

Canadian Pacific Women's Open

Wednesday, August 22, 2018

Mike Whan

Laurence Applebaum

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll just have the two gentlemen make some brief opening remarks, and we'll start with Laurence.

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Thanks, Christina.

We're thrilled to be back at Wascana Country Club here in Regina, Saskatchewan. Couldn't be more excited about the field that we've got: top 90 out of top 100 LPGA Tour players coming back to Canada.

We've had already a great week with our women's leadership summit yesterday at Hotel Saskatchewan. It was a phenomenal day filled with some of the most influential business leaders, including Lorie Kane, Lesley Hawkins, Joan Hardy and Shannon Cole, as well as Dr. Andrea Lavoie from the hospital, Jimmy Pattison program and our recipient for CP Has Heart this year.

We announced it earlier this summer, but to have the renewal of the Canadian Pacific Railway, CP, as our title sponsor, and overall partner of Golf Canada for the next five years.

Keith Creel, the CEO, came to Magna Golf Club this summer and announced, along with myself and the golf club and the LPGA Tour, five more years of a title sponsorship.

We could not be more appreciative and more grateful for the partnership that we have with CP and what they do to Canadian golf, what they do to the community in Canada in supporting CP Has Heart across our nation.

We're so excited to be hosting the LPGA Tour, and in particular to have Mike Whan join us, as he always comes out for this great event.

So thank you, Mike.

MIKE WHAN: Thank you.

Yeah, on behalf of all of us at the LPGA, not just our players and our caddies, but our staff and our fans



around the world, thanks for welcoming us so to your home.

I said in a tweet yesterday that I've been lucky in my business life to travel all over the world. I was in the hockey business before the golf business and traveled all over Canada, but this is my first trip to Saskatchewan and my first trip to Regina. So it's nice when your business life gives you personal experiences you haven't had before.

I wasn't sure what to expect, but I had so many thank yous and pleases and have a nice days before I got out of the airport that I realized I was in one of the nicest places in the world.

In fact, the guy at National Car Rental when I checked in said, Have a great tournament, so I knew we were on to something special when at the airport we were talking about it.

Got to the pro-Am party last night late and ran to the bar to get a beer and they said, We're sold out of beer. I know how much beer we brought in, so I know that that's a good sign. It only happens in Canada and Scotland where they sell out of beer, so that's a great sign.

I walked the range this morning for a couple hours as I typically do on a Tuesday and just listen to players. The discussion on the range is about greens. To a player, they all said, Some of the fastest, firmest, truest greens we've played all year.

So on behalf of our players and caddies, thank you to what I know has been a Herculean effort from a staff to deal with freezes from the winter that a lot of tournaments -- a lot of golf courses have dealt with; few of them have dealt with it as well as this tournament.

This tournament is special for a lot of reasons. One is because the people of Canada embrace it in such a big way; two is because we have very few title sponsors as special as CP. I mean, they really treat this event as a as serious, significant, premium stop, and players feel it when they got off the plane.

We play a different course every year, and that makes it exciting. You don't get the comfort of saying, I know

the course and how hole No. 3 breaks. There is anxiety that you feel here that's special.

And I think knowing that we're going to have so many Canadians in the field, not only from the LPGA Tour but Canadians from the Symetra Tour and Canadians that are making it to the next level. I can tell you the pipeline for young female golfers in Canada I don't think has ever been stronger -- a little least in my ten years of sitting up here.

I'm not only excited to be here today, I'm excited about the next five years with CP. I'm excited about what's happening in Canadian golf at least on the women's side. I don't watch enough men's golf to tell you if the same thing is happening, but I can tell you in women's golf it's an exciting time for the country and an exciting time for us to be here.

We look forward to being here for five-plus more years. This is a stop that I would hate to ever not have. It's special on tour, and it's not just special to players, it's special to the staff. We can? All attest to the fact that we enjoy coming here.

And just to see the people coming in on a Wednesday -- unfortunately we might hit a couple of them with our 12:30 tee time, but it's exciting to see the town really embrace it.

I've seen the green and white on TV before, so I see how this town can rally behind football. I hope we can do the same thing around golf.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Commissioner, if you would, expand upon your hockey career background. Tell us about that.

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, career is probably a stretch. O actually I was at TaylorMade/adidas golf for many years, and then I left to run a hockey equipment company called Mission Hockey originally. It was roller hockey based out of California owned by the guy that owned Minnesota Wild, Bob Naegele.

I met him at a dinner. Never forget. Bob, before we had dinner, he said, Can we hold hands for second? Thought that was strange. We reached together and he prayed, and I remember thinking, I haven't prayed before dinner in a while, shame on me. My mom be so upset that I said that out loud.

At the end of dinner he hugged me and he said, I think we could do special things together. Let's do this.

I remember driving home, and I saw my wife -- and I had a different job at the time -- and I said to my wife, I

think I met a guy that I needed to meet at the right time of my life. He was a born-again Christian. He was all about faith. He believed in a greater vision, and I had gotten away from that in my race for a career.

So I joined him. They had a business that was losing about \$10,000,000 a year at the time. He said, Either help me fix it or help me close it, but do it humanly. Got a lot of family and friends working there. We kind of got it turned around over the next couple years. We bought ITECH in Montreal, so for about five years I would spend one week in Irvine, California and one week in Montreal, go back and forth.

I'm happy to tell you that I have paid more in Canadian taxes than I ever thought I would in my five years of working in Montreal one half the time.

Through doing that, we also acquired the business of a small clothing business in Toronto. When you're in the hockey business you spend a lot of time in Canada, and I did. We did that for about eight or nine years. We sold it Christmas of 2008.

At the time I lived in California. I remember coming back from the closing and you can relate with this. My wife said, Now what? I was all excited we sold it. I said, well, I'll make you three promises: One, I know you love living in California, so I'll never make you move from California.

We live in Orlando.

Second promise is I'm not going to work for a year. I'm going to take the kids to school and pick them up and be the dad I always should have been.

I almost made that a year.

But the most important promise is, whatever I do the next in my life I won't travel as much as I used to. You can imagine how shaky my marriage is now.

Q. Commissioner, can you maybe just describe the growth that the LPGA has experienced the last few years and how you're utilizing title sponsors and marketing partners to really expand the influence of the LPGA around the globe?

MIKE WHAN: I like your words better than mine, so print what you said because you made it sound better. Use Explosive and momentum. Feel free to use all those words, preferably in the headline.

The reality of it is I joined in 2010. I always tell people, going global is like going through -- I mean, it's a good analogy for CP. It's like going through a tunnel on a train. Like you want to get to the other side, that's where your destination is. But when you first get into a

tunnel it's dark and it can be scary and everything in your body says turn around. Go back to the light.

When I joined the LPGA they were in the early phases of the tunnel. They were going global. When you first go global it's just full of mistakes. Language isn't easy. Personal space in Beijing is different than it is in Boston. You're making money mistakes and the way you do business is different. International TV has requirements you didn't know before. We were right in the middle of that.

When I joined I was just clueless and knew enough to look at it and go, Why would we go back? I mean, if you want me to be the commissioner in 1985 when essentially every player came from North America and Europe, every sponsor came from North America and Europe, every fan came from North America and Europe.

Which was a nice run, but every sport in the world is trying to create a more global audience. We were just way ahead of the world. How many times we have to watch the NFL play one game in London and call it a global breakthrough, or the NBA plays a pre-season game in Shanghai. That's fine, but we decided to really be global.

So we play all around the world and we encourage players from all over the world to get here. This event is going to be incredible for Saskatchewan, but we'll televise it in 172 countries. I remember saying in my first press conference, There is no greater example of sport than the Olympics. Why can't be the Olympics every week?

Put on a platform where the best female golfers from all over the world want to compete against each other. Let's make it an incredible hometown event, which I always think the Olympics are, and let's just let the rest of the world eavesdrop.

So now if you look at the tour we have sponsors from everywhere. We have fans from everywhere. Our website is translated in ten languages. From 2010 to 2005 we probably averaged 30 translators a day on the tee box. I haven't seen a translator on a tee since probably 2014, but for a while we really needed it because we were still learning how to even talk to each other, let alone press conferences and the rest.

The outcome of that, the other side of the tunnel, is pretty exciting. Now we really do have fans from all over -- I think we had 46 countries at last year's Q-School. We just started Q-School this week. I don't know how many countries were there.

But 46 different countries trying to make it to the best

tour in the world. That's an exciting time. So no different than a lot of the brands that sponsor us, we want to have a hometown, we want to be from somewhere. We want our players to move together.

We don't want to be nomadic and everybody flies back to where they grew up and flies in. Our players live in America, they move to America. We really travel all over the world, and as a result of that traveling we've really created a fan base that's significant.

So when other sports say to me, How can you sell your TV rights to 172 countries, my answer is usually, How can you play your whole season in one country?

If you want to be global it's not fun, but you got to get in the tunnel. The other side of the tunnel is pretty glorious, but the tunnel can be dark for a while.

See how quick my answers are.

Q. First time in my memory that I can recall there is actually no domestic broadcast or simulcast of this tournament in Canada. Any concern on that? Just following up on what you said.

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I think at the end of the day we want every country to celebrate their own event. This one has been a little challenging -- not because of Laurence and Golf Canada, more because of our agreement with Golf Channel in a North American event. They inherited that, not created that.

So I think that's something we'll definitely work on, as we talked about '20 and beyond both in our agreement and our agreement with Golf Canada. It's something we both want to rectify, and I'm sure CP does as well. It's not a long-term phenomenon; it's a 2018, maybe 19 phenomenon.

Q. Question for Laurence. You've been on the job about a year now, when you look back at that year, what are you most proud of and what have you learned about yourself?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: I like the question from over here. A lot easier. I'll first say last year the CP Women's Open event in Ottawa was one of the highlights of the last year in terms of the fan outreach, the performance of Brooke, and the way that community rallied around this event.

It's obviously Wednesday of this year, but I already feel -- I know all of our metrics for the CP Women's event 2018 is going to exceed. It'll be a record on many, many fronts here, so I'm really excited about this week. I'm excited about 16 Canadians in the field. I'm excited about our prospects for a great weekend.

From a standpoint of Golf Canada, I'm exceptionally proud of the last quarter. We've had a record, record commercial run re-signing CP to a long-term partnership, extending our relationship with RBC, and the relationship not only for the RBC Canadian Open, but their participation here with the CP Women's Open and Team Canada.

We are about to announce an extension with our partners of Acushnet, so Titleist, FootJoy, a long-term extension which we're very proud of. And bringing on our entire community. So from a business prospect what we've been able to achieve in the last year has been incredible.

On the sports side and the work that our team has done has been really quite striking.

So Team Canada or our sport group that is led by Jeff Thompson has really had -- it's a really important moment in Canadian golf. We have started our central training center in Bear Mountain. We have an exceptional group of young men and women who are making their way progressing from -- we have a great amateur crew at the moment, but making that progress into professional sport.

I think Canadian golf is in a golden moment, so we're really thrilled about that progress as well.

MIKE WHAN: I'll brag on him for a second. My father used to say, You can't coach passion; you either have it or you don't.

Laurence has got passion. He loves the athletes, he loves what he's doing. At the end of the day, people want to work with people that like what they're doing.

To me, last year we walked the range together. I've never had anybody say to me, Can I walk the range with you? It was exciting for me just to have a partner to do it.

And see him sitting inside all morning talking to different players, bringing Team Canada together, listening to the input of the athletes and parents and caddies and managers, that's exciting. You can't coach passion. He's got it.

As I told him before, if he was a stock, I would buy him.

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: He doesn't know I was working on my wedge game. That's all I was doing, was walking the range trying to figure out how to get it done. Right?

MIKE WHAN: You can coach wedge game; you can't coach passion. (Laughter.)

Q. Quick question for you, Mr. Commissioner. I'm wondering, are there any thoughts about adding another Canadian event? You enjoyed a few strong years in Waterloo. Is that something that's crossed your mind? Why didn't that event work out in the end?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, we would love it. At the end of the day, I think it's good for Canada, good for young Canadian people to see as much exposure you they can. And it was a good event.

This always depresses my players when they read me say this in a press conference, but it's the truth. I don't really sit in my office and circle markets and go, That's where I want my next event. I wish I could. If I was commissioner of a different league may be.

But I play golf where the check writer says it can make the best impact for their business. I didn't pick Waterloo. ManuLife came to us. When we started talking to Waterloo I said, Where can this work the best for you? They said, We would like to bring all our customers and dealers into Waterloo. We can make this more than a golf tournament with some of the seminars and business relationships we have; we could showcase our hometown.

So that's why it works. CP likes the fact that this moves to some of their bigger markets where they do business. That's why it works. It's funny, I have players all the time come to me saying like, Why don't we play in Oklahoma City? When are we going to have an event in Jacksonville, Florida? The next time I meet a CEO or CMO or CIO or CFO that says, We want to do this and this is what works for our business.

Would I play another event in Canada? I would play as many events in Canada as you guys would have us. I don't circle that on a calendar at home and say, Next stop, Canada. We have added three new events for next year. One is in Midland, Michigan. I didn't know where Midland, Michigan was, but when I met Dow and they started talking about a tournament and they said, Our home is in Midland; what do you think about playing in Midland? I said, I play where you want to play.

We added one in Orlando with Diamond Resorts and we have Busan, Korea. I made my first trip to Busan, Korea about six months ago.

Again, all markets in the case of Diamond Resorts, BMW, and Dow, where it would work best for their business.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you gentlemen very much.

Looking forward to a great week.

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: I just wanted to make one final comment and to thank the team here at Wascana Country Club. The CEO and general manager, Greg Dukart, is here. Just what his team has been able to do in the last 60 days in a challenging -- in really challenging weather environment and a challenging summer -- they've put their hearts and they've their minds and they've put their resources into making this a great event.

Over 1100 volunteers will take part in the CP Women's Open here in 2018 here in Wascana. It's a testament the this marketplace and the leadership here and all the volunteers that have been putting their effort here.

Thank you, Greg, and thank you the to marketplace.

MIKE WHAN: Thanks, guys.