

KPMG Women's PGA Championship

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Frisco, Texas, USA

Fields Ranch East

Gil Hanse

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Pleased to be joined by the architect behind Fields Ranch East, Gil Hanse. Gil, welcome back to PGA Frisco. Seems like we were just here a couple years ago for the Senior PGA. How does it feel for you that the next chapter of championship golf has arrived?

GIL HANSE: It feels great. I think one of the things that we notice is the maturation of the golf course. When you build a brand new golf course it takes six, seven, eight years before it really starts to match the vision. I think Roger Meier and his team here have done an amazing job of moving it forward.

I think two years down the road we're looking better, and I think two years from now we will even look better from that point in time.

Q. Regarding the course specifically, we've been going through press conferences and the players have been going on and on about the wind and how the wind will be adversity for them. With construction and design of this course, was wind something you thought about from day one or something that only played in the process a little bit later.

GIL HANSE: No, we 100% thought about the wind here. Anything in Texas you're going to deal with wind. We're building a new golf course out in west Texas, and we think about it even more out there.

But we knew, and the good thing about it is it's fairly predictable where it's going to come from, south-southeast and it's going to basically blow in that direction the time of year major championships are held, unless we get a front coming through. Then we might get stuff might come out of north and we are also going to bad stuff coming with that in terms ever thunderstorms.

From the standpoint of the wind and the design, we want a change have direction. We feel like we've got that in the

design. We move around a little bit. We're downwind, up into it, et cetera.

But we also focus, and when I say us, Jim Wagner, my partner and I; Jim is equally responsible for this. We look at the golf course and we try to present challenges not only through the movement of the holes and the directions of them, but the features that you're playing into.

So there are certain greens that actually sit down on the ground where you can bump and run a ball if you want to; you can knock a ball down to play into it.

And there are others, like the second, that sit way up on a hill and you got to flight your ball properly going into them.

So not only is it the direction of the wind, the intensity of it, but it's the shots we're asking you to hit by varying those and varying the requirements of the greens and how receptive they are. We also think we're adding another layer to the wind.

But it will ultimately be -- every championship that's held here, it will be the determinant of what the final score is and certainly the difficulty of the golf course is just going to depend how hard the wind blows.

Q. A lot of the players hinted at the unique position of the sightlines off the tee. I am curious is there a specific sight line that's a favorite or most unique on the course?

GIL HANSE: I keep going back to 2. Somebody asked me what my favorite hole was. I love 2 because the bunker sort of short right of the bunker and the one long left, and they overlap slightly from the tee, so takes away some of the depth perception of what happens in between them.

I think those are things that Jim and I really feel strongly about in trying to create, I wouldn't say visual uncertainty, but just a little bit of doubt in the players' heads.

As a architect you're doing things to try and challenge the way they play the game and the physical striking of golf balls and positioning, et cetera. But architecture at its best

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is really more of a mental exercise. It's how do you plot your way around the golf course.

And if there are little mental cues that don't quite register but they ultimately will register if you study the golf course and you think about it and you practice and you learn, then it becomes a much more familiar environment.

So we like golfers -- we would hate for golfers to ever play one of our golf courses and just walk out the first time and go, okay, okay, got it.

Think about any great golf course you ever played. That doesn't happen. So if we're trying to build, and I know great is a strong word, but a good and challenging golf course, we want to make sure it asks compelling questions and requires thoughtful answers. The only way you can have thoughtful answers is to study for it.

Q. You just mentioned the wind obviously being a factor in your design and the level of intensity. We are expecting 25, 30 mile an hour gusts this weekend. Is that pretty typical for this area? Is that factored into your design?

GIL HANSE: It is, and that's pretty typical. I think you can see 30 to 40, which obviously would start to impact playability of the golf course. I think if we stick in the 25, that's going to be perfect.

From the setup, it's a wide golf course, but it's -- the width is effective from the standpoint of yes you have 60 yard fairways to hit into, but you really only want to hit to the right 20 or 30 yards of it.

So I think there is an opportunity. If the wind really gusts there is still width, but you're going to have to strike your golf ball extremely well to get to the proper side of the fairway.

So I think if we had 20 or 30 yard fairways out here with this type of wind it would probably be too much, too difficult. I think the combination of the width off the tee, ability to have good angles, to have certainly on the par-5 holes thoughtful layup shots.

I think the golf course, unless the greens get super fast, which I can't imagine Kerry is going to do that. I know they'll be championship speed. But I think we're going to have an opportunity to see good ball striking rewarded, proper flighting of the golf ball, proper shaping of the golf ball, and I don't think at 25 miles an hour it's going to render this golf course too difficult.

Q. You mentioned seeing the maturity of the golf

course. How have you seen it change and grow the most since the Senior was held here?

GIL HANSE: Yeah, for the Senior it was what we opened to, right? The golf course wasn't even open to the public before the Senior. The native areas were pretty thin. The grass itself, we had some winter kill the year before so there was a little bit of thinness in the fairways and some of the knobs and the higher spots that would be susceptible to winter kill. I think we were trying hard to get those back.

I think Roger and his team, Roger Meier, have done a great job of learning the golf course and what needs to be protected during the winter; when you come out of winter, how do you push things a little bit further along.

I think native grasses are so fickle. If you go in and just seed them in order to get instant establishment they become unplayable. They become too thick. They don't look right. They all kind of lay over on top of each other.

It becomes one of those things where playability and visuals are bad. So you just have to be patient. I know for the Senior you could still see dirt through the natives when you look down. From a distance they look great, but when you look from the top.

Now all of that is gone and we're starting to see the growth underneath take shape. Like I said I would think by '27 we'll be in a better place. Probably '29 really see this place in full bloom.

Q. You said last week watching was really nerve-racking for you. How different is the experience when it is completely your design and you'll be watch this weekend?

GIL HANSE: It'll be nerve-racking. I think one of the things that we've had -- it's very interesting, because we live in both worlds of golf architecture. We got a foot firmly planted in the restoration world and we've got a foot firmly planted in the new course world.

I think there is less pressure in the new course world because the restoration world there is a full membership that has expectations and dreams and goals for it; whereas here, like the organization that is running the championship is also the one that owns the golf course and is our client. Their hope matches our hope in this regard, is that we just want to see a great player win. Don't really care and the score is.

A lot of major championships there is a lot of scoreboard watching and different places, and that's appropriate. Here I think it's just let's present a great test. Hopefully we've

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created a golf course where we're going to inspire them to hit some really interesting shots and find some really creative ways to play the golf holes. P.

Winning score will be what it is. I think we all just want a great champion hoisting the trophy on Sunday.

Q. When you and Jim get on a project, what's the difference between doing a Boston Golf Club or is it CapRock out in Nebraska, to doing this? You know there would be championships here. What are the challenges you guys faced then?

GIL HANSE: Yeah, this project was without a doubt the most complicated golf course we've ever built from the standpoint of the site of challenging because we had to raise everything out of the flood plain down through the areas along Panther Creek. We had to move a lot more dirt than we normally would like to move.

We had a lot of outside-of-the-ropes stuff we had to think about. Where do you put hospitality? Where do you put storage, all the things that go with hosting major championships.

You all know this, but the footprint for hopefully a Ryder Cup here is enormous when you think about the buildout outside. Boston Golf Club we didn't have to think about where to put the hospitality tents and where are you going to put the Wanamaker Village. How is the first tee going to set up with grandstands all the way around it for a Ryder Cup.

So there were a lot of conversations out with just how to you build the golf course in order to get a golf course that you want to play, which is ultimately the final goal from a member's course or even a public golf course that's not going to host major championships.

I was joking a friend of mine, he asked what's that golf course like, meaning Fields Ranch East. I said, well, it's Gil and Jim trying to build a hard golf course. We like to build golf courses that are fun and playable. Yeah, there's challenge to them, but they're not easy, but more focused on fun and creativity.

We knew here that public perception of this golf course was going to be predicated on the major championships that are held here. So if it didn't have a certain level of difficulty it wouldn't be regarded as a major championship test, so there might be some things that we did that we may have pushed the envelope a little further than we would've at a member's course or at a public facility.

I am not saying we deviated 100% from our design

philosophy, because I think you can still a lot of what we believe in width and angles and setup and scruffy looking golf courses. That's still wholly apparent here.

But I think we had to look at it through the lens of this has to be challenging for the best players in the world. We can rely on the wind to a certain degree, but we also have to rely on the challenge that golf course presents.

Q. When you took this project on, how much did, okay, Gil, so many acres, or was to give us the best golf course and we'll work from there?

GIL HANSE: So there was a competition amongst five architecture groups. We were awarded. So this is the plan we came up with. We basically came up with the plan for the clubhouse is going to sit where it sits now. The East Course would sit where it was. The West Course where it sits.

And then at the time it came down to, all right, you guys do 36 holes. You know as well as anybody we're not set up to build 36 holes at a time. We had to gracefully say we can't do the West -- we can't do two golf courses. We just don't have the enough people and don't feel like we can pay enough attention.

Beau Welling was involved and he's such a great land planner that they said, Beau can do the West Course, which was great. We started working and collaborating with Beau on the land plan and how things could work out. He had a ton of good ideas and we obviously had a lot of input from the PGA of America. Had a lot of input from Omni.

That was the other thing I didn't mention. In the construction of this golf course we had a lot of infrastructure associated with the hotel and the resort. There are amazing pipes underneath this golf course that are taking storm water from the resort and taking it where it needs to go.

So there was a lot of interaction. And then aside from that, we started in October of 2019 and COVID hit in March. Right during the middle of construction we have COVID to deal with.

So it was a challenge, but I couldn't be more proud of how we came Liu it at the other end.

To wrap that up with the bow, yes, we feel like we built the best golf course we could here. That was always first and foremost. Like if they kept asking us to deviate from the quality of the golf course I think we would've had a harder time. The golf course got locked in amber, and then



everything else had to happen outside of that.

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