

Travelers Championship

Monday, April 29, 2024

TPC River Highlands

Cromwell, Connecticut, USA

Andy Bessette

Nathan Grube

Chris Berman

Keegan Bradley

Press Conference



COURTNEY NOGAS: Welcome, everyone. I'm Courtney Nogas. I head up media relations for Travelers, and thank you for joining us, and welcome to TPC River Highlands, home of the 2024 Travelers Championship. We have a great day in store for you. In a few minutes I'll be joined by Andy Bessette and Nathan Grube to discuss the Travelers Championship from the perspective of the title sponsor and the tournament staff.

Then we'll have our reigning champion Keegan Bradley join us and discuss last year's win with our friend Chris Berman.

Please get your questions ready because you'll have a chance to ask them to Andy, Nathan and Keegan. We have microphones set up on both sides of the room. We're looking forward to the conversation today, and I know many of you are looking forward to getting out on the golf course. Let's get started.

Would you please welcome Andy Bessette, the executive vice president and chief administrative officer at Travelers, and tournament director Nathan Grube.

[Applause.]

Here we go. 2024 Travelers Championship, Signature Event. Andy, the tournament was a Designated Event last year and this year a Signature Event. What motivated Travelers to secure the status with the PGA TOUR?

ANDY BESSETTE: You know, Courtney, believe it or not, it starts back in 2005 and 2006 when I started negotiating the deal to put this tournament together. How many of you remember that this tournament was dead, buried, gone, not a part of anything on the PGA TOUR? It was dead. It was gone.

I've heard some stories that say, well, they were thinking about -- no, it was dead. It was gone. We negotiated to -- when 84 Lumber went out of the PGA TOUR title sponsor business, we jumped in and seized the week right after the U.S. Open, and it's been history ever since.

We started back in '06. We saved the tournament, brought it back. Since then, Nathan and I have worked really hard with our teams, and we really do have world-class teams running this thing and building it.

Since then, we've always wanted to be world-class. Right from the first day. I said to Tim Finchem, who was the commissioner back then, we wanted to be one of the top events on the PGA TOUR, and when Jay Monahan took over, I actually took Jay -- I'm not sure he was commissioner yet. I had him come up here and look at the old clubhouse if you remember what that looked like, and I said, this is acceptable. This isn't world-class. This is like somebody's house, and he agreed.

A year or two later we started construction on this beautiful new clubhouse. That's the history of it.

Now to be a Signature Event with 70 to 80 of the top players in the world and no cut for four days, this is what we wanted to be. We're one of the top four events, I believe, on the PGA TOUR, and we're going to keep growing. We're not stopping here. We're not done yet. We're going to keep going.

COURTNEY NOGAS: Nathan, with a Signature Event status comes a new look. What are some of the things that fans will notice this year at the tournament and what are you most excited for?

NATHAN GRUBE: Our team has heard me say this a lot. What I'm most excited for is I love seeing the pride on people's faces when they walk on property. The fans and the corporate partners go, yes, we are proud to bring guests here to entertain them. We are proud to say that this is what we can do with a professional sports franchise basically.



But I think to Andy's point, we always try to get better. Somebody asked us the other day, they said -- I forget what the context of the question was, but they said, oh, did you guys think you were going to be a Signature Event one day, and we kind of joked, like, we have talked about being everything. We have talked about what it would mean to host a Presidents Cup here. We've talked about what it would mean to be a playoff event. Back when there was World Golf Championships, we said, how do we become a World Golf Championship event.

I feel like everything was always on the table, like how do we get there, and when this opportunity came up and Travelers jumped at it, we want to be the best Signature Event of all of them that are out there. We've gone to all the other Signature Events so far. We've looked at what they've done, how they treat the players, the caddies, the media, the fans, and we've said, okay, we are going to raise the bar in every single one of those places.

The media, you will notice a difference when you come on property this year. Caddies will notice a drastic difference. Players will notice a difference. Our fans, they will notice a difference walking on property, from the viewing experience to where we're building facilities to the work that was done to the property to kind of open up new sight lines.

Every single one of our constituents, the volunteers, they're going to notice immediate differences right away, too. We take that word very, very seriously. It's not just, oh, hey, you're Signature. No we want to earn that, and we want to be the best one on TOUR.

I think we're on a path over the next 48 days to get there, to deliver that.

COURTNEY NOGAS: You mentioned some course improvements. There were some comments made about the golf course last year, after last year's tournament, and I know you guys worked closely with the PGA TOUR since then on making adjustments to TPC River Highlands. Andy, any updates or details you want to provide?

ANDY BESSETTE: I think the comments that Rory made last year got blown out of proportion really because Nathan and I for 17 years have gone to every player, every caddie, every wife, might have even gone to the kids and say, how can we make this better. More Cheerios? Okay, great, more Cheerios. We go to everybody every year and ask how we can make it a better experience and a better tournament, and that's how we got to where we are today.

It wasn't just Rory with last year's comments. We got comments from a dozen players about hey, maybe this,

maybe that, because we ask for it and we get it.

I think the beauty of this is we have such a great partnership with the PGA TOUR, and the PGA TOUR is comprised of I think the best professionals in golf, and the rules officials work with us, Gary Young and his team, phenomenal people. The course designers and the course design team, they all descended on this place last year, but they've descended on this place almost every year that we've been doing this, and they come up with stuff, and Nathan can tell you about the things that they've improved on this course over the last decade.

I just wanted to make sure it was clear that what we did this past year -- actually shouldn't say we. I should say the PGA TOUR did. This is their club. But maybe tell them, Nathan, a little bit about what was done.

NATHAN GRUBE: First of all, Gary Young is here. He's the chief referee with the PGA TOUR. He's a New England guy. He's in charge of all competitions for the PGA TOUR, and they do an evaluation of the property every year: How did it play, how did it compete, what did the guys think, things like that. To Andy's point, there has been a narrative with this facility for the last dozen years, new bunker renovation project, new tee box up on 17, new practice facility, new clubhouse, new irrigation work. There has been a step made every few years to improve the competitive nature of the facility.

So when last year obviously Rory made his comments, it kind of put a spotlight on it, and Andy and I kind of took a step back and went, but this is what happens every year. Like things get evaluated, things get looked at, and to the TOUR's credit, and Andy was part of this project, they walked the golf course in the fall a couple months after the event and looked at everything like they always do. Hey, what about this, what about this, what if we did this. They looked at the shot data. They looked at how the course played. They looked at how the rough grew in that spring; was it thick enough, was it not. How dry were the greens? Do we need to make tweaks here? So the competitive enhancements that were done to the golf course this year are part of that narrative of how do we make sure River Highlands is competitively where it needs to be.

I don't think the fans are -- my guess is I'm not sure they're going to notice at all, but I guarantee the players are going to go, it used to be 138 to get there, now it's 147; okay, now I've got to think through that. Now the tee box is here; it moved over five yards; now I've got to hit a different shot into that.

Honestly, that is what the players have said. When we went over the changes with the players, they're like, we like

that. As competitors, we want to think our way around the golf course, and these are things that are making us think our way around the golf course.

Before they stuck a shovel in the ground or did anything, they had signoff that these were the right moves, but we wouldn't have been able to get there without Gary and the team here at River Highlands and how accommodating they are. But this is a narrative that's been happening over 10, 15 years, some of the tweaks that were made.

I'm excited to see what the guys think about it.

COURTNEY NOGAS: Will the media notice today?

NATHAN GRUBE: How am I supposed to answer that? Definitely, because the quality of play here is just like the TOUR players, and they will notice. They will be standing on the 9th hole going I used to be able to carry that 320 --

COURTNEY NOGAS: Lots of birdies today?

NATHAN GRUBE: Thanks for setting me up for that one.

ANDY BESSETTE: You don't have to carry anything with a 200-yard drive. That's what I play.

COURTNEY NOGAS: We've mentioned this in the past a number of times, which we're super excited about, the Travelers Championship is the only PGA TOUR event in New England. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the tournament and have never been, why should they put it on their calendar? Why should they make the drive from the other states to come here?

ANDY BESSETTE: I think the player field. The player field if nothing else and the fact that they're going to get treated -- everybody is treated very, very special here, all the fans are, and Nathan can expand on this, too, but we have four or five venues that are no charge where fans can go up and feel just like they're in a club and have a very special experience and/or you can just walk around and sit in the beautiful grass with your family and have a little lunch and walk around some more.

The fact that this is New England's event, this is the northeast event, it's a PGA TOUR event, and we are bringing this year the best 70 to 80 players who qualify for this event. That's important because there are different rules around a Signature Event, but we're bringing the best 70 to 80 players in the world here to New England to be a part of this thing, and if you don't want to drive further or fly further, my gosh, you can come here and see everybody.

We have all kinds of events during the week, too. We have

Women's Day on Thursday, but we have the Charles Sifford outing on Tuesday over at Wethersfield, and Charlie Sifford if you don't know was our champion in 1967. Nathan wasn't born yet. I was.

NATHAN GRUBE: Really close.

ANDY BESSETTE: But the Charles Sifford event is very special to us. It means so much on TOUR. Charlie Jr, his son, and I have really befriended each other over the last couple years, and he's just a great guy, and his dad tried -- it was hard for him as an African-American player back then. Are you kidding? It was tough. Think about it, in the '60s. You think about the world and everything, and for him to accomplish what he accomplished I think was beyond world class.

That's why this will be our third annual Charles Sifford outing, and we're really proud of that. We're excited. It's going to sell out like it usually does, and we'll contribute another \$100,000 to the Charles Sifford Foundation, which helps kids who are going to Historically Black Universities and Colleges -- I always forget the acronym - shame on me - but the kids that are going into golf programs at the schools that have golf programs. So important. So, so important.

We're so proud -- I get excited just talking about it. Between the Charles Sifford event on Tuesday, the celebrity pro-am on Wednesday -- where's Matthew Bordonaro? Where are you? Just to be clear, Patrick Renna -- this morning when I was talking to Meredith Gorman, I said "Renner," but he didn't understand that. I'm a Boston guy and in Boston we don't put R's where they belong and we put them where they don't belong. So I called him Patrick "Renner." Who else is from Boston here? Us Boston guys do that, we say "Renner."

Anyways, so I just had to make sure. Sorry, Matt, but I wanted to make sure it was clear. So Patrick Renna is going to be playing -- he was "Sandlot," right, the chubby boy with the curly hair, and he's like 40 something now.

NATHAN GRUBE: Don't pick on 40 somethings. We're still young.

ANDY BESSETTE: I passed that a long time ago.

NATHAN GRUBE: But I think Andy, to your point, I think the pros, I think what people can see, Courtney, to your question, we were down at THE PLAYERS Championship, and it hit me that week in March when basically half the field at THE PLAYERS weren't eligible for our event, and we're walking around, yeah, hey, yeah, I'm hoping I get in. I'm hoping I get in.



Just having a Signature Event and how the players look at Signature Events is I think something that -- just the status of how they perceive this golf course, the title sponsor, the event. You can see it on the players' faces. There is something that has been created that they are aspiring to get to, and you can see it on their faces. Peter Malnati was awesome. When he wins, he's like, I am so excited I'm now in Travelers. Like these guys think about these Signature Events now.

COURTNEY NOGAS: That's great. Andy, you've made a point saying how meaningful the tournament's charitable efforts are because it aligns with Travelers, our approach to corporate giving. Why is that such a high priority every year for Travelers and the Travelers Championship and this community?

ANDY BESSETTE: Well, Travelers is a company -- I've said this before, as a company we give over \$24 million a year to different nonprofits and charitable organizations, and it's really important. It's the ethos of who we are as a company. We care about people.

This tournament over the first 17 years that we've been together, we've raised over \$30 million for over 900 charitable organizations. That's like real stuff.

All the net proceeds -- there's no wealthy owner. I guess maybe the charities are the wealthy owners, but we have no wealthy owner walking away with hundreds of millions of dollars. We have the charities, and that's all net proceeds, all net profits. The net proceeds go to charity.

That's what turns us on. It's who Travelers is as a company, and it's who we are as a title sponsor of this event. We're lucky to have Nathan and Tara and Kevin and their entire staff to put this on because I can say all these words, but unless you have a world-class staff putting on a world-class event, it doesn't work.

Nathan, thank you, Tara, Kevin, the whole team. You guys are great, and we wouldn't trade you for anything or anybody.

NATHAN GRUBE: Did everybody write that down? You said that publicly, so I just want to make sure.

COURTNEY NOGAS: Bonus time is over. Next year we'll write it down.

I think you guys sort of alluded to this next question a little bit in the beginning, but Travelers will match the tournament record with its 18th consecutive year serving as the title sponsor. What has it meant to Travelers to be

the title sponsor of this event and has it exceeded the expectations, any expectations you had?

ANDY BESSETTE: Me, yes, but I'm only one of 30,000 plus employees. I think many of you know Jay Fishman was very involved with this from the beginning until he passed in 2016 and Alan Schnitzer has been very, very involved and engaged in this since that time.

We couldn't have two better leaders over this 17 years, 18 years of this tournament to be where we are and who we are and what this means to us. I've already talked about it.

But this is a whole company. The whole company gets into this. You should see our leadership and our women get into Women's Day. It's unbelievable. Matt and I just sit on the sidelines and say, whoa, okay, fine. We kind of steer the ship, but everybody is engaged.

When you go to Women's Day this year, you're going to see something really special. It's going to be really, really cool. It's going to be very entertaining. I'm not going to let the cat out of the bag, so to speak, yet, but it's going to be really good. I'd really encourage you to go to women's day on Thursday.

But again, it really exudes who we are and what we do and what we're about.

COURTNEY NOGAS: Are you ready for my zingers?

NATHAN GRUBE: Bring it.

COURTNEY NOGAS: Will the Travelers Championship be a Signature Event in 2025?

ANDY BESSETTE: I hope so. Yes. Our contract with the TOUR goes out to 2030 for this event. When we put that together last year, where I was negotiating it, we wanted this to be a Signature Event through that time.

But the thing to be careful is I don't know -- this is a good thing. Everything that's evolving in the world of golf as a sport is changing, and so if there are Signature Events, we're going to be one for that period of time, and it's going to be very, very special.

I just don't know how the golf world is going to change with all the things with PIF and LIV and everything else you read about, but you know what, golf is a great game, and I was saying this morning to Meredith Gorman, that what's really cool about golf is that you can go -- if you're a Boston guy, sorry -- David Ortiz, man, nothing beat going to watch David Ortiz play basketball. If you're a Yankees fan, going to watch any number -- they have a lot of superstars. It's



like going to watch them. It's like in the old days watching Babe Ruth. It's going to watch the very, very best players on a team.

But what's so unique about golf, I think, is that there's nothing like PGA TOUR golf in the world that I can think of. Maybe tennis. But where you bring all of the best players together on the same week and you've got the best players in the world with you. Think about it. You can't do that in professional sports that have teams, so to speak, because they're all on teams. This is where they come out, all the best players in the world come out to play against each other and compete against each other to prove who's the best.

I think that's part of the cool part, interesting part about being a Signature Event.

COURTNEY NOGAS: You talked a little bit about the player field and having the best players come out to the event. What about the exemptions and the college amateur standouts? We've been known to have them in the past. Can you talk about that element of the tournament and what's changed there?

NATHAN GRUBE: So it changed a little bit. So our field size is going to be between 70 and 80, and we used to have eight exemptions and now we have four exemptions. To your point, we've always earmarked a couple for some of the young guys. Who's going to be the next generation of the PGA TOUR?

This is where Andy and I haven't talked about this, so he might hit me and be like, what are you talking about. But part of me, you have to look at the reason we did that was to build relationships with the next generation of players. Who are the next top guys going to be? We want to make sure we have these relationships.

Honestly, if you look at the top 10 in the world, I think we're at -- at least half of those guys were exemptions at one point with our event, and now they're actually coming here. The relationships that we made are there.

Now, we still, though, going from eight to four, we still made a commitment to I would say investing in that next generation, and the PGA TOUR has a program called PGA TOUR University where they rank all the top college players and how they play and things like that. It's a rolling ranking.

We made a commitment to say whoever wins PGA TOUR U, we are giving them an exemption into the Travelers Championship. We kind of are still holding onto our roots. Obviously the exemption program is different, the field size

is very different, but we thought that was very, very important. We didn't have to do that, but we thought it was very important to keep a tie to the young guys, so we're talking to those young guys who are like 1, 2 and 3 right now on PGA TOUR U going, come on, grind it out, you got this, there's a spot waiting for you at our event if you win.

Still keeping those relationships there, that was important to us. Hopefully that will still keep the tie.

ANDY BESSETTE: Agreed completely.

COURTNEY NOGAS: One last question from me and then we'll open it up to the audience. What else do you want to tell us that I didn't ask? Andy, you usually like to leak something. You've been on your best behavior today.

ANDY BESSETTE: Really? No, I never do that. I really don't. I think you've asked a lot of the right questions, Courtney.

I think the most important thing to me and to Travelers is the pride that comes along with this event. When I see the word "signature" over there, I don't see that, I see pride, and I know how proud the people in Connecticut were back in 2006, '7 when we first saved the tournament and all, but it's still happening today. So the pride -- you go out and watch and stand in the front gate coming in with families, and the excitement in the little kids' faces to come in and the families I think is just second to none. It's just so cool to watch. Everybody is so excited about, whoa, where are we going. It's kind of like a carnival in some ways.

But I think that would just really emphasize that and say we're a New England event, we're a northeast event actually, and as much as -- I hope everybody in the northeast embraces this and really understands what it is that's going to be here from the 17th to the 23rd of June. It's going to be so unique and so different -- so we're giving caddies cars.

PGA TOUR players get cars every time they go to a PGA TOUR event. It's not just us; every one of them. Did I say something I shouldn't say?

NATHAN GRUBE: No, continue. I'm right behind you.

ANDY BESSETTE: He's going to kick me in a minute.

NATHAN GRUBE: No. I already did.

ANDY BESSETTE: So this year one of the special things we decided to do, Nathan said, hey, Andy, we're going to have 156 cars, because we usually have 156 players, but only 70 or 80 players. So we decided that the caddies

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deserve some recognition and some help, and we're giving them cars, too. That's pretty cool.

[Applause.]

NATHAN GRUBE: PGA TOUR caddie right there? Is that what that was?

ANDY BESSETTE: That's the kind of thing. Then for the wives we're going to convert the ladies' locker room and the lounge into a massage studio or a treatment studio, so the wives can go in during the day when they're out here with their husbands and watching them, if they get tired and they want to go sit down or whatever, so I said to Nathan today, we should give every wife a locker, too. How cool would that be? So they have a locker. Now the wives are going to feel so engrossed.

I tested it on Austin Eckroat's wife Sally. She's like, whoa, that would be so cool. So I've been testing this to just make sure we're going to get the right reaction to it. They're going to love it. Oh, my gosh, it's going to be great.

CHRIS BERMAN: Like a little wellness-type area.

ANDY BESSETTE: It is. It's a good thing. Kids we take care of anyway. We give kids tons of Cheerios and cookies and candies, but my last story is last year I wanted to make sure the kids had a great experience, and so I said to the chef, who is world class here - I don't know if he's here. World-class chef, and I said, hey, we should bring out mac and cheese, chicken fingers and tater tots. That's like good food. I want that food.

You know who the first 60 people in line were for that kids' food? The players. They have a very healthy menu that they do eat most days, but when we brought out the food, the chef was so good, and to have tater tots, mac and cheese and chicken fingers, are you kidding me? The first 60 of them, I said, don't you wanna let your kids in? No.

CHRIS BERMAN: Next year's media day menu: Chicken fingers, tater tots --

ANDY BESSETTE: Yeah, same thing.

Sorry, that's my comment. Nathan?

NATHAN GRUBE: Man, I think there is a general theme and feeling among everybody here that we don't take this for granted, from the staff to the volunteers to David, the GM here at the club. I feel like everybody feels like we have to earn this every single year, and there is no bit of -- to Andy's point, in our very, very recent past, we didn't

have this, and I think there is a healthy amount of we'd better do this better than anybody else because we kind of know like we have to earn this.

I think when we treat it like that, that we have to earn it, I think the players feel that way. We don't take them for granted. The whole entourage, the whole team, it's personal for us.

I think I just saw him walk in and Chris is going to interview him here in a second, we could not have a better champ than Keegan and how he won, how he wore it on his sleeve how he won, how he talked about it. We could not have a better ambassador for us as an event, for us as a region than having him as a champion.

It's been a phenomenal ride, and I hope he wins this the next seven years in a row. He's an amazing human, an amazing dad, and we were fortunate to have him as our champion. That's what I have to say about that.

COURTNEY NOGAS: I couldn't have said it better.

Q. I understand everything you said about tweaks being made every year, but can you describe what some of the biggest physical changes to the golf course was, and then I understand the weather has a lot to do with this, but is there a score that you guys are looking at and saying if we hit this score, everything worked the way we wanted it to?

NATHAN GRUBE: Good question. Gary, can you come to the microphone, please?

No, I would say this. It's very interesting, I'm not a rules official, nor do I play one on TV, but they have helped educate me on this to where -- how the spring affects a score. If the rough isn't coming in thick, they start to look at that. If the greens aren't drying out, they start to look at that.

I bet you they could probably say advance week, oh, here's probably a score we're going to hit because of X, Y and Z factors. There's years where I think 12-, 13-under wins this event, and the U.S. Open shot lower than here because our course will play super hard. There's other years where it's softer, whatever. I think there's so many things that go into it.

But a couple of the things that Gary and the team pointed out, I think you'll notice today, No. 6, they narrowed that up a little bit. No. 9, they moved that tee box to the right a little bit so that the guys wouldn't have the -- I would say the lure to drive over those homes. They shrunk the greens a little bit on No. 9 --

ANDY BESSETTE: Those aren't things a normal human being would care about or even be close to seeing, right? Keegan does and his buddies, but I went out and looked at them, like yeah, I don't hit my ball anywhere near where those things go.

NATHAN GRUBE: 11 green, they shrunk that a little bit for a different type of approach shot. So they put rough on -- is it 12, 13?

ANDY BESSETTE: 12.

NATHAN GRUBE: On the downslope to kind of make the guys think about where to hit it. Again, I think what I learned, and I don't want to speak for anybody, but I think what we both learned listening to PGA TOUR, the rules team and the competitions, they just want the guys to think, think their way -- and the guys like to think. They like to not just stand up there and just, ugh, whatever, I'm just going to blow it somewhere over there. They want to hit it to certain places. They want to think about their next shot. They want to think about what putt they want to hit to certain pin placements.

So to see the tweaks that they did to make the guys think more, it was fascinating. But you'll see those. You're not going to go over the houses anymore, Pat, so you'll --

ANDY BESSETTE: But I would just say, to answer your question, Pat, no. I don't anticipate any changes in scores because we've had 15-under win, we've had 22, 23 win. You look on the PGA TOUR this year, look at how many -- there have been quite a few greater than 20-unders winning. You are don't know. There's other factors. Gary would be the expert or he is the expert, but there are so many factors that come into play to determine the final score, but I'm not looking for any changes in scores.

I think what the TOUR did and all the experts that they have was to make it just a little more competitive.

COURTNEY NOGAS: Thank you to you both. Now I'd like to bring up Chris Berman for our champion's interview. You all know Chris as the longtime voice of ESPN. We know him as a close longtime friend of the Travelers Championship. As Chris makes his way up, we're going to start by playing a short highlight video from last year's Travelers Championship.

CHRIS BERMAN: Our champion, Keegan Bradley.

[Applause.]

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Thank you.

CHRIS BERMAN: That's all we had? I thought we were going to have every shot.

How are you? Welcome home.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Thank you. I was saying earlier, did a few interviews, just coming home to New England just even for a little bit is so fun. Just going to the airport and seeing the local sports. It's just so special. I just love it up here.

CHRIS BERMAN: The trophy you have and the trophy the kids have that they got on the 18th green, are they all still in good shape at your house?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: They definitely have seen some better days, but I can't tell you, in my house I have no golf stuff displayed. I have an office and I take my trophies up there, but the Travelers trophy with the kids' trophies we have right in our living room.

Just the other night, two nights ago, I caught my wife, she was staring at the trophy, and I sort of -- I looked at her, and she just said, I just can't believe that happened. It was so surreal for us that even now it seems like a dream. It's just such a special thing for me to come back here as the champion. Remarkable.

CHRIS BERMAN: Golf is always the next round, the next event, et cetera. But to your point, you thought about this as a nine-, ten-year old coming down from Vermont. So it does recur in your mind, right? Do you ever have a glow when you think of what happened here?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, everybody that comes over to my house, they want to see the Travelers trophy. They don't want to see the PGA Championship. They always say it. I bring them over and I show them the names.

I was looking out at the range right here, the old range back at my first tournament I ever game to, I waited right outside there for David Duval to come out and I watched him warm up and I watched all 18 holes. It was such a far dream. I knew this is what I wanted to do, and I had no other dreams in my life than to play on the PGA TOUR.

But being out here, it seemed really just a fantasy, and then fast forward I don't know how many years, 20, 30 years later, I'm going to be the winner here. It's literally what dreams are made of. It's really special.

CHRIS BERMAN: Last year, and I know it's 11 months ago, but you said Saturday -- okay, last group, I have it in my hands, just play your game, yet you said you didn't

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sleep well.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: I was very nervous. I slept okay, but when you're in the final group of a tournament at anything but especially a big tournament, Signature Event but then especially this tournament --

CHRIS BERMAN: Your Signature Event.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: I wake up, and as soon as you open your eyes you have electricity going through you. Just something is just different. I remember waking up and being a little bit scared of how nervous I was. It was different. This is why I always call my family my secret weapon is my two boys have no clue about -- they know I'm going to come out and do this, but they don't really care; they want to do their normal boy stuff.

I was renting a house with a basketball hoop, and my son had me out and I was shooting hoops with him playing pig and people are honking their horns, sticking their heads out, waving to me, and I remember thinking about how calming it was to -- this is like a normal morning in my life, and what I'm about to go do is the opposite of normal. And it helped a lot.

CHRIS BERMAN: Also, some of you remember these stories, but yet it's now -- we've had winter, although it was pretty mellow, but not only the basketball hoop but the Father's Day, the Sunday before this Signature Event, you've got an amazing tee time with your boys, and maybe we should all use this to improve our game is where we're going.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, so I played U.S. Open and I missed the cut, and sometimes you miss the cut and you play well and it's disappointing, and sometimes you miss the cut and you've played awful. When you do that at a major, it can really shake you. It can be a bummer. You feel like, okay, I've got to really start over here, and I played really, really terribly.

I came home, and that weekend I went and played mini golf with my two boys, and it was so great. We were in Seabrook, Mass, playing this tiny little place, and I had just come from the U.S. Open, and now I'm here with my boys playing mini golf, and it was really great. It sort of reset me. In a lot of ways missing the cut at the U.S. Open helped me play well here.

CHRIS BERMAN: The windmill can be a tough hole. Clown's mouth, it's no cake walk.

To come here, and we know what it means to you being a New Englander, but as it was alluded to before, there's no

major this year, Boston, New York, Philly, not even upstate New York. So it's not only our hometown and New England event, but this is -- you draw a circle of 500 miles, and oh, by the way, it's a Signature Event. Does it get heavier to carry that crown a little bit, or does your chest go out more knowing that around here this is it all year?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: It got heavier on the weekend for sure. What's interesting about my life is I went to school at St. John's in New York City, so I actually get such extreme support in New York, as well. So when I'm in New York, I'm from St. John's. When I'm in New England and Boston, I don't --

CHRIS BERMAN: Smart, very smart.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Hartford is normally the cutoff. Anything south of Hartford is New York fans. When I come here, I feel a lot of pressure. I really do. I think of the New England kid out here watching and looking at me and thinking, this kid knows what I'm going through. I couldn't play golf in the winters. Where I grew up, this was the south down here. You could play here in the winter. Not where I was.

I felt like that Sunday and that weekend I wanted to do that for the New England kids to watch and think like they can do this.

I remember watching Brad Faxon and Billy Andrade and those guys play and thinking like, okay, they did that, and that means I can, too.

CHRIS BERMAN: Have you met any younger ones -- well, your kids' friends, et cetera, that might even say, hey, I'm in high school or I'm in eighth grade but you showed me I could do this? Have you run into any?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, so I have a place just 30 miles north of Boston, and we go there in the summer. After I had won here, I noticed a big difference in just how the local kids said, I went and played golf for the first time because I saw you win. I can't tell you how much that means to me.

This area is everything to me. Something happened, when I had kids, I was drawn back here. I live in Florida, but as soon as I had kids, it's just like, I kept getting pulled back. I wanted to come back. I just love it up here.

CHRIS BERMAN: What broader base -- tell the folks what the players have always thought about -- the players on TOUR, about coming here. Even now that we're limited field, but before. What was special about them coming here that you heard over the years?



KEEGAN BRADLEY: So I think that the Travelers -- well, I don't think, I know. The Travelers is a model of how to run a tournament. Take a tournament that wasn't a premier event necessarily on the TOUR and turn it into what it is today, and what they did was they just did -- they made all the right decisions.

You talk about how the caddies are going to have cars this year. That doesn't affect --

CHRIS BERMAN: That's unbelievable.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: That doesn't affect the viewers watching. That's not going to help their viewers. That's not going to help their bottom line of the tournament; in fact it'll probably hurt it. But that's just a small decision that they make that affects the outcome of how we feel when we come here.

On Thursday night or Friday night right over here, they have a wiffle ball game for the players' kids, and they set up a fake Green Monster, and my kids talk about it all year long. If there was ever a time where -- let's say I'm not from New England and I'm not going to come here no matter what, but if I said to my kids, hey we're not going to Hartford this year, they'd be pissed because they don't get to play that game.

These are just small examples that the public wouldn't even know, and I was always so proud to convince players to come play here back in the day. I remember I convinced Luke Donald to come. You've got to come play Travelers, it's so fun, and after the week is done, they go, it's one of the best weeks I've ever had in a tournament. I always felt a sense of pride to show off this tournament.

Now to see what it's become, easily outside the majors, it's one of the biggest events in the entire world.

CHRIS BERMAN: As do we have a sense of pride. A couple of broader golf questions. Signature Events, and in case we forget, there it is in lights. You played well at Pebble, although three days, but you played well. Masters. How are they working, especially the limited fields? Only a couple of years -- a little different. How do you players feel it's working, the signature situation?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: I think it's great. I think it's really nice to know -- as a player, I know I have to really play well that week. I know that if I want to win the tournament, I'm going to have to beat Scottie Scheffler on Sunday. He's going to be there. That's just an example.

I think it's really nice for the fans to know that all these guys

are going to be playing. I think it's cool that they know out here in Hartford they're going to have a world-class field. I think that's amazing.

I think the TOUR has had to make decisions on the fly without really figuring anything out over the last couple of years, and I think they're still doing that, and I think that it's been great.

I still don't know if we know exactly which way the TOUR is heading or how long we're going to do this, but they have to choose tournaments like Travelers and make them a premier event, which they already are, and they can show off what a great product the PGA TOUR has.

CHRIS BERMAN: You don't stand over the ball thinking about, okay, where is golf headed this year, but what's the talk of the players? It looks like all year -- we don't know. You don't know probably. It's not going to be a resolution. We're already almost May. Look, the great events, the great players. What's the chatter on TOUR of is this going to go on for another year or two? Do we really know where the big ship is headed even though ships like the Travelers and the majors exist?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: So I'm going to preface this by saying I know nothing. I hear a different new rumor every day.

But I think the feeling amongst the players is that inevitably we're going to come together. I have no clue when that is. I think it would be really fun to have a tournament like the Travelers where you're coming down the stretch against a PGA TOUR versus a LIV guy. I think that would be fun. I think that would be fun for the media. I think it would be fun for the public. I think it could be fun to watch.

I don't see where having those guys play on the TOUR is bad for golf or the PGA TOUR. I think that a lot of the guys left were big characters, good and bad, and great players, and I think eventually you'd see them come back, but they're still not going to -- the LIV guys are going to have to play on LIV. It would just be an event here or there. I don't think any of them are going to jump over and play full time.

There's still a lot to figure out. I have so much trust in Jay Monahan and the PGA TOUR. I'm thrilled about Fenway Sports Group coming on with the PGA TOUR. I just think that they're so smart, and I feel lucky that I've come along at this exact time on the TOUR because we're making way more money, which is amazing, and I think it's so fun to come and see the TOUR growing and seeing changes to the TOUR, and I think it's a great thing to see.

CHRIS BERMAN: You just mentioned that your PGA was



2011, and here we are in the last year -- winning here in 2023. Are you a much better player now than when you won -- notice how I'm saying this, your first major?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Honestly, I do. I feel --

CHRIS BERMAN: Because?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: I think this is common for a lot of players, but I feel so much more comfortable in contention now. My wins as a younger player were always from behind, chasing, and I felt the best in there. But winning here my last two wins I've won from being in front, which is a much different, much different animal. It's different from the moment you wake up, like I said. It's different from being on the first hole with a lead to the last hole.

I feel like I can manage those situations a lot better, and I think for me, I think it's more impressive when a player goes out and has the lead and wins the tournament. I think it shows a lot.

CHRIS BERMAN: Very much so. Easier to be a chaser than the chasee.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: It is for sure.

CHRIS BERMAN: If that's a word.

We've got a couple more, but we have microphones. We have maybe questions. Maybe we don't have questions. Back to the mic.

Q. Wanted to get your thoughts on the PGA equity program. Are you part of it? Do you think it's going to help in terms of remaining players? Did they put you on the right tier?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, I think it's unprecedented in sports. I think if I played another sport, if I played in the NBA or the NFL and I saw the players gaining equity into the league, I think I'd have some questions. I'd want that to be with me, as well.

I feel very happy with the way I was treated by the TOUR. This is something I never expected. Imagine you worked your whole life and were compensated great and then randomly they said we're going to give you a piece of the company. I think it's really special. I hope it stops players from going.

But you never know. LIV has tons of money, so they can always come over the top. But I feel very grateful for what the TOUR has given me.

Q. Keegan, as the defending champion and you set a tournament record, are you familiar with the tweaks they made to the course, and how do you feel about them?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, I was just told about them briefly when I got here. They don't sound like anything very major. I think courses are always trying to improve slightly. I just love the flow of this course. I don't think they need to do a lot. I love the back nine here. I love what can happen. I think that's what makes this tournament unique.

Q. You've heard of Tiger-proofing courses. Do you think it's a Keegan-proofing of this course?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Well, if they did, we'll see. I would be very honored if they did that, but I don't think that's the case.

Q. I was distracted this whole time because I'm just wondering when you mini-golf do you use the blue putter with the dinky head or do you bring your own?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: No, I don't bring my own. I think that would be a little strange if I brought my own. No, I use the regular putter. When I'm out there, I get some looks like geez, you look like a golfer but surely that can't be you here. I just went a couple days ago in Jupiter. My kids love to go. It's fun.

Q. Speaking of St. John's, Keegan, it's about 22 miles from Utopia Parkway to Bethpage Black. Your thoughts?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, I want to play on these teams as much or more than anybody. What happened last year took so much out of me and my family, and it was crushing. I really, really was out of my mind every second of every day. I can't do that again.

I want to be on these teams. I want to do whatever I can to be on these teams, but if I start thinking about Bethpage right now -- to me, winning at Hartford, playing the U.S. Open, playing pretty well at Brookline, that's a highlight. Playing the Ryder Cup at Bethpage would be one of the coolest things I could ever do in my life, just alongside winning majors.

I played -- I used to play there on Mondays when I was at St. John's. One of my favorite courses. I felt like when I played at Bethpage, I got some of the biggest support of anywhere in the world I've ever played, including in New England. I would love to play there and be a part of that team, and that'll be a huge goal of mine, but I've got to try my best got to go through what I went through again.

CHRIS BERMAN: Do you think it might be loud for the Ryder Cup at Bethpage?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Boy, oh, boy I'm pretty close with Luke Donald, and I was saying to him, you'd better be ready; this is going to be a little different.

CHRIS BERMAN: We'll refer to Monty on that one.

Once upon a time you wanted to be a skier. Well, you were a skier. Do you still ski?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: No, I don't. I don't want to get hurt.

CHRIS BERMAN: Do your kids ski?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: They haven't been, which is like horrible. But I haven't skied in so long, but recently I've been wanting to go back again. I really want my kids to do that. It's such a strange thing to have something be such a huge part of your life and then be done, but soon I'd like to do that again.

CHRIS BERMAN: It's far fetched, but imagine in the giant slalom compared to you coming down 18. That was a dream of you once, like I could be a really good skier, I grew up in Vermont.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, I think my skiing career has been blown out of proportion a little bit. I was pretty good, but I equate ski racing and golf, they're very similar. When you're in that starting gate for skiing, you're there by yourself. There's no one else. There's no teammate. There's no one to pass the ball. And when I was on this first tee on Sunday at 2:00 or whatever, I'm looking down that fairway with all these people cheering for me, and I'm like, oh, shit, this is really serious. The same sort of feeling.

There's a feeling of helplessness where if you're playing for the Celtics and you're Jayson Tatum or whoever, you have an off night, you've got Jaylen Brown right there. So when you're out there here, you have your caddie, which is a huge advantage, but in skiing especially, you're all alone in that gate. It's very similar. It's a very similar sport. You have to do it all yourself, and it's very mental and difficult.

CHRIS BERMAN: You won the PGA so the name is on it -- the names on this, they're pretty good. When you look at them and you know who a lot of the winners are, were there a couple previous winners of the Travelers/Insurance City Open/GHO Sammy Davis Jr. --

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Like Billy Casper, Arnold Palmer --

CHRIS BERMAN: You're honored.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, I've said this over and over and over, but to win here is so incredibly special for me, and it's still -- I'll be driving down the road when I'm home and I'll think about it, and like I said, it still feels fake. So many times on the TOUR you can win, and my first PGA TOUR win I won in Dallas and I was there totally by myself and it was amazing and I went to bed and got up and went to the next tournament.

Here I have basically every family member that I know is here. These guys know. They've got to give me like 500 tickets a day.

We have these traditions now of just from Hartford. My mom cooks on Tuesday night. She cooks her special meal. Then the next night, another family member. So this has become sort of a family reunion for us, and then there's a tournament on the side. Everyone is having a great time while I'm nervous and freaking out.

It's a really, really special place for me. It would have still been if I hadn't won, but now I'm upstairs doing a few interviews, and the last time I was in that room, I had just won, and my whole family was down there and we were hanging out. I have these family just even in this clubhouse.

I have memories of my nephew who's now 13 as a little tiny baby here, and they used to let us back in the old clubhouse, they used to put cones out for my sister to be able to park so Aidan, my nephew, could be there. So I have these memories of decades, a decade of playing, and now to cap it off here, I have this trophy and it's special.

CHRIS BERMAN: How is your year going? Hawai'i started really well, Sony.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: It did. I felt I should have won that. It's the one time in my career where I really felt I should have won, and I finished -- a lot of times you finish second and you hear the guys in the interview they're bummed out but really when they leave they're pumped. It was a great week.

When I left Sony, I was bummed, felt I should have won. That was the first time that that's happened to me.

The golf in your career, it goes up and down. It's a tough -- sometimes it can be tough. I feel like I'm playing good.

We grew up playing in the summer, so I always feel like my game is best in the summertime. I'm excited with some big



events coming.

CHRIS BERMAN: Well, that's our body clock, right?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: What do you think of Drake Maye?

CHRIS BERMAN: I think that six quarterbacks in the first round, whether they were 1 through 12 or all the way to the end, three are going to -- the history tells us, two or three are going to be really good. One or two are going to be okay. One or two are going to be below okay. I'll leave the initials out.

But it doesn't mean that one -- he has potential to be one of those really good ones. He's going to need a receiver or two.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: This wasn't a glowing endorsement.

CHRIS BERMAN: He's going to need a receiver or two, don't you think?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, we've been saying that for 20 years.

CHRIS BERMAN: Well, the last great receiver they drafted was a quarterback from Kent State, and that was Julian Edelman. But we digress.

Your other teams, your winter teams are doing pretty well, your hockey team --

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, the Bruins play tomorrow night and I was flying up here going, geez, if I just stay one more night, I could get a game in.

Yeah, I'm on the road by myself now. My kids are in school. And Boston sports sort of keep me sane. I listen to --

CHRIS BERMAN: Are they fired up on the Boston teams, too?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Oh, yeah. They'd better be.

CHRIS BERMAN: I just want to make sure.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: My son yesterday, I told him to go get dressed, we were going to do something yesterday, came down in a full Jayson Tatum jersey with Celtics socks up to here and Jayson Tatum shoes.

CHRIS BERMAN: Bruins tomorrow.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Bruins tomorrow.

Sports mean a lot -- I always tell this to athletes, that sports are important. Sports mean a lot to people, and what sports do for me is when I'm missing my family and I'm watching the Celtics, it brings me -- I'm talking to my wife, I always tell -- I told Bill Belichick this, too. Sports are important. What sports have done -- my first Super Bowl I watched with my dad. I went to two Super Bowls with my wife, and my last Super Bowl I held my son. Sports are important. Travelers is important.

This does a lot for the community. They give back. I live for these Boston teams.

CHRIS BERMAN: Well, a lot of folks, I think, whether they're dads, moms, daughters, sons, you brought that to people. I do want to say as an aside, we don't get defending champions very often showing up here, not because they don't like the cooking, but we just don't because that doesn't happen as much anymore, but Keegan made sure that he came back to visit with everyone today. I thought we should point that out. You can applaud if you want.

[Applause.]

This is an interesting tradition, and I can't wait to see where this is going to go with Andy and Nathan, but Felix the cat, that's a bag of tricks I'm looking at so far. You want me to get out of here?

ANDY BESSETTE: Before we do this, Keegan -- Chris, I have to say this to you because you've accomplished so much in your life, in your profession, in your career, but you know what, from day one in 2007, you've been our uncompromised partner for this tournament, and I've offered you all kinds of stuff to make you feel good. No, I don't know why I offered it to you, but I offered you all kinds of stuff, and you said, no. I just like to keep it low key, and I'll keep being supportive.

But I just want to say thank you to you because you're not only the swami but you're the swami of the Travelers Championship. So thank you for all you do, Chris.

CHRIS BERMAN: Happy to do it.

ANDY BESSETTE: Keegan is looking at me like what is he going to do now. You have to watch the video because we had this video made for you from some of your buddies, and they're like the guys -- my favorite band in the world. If we play the video first --

[Video shown.]



KEEGAN BRADLEY: That's great. You've got to send me that.

ANDY BESSETTE: Every year we do something with our defending champion, and we've given away ping-pong mallets, we've given away cricket bats, we've given away fishing gear. Really good stuff, too. This year, Keegan, we got you a special gift, and Boston Common Golf was huge in a big part of helping us get this thing and Fenway Sports Group and all the guys, John Henry and Sam and you know all the guys. They're a huge part of this. But we thought you're such a big Boston sports fan, we thought this was something you could appreciate and it'll go right into your office at your house. Now, your wife might kill me --

KEEGAN BRADLEY: She's into it just as much as I am.

ANDY BESSETTE: This is something very special for you.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Holy shit, are you kidding me?

ANDY BESSETTE: It's from Fenway Park, and it says on it, Travelers Championship, Keegan Bradley, 2023 champion. That came out of Fenway Park.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Are you kidding me? This is the coolest thing I've ever got in my life.

ANDY BESSETTE: Isn't that great?

KEEGAN BRADLEY: That is unbelievable. I can't thank you guys enough for this. This is like the greatest gift I've ever gotten in my life. She's going to love this. Straight when we walk in the house, this is going to be right there. Once again, amazing. That is so special. This was in Fenway?

ANDY BESSETTE: Yeah, that was in Fenway. When they renovated it, they pulled chairs out, and I called Sam Kennedy, I said, hey, Sam, I need you to help with something. Do you have any old Fenway Park chairs left? He goes, oh, yeah. So the guys at Boston Common Golf helped us and they put it together, and that's it.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: After I had won, I posted some videos and someone commented on one of my videos and said, thank God I'm from New England. It always stuck with me, and this is just another example, how cool is this. Thank you so much.

ANDY BESSETTE: Something for the boys, because I'm going to ask you to tell the story because I think it's one of the greatest stories I've ever heard, and it exemplifies who you are. These are for the boys. Tell the boys we missed

having them. We knew they had to be in school.

Tell the story -- Keegan and I were talking last year, I can't remember, we saw each other, and you said Andy, this is an embarrassing moment I'm going to tell you about, but it made you so human. It was a coffee shop story.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: Yeah, I was in the coffee shop in the town that I have a house in, and I had just won here, and I'm a pretty shy to-myself guy. I'm not looking for attention, put it that way. I went into the coffee shop, I could feel people sort of looking at me, and I was just trying to mind my own business, get my coffee and leave. I was in there with my six-year-old son. Starbucks, and they said all right, Keegan, and then as we were walking out, Logan, my youngest son, loud, yelled out, Keegan Bradley, Travelers champion. I'm like, Logan -- like I was pissed. As I walked out, everyone started clapping.

CHRIS BERMAN: That's awesome.

ANDY BESSETTE: I thought that was one of the best stories I had ever heard. What a great family moment, but also to embarrass his dad, that's pretty good, too.

KEEGAN BRADLEY: After I was in the car, because everyone was laughing and he thought it was funny, and I said, don't -- we had to have a serious chat, don't ever do that again. I don't want any of that.

ANDY BESSETTE: Well, Keegan, thank you for being here today. We really appreciate it. We hope you enjoy the seat, the chair, and hope the boys will enjoy their jerseys, and we'll see you here in 48 days.

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