

THE PLAYERS Championship

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Jay Monahan

Press Conference

LAURA NEAL: Good morning, everyone. We'd like to welcome PGA TOUR Commissioner Jay Monahan to the interview room. Jay, different circumstances since you last addressed the media here at THE PLAYERS Championship, for good reason. I know you have some opening remarks reflecting on where we've been and what we're looking forward to this week and beyond. I'll turn it over to you.

JAY MONAHAN: Good morning, everyone. 362 days ago, on March 13th, seems like a lifetime ago in many respects, I sat with you and discussed the cancellation of our flagship event here at TPC Sawgrass.

As gut wrenching as it was at the time for the TOUR, our players, our fans and our community, it goes without saying that what we experienced that day would pale in comparison to what our world would experience in the coming days, weeks and months.

That Friday morning, I had several parting thoughts, one of them being that, even though we had no clue what was to come, we would take what we were experiencing and turn it into a positive, something I feel our game does better than any other.

I also said that we'll take our commitment to northeast Florida very, very seriously, and we were ready to get to the work at hand to make sure that we continue to help our own community.

Fast forward to today, and I'm extremely pleased to recognize those directly responsible for our response after THE PLAYERS was canceled, as well as our successful return this week.

The unwavering support of our proud partners, Optum, Morgan Stanley and Grant Thornton, who have stood with the PGA TOUR at THE PLAYERS throughout the last year and as we head into this week, we can't say thank you enough for their commitment and the impact they make with our championship and in our community.



Our PLAYERS Championship team, led by Executive Director Jared Rice. Our PGA TOUR Rules Committee, led this week by Gary Young and our Advance Tournament Official, Stephen Cox. TPC Sawgrass Director of Golf Course Maintenance Jeff Plotts. The Stadium Course is in peak condition thanks to Jeff and his team who have worked tirelessly to prepare for this championship.

And of course our loyal volunteers and Red Coats, chaired in 2021 by Troy Smith, after the steady guidance of Andy Carroll last year. Each Red Coat, past and present, has impacted thousands of lives through their dedication and all of the chairmen and chairwomen have volunteered tirelessly for something bigger than themselves.

Northeast Florida is our home. We live here, we work here, and our kids go to school here. And as an organization with more than 1,000 employees, we contribute to the social, charitable and economic impact. In fact, an independent auditor recently estimated this at a billion dollars annually.

Each one of us is proud to make our community stronger now, and thanks to our new global home, and in the future.

A few of the highlights as we head into year three of THE PLAYERS in March. Since the return of golf, we've successfully conducted 36 PGA TOUR events, including 22 in this year's super season. With health and safety being our absolute number one priority.

We are incredibly grateful for the cooperation we've received from government officials in every community, and we thank our officials in St. Johns County for their support this week.

We see some light at the end of the tunnel, with the COVID-19 vaccine being accessible on a widespread basis over the coming weeks and months, but until the pandemic is in our rear view mirror, our commitment to health and safety continues at THE PLAYERS, where we are welcoming a limited number of spectators.

This week will mark our largest footprint to date and our players are excited that we're getting back to entertaining and inspiring our fans in person. But we remain conservative, administering tickets at only 20 percent of



our normal capacity, so that we can continue to learn and adjust as we go, again with safety as our absolute top priority.

While we anticipated a strong interest from fans in attending THE PLAYERS, little did we know that we'd sell out our four competition days in less than one hour on February 16th. That's an amazing testament to what our fans have done in building this championship into one of the premier events in all of golf.

I'm biased, but I feel like our fans are the best in all of sports, and they should feel a tremendous amount of ownership in the success of THE PLAYERS.

We ask all fans attending the championship this week, for your safety and that of others, to follow our on-site health and safety measures and please be respectful of those volunteers and others that will be assisting and ensuring your well-being. The return of fans will also add significantly to the charitable impact we are able to make in northeast Florida. More than ever, these groups need our support.

I wanted to highlight one of the many charitable partners that's done a remarkable job in helping those in need over the last year. As some of you might remember, after last year's cancellation, the tournament donated 22 tons of food items to feeding northeast Florida, serving vulnerable citizens across 50 sites in the area. This simple donation catapulted a program in feeding northeast Florida that resulted in an 82 percent increase of food donations over the previous year, the hiring of 78 furloughed restaurant workers and the serving of 600,000 meals.

I'm delighted to say that our partnership continues as our tournament caterers and TPC Sawgrass have committed to donating the remaining food from THE PLAYERS Championship this year to feeding northeast Florida.

There are so many similar success stories, and we're proud that we, like many others, have found silver linings throughout this pandemic.

Among our guests on-site this week will be heroes, more than 1,000 first responders, front-line workers and teachers from the Jacksonville area. We can't say thank you enough, and this is our way of showing our appreciation for those who have sacrificed so much in keeping us safe in the last year.

Tomorrow we're also excited to welcome 12 members of the golf team at Florida A & M University, home to four of the top 5 Black golfers in the APGA Cup collegiate rankings. They'll get an inside look at THE PLAYERS as

we hope to inspire them to do great things on and off the golf course, and I have no doubt they will inspire me and our team.

As far as what goes on inside the ropes this week, I couldn't be more excited to see what unfolds in the third event in this season of championships. I'd like to congratulate each of the 154 players who make up what is annually the strongest field in golf. They'll be competing on Pete and Alice Dye's masterpiece at THE PLAYERS Stadium Course at TPC Sawgrass and looking to add to a 46-year history that belies the accomplishments and unforgettable moments that have taken place.

Rory McIlroy, who hoisted the trophy in 2019 is our reigning champion, and he's joined by the best in the world, a total of 48 of the top 50 in both the FedExCup and Official World Golf Rankings.

One player the world will miss this week is our two-time PLAYERS champion Tiger Woods. With 2021 being the 20th anniversary of the "better than most" putt that took place in 2001. While we'll celebrate this moment on Saturday, talk of Tiger's future in golf can wait. At this moment, our thoughts continue to be with Tiger and his family as he begins his journey towards recovery. We'll be there to support him every single step of the way.

Once again, we anticipate that you will enjoy our enhanced domestic coverage on NBC and Golf Channel, once again under the guidance of lead golf producer Tommy Roy, who's covered the last 27.25 PLAYERS Championships.

Coverage throughout the week will feature limited commercial interruptions thanks to the support of our proud partners. And for the second year, NBC Sports Gold streaming of PGA TOUR Live features Every Shot Live for every player in the field.

Before I take your questions, I'd like to thank each member of the media for adapting to all the changes we've required due to the pandemic over the last 12 months and to our many journalists overseas who faithfully made the journey to Jacksonville to cover THE PLAYERS every year, our best wishes to you, and we look forward to seeing you in the near future. Thank you very much.

Q. Wondering if you could possibly describe what your emotions are going to be on Thursday when you go to watch the first tee shots that you're going to see, get the tournament underway and what might be running through your mind?

JAY MONAHAN: I'm going to be excited. I'm going to be proud. I've always made it -- I've always been there every



single year for the first tee shot since I moved down here to serve as Executive Director of THE PLAYERS, and that's a special moment for our tournament chair, all the Red Coats, all the volunteers and all of our staff, because at that point in time the show is on.

Last year, for obvious reasons, we were up at TPC Sawgrass in the boardroom where we spent the entire day. It was the one time I wasn't there for it.

I will be there on Thursday. I look forward to it. Just proud, most importantly, to be back here a year later, proud of our players, proud of all the caddies, everybody that has worked so hard to get us back to this point in time, and, candidly, to do so in a really inspiring way.

I think this is an important week for us every single year but particularly so this year.

Q. Was there a moment in the past year that stood out as when you first saw some light at the end of the tunnel, when you were able to take a deep breath?

JAY MONAHAN: You know, I think that we're still dealing with this pandemic and still operating in realtime and still adjusting to the realities market to market.

There will probably come a point in time where that'll happen, but we're focused as we've been kind of day-to-day, week-to-week, and while we're here this week, we've got the Honda Classic next week and a series of events that we're all making certain that we're prepared for.

I think when this is clearly in our rearview mirror and we're back to full fans and full normalcy, I think probably will be a time to answer that question, but there hasn't really been any letup from anybody.

Q. You mentioned in December that there would be no mandate for players to get vaccinated. I'm wondering with three now on the market, has there been any update or what's the plan with the vaccine being made available to players? Is there any sort of update on that front.

JAY MONAHAN: Well, we are certainly encouraged by the incredible progress that has been made with the vaccines, by virologists, and I think from our perspective right now, we're partnering with the National Ad Council, we're going to participate, alongside many other leagues, in an upcoming campaign around vaccination. We're going to do everything we can to educate all of our players on the facts behind vaccination.

And then, as it relates to being prepared, I think one of the

unique things about our sport is that, while we're going to do everything when the time is right and when we're able to provide vaccination to have our players, caddies, their families, all of our constituents in a position to get it, our players also -- we got 94 players from 29 countries and territories, they live all throughout the world, so I think the most important thing right now is education, and then we're going to do everything we can to support vaccination for our players when it's appropriate to do so.

Q. They've stopped temperature checks for the last couple of weeks, I think, but what has to happen, do you think, before testing of players stops, from a CDC point of view? And secondly, with Canada being canceled today, I'm curious what kind of timeline you have for Asia decisions.

JAY MONAHAN: So on the testing front, I would tell you that, for us, like we've done every step of the way, we're going to rely on CDC guidance, and our programs are going to be subject to the approval of our partners in every community where we play.

I think as players become vaccinated, as our constituents become vaccinated, we're hopeful that everybody will, but we will continue to provide testing for the foreseeable future, and hopefully, as we get to a high percentage of our players that have been vaccinated, we can start to pull back from the program that we know it as of today.

It's hard to determine when that will be, but clearly we see light at the end of the tunnel, and I think we'll get to -- the conversations we're having with players and with everybody in our ecosystem have been very positive. I think players are eager to get vaccinated and are certainly studying this.

Then, as it relates to Canada and decisions on Asia, again, it's hard to give you a specific timeline and time frame. We're hopeful. Obviously we've got events overseas with the Open Championship, you've got the Olympic Games, and we're hopeful that, by the time we're able to play in Asia, that we'll be in a position to do so.

But as we've demonstrated every step of the way, we're going to spend a lot of time making certain that we have contingencies in place. I think what ZOZO and C.J. did last year by hosting their events in the United States and staying on our schedule was remarkable. I think, to your point on Canada, it's really tough news to know that we're not playing their national open two years in a row. We're going to find a solution there.

I think if you look back over the last year, I think you can expect -- it's hard for me to tell you exactly what that will be

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right now. There are a lot of different ways we're looking at it. But we're going to figure that out.

Q. For you personally, I'm just wondering, outside of a year ago this week, what was your most trying moment during this last 11 plus months and what has been maybe your most triumphant or rewarding moment as you've carried on?

JAY MONAHAN: You know, I'll start with the positives. I think that the way that our sport came together and the way that sports in general came together. But you look at all the golf organizations that we partner with, I don't think there was ever a period of time where we worked more closely together, more honestly together, more directly together. Had a lot of hard conversations about what we thought we needed to do for our sport and we operated as, as I think you've heard several of us say, Golf Incorporated.

I think that served the game very, very well, and to see the game flourish as a result of that and see more people coming into our game, more people making golf their thing, and for the game to become more and more welcoming and inclusive in the process, I think big picture wise that's very positive.

I think there were a lot of challenging moments. It's hard to pick one, but as the leader of this organization when you have to let great people go and you have to furlough workers and you have to take some of the steps that we take, those are things that I'll never forget, and I still feel today. That's the kind of thing that'll always stay with you.

It's hard for me to single one out. I just did. Thank you.

Q. Could you envision a scenario where you would require spectators to be vaccinated to enter your tournaments down the road, if it meant having a full house at any of those places whenever that might be?

JAY MONAHAN: Could I envision a scenario? I think that hopefully we're getting to a point sooner rather than later where that's not a scenario we need to mandate. That's the reality with the way people have responded to the opportunity to be vaccinated.

I think that it's hard for me to answer that question. I'm not the subject matter expert. We'll always rely on CDC guidance, what's going to be acceptable in the local marketplace, and we're going to listen and be a great partner. If that's the place we get to, it's hard for me to predict that being a place that we'll get to.

Q. What learnings or aspects of this new normal over

the past nine months could you envision being implemented permanently once the TOUR gets green-lighted to resume as normal?

JAY MONAHAN: I think some of the work that was done early in the week and early on to raise funds for COVID-related causes, starting with Bubba in Detroit and that outing that he put together. I think just continuing to find ways to express our thankfulness and gratefulness to be in every market where we play.

One of the great -- one of the things that's happened here for a lot of us as staff and the team at the PGA TOUR being out there week in and week out is you really got to know our players, our members even better than we ever had before and got to know the people that are so close to our product even better than before. That's something that you've always got to work to make certain you don't forget, and I know that we'll take that as something that we continue to focus on.

I think that when you step back from what's happening, you think about the PGA TOUR, PGA TOUR Champions, Korn Ferry TOUR, our international tours, our relationship with our partners, we have to take what we together created as an industry, this close working relationship, that spirit of that, and make sure that we drive that forward to the betterment of our game. And there's no question that's going to happen, it's just a matter of how and when we apply it.

Q. Last week at Bay Hill there were numerous people that were fans that weren't wearing masks, and though you have people out there asking these people to mask up, their responses are usually not polite when they say they're not going to. The question is, how do you enforce a program that seems to be almost unenforceable considering the amount of volunteers that are involved with the mask situation versus the people that are out there?

JAY MONAHAN: You do the absolute best that you can. We're now five events into the return to fans, and we're working closely with each one of our tournament organizations, our volunteer leadership team. We continue to stress the importance of it.

While there are some, I've been encouraged by the number of people that have been wearing masks. And while I have seen some that aren't, and we want everyone to be wearing masks and we're going to continue to reinforce that, I like the actual progression that we've been on, and I think you'll see more growth on that front this week.

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I know Jared and Troy and the teams here have spent a lot of time and energy enforcing those guidelines and protocols and being in position to do that. You'll see signage everywhere. I drove home from Bay Hill on Sunday night. As I got within a 10-mile radius I got my app alert from THE PLAYERS Championship, reminding me of all the safety protocols.

Listen, we're all adapting in all these different scenarios to new normals, and we have to, as I think we've done every step of the way, continue to be very clear and very specific about what our expectations are.

Q. I'm curious if there's any measures that will be enacted to control the flow or congregation of fans, especially on Sunday, when maybe everybody here wants to be with one or two groups on 16, 17 and 18.

JAY MONAHAN: I think that's probably a great follow-up question for Jared and our team. They can walk through the specifics of how we're going to handle that. But again, we have put a lot of thought into the way that we have returned to 20 percent capacity. If you go out on the property and you see the structures that we have as you come in, the fact that we're open air, a high percentage of people will be in the structures that are located throughout the property, and keep in mind you've got -- this is a stadium golf course with 20 percent capacity. You can see every single shot as a fan here from various perspectives on the golf course. Now at 20 percent your ability to do so and space out, this place lends itself really well to it.

But you're outdoors, and people are moving and people are going to follow their normal patterns. But for us, if you're wearing a mask, you're socially distant, you're following the guidance that we're providing you, ultimately we feel like we can stage the event at that level.

Q. Was there any consideration given, on tournaments going forward, with a limited number of fans, to on the featured pairings, when you put them back-to-back, like last week that's where everybody was on Thursday and Friday. Was there any consideration given to only doing one and spreading out the stars, so to speak, to allow for more outdoor golf distancing?

JAY MONAHAN: Well, I think that's something we'll continue to look at. I mean, we've got 154 superstars here this week, and I think our fans are here to see them all. But that is a reality, and that's something that I know we've talked about and we're mindful of as we do featured pairings and as we stage our events week in and week out.

Q. If you think back to Colonial, first week back, zero positive tests. Right or wrong, there was like a false

sense of security after one week that, this is going to work, and then the inevitable happened. Is there any sense now, as we mark kind of a one-year anniversary, to fall into the trap of thinking the worst is behind us and to still maintain? Do you have to guard against that?

JAY MONAHAN: Yes. I think until we're told that we don't, we will be. We've seen surges, we've seen the unpredictable, the uncertain nature of this pandemic and this virus. Yeah, I think, while we see light at the end of the tunnel and there are a lot with vaccination and the progress that we're making and the hope that's in front of us, you take that, but you still have to remind yourself that you've got to focus on your plan and your protocols and make sure we're doing everything we can to keep health and safety as our number one priority.

Q. Earlier you noted that the PGA TOUR's impact was right at about a billion dollars. Now is that all employees, and how much of that is local, and if you would kind of delve into how much the last year has emphasized the role the PGA TOUR plays here in the local economy.

JAY MONAHAN: Well, that number takes THE PLAYERS Championship, the PGA TOUR and our employee base here and the fact that we're headquartered here. It takes our TPC Sawgrass operation, which obviously is year-round with people coming in from all over the world to play one of the great golf courses on the planet. And then it takes our PGA TOUR Entertainment facility, where we're broadcasting PGA TOUR golf across all of our tours all over the world and the impact of that.

So, in aggregate, it's a little bit over a billion dollars annually. Happy to share with you that data and follow-up.

And then I think that, as it relates to our impact, I think that the community speaks with the way it responds to this event, the way it supports this event. And you look at the volunteer leadership team we have here -- I gave you the story of feeding northeast Florida -- so many of the organizations we work with continued to benefit from THE PLAYERS, even though we weren't able to stage the entire event last year, and for us, that just creates even more motivation to do even more in this town, but we feel like we're part of the cultural fabric and underpinning of a city and an area that we love.

Q. You noted that the Florida A & M golf team is coming here tomorrow. If you would describe how that came about and how that in some ways could provide visibility to HBCU -- golf at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

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JAY MONAHAN: Well, we have a long-standing commitment to the APGA. We have a perpetual commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. If you look back over the last year and you go back to that point in time where we all lived the senseless killing of George Floyd, one of the things that this organization did and a number of our players did with their events was to raise money for a number of causes that affect social and racial injustice positively and address it.

For us we've got a great leader in Marsha Oliver, who's our vice president of community and inclusion. You've seen a number of organizations that have made really strong positive contributions to HBCUs. We wanted to find the right way to do so. We made an announcement of \$500,000 to support HBCUs, and with the APGA collegiate ranking, we're trying to find a pathway for top players from HBCUs to ultimately find their way on to PGA TOUR, into our development tours and get them on the path to be on the PGA TOUR, to continue to play our role in making our sport more diverse, more inclusive.

As I said earlier, to have four of the top 5 players in the ranking from your alma mater here, I think it's a nice way for us to -- it's another step in our process to celebrate and understand and share what we have here and hopefully inspire all five of those players that are going to be here to get here one day.

Q. Last month the USGA and the R&A released some results of the Distance Insight Project. It drew pretty strong reactions from some of the players. What was your reaction and kind of your stance right now on that whole distance debate?

JAY MONAHAN: Yeah, I think that's the second time that that Distance Insights Report was released. You know, the USGA and the R&A, they're our industry partners. I think when they came back and released it, released the fact that they were going to go to a period of notice and they were going to reinstitute that project, to me they're taking back up the work that they stalled after the pandemic last year, and this is a long-term subject that they're exploring, and we as industry partners are going to participate. We've been invited to participate and collaborate. That's exactly what we're going to do.

Ultimately I think where we'll end up will be a place where, from a PGA TOUR standpoint, I think if you're a player, if you're a fan, I think the excitement that you see here week in and week out, that's something that you'll continue to see as we go forward and as we debate that subject. I think it's -- everybody needs to be patient here. As they've said, it's a project that's going to take a number of years to

get a recommendation and a result, and we're excited to participate in it.

I'm not surprised with the reaction. It's a subject that generates a lot of debate. I'm proud of our players for expressing their thoughts, and we'll continue to express ours in the context of those discussions. But as I said earlier, I think, as an industry, these are the things that we need to work together, need to work through short-term items and we need to work through long-term items in the best interests of the game, and that's the approach we're going to take in those discussions.

Q. It's tough to get a tee time around here without advance planning, for folks that play golf. Have you noticed that across the country? It's been a boom locally. How much is that going to help, from your standpoint, with the growth of golf, the PGA TOUR, will you have new fans? What's your take on the last year? I think last year when we talked to you, you said, go play golf, grow the game, and boom, here we are, at least in the state of Florida and in Jacksonville.

JAY MONAHAN: Yeah, that's where we are here in Florida. That's where we are throughout the country. You think about it, for a lot of states, golf courses were closed sometimes up to two months, but we as an industry, through We Are Golf and through guidelines created by the PGA of America, back to golf guidelines, we worked state by state to make sure that golf courses remained open as we moved forward in the pandemic.

I've said it a couple times, but as we sit here today, more people have made golf their thing. Whether you're playing nine, whether you're playing 18, whether you're chipping, whether you're putting, whether you're playing PGA TOUR 2K21, the game itself has served an important role. It's been a respite. It's helped people with their mental health and well-being, their physical health.

I think that when I look at what we've been able to do, to play 36 events, to showcase the natural beauty of our sport, to inspire so many fans, I think in a lot of respects that has led directly to the renaissance that our game is undergoing.

The most important thing is what are you doing right now to make sure that that is something that continues for a long time to come, and that's something that we're working with our industry partners to make sure that we're doing.

Q. Do you know if there's a correlation or will it be some time down the road that you get amateur golfers or the recreational golfer hooked onto the sport watching on TV, coming to events? Will that be some

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time until you really know that's happening?

JAY MONAHAN: Yeah, I think it will be some time, but to have 600,000 juniors come into the game last year, to -- it'll take some time to assess it retrospectively, but I think all you have to do is what you alluded to up front, which is you're talking to golf course owners, PGA of America professionals, people that play the game themselves, we're in a far different place, to your point, it's harder to get tee times, but you can get tee times. People are finding a way to play the game.

I expect that will continue. People, as they're coming out to play, if they haven't played in the past and they're just taking it up, they're finding this welcoming, exciting entrance into the game, and I think that that's something that will carry forward and we're excited about.

LAURA NEAL: Jay, thank you for your time, and have a great week.

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