

THE PLAYERS Championship

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Executive Director Jared

Rice

Tournament Update

STEWART MOORE: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the 2021 PLAYERS Championship media day. My name is Stewart Moore. I'm senior director of communications for Championship Management at the PGA TOUR. I've been in this role for a few months now. I know a few of you out here from past years. Looking forward to working with you to deliver a great event this March and meeting some of you out on the golf course today. I think we're very fortunate to be able to pull this day together in a safe and responsible manner. I know a lot of you will have a wonderful time playing THE PLAYERS Stadium Course later this morning.

To my right is executive director Jared Rice. Do you want to start off with a couple opening statements?

JARED RICE: Before we get started officially, a couple of things, maybe superlatives, but first of all, want to welcome Stewart to our team. Really fortunate to be able to have him join THE PLAYERS Championship team.

There's a few others. I want to make sure I recognize Stephen Cox. He's our senior tournament director and really responsible for all the administration of the tournament from a competitive standpoint and kind of one of those people that does a tremendous amount of work in making sure that this tournament comes off in a great way that no one really knows about. So we want to make sure you know about him.

And Jeff Plotts, not surprisingly, they're close by each other because Jeff is singularly focused on making sure this property looks amazing and is responsible for the conditions that you see on the golf course and does a tremendous job. Thank you, Jeff.

Thank you, Emily Tillo, who is also on our team.

Derek Sprague, as well. Derek is the general manager here at TPC Sawgrass and his team does a fantastic job. I think you spend quite a bit of time here over the course of



the year and see the evidence of his leadership, so thank you to all of you.

Again, a thanks to all of you from a media perspective, A, for being here and knowing that last year about a year ago that our world has changed significantly for many of us right here at the site of THE PLAYERS Championship. It's not lost on us that you did a tremendous job supporting us, covering us, and since then have done an amazing job for our community and making us aware of what we need to know as we all go through this. Thank you all for what you're doing.

As we think about what's happened since that day for the PGA TOUR, we've really been back at playing golf for the course of the last 30 weeks or so since June, and we take a tremendous amount of responsibility and pride and care and consideration for how we've been able to do that with health and safety being the priority of everything that we're doing.

It was really important for us to do that for the communities in which we play. That was really important for our title sponsors here in northeast Florida, for our title sponsors, our proud partners, Grant Thornton, Morgan Stanley and Optum.

It's really important for our players, too. That is really central to how we leave our communities better than what we first arrive, and I think there's evidence of how we've been able to do that over the course of the last 30 weeks.

As we get started today, we are going to talk about how we are going to have a limited capacity at THE PLAYERS Championship this year, and as part of that we're going to ask a lot of things of this community and ask for the greater good, whether it's how we all come and enjoy this wonderful tournament and some of the steps that we take to do it, and even for you all from a coverage perspective, a year later, this is our story. This is how this community can really rally and host a tournament of this magnitude and do it in a very safe way, and I know that we're up to the task and we'll have some fun doing it.

STEWART MOORE: That's great. You talk about the importance of community. Can you expound a little bit on how this community rallied, starting a year ago when our



world paused and how it's continued throughout leading into the 2021 event?

JARED RICE: Yeah, not ironic, this is the 40th playing of THE PLAYERS Championship here in northeast Florida, and supporting this community is again central to the mission of the tournament from the outset. Commissioner Beman said 40 years ago that we are a public trust, and that is not lost on us. We think about that every day.

Since Thursday of THE PLAYERS Championship, I really think the evidence of all that started immediately with Brittany and Billy Horschel helping us to load trucks for northeast Florida of food that was unused at THE PLAYERS and get that right out to the community, the Saturday morning after, Commissioner Monahan with our staff feeding the homeless at Sulzbacher Center. We mean it. We take that personally and that's a big mission for us.

And again, throughout the course of the year, even most recently, the announcement we made at Brentwood with the First Tee and supporting the Rising Leaders of Jax program and really working with the military and programs like K9s for Warriors and Rethreaded, these are very important things for us to do, and we want to hold ourselves accountable to the community to do it.

STEWART MOORE: Health and safety protocols has been part of our vernacular now for 11 months. As we look to the week in March, what can fans expect to be the norm as they come out here to THE PLAYERS Championship?

JARED RICE: No question, health and safety is the priority. We want to do everything we do out here responsibly and think we have a very good plan in order for us to do that. Things that you can see or expect to see are contactless entry and really contactless commerce throughout the golf course in terms of food, beverage and our fan shop. Masks will be required to be worn. We also see some modifications to our hospitality programs and steps we're taking throughout the golf course in terms of social distancing, and again, getting back to that -- asking the community to do the right thing and what's right for the greater good.

You'll see a lot of commentary about three W's: Wear a mask, wash your hands and watch your distance, and those are things that we'll talk about when you're on-site.

STEWART MOORE: Before we turn it over to the media for a few questions, we've talked a lot about engaging this community that's unfortunately not going to be able to attend. We're going to have a limited fan footprint. Talk about some of the ways the tournament is trying to bring

this experience to those who are going to be engaging with us from home.

JARED RICE: Sure, and again, that's really important for the community here that there will be limitations in terms of access, and again, we're doing that responsibly and to have a keen sense of health and safety. But we still need you to engage. That helps all of us to not only raise the profile of Jacksonville but really help charities in our community. When you watch with our broadcast partners, when you engage on social and digital, when you get tournament updates from all the local media and your favorite local media here in northeast Florida, that means something. That's really important.

And over the course of the next 40 or so days, we're going to be bringing out specific programs about how we're working with restaurant partners in terms of socially distanced watch parties, how we're working with some of our retail partners and official marketing partners about watch-at-home kits.

You can play golf. Go play golf. Spend some time with your friends and enjoy some time in the 19th hole afterwards watching the tournament and following it on social digital. That all matters and makes a big difference for us.

STEWART MOORE: And also Every Shot Live returning this year in 2021. A fantastic way for fans around the world to engage, follow their favorite player, feel like they're on course with them.

JARED RICE: We want to bring the Stadium Course experience to the community, and Every Shot Live is a great example of doing that. There's really -- with the technology and what we're able to, again, bring to fans, there's no reason why you can't see every shot by every player in the field live.

STEWART MOORE: Great. Any questions?

Q. Jared, have you arrived in terms of capacity for fans, have you arrived at a percentage or a number each day, and as far as the corporate hospitality goes, what percentage of corporate hospitality will be open out there, if you had a number you could put on it?

JARED RICE: Sure. Our goal, our north star on this is 20 percent of max capacity. Again, we feel that hits our priority of how we can deliver the tournament in a healthy way and with the safety of everybody in mind, our sponsors, our fans, our volunteers. All of that is mission critical to us.



And that number also -- just for reference, that's the total tickets issued or access issued. We know over the course of 150 plus acres of turf grass out on the golf course, 18 holes, 12 hours that fans will be able to be walking around freely and enjoying every bit of this golf course that Jeff and his team makes look so spectacular.

From a hospitality perspective we've modified everything. That means in hospitality zones we'll have open-air venues, and again, looking for ways to make sure it's as safe as possible, limiting some access there. And then from a fan perspective, again, really looking at ways we can focus on social distancing as part of, again, any food and beverage experience but still make it great for our fans.

Q. 20 percent of what?

JARED RICE: Of max capacity.

Q. Do you have a ballpark figure on what max capacity has been?

JARED RICE: We do. (Laughter.)

Q. Will there be any kind of military venue?

JARED RICE: I appreciate the question, and from an attendance perspective I think you all know that that isn't something that we promote. Not making light -- we have a responsibility to do the right thing, like we're asking the community, so when we look at that percentage, we feel really confident in our ability to, again, deliver a great experience safely, and that's the priority.

From a military perspective we will not have a Patriots' Outpost. I was mentioning about adjustments to some of the hospitality. You won't see shared venues when you play golf today, so those areas that are akin to a club level at an arena where everyone shares a common experience, those don't fit the profile of what we feel is a safe environment. Unfortunately Patriots' Outpost fits that profile, as well.

We do have, however, because of some of our top partners, a plan where we will be providing some level of complimentary tickets to local military. It's a challenge for them, too, in that our understanding is at this time those active in our local military do have some restrictions about whether they can come out, so we're working very closely with that group. Thank you.

Q. With the full year you will have had from the time that the pandemic started impacting sporting events until we start here, aside from other golf tournaments,

are there other sporting events or other public events that you have learned a lot from in terms of how to operate in the way that you need to, and what lessons did you draw from those?

JARED RICE: That's a great question. I think one of the things I would mention, and that has been reported in some other stories, one of which was Golf Digest, and I thought it was fantastic, where Tyler Dennis and Stephen and a number of others on Thursday really built the framework of how we could operate the tournament with no fans. We were prepared to do that on Friday of tournament week.

That really began a process for how we came back as a TOUR. There is evidence, there is DNA of how we addressed that situation here last year in terms of how the TOUR has returned to golf. Now, of course we have learned along the way and made adjustments, just like we're going to continue to look for guidance from local health officials to make right decisions, we're constantly looking at how our other events, some of which have had fans already, have produced their tournaments, so yes, we are looking at that.

Q. You mentioned the 20 percent figure and it's very common in other sports where there are indoor venues is 20, 25 percent. Is that number something that's going to be sort of locked in for the foreseeable future for the PGA TOUR, or is it possible because you are outdoors and people are moving around as opposed to sitting in seats at a football game that that number could gradually maybe rise a little bit, particularly as the vaccine gets to more and more people?

JARED RICE: Sure, I think the sport of golf lends itself very well to social distancing, and that's, again, evidenced in our ability to come back in June like we did with no fans and a testament to our athletes, our players for their understanding of what it takes to operate that way.

You know, just from a long-term perspective, I think we're really looking forward to being able to set in motion this plan. And to Cole's question, I would assume that we will all learn from that and be better from it and continue to look at the future from there. I couldn't say that it's in stone, as you put it.

Q. Before I actually give my question, I just had a new Tweet into the First Coast News account: Will there be restrictions based on residency for patrons?

JARED RICE: Not at this time. Not at this time. Again, I think just as you look at THE PLAYERS Championship and how we're delivered to the world, getting back to some of



my opening statements, as a community we have an opportunity to show the world how great a community can come out and support a tournament and do it safely. So we all have an opportunity there.

And from a hosting perspective, this tournament has opened its doors to the world, and how we are able to do it safely in 2021 is going to put us in a great position to be able to come back even bigger in 2022.

Q. Can you elaborate a little bit more? I know it's fluid, but the 19th hole, some of the virtual opportunities you're going to have for fans, if you're able to share any details.

JARED RICE: Yeah, we're going to be coming -- at this point not a ton of detail to share, but we will be over the course of the next 40 days, and we think that, again, this cadence of a consistent drumbeat of here's where you can go, here are some of our great local restaurant partners and working with our official beer, Michelob Ultra, and Spirit and others, we'll be able to tell you where to go and have a good time and watch the tournament, but more to come on that.

And please check our website. This is going to be a really important place for people to go to get all this information and reinforce what we're talking about today.

Q. So every year PLAYERS has the best field in golf. Are you guys foreseeing any issues with international players who aren't based in the U.S. as far as being able to get them here for this tournament?

JARED RICE: Again, I think from a competitions perspective, we have a great staff that is thinking about those types of things and making sure that our athletes, our members have an opportunity to be here. I think, whether it's for the purpose of their health or other things, our players want to be here. This is their home. This is everybody's home course, and they'll make all attempts to be here.

Q. Will there be any kind of priority system on ticket purchasing, people who have bought tickets here in the past? Or do you have a list that you're going to prioritize?

JARED RICE: It's a great question. Yes, there is. This is important to us when we think about the impacts of a 20 percent program and a limited capacity. We want to be sure that we go to our stakeholders that have supported the tournament.

Starting February 1st, there will be a couple-of-week

process where we will have a rolling presale, if you will. We will be sending out correspondence to previous ticket purchasers and other people in kind of our universe, if you will, that support the tournament, that we want to provide an opportunity for them to purchase tickets.

And then on February 16th is when we will have some very limited tickets being available to the general public.

For those who are maybe listening at home, when you get that email, act on it, and again, we are doing that because if we want to be able to provide you an opportunity to be able to get involved as soon as possible and please be sure to head back to our website for those details.

Q. Will all purchases be made through your website?

JARED RICE: Yes, it's all online. Great question. Digital tickets for all ticket types. We'll have digital parking passes that will be available. Again, to feed our program or feed our mission of contactless, it'll all be done digitally.

Q. Will there be nurses and other essential workers who will be receiving passes or access to the tournament this year?

JARED RICE: It's something we're working through with a couple of other top partners, and that is a priority for us, as well. Again, over the course of the next month or so, you'll see some additional details on that. We're looking for those types of opportunities, and we'll tell you more about that in the next month or so, but yes.

Thank you all again for being here. Have some fun. Jeff has made sure we've got Saturday pins today, so you'll have a chance to recreate the "better than most" putt from Tiger Woods. So you'll get a real taste of tournament golf today in tournament conditions. We're really happy to be in a position to be able to host you all today, and thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

