

U.S. Open Championship 2024

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

Village of Pinehurst, North Carolina, USA

Pinehurst Resort & C.C. (Course No. 2)

Mike Whan

Fred Perpall

John Bodenhamer

Press Conference



BETH MAJOR: Good morning, everyone. My name is Beth Major, I'm the managing director of communications and content for the USGA. On behalf of everyone at the organization, we're thrilled to welcome you to Pinehurst for the 124th U.S. Open Championship.

I hope you've seen over the past few days the excitement in the community, the excitement that we all have to have our second home here now in Pinehurst, and to be an anchor site at this amazing venue and this amazing resort and community.

I'd like to introduce my three guests today. Immediately to my left, USGA CEO Mike Whan. To his left, USGA president Fred Perpall. And on the far side, USGA chief championships officer John Bodenhamer.

FRED PERPALL: Thank you, Beth. Good morning. I'd like to welcome everyone to the 124th U.S. Open Championship here at Pinehurst. It's truly our pleasure to welcome you here to our new second home.

We talked about this at media day, so this might be a little repetitive, but what we were saying was when you fit, you can actually feel it. Like you can feel it when you fit somewhere. The USGA just fits here at Pinehurst.

I was in my early days when we started to discuss this anchor site strategy, like what could it be like if we had the opportunity to go back to places on a more frequent schedule. We thought we could make deeper investments in those places. We could work on continuously improving the experience for the players, the experiences for the fans.

We thought that there were so many inefficiencies involved with moving our U.S. Open around that if we could just kind of have a deeper and longer commitment, that long arc of time will allow us to have the clarity that brings the confidence to execute.

You're seeing some of that this week. Our largest U.S. Open build. The opportunity to upgrade the experiences for the players. You'll see a new tunnel from the locker room to the 18th green. These are things that we just couldn't do if we were in our one-off mode. So we're really, really happy with how this has turned out. We know that over time, as we lean into this anchor site strategy, we'll continue to improve our main thing, which is running great U.S. Opens.

None of this would be possible without our strong partnership with Pinehurst. On behalf of everyone at the USGA, I would like to thank our friends Bob Dedman and Tom Pashley for their relationships and also for their commitment to this strategy.

We're also incredibly grateful to the local community, which has quickly embraced us, as well as the Carolinas Golf Association, which has offered its full partnership and support.

Wow, what a week it's already been. We haven't even teed it up yet, and it's already been a special week. I've never been more proud to be a part of the USGA.

On Monday night, we had a World Golf Hall of Fame induction, which was really a nice celebration of bringing the World Golf Hall of Fame back to its original home here at Pinehurst, and what a spectacular class.

Last night we had our Bob Jones annual awards ceremony, where we were able to honor one of the true all-time greats in the game, Tiger Woods. What an emotional and special experience for all of us who were in the room, to celebrate one of our heroes in golf.

Tonight we're going to end our pregame festivities with a large USGA welcome ceremony here in the village, and we hope to see many of you there as we celebrate what has been the spectacular start of a great week.

I also want to talk before I turn it over to Mike about something that is very special to me. A group of young interns, 24 of them, will be here with us this week. Our



Pathways interns. It's a 10-day program where we offer an educational experience to those from underserved and non-traditional backgrounds, exposing them to careers in golf.

40 percent of our past interns from our first two classes currently hold full-time jobs in golf, and they are employed by organizations such as the USGA, PING, Excel Sports, just to name a few.

We think it is our duty not just to build a better game of golf but to help people build better lives through golf, and I'm so proud of this program and what it will mean for the future.

I also want to thank our partners at Deloitte and the Southern California Golf Section as well as Mass Golf and the PGA TOUR, who have also provided opportunities to our interns.

It is truly special to try to change some lives through the game of golf, and I've never been prouder to work with these gentlemen and everyone at the USGA while trying to do so.

That's just a little bit on how our week has started, a little behind the scenes. I'd like to now turn it over to my friend and partner Mike Whan and John Bodenhamer to walk us through what's next with this U.S. Open. Thank you, and welcome.

MIKE WHAN: Thank you, Coach. It's kind of hard to listen to Fred and not feel like you are ready to go out there and tackle somebody, so I'm excited to be sitting next to you.

Well, welcome to 1,000. I was thinking walking over here, if you guys were with us, when we were at The Open Championship and Martin Slumbers was celebrating 150 years. Remember that the 150 was everywhere.

So Martin walks into a meeting room, and he's got this huge '150' on his chest. And I couldn't help myself. I said, Hey, Martin, is this an anniversary year, anything special going on?

He kind of goes like that.

I go, But is this like the 70th playing?

He goes, It's the 150.

I go, Well, why don't you tell somebody, and it's everywhere.

It's on his chest.

I'm like, I'm kidding you. It's 150. We got it.

So we have 1,000 up a lot. I am sorry if you don't find that as exciting as we do. But 1,000 championships since the USGA began is pretty exciting. And if Martin were here, he'd be having a field day with me with the 1,000s on premise.

The other number, other than 1,000. Is 1895. In 1895 the USGA began playing its championships, and in 1895 James Tufts bought approximate 52 acres of land in North Carolina with the vision of Pinehurst. We go all the way back to our birth together.

In that year, 1895, we played our first U.S. Open with 11 competitors, four times around a nine-hole golf course in one day, winner won \$150. So a lot has changed in 130 years.

This year at the 124th playing of the U.S. Open, we've had over 10,000 entrants try to make it into the field, entrants from all 50 states, 70 different countries. And the ages from age 12 to 74. We hosted 109 qualifiers. I say 'we', our AGA partners, and thank you allied golf associations all around the country who helped us host 109 qualifiers and 13 final stage qualifiers. And thanks to folks both in the U.S. and DP World Tour in Japan who helped us host those.

That got us to the 156 competitors in this field. Those competitors won't be playing for \$150 like 130 years ago, but they'll be playing for \$21.5 million, which means our winner's purse will be a \$4.3 million check to the winner. And as we always go \$10,000 even, if you miss the cut because as I say every year, we really believe making the cut at the U.S. Open is about getting into the field, over 10,000 people playing for 156 spots.

So we've got history here as Fred talked about. 25 years ago Payne made a putt that we'll all remember forever. I want to thank the Stewart family publicly for all the apparel and apparatus they were able to put in our USGA experience.

If you haven't seen it, Payne's jacket that he cut the sleeves off on the driving range, golf ball, hat, many things he used are actually on display this week. The Stewart family has been with us all week, and we are appreciative of that.

It's only been an decade since the back-to-back Martin Kaymer and Michelle Wie experience here. And I'm excited to tell you that in five years, in 2029, we'll be back-to-back here in Pinehurst. And in approximate 2036 we'll be back-to-back at Shinnecock Hills.



It's not just the history we have. We've got a future here. 12 championships in the USGA are going to be played here in the next quarter of a century. I am proud to say those are opens and amateurs and women and adaptive. And now we are neighbors. I am not sure how the Village of Pinehurst feels about us after bringing 225,000 people to their town in the next seven days.

But we have a seven-acre facility right across the street. 46,000 square foot building that has the new test center for the game. Our greens section is there. Our championship section is there. Our test center is obviously located there. Then next door is the USGA Experience at the World Golf Hall of Fame.

For those of you in the room and those watching, we encourage you to take a look at those facilities while you're here.

Fred talked about the anchor sites and the ability to invest with Pinehurst and in Pinehurst because we know we're coming so often in the future.

We said this last year, and we talked kind of for the first time about what we do to impact lives outside the golf course. We really believe that the benefit of the U.S. Open and all of our championships is they can change the lives of a competitor, but we hope we leave something to change the lives for others, too.

And last year, together with the Southern California Golf Association and LACC, we made a significant investment into the Maggie Hathaway Project to really leave a better opportunity and playing potential for folks in that area.

This year in 2024, we're tackling a different problem. If you ask folks -- I was going to say if you ask folks in this area, but if you ask golf courses around the U.S. right now what's their number one problem, surveys would suggest what you are likely to hear is finding, acquiring and retaining skilled labor, especially on a golf course.

As golf has exploded, finding people to actually be skilled laborers on a golf course has actually been a challenge.

A couple of inspiring and impressive teammates of mine, Chris Hartwiger, Jordan Booth, Cole Thompson, came to us and said, We'd like to start a college program here at Sandhills Community College called the Greenskeepers Apprenticeship Program where we would do in-classroom and on-course learning for anyone who would take this class.

I agreed to fund it, or we agreed to fund it, for a year. We

thought it was going to be a fun project for a year. But what came out of a fun project was a program, if you take this class here in Sandhills, you had a job. You were working on a golf course. If you didn't have one when you started, we got one when you started. You didn't pay for this course.

Over the course of our first graduating class, every graduate in that class had a salary increase where they were working, and 50 percent of them had a promotion on the golf courses they were working at. The golf course reaction providing much more skilled labor was through the roof.

We call it the Greenskeeper Apprenticeship Program or GAP because we are trying to bridge the gap between the needs on a golf course and what's available.

There's a deep and diverse pool of talent here and we just had to give them a head start.

Because of the 2024 U.S. Open, together with our partners, we're going to make a \$1 million commitment to a program that was just a pilot program a year ago. With that \$1 million we're going to endow that program until we're back here in 2029. So there will be an ongoing college program still at no cost to the students, still the ability to get them and to pursue a job.

We'll also through that \$1 million expand this to South Carolina through Horry-Georgetown College and start a GAP program there.

We keep the program free. We keep the program impactful. And that \$1 million, kind of like Maggie Hathaway last year, is kind of like us coming together as a group. So it's the USGA, it's Pinehurst Resorts, it's the Bob Dedman Foundation, it's Ewing Outdoor Supply and it's Carolina Golf Association.

And I just want to say to Jack Nance, who's going to be retiring after 32 years as the executive director of the Carolina Golf Association, thanks for pushing your support through the organization, as well. We hope to make Carolina not only continuing a hub of American golf but by bringing more jobs to the area, as well.

I was going to shorten and end there but when I ran into our friend Mr. Ferguson at the Ladies U.S. Open, he said, I only have one comment to make about USGA press conferences. They're way too short. When you guys provide your materials, we would just like to hear more from Mike Whan.

So I went back and thought, How can I add five more

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

minutes just for Doug Ferguson. So I did.

I would just tell you as somebody who's fairly new to the majors side of the business, meaning when I came here from the LPGA, I walked in and realized that we had a significant responsibility in hosting and running a major. I really believe that the majors play an important role in the ecosystem, and quite frankly carry a responsibility, and one of those is legacy, history, consistency, and in our case, it's openness and providing opportunity.

But it's also about making a real commitment to the future of the game. And you've heard me talk about unify, showcase, govern and advance. And that's how we do it. But millions of dollars, tens of millions of dollars each year in juniors programs, launching the United States National Development Team for the pipeline of the game. Our 15, 30, 45 Initiative. In 15 years we are going to invest \$30 million to reduce water needs by any course that wants to pursue it by 45 percent.

Our greens section that's now doing agronomy consulting with 70 percent more golf courses than just a few years ago.

Our GS3 ball that's providing real tools and talent for greenskeepers that are preparing. If you're out here at 5:45 with J.B., you probably won't see me but you'll definitely see the ball rolling across every green.

I also think we have a responsibility to bring the game together, and I hope you agree that we do, by being this open. Doesn't matter where you came from, doesn't matter where you play, doesn't matter who your sponsor is, you have an opportunity to play in our national championship.

Last is creating big moments for the athletes, for their families, for their caddies, and for the fans. This week we'll have 225,000 people walk through the gates. That's a big moment. If you go sit at the very top of the grandstands on 18, as I did this morning for an interview, you probably see golf in a perspective you've never maybe seen it before.

The U.S. Open will provide the most network TV hours of any major: 1:00 to 7:00 on Friday, noon to 8:00 on Saturday, noon to 7:00 on Sunday. On Thursday when we're on USA Network we start at 6:30 a.m. and we go off at 5:00 p.m. On top of that we're going to provide options, supplemental options for people that want to watch in a different way, on our platforms, on USGA website and app, you can watch featured groups all day long. If you like those featured groups, you can literally watch every shot, every day of those groups.

On Peacock, if you want to watch all access, more of a red

zone experience. If you want to watch Sky feed on the weekend. But all of those supplemental opportunities offer reduced commercial time.

On the topic of reduced commercial time, I think you guys have heard me talk about it for two years, we've worked together with NBC, our partner, we've dramatically reduced both the NBC and the USGA promotions - you know how much that hurts me - in order to provide more coverage time than we've provided in years past and we'll start that on Thursday where last year we started that on Saturday and Sunday.

Finally I'm just going to say to you what I said to Jack Nicklaus and his table last Wednesday. I get the opportunity to go speak to Jack's table every year. And Jack said to me, Well, Mike, what are you going to say to us this year?

And I said, I'm going to say why do we as an industry have such a hard time accepting success.

He goes, What do you mean?

Well, the game is blossoming like never before and we can't help ourselves, we just spend all this time looking for the negative storyline. But 12 million more golfers in the last five years, made up of people of color, juniors, youth. We're younger than we've ever been before. We're more female than we've ever been before.

I made this comment to Jack, and I caught him off guard, I didn't think it was as important of a stat. But I said, There's 1,000 more, 1,000 more girls golf high school golf teams now than there were 10 years ago. There's almost as many girls golf high school teams as girls soccer teams.

To the guy who was commissioner 15 years ago, I never thought I'd be able to say that. We're really blowing up as an industry. We're not talking about how to fill tee sheets anymore, we're talking about how to let assistant pros go home because the workload is so significant.

So I just hope and all the other stuff that you get a chance to write about. As my media partners and friends in this business, maybe the positive story isn't as sexy, and I don't know what to do about that. But what an amazing time we are living through, and we have all lived through different times in the game, but I've got to tell you as somebody who's spent most of his adult life working in the game, I never thought I could rattle off some of the stats that I've been rattling off over the last 12 months. It's really a glorious time.

Yes, we're having some disputes in men's professional golf

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

that we'll have to work through, and not everything is perfect. But geez, what a great time it is to be in this sport. And I hope occasionally you get a chance to walk out there and see what 225,000 people feels like. And this place, even when we're not here, feels like the cradle of American golf.

I'm really proud of the industry because I think we were ready for this wave, and maybe we've missed a few in the past, but it's really an exciting time to work in the game.

I hope you would agree that it's an exciting time to write in the game because we may not always get these kind of waves, but what an incredible wave we've got. And while everybody keeps telling us when it is going to end, it just keeps growing every year.

Excited to be here with you. Excited to be here with you and J.B. and really excited to get started with the 124. You really didn't come to listen to Fred or I. Now that I went as long as I think you probably wanted me to talk, I'll slide it over to J.B.

JOHN BODENHAMER: Well, thank you, Mike. Good morning, everyone, and Mike, Fred, I'm proud to be your partners, too.

I would just say, welcome, everyone, to our first U.S. Open at our first anchor site, and the bigness of the U.S. Open here at Pinehurst. It is our biggest site.

As you would imagine, it's a multi-year journey. It just doesn't happen overnight. What happens out on No. 2 and all around the village here, and you've heard me say it before but I'm going to say it again, we really, over that multi-year journey ahead of the U.S. Open, all of our championships were guided by four strategies that we think about 365, 24/7.

The first is we go to America's greatest venues. We like to think of them as the cathedrals of the game. Really when you think about the cathedrals of the game, part of it is really Pinehurst is one of them. The ghosts of the past matter.

When you think about it, you go back to where Bob Jones completed his Grand Slam at Merion, Hogan tamed the monster at Oakland Hills Country Club, Jack and Arnold dueled it out at Oakmont, Jack's 1-iron, Tom's 15-shot win at Pebble Beach and of course Payne Stewart's putt here on 18.

Those are the ingredients of a cathedral. And it makes winning a U.S. Open at a cathedral that much more meaningful for the players, the fans and the game of golf.

And we're proud that that's really the foundation of our strategy.

Second, you heard Mike say it, 'openness'. That is our operative word. We are open. Over 10,000 played, you can follow your dream, and it really is true. Mike is using the line, and all of us use it, it doesn't matter where you come from, the clubs in your bag, the shirt on your back, the color of your skin, it just doesn't matter. You get your golf ball in the hole, U.S. Open, U.S. Women's Amateur, girls junior, you can play. We're proud of that.

We are the most open, bar none, championships in golf, and we're proud of that. That's our DNA, and we intend to keep it.

The third strategy is tough but fair. Those are the key words. It's not about score for us. It's about getting every club in a player's bag dirty, including the one between their ears. It is also part of what we think about as staying true to the intent of the architect.

Far be it from us to come to one of these great cathedrals and put a U.S. Open cookie cutter setup on it. Every run of cathedrals are different. We believe we can go all around our country and showcase the greatness of what these great playing fields, what their great creators intended, and we intend to do that at Pinehurst. More on that in a second.

Lastly and fourth and probably most recently, we're player focused. It's not a be all, end all. But what it does mean is we listen to players, we listen to their perspectives, we inform our decisions. But when we do make a decision, we explain what those decisions are.

We are not looking to be everybody's best friend, but we are looking to earn their respect, and part of that is coming to explaining the 'why' behind what we do.

We also focus, and this is often lost, not just on the U.S. Open or the U.S. Women's Open. We start at our junior championships, boys and girls, the U.S. Amateur, the Women's Amateur, the Walker Cup and the Curtis Cup. By the time these great players get to our Open championships, we feel like we know them. We know their parents, their families, their college coaches. Heaven forbid this day and age with amateur golfers, their agents. But we know them. We know what is important to them. We build those relationships. We work on it very hard.

Those are just part of what we follow.

I mentioned the intent of the architect. It's no secret to anybody here at Pinehurst, Donald Ross was the creator of



No. 2 and much of what is here. Donald Ross did a lot of impactful things, a lot of important things.

Perhaps at least one of my favorite quotes that he said, it went like this: "A country which gets golf minded need not worry about the honor, the integrity and the honesty of its people." That hangs in Golf House Pinehurst for every one of our staff to see.

Pinehurst isn't a country, but when you come here, you feel the energy, the excitement, the celebration of the game. People here get the game. When they feel it, it fits. We fit here at Pinehurst because it's about golf. It's at the center of this community. It bleeds through everything that's here.

I believe our country, the world would be a better place if every young boy and girl could grow up on a golf course. Boy, if they could grow up at Pinehurst, it would be even better.

Think about this when you think about Donald Ross. I didn't realize this until just a few weeks ago. 1,000 USGA championships, 17.5 percent of those, 175 of them, almost one in five, have been played on Donald Ross golf courses. That's pretty darned prolific.

This was his masterpiece. Donald Ross wasn't just a designer. Sure, that's maybe what most people know him to be. But he was a superintendent here at Pinehurst. He was a club maker. He was a carpenter. He did other things. But he was a designer, and he lived at Pinehurst.

You can go to the third green, look left, that's where Donald Ross lived. His home is still there. Pinehurst is the caretaker for that. This was his masterpiece. He refined it. He took it from sand greens to turf grass and kept improving it over and over again.

Each hole, he talks about this, was a different challenge. No two holes go in the same direction. You think about how the wind works around those holes and how it swings through the pine trees here.

It's natural. That's intended. What is off the fairways here is what Donald Ross intended it to look like. When we were here in 2014, it didn't quite look like what it looks like now, and we're really happy with what's off those fairways now.

We were here in 2014. It was just a few years after the restoration of No. 2. It hadn't grown in like it was when Donald Ross was here, but now it has a few years later, and you see with a warm wet spring, not just wire grass, which we did supplement a little bit in certain areas because some of it had disappeared from the restoration,

but what's all in there is what Donald Ross called 'the perfect rough.' Why? Because when a player hits a shot into those sandy natural areas, it's a walk up that fairway of a bit of anxiety, a bit of emotion, because they don't know what they're going to get. The randomness of that, it's not just five-inch green lush rough. It can be something gnarly, wire grass, or it can be a perfect sandy lie.

I think you're going to see some players walk to their golf ball and be unhappy, and others are going to be thrilled that they can spin their ball off of those tight sandy areas. We think that is pretty cool, and we think that is exactly what Donald Ross intended.

What is different on No. 2 from 2014? Not much. Champion Bermudagrass greens. The day we left in 2014, they blew up the greens and installed champion Bermudagrass. It's wonderful. We did supplement the wire grass a little bit, but this undergrowth is different than what we had, as I mentioned. Kudos to John Jeffreys and his team for nurturing that.

We narrowed the 13th fairway 10 to 12 yards. But that's about it. It's basically the same Pinehurst that you saw in 2014. We'll play it about 7,550 yards, a par-70, and we'll let Pinehurst be Pinehurst.

Our setup strategy is not very complicated, either. We want the players to get every club in their bag dirty. We want to give them choices, want to give them variety, give them angles. And we can do it all here. We endeavor to create firm and fast conditions because we believe the world's best players can control their golf ball not only in the air but once it hits the ground and think about where to miss it not just where to hit it.

I will tell you that, as you've seen, the fairways here are a bit wider than maybe some U.S. Opens. 30 to 35 yards. But that's intentional because Donald Ross intended you not just 20 hit it into the fairway but into a certain side of the fairway.

Think about the second hole and how that putting green sits a little bit from left to right. You need to hit it into the left side of that fairway on that 500-plus-yard par-4 to have the right approach shot into that green. You watch the greatest players in the world figure that strategy out and they will do it. In 2014 we had 70 percent of the field hit the fairways, but 56 percent of the field hit the putting greens. It is all about these magnificent upside down cereal bowl putting greens. They are difficult to hit, and we need to get the right firm and fast conditions around them.

But when they do miss the greens, we'll also endeavor around the surrounds to give them choices. You'll going to

see players putt, you're going to see them pitch, you might see them bump-and-run it a little bit.

Those are the choices we want to give them. We want to see their creativity and their talents. Then I think you'll see the sandy natural areas be a star, as well.

Lastly, just a couple of things. We're really proud to be here in 2024 and celebrate the 25th anniversary of Payne Stewart's iconic victory here. What a memory that was. I was here. His wife Tracey and his family are here. His caddie Mike Hicks is here. You may know that. We moved Payne's statue from behind the 18th green out to Fan Central. Tens of thousands will take pictures with that. It's wonderful.

But what you won't see is what is done inside, in the players' locker room. We've taken some memorabilia that the family has given us. In our champions' locker room, our past U.S. Open champions, is a glass locker with some of Payne's memorabilia for the players as they walk through the locker room this week to remember Payne. We're remembering him in a number of ways.

On Sunday we'll have a special flag on the flagstick to commemorate Payne. And around the mesh on that wonderful amphitheater on 18, you'll also see a little bit of an understated collaboration.

Yes, Jeff Hall won't like me very much, but I will tell you, we will use the back right hole location on No. 18 where Payne made that iconic putt.

I will tell you one last thing, and that is I believe we're about to embark on something very special. 1,000 championships. That doesn't happen very often. But it will be special partly because Payne Stewart, I believe, is smiling from above looking down on this week with great pride.

I think the moment so far that stands with me is something quite simple, and I'll leave you with this: It came from Andrew, the roller. He's one of those guys out on the crew, on the roller, rolling the greens, and our team was out with him a few days ago, and he just approached us, and he said, I love the U.S. Open.

We said, Andrew, why do you love the U.S. Open?

He says, Because it is the one week each year where you can cheer for the golf course.

We're going to be cheering for the golf course, too, as well as these great players. Thank you.

BETH MAJOR: As you can tell, lots of excitement around our 1,000th championship and our 124th U.S. Open. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. After all that positivity, we've had a lot of players recently mention that they can hit the ball anywhere on the driver face and kind of get away with it. I'm wondering if that's something that is a comment you've noticed in regard to the protocols and different things you did with distance and that you tabled the driver, and if that's something that would reignite interest in that topic?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I think that comment was before we came out with our final distance and the change on the golf ball regulations, and after. So I think that's been consistent.

I would say comfortably speaking for both Martin and I, we had and have real interest in figuring out a way to provide a difference as it relates to the driver, as well.

To date, in terms of the five-year process we went through, we didn't really come up with something that wouldn't have a much more negative effect on the recreational game.

In fact, like what we did on the golf ball is going to have much more of an impact at this level than at the average level.

When we started talking about changes in the driver or driving equipment, it was just the opposite. Much more significant impact across the board than just at the elite level.

I think we said this when we announced, and if we didn't I will just tell you. We shelved it for now because we thought it was time to make a decision and put it on there, but we didn't retire the idea. We just didn't, quite frankly, have an idea that we believed was worthy of going to the market yet. But I would just put a 'yet' on that statement.

Q. You spoke about the USGA's responsibility earlier. I'm wondering what is the responsibility to the TV audience?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, we really feel like we want to give people choices. First choice is probably an unmatched level of network TV. And if you want to watch on Thursday, you have USA Network from 6:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Compare that to some of your other experiences and you can make your own comparison there.

We also realize that everybody wants to watch it different. I've seen this happen with my own kids. They're watching

it a different way than I'm watching it. So if they want to take approaches, they can. And if you want to follow a specific group or player, we give you that option, as well.

I think what we want to do is give people a way to engage in the U.S. Open and to do that in whichever way you want to do that.

You can never get perfect, but I'm really proud of the changes we've made in just the last few years to give you more and more options. And quite frankly what our partners at NBC Universal have done in terms of just opening up the hours. Last year, if you think about it, we came on at 11:00 a.m. and went off at 10:00 p.m. on Saturday. Think of another sport that commands an NBC audience the entire day like that. That's exciting.

I think sometimes we almost take for granted - I'm saying myself included - just how much time you can wake up at 6:30 and leave your TV on until 5:00 and be watching. And then when that's over, or separately when that is going on, have other viewing options. And that's what we provide.

Q. Obviously a lot of conversation always around the commercials at this event. I'm wondering how does the USGA balance its own financial interests and generating certain amounts of TV rights revenue against the maybe desires of golf fans who would prefer to watch a lot more golf with a lot fewer interruptions?

MIKE WHAN: With choices. I would say we have made -- it's funny, what I was saying to Doug, we have made a significant reduction in our own promotions, and in fairness to NBC, they've matched us, because this is our big microphone, too, so we like to be able to use this opportunity to share all the stories of the USGA.

Cutting back on that doesn't come easy. We also understand that they've paid for our rights, and they've got to monetize those rights, as well.

But if you prefer to watch it a different way, you can go on our app and watch it all day long in a whole different way. I'm sure NBC and the audience doesn't probably love that comment, but we just try to provide options.

Some people want to watch it a certain way, and you can go -- if you like All Access and more of the Red Zone, jump around, which would probably describe my 26-year-old, then there's an option for them.

Yeah, I don't think this has to be a one-size-fits-all anymore. And I think if you really understand the viewing audience and the game today, especially at an event this

size, it's about giving them choices, not just a one-size-fits-all.

Q. Given the nature of these greens, as much as you want to take things to the edge for a U.S. Open, how difficult is it to do that without it getting out of control?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Well, I think it's always difficult. Our strategy is built around tough but fair, but these are difficult greens, no bones about it.

I think, look, just to put it out there, I think what we're endeavoring to do, we look at the weather, that's always part of it. But I think the way we think about it, we'll play in the mid-13s for most of the day. That'll drop down as the day goes on a little bit.

But we think with the hole locations we choose and if the weather cooperates, we think that's a good place to be, along with everything else that's here with Pinehurst.

It's not just about speed on these greens. It's the wonderful putting greens themselves and how firm and fast they get, and I think fairways too. I think there's a lot more that Donald Ross intended here even off the fairways. Even the visuals that you see, the way it turns, the bunkers. I think we're really working hard on the bunkers, too, and getting them just right for these great players.

So it's a lot of things.

Q. I was just curious with the change away from bent, is it easier to control?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Easier to control? No, it's just different. I don't know that it's easier. I think it's just a different putting green surface, which we're familiar with. I wouldn't call it easier. It's just different.

Q. Mike, regarding the purse increase this year, as you think about a strategy there for the rest of this decade or so, is there an ambition to return the U.S. Open purse to the single largest in golf like it was the previous decade or so?

MIKE WHAN: I'll be honest with you. We don't sit in rooms and say, How do we... We want to make sure that our purse maxes how we feel about the best of our championship, which is a life-changing difference in the game, and I think we're there and we'll continue to kind of monitor that.

I think there's probably some, if we went a million higher than some others, they'd just go a million, and I'm not really sure that's the best answer.



But I don't think anybody who wins this week and walks away with \$4.3 million, and quite frankly all the other that comes with winning the U.S. Open, is going to question whether or not that was an event that's changing.

We're proud of our purse. I'm proud of the fact that we as an organization consistently ask ourselves whether or not we think we've got our purse right, our TV right.

All of those things have changed quite a bit in the last few years, and change is uncomfortable, but I think we're not only keeping up with the times, but hopefully at least in the landscape of majors, in a lot of these cases we're leading.

You guys can decide if you think that's right or wrong, but that's how we think about it.

Q. John, I think you used the term same Pinehurst compared to 2014. I believe that applies to the total yardage, as well. Given the conversation we're having about distance gains over the last decade, what does that say about this golf course, that you can essentially play it the same way we did 10 years ago?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Oh, I don't know what it says. I know that we will be very similar. We looked at lengthening. We chose not to. I think we'll play it overall a bit longer than we did. We move it around a lot.

I think, look, players are hitting it 10 yards further now than we were 10 years ago, so that's part of our strategy. We think about that.

So I think all in, we'll play it a little bit longer than we did in 2014, but that's just how we'll move it around. It was just a choice we made.

Q. John, how do you weigh player feedback in real-time versus you have a plan coming into the week, you want it to be this, then the reactions are that, and how do you go from deviating based on that? How do you weigh those scales?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Well, we've got a team. Scott Langley leads that for us, our player relations capability, but he's got a team of five or six around him.

It can be a lot of things. It's certainly about the golf course. We pay attention. We listen to what the players are saying. We ask them questions. We have a number of the players that we really trust their opinion. They understand the architecture, they understand what we're trying to achieve. So we'll seek their opinion. We don't just sit back and wait. Scott played on the Tour for 10 years. He won

on the Tour. He's got a great relationship with them.

It doesn't just stop with the U.S. Open. We did that two weeks ago at Lancaster Country Club. We engaged the players all throughout that week.

Look, I think it's our job to really seek that and understand it and let it inform our decisions but not drive all of our decisions, either. We're going to be the USGA. It's going to be the U.S. Open. We're going to be tough but fair. The players know that.

I think they want that. I think that they want to win something special. We're tough but fair not just to be tough but fair because when you win, it means what Bob Jones won, what Ben Hogan won, what Tiger won. It just means more.

There was a U.S. Open champion a few years ago that sticks in my head. It's a story I tell our team. He sat in a room just like this. I was there. I won't name him. But he shot 67 in the third round of the U.S. Open, and a member of the media - might have been one of you in the room - said, Did you enjoy shooting 67 today in the U.S. Open? He looked around a little bit, and if you know this player, he's pretty cerebral. He says, I don't think what I did today was enjoyable, but I really feel like I achieved something.

That's what we do. That's the way we think about it.

MIKE WHAN: I'll say, too, it's not just golf course. I remember standing on the range last year Saturday and Sunday talking to players about the U.S. Open experience. One of the things we heard is the recovery system and what's kind of happened; ice baths and saunas and that kind of stuff was growing faster than we were.

So the commitment that we've made in the last year to the player recovery process -- it's not just about golf course feedback. It's just making sure an ease of their family's experience and getting in and out of the golf course, that kind of stuff. That's the stuff that we want to make sure -- to John's point, we're going to make it probably uncomfortable during their 18-hole experience, but the rest of the experience doesn't have to be.

So that's the kind of stuff we want to understand, as well.

JOHN BODENHAMER: That's a great point. We work hard on the experience, not just on the golf course. Super good point.

Q. Mike, John referenced this on June 3, the final qualifying day on Golf Channel, and I think you were asked at media day about the access for LIV Golfers,



and that's directly via maybe their points list or what have you. How serious of a discussion is that for you going forward, and what could you envision that maybe being if that were to come to pass?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, so two things. First, let's start with the obvious. About half this field is filled open, and I think we had 35 players from LIV that were exempted right into final qualifying. So if they really wanted to be here, they could go play 36 holes and qualify, and some did, to their credit.

I think we have 13 or 14 LIV players in the field, and that's essentially what we've had in '22 and '23.

There is no out-of-bounds stakes on our field criteria. In other words, this major probably different than some others, you can get in. It's not a closed field. It doesn't require a committee or an invitation. If you want to play in this field you've got an opportunity to play in this field, and we're proud of that.

I would say to your specific question, John and I have both talked about it, and we're going to talk about it this off-season, whether or not there needs to be a path to somebody or somebodies that are performing really well on LIV that can get a chance to play in that way. I think we are serious about that. Exactly what that looks like and how that'll curtail, I'm not just being coy; we haven't done that yet.

I also think, if I'm being perfectly honest with you, we've always felt like for the last maybe year and a half that we're always three months away from kind of understanding what the new structure is going to look like. So before we kind of react, what is LIV going to be, what's the PGA TOUR. So we always kind of felt like we're just about to know that answer, so let's figure that out.

Now I think the reason we're being more vocal about looking at that for next year is maybe this is the new world order, and if that's the case, we wanted to take a look at that.

I think it's feasible. I don't think it's a huge pathway, but we do offer other pathways through DP or Korn Ferry, so we know that there's an option to get there.

But even that said, since the first -- I think they played their first LIV event the week before our 2022 U.S. Open, and in that U.S. Open there were 13 LIV players, suspended at the time playing in our championship, so we're not a closed door. If you want to be here -- you've got to want to be here, but if you want to be here, there's certainly a way to get here.

Q. John, can you speak about tee positions because in 2014 you moved the tees around and because of the nature of the greens; where the pins are located and where the tees are located are integrated together I'm sure. How do you alert the players to this, about the possibility of the tees being put in different places, and especially like, for example, hole 13? Would that be a drivable par-4 possibly? Do you alert players to this possibility that the holes could be played from these different positions so that they're prepared for it when it comes time? Or is it just a surprise that day?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Well, I don't know that we alert players. I think over the last couple of decades, I think they know us pretty well now that we're going to move it around a lot. It's kind of who we are and what we do. We believe in giving players choices everywhere we can.

In 2014 we played a number of holes drivable. You referenced 13. We played 3 drivable twice. We played No. 7 up, way up. We moved par-3s around, giving different yardages, angles.

That's what we do.

As far as alerting players, I think if it changes, if the approach that a player would -- it would change the architectural approach that the player would have to look at and experience, we would show them what we would do in practice rounds.

But if it's just an exercise of math and it's in their yardage book, then we probably won't, and haven't really. We haven't had, I don't believe, I'd have to think, had really any alternate tees, but we will move it around, and it's just a matter of them doing the math, and they do that every week. So it's nothing unusual.

I think they expect it, and we will -- it really is in real time based on what -- Mother Nature has a seat at the table, and it's an outdoor game. Until we put domes on these great places, which I hope to heck we never do, it's a real time decision, but we do plan to move it around.

Q. Mike, earlier you mentioned the friction in the professional, the need for unity. Is there any progress in getting unity with the ball rollback, and how important is the PGA TOUR support for that concept?

MIKE WHAN: I'll give you an answer but I would say, like anything I say, you should probably follow my actions more than my words.

Our actions were we came out and were pretty strong in

the idea of an MLR, an individual ball that we played at a higher level and nothing at the recreational level. In real clear conversations, real clear conversations, PGA TOUR and the PGA of America asked us on the top of their list of concerns was that.

In an effort to -- I always say we lead in a huddle. We try to bring the industry together and hear everybody's points of view, but at the end of the day, somebody has got to call a play, and that's our job, so we call a play.

But in that huddle, we heard loud and clear that the idea of a bifurcated product line was really concerning to both of them, and concerning enough that I'm not really sure that the PGA TOUR and other tours would have implemented it.

As I said from the beginning, this was never a paper exercise. We didn't want to do something, check it off our to-do list, and then it never really affects the game long-term.

Our decision to go back to an across-the-board regulation, which admittedly by going across the board we had to give it more time, so longer to implement, and lessen the impacts, so that the impact of the recreational game was minimal at best, we all outcomes of those.

I don't think those were our probably choice No. 1, but the right choice, if you're actually leading in a huddle versus leading in a silo. Yeah, I think not only do we respect their opinions, but their opinions fundamentally shaped the final outcome.

Q. John, the course is very much the same, as you said, but in 2014 it was very brown and now it's green. Why is that, and did what you were trying to achieve then not work?

JOHN BODENHAMER: That's a good question. I'll go back to Mother Nature has a seat at the table. It's rained a little bit more than it did last year. We had five weeks leading up to 2014 where it was very dry. This place is spicy and bouncy, and it's at its best when it's that way.

But I'll say this: John Jeffreys, Bob Farren, Kevin Robinson and the whole Pinehurst team, we heard words like -- this is a player feedback, words like "mint," "perfect," "amazing."

Here in the Sandhills where it's sandy, the hydraulics are fast. To be as we are, it's pretty fun to see the players and the fans see this great place as it looks, but you can see it's starting to turn.

It rained last Sunday, and it kept it a little greener. You'll see it as the weather progresses, what it looks like. It'll turn a little bit. It will not look like it did in 2014, and frankly, honestly, that's by design.

I think it was just so dry in 2014, and we felt we could achieve something a little bit different and still have it be bouncy.

Q. You mentioned the explosive growth of the recreational game, but some of that has probably come at the expense of the professional game; if you're out playing you're not watching. How do you reconcile those two sides of the game? How do you get fans of playing become fans to watch on TV?

MIKE WHAN: At the risk of being snarky, every other sport in the world would say, gosh, if we could just be 50 percent bigger than we were 10 years ago, and we're 50 percent bigger, and we're worried about a TV rating one week or five weeks.

If golf was a stock, it would be soaring. You'd be purchasing it. Whether you're a television producer, whether you're a golf course owner, whether you're a golf club builder because there's just nothing better for the game than people loving it. If people love it -- so if they're out playing versus watching the U.S. Open, I'm okay with that. That's pretty exciting for the game. It's exciting for them. It's exciting for their kids because they're going to create more future generations of golfer.

If you're out playing because you love the game so much, you're going to come back. We're going to get you. You're going to be watching. I'm not going to worry about it this week or next week or next month.

But long-term, there's virtually no way for us as an industry not to be over the moon about what's happening in the game, and if people didn't watch a couple of weeks or if there was -- to me, a great example is I read these results of how Augusta was down on Sunday. Augusta was across-the-board four days up, but for three hours on Sunday it was down versus a year ago. Headlines were: Augusta was down on Sunday.

I gotta love my Augusta friends because if it was me I'd be out there going, Are you kidding me? We were double digits across four days. But that's okay.

I'm just saying, I have zero concern about the future of the game and the future of viewership and the future of fandom because we're doing what we've always wanted to do, and quite frankly couldn't. If I was being honest with you, only one other time in the Tiger effect did we see a bounce like

this, but it was half the bounce of what we're experiencing now.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

Yeah, we can try to find a reason to not be excited about this, but we'd have to be looking for one because this is a pretty exciting time for the game, and for a group of people to put on 15 national championships - some are amateurs, some are women, some are boys, some are girls, some are professionals - it's an amazing time to be doing what we're doing.

Q. Since most of your championships are amateur championships and there's so much money coming into the game now, including NIL, at what point do you start looking at, in case of let's take this event, which is an open championship, why wouldn't you say if they earned it and made the cut, why wouldn't you pay amateurs what they deserve to get for making the cut here?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I think as the amateur -- we've tried to evolve NIL and amateur status, as the game has, we as the USGA kind of created an NIL and amateur status angle before the NCAA did, so golf was kind of ahead of that time. I'm not sure. You may be right. We may be heading to that path sooner rather than later.

BETH MAJOR: I typically end these conferences, as you know. First, I just want to thank you all. I hope you can hear the excitement that we have about being here, 1,000th championship, 25th year of Payne. It's a really exciting week for all of us. We're thrilled that you're all here to be a part of it.

Appreciate your support and your coverage, and look forward to helping you throughout the week. I am going to turn it back over to Mike for just a minute to recognize a few folks.

MIKE WHAN: If you have an unhappy experience this week, please blame me. That's the right place to go. But if you have a great experience here, if you enjoy what it feels like to hang out at the cradle with 225,000 other golf fanatics and you get an opportunity, please thank Reg Jones, Eric Steimer or Leighton Schwob because what it takes to put on an event of this size is just so overwhelming.

I'm amazed to be able to sit and watch them do what they do. If you run into anybody and you see that on their placard, please high-five them. More importantly, give them a hug because they haven't slept in three months. But Reg, Leighton and Eric, thank you guys for making us all very proud.

