along, and we will continue to comment. I would just say it's not an us-against-them sort of thing. This is very interactive, and the ruling bodies have been great about reaching out and having conversations and listening.

We're glad they've left the recreational game alone because we think now is not a time to make it harder or less fun for -- while we're finally growing in a way that we want to grow.

We're struggling with bifurcation case, like a lot of folks are, in the sense we think that's an integral part of the game that we can all test ourselves against others.

And frankly, where does it stop and start? Policing another 28,000 -- would be in the position of kind of being the policemen on that, and we struggle with that a little bit, as well.

Again, it will be, I think, very interactive, and we're always going to work with our partners in the game and figure out what's in the best interest of the game. That's how we think about it.

We do this once a week, but every day we're out there trying to make the game better, and therefore we always are -- our true north is always going to be what's in the best interest of the overall game, and that's where we come from.

Q. Kerry, how much are you able to borrow from the setups of the past here, or do you approach it as

almost a brand-new golf course?

KERRY HAIGH: Yeah, I think every time we go to a championship, we try and look at it with fresh eyes and see how we can better challenge and test the best players in the world, and certainly the redesign has allowed for a lot more thought in that process.

Things I said, more rollofs, more hole locations, more tee options, all of which will hopefully make it more interesting, not only for the players, the spectators and everyone.

Q. For all three, what are your hopes for the Corebridge game that comes here? It's a high test to come here and play against the world's best on such a tough test. What your hopes for their experiences this week?

JOHN LINDERT: Well, I'll answer it as someone who really wanted to be here. We hope they perform at their top level. At Bethpage in 2019 we had three players make the cut, which was fantastic. We hope every year one of our players stands out.

We've had a couple of them that have had pretty decent success. Ben Kern played beautifully at Bellerive. No reason he can't do the same here. There are some players in that field that definitely have the game to succeed, and we hope they definitely do.

SETH WAUGH: I don't think they're here just to be here. It's great to be here, but now once they're here, they want to play. As John said, they're quality players. Bob Sowards in our senior a couple years ago top 5'ed it, and at Kiawah we had a bunch of folks that were semi in the mix at one point.

So they're amazing folks that work for a living and play for a living, and they're here to compete. Again, I hope they have a great showing.

But as John says, it's an accomplishment to get here, but they're not thinking that way. They're ready.

Q. Seth, being on the governing board of the OWGR is usually a musty, ceremonial position, and now you hold the future of professional golf in your hands. Are you enjoying this responsibility or is it a little too much pressure?

SETH WAUGH: I'm just one board member, and I've lived through 9/11 and a financial crisis or two. No, I think we can handle it.

Q. You had some critical things to say about LIV

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

recently, but isn't your role to be sort of an independent neutral arbiter here?

SETH WAUGH: Yeah, and I appreciate you asking, because I think there's been more play which has kind of gotten out of context.

What we're about this week is having it be the greatest field in golf. We said that's what we wanted to do, and that's what we've done. Everybody who's here this week is our invited guest, and we're happy to have them and we're going to treat them all the same.

A lot of these folks are people that I've known for a long time that are friends that I still talk to, so none of it is about that. It's about being -- as I said before, having the true north of what's in the best interest of the game.

I've been very consistent and reflecting ours, which we don't think division is in the best interest of the game. And then when asked what do I think, as a former businessman who looks at things, I think disruption is a good thing. I think good things have happened from that.

Certainly the players are better off in a lot of ways from what it was. I think having more the fans deal with -- get to see more of the great players together more often is a good thing. I think there's more interest in the game frankly as a result of all this disruption.

But when asked, I struggle and I have since the beginning, even before the beginning, with understanding how it's a sustainable business model.

When asked, I tend to try to say what I believe. That's not being a neutral body. I think being a neutral body is always acting in the best interest of the game, and that's what we'll always do and that's what I'll always do.

Q. As a board member, it seems like you guys are really committed to this timeline for review, but the 12 months is often because these are developmental circuits that might not be able to sustain itself. Clearly LIV has resources to keep going, so why is the OWGR being so strident --

SETH WAUGH: That's a total mischaracterization. What I've said and what I'll say now is there has been healthy back and forth. It has not been acrimonious. There's been collegial back and forth of them making an application as other tours have done. We've responded; they've responded.

The ball, from my understanding, is in their court from our last response at this point.

But it's a natural process. There is no magic to 12 months. It's just sort of most of these -- all of these, I think, certainly since I've been around, have taken more time than I think was assumed early on.

That's where it is. It is not a -- this is not an us versus them. I think the OWGR, if you take a step back, the whole point is to create a level playing field, a yardstick by which to measure the game. Our job is to measure tours. Not players but tours and how they perform on those tours to come up with that yardstick. That's what we're all attempting to try to do.

We've been, I think, very responsive to them in terms of their requests, and they've been responsive to us. It isn't some battle.

Q. Question for Kerry. We saw a sign that may indicate there's some kind of internal OB situation on 6 and 7. I'm not quite clear on what that means. Is it something you could explain?

KERRY HAIGH: Yeah. In playing the 6th hole, the fairway on hole 7 is out of bounds. That is the same rule we played at the KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship. With the redesign, the trees that were no longer there, sort of if you go down that way, take the water out of play, which is the architectural design of the 6th hole.

Q. Is the idea pace of play or just this is how the course is supposed to be playing? What's the logic behind it?

KERRY HAIGH: A little bit of both. And safety.

Q. Seth, this is primarily a question for you, but John and Kerry, please chime in if you want. This championship was always the one when the schedule was changed to May that was the most on the fence. Now that we've seen how the plan has gone through and how successful this has been so far, can you assess how well it's gone, and how has that changed maybe your opinion on how likely it is to have a championship in the northeast at a club like this going forward in May?

SETH WAUGH: Well, I'll answer your last question first, which is how are we looking out there right now. The course is perfect. As Kerry said, look, it's an outdoor sport, and we're obviously going to go back after this championship -- we haven't hit a ball yet, so we'll see how it all plays out and then come back and think about it for ourselves and see what the club wants to do and other clubs.

But to go back to your original question, we think we've added more courses than we've taken away by moving to May. We think it's better for the kind of ecosystem of the game to have the majors lined up in the way that they do. We think it's better for us in that, again, we have 28,000 out there every day growing the game, and a lot of them this is the beginning of their season.

So our Team of 20 -- but what you'll see over the course of the weekend is talking about growing the game. That's really what we do. This is one week of the year to have our platform and talk about all the amazing things, how we're saving lives with PGA Hope and changing lives through other reach things that we do and programs that every one of our folks is doing.

We think it's been wildly successful from our perspective and also the game's perspective. We always respect our partners in this, as well. The TOUR now ends at Labor Day, and that was certainly something that they wanted to do. The Olympics, which can interrupt, we think this is better relative to that, as well.

Not to use another sport analogy, but it's been kind of a home run in terms of for us. Again, it looks pretty good out there right now.

Q. Kerry, can you talk about the criteria and process of the exemptions you gave this year, and will it be the same criteria and process going forward?

KERRY HAIGH: So the question was the criteria for entries into this year's PGA Championship?

Q. Well, obviously you gave people like Dustin Johnson, Paul Casey exemptions. Just trying to understand what criteria you use and how the process works, and will it be the same criteria and process in the following years?

KERRY HAIGH: Yeah, the criteria for the PGA Championship has been pretty much the same for 30 years. We added the Olympic winner. This year we added the federation rankings, the top three players from that.

I don't envision any change to the categories that are currently there.

We also have the opportunity to invite other players who are not in those exempt categories, which for 30 years we have done, as far back as Ernie Els when he was first playing. I remember inviting him as a very young professional.

That's what that category is for, is to invite upcoming players, great players who are playing on other tours.

Yeah, no real change.

Q. Is that process a process that goes just you, or is it a committee kind of review process?

KERRY HAIGH: The process, we have a committee that meet and review the invitations. I do most of the homework and the background about the categories and the players to be considered, but we have a committee that review and then ultimately approve.

Q. Kerry and Seth, I was curious about what prompted you, a spot for Paul Casey; Louis Oosthuizen, who's got a pretty decent record here, as well, did not get an invite. I don't know how far they're separated in the World Ranking. How you went through that process, the committee did. Secondly, assuming that LIV might get ranking points let's say in July if a decision is made then, at that point they're going to be pretty far down the pecking order. Going forward, if somebody outside the top 100, how would you consider players from LIV for this field?

KERRY HAIGH: Yeah, two questions there, but I guess one at a time. The process for inviting players who are playing well enough and good enough we will consider no matter what tours they're playing on, just as we do this year.

Some LIV players were invited this year, some Japanese Tour, Australian Tour. Yeah, we look at all tours, all rankings, and all players' abilities.

Paul Casey, great player. He's certainly had some injuries. Played on the Ryder Cup last played, and has played well in PGA Championships. Again, we review all those criteria for a number of players, and he was one of a number that were selected.

Q. Following up on the question about northeastern venues, do you guys view this tournament, Aronimink in 2026, Baltusrol in '29, do you view those tournaments as kind of tests to see how a northeastern PGA is going to work in May and for the future?

KERRY HAIGH: Based on what we've had the last -- we've already had three, I think, in the cooler climates. Yes, we have to change our agronomy plans with the host superintendent and the club, and in this case adjust our building plan for the hospitality because of the snow or likelihood of snow during the winter.

So far we've been delighted. The golf course conditioning has been probably better in May than August, dealing with the stress, the heat, and although it becomes sort of a tight window right before the third week in May, we are delighted with what we've seen at all of those venues.

Q. Seth, I thought you were walking back some of your comments in the beginning, and then I thought you reiterated some of those other comments. Could you clarify what exactly was out of context, what was said about LIV that was out of context?

SETH WAUGH: I think some of the -- if you look at the whole article, if you will, it was, look, I am proud of Masters because they returned civility to the game. That's how they dealt with it. That's how we want to deal with it.

Again, everybody is our invited guest.

That's consistent, and I'll say that today, and I'll greet the players when I see them for sure. They're all invited to our dinner tonight, past champions. We're treating them in the way that we would treat everybody else. That's number one.

Number two is, again, when asked about what do you think about the viability of it, I'm going to be honest in the same way that I was at Kiawah three years ago to say, I'm not sure that it's a superior product and I'm not sure that it's a sustainable business model because nothing has changed my mind about either of those things.

When asked, I'm giving an opinion about what it is. I'm just one opinion. I don't have any authority here.

As I said, we assembled the best field in golf. We're happy to have them all here. I think we were fair and balanced about how we did all that, and let's have a great week, so the best week ever.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Look forward to being with you the rest of the week.

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