

# Canadian Pacific Women's Open

Wednesday, August 21, 2019

## Mike Whan

## Laurence Applebaum

### Press Conference

**THE MODERATOR:** It's always a wonderful week for the LPGA Tour at the CP Women's Open. We've got literally Brooke teeing off right outside. This is going to be an amazing week here in Canada. What are you expecting?

**MIKE WHAN:** Yeah, if you hear cheering, it's not for you, Laurence.

**LAURENCE APPLEBAUM:** Well, this is a week we've been looking forward to for a long time, and since Brooke hoisted our national championship trophy a year ago in Wascana, we knew we'd be coming to a spectacular golf club, an amazing turnout for the week ahead, and we couldn't be more excited to watch Brooke as well as our 15 Canadians who are in the draw along with 96 out of the top 100 LPGA Tour players. We're so thankful that the Tour has made this such an important stop on their global tour.

**THE MODERATOR:** And that leads me right into my question for Mike. Certainly we see everything that Brooke and Alena and that whole group have done for this championship, but this is one of our 33 stops around the world at the LPGA Tour. What does it mean to have an organization like CP and Golf Canada as such a strong partner of the LPGA?

**MIKE WHAN:** Yeah, you talked about it as one of 33 stops, but as we talked about it last night at the pro-am party, I don't believe we've had another stop where 96 of the top LPGA 100 are here, and that includes majors. Don't write that in your papers. But the reality of it is this is -- I always tell -- when people say to me, how do people feel about our tournament, and I always say, you don't have to ask me; people feel about your tournament with their attendance, and they attend this tournament in a big way.

I don't know if -- are you a caffeinated guy? You seem caffeinated like me. And last year, as we were in Regina, he looked at me and said, wait until you see Magna Golf Club. I mean, he was excited, so we got excited about it. I haven't been this excited to play in a pro-am in a long time, but this place is special looking.



This is elite. It has been elite for a long time. I think Laurence and CP just continue to make sure it stays that way, and I can just tell you from flying up here with some players, it's a different feeling. People are excited before they get here. A lot of it is just they know Golf Canada does it right, but what they do here in terms of how they treat the players, how they treat the caddies, how they treat the fans, it's unique and it sets itself apart, and as a result we get the best of the best every year.

**THE MODERATOR:** Laurence, you mentioned the 15 Canadian players in the field, ranging from Brooke and Alena and Brittany Marchand and that group of LPGA players down to some of the up-and-coming names, particularly we think Michelle Liu, 12 years old was up on this stage charming us yesterday. It looks like the state of Canadian women's golf is very strong as we look to the future. What are your thoughts on the development of the program?

**LAURENCE APPLEBAUM:** Well, I think that one of the interesting stories is definitely Michelle's story. She's a member at Shaughnessy Golf Club out in Vancouver, so it's really exciting. We have a delegation here from Shaughnessy Golf Club who are taking in all the great things that have been done this week, and are already a year ahead in their planning for next year.

But on top of that is our Team Canada players, our amateur squad, our young pros, they're having a really special moment, and a lot of them, five of them call the LPGA Tour home, and with obviously Brooke leading that group, and they're starting to feel really comfortable out there. And then there's this whole other group that's coming through. One player I'll mention in particular, Celeste Dao from Quebec, she just accepted a full scholarship to University of Georgia. She's going to be a bulldog, and she's really excited. She's had a wonderful summer.

And then one thing that doesn't get talked about too much is the Pan-Am Games. Our team took home a bronze medal, a mixed team, so it was a team event. Austin Connelly and Joey Savoie on the male side, and then Mary Parsons and Brigitte Thibault along with their coach Tristan Mullally took home a bronze medal, the first for Canada in golf, so we're really excited about

that state of golf and our young and up-and-coming players.

THE MODERATOR: Mike, one last question for you before we open it up. Yesterday we had Brittany Marchand in here talking about everything she's working on with STEM education. She has a chemical engineering degree. She's smarter than any of us --

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, she intimidates me. I don't really talk to her when she's on the range because I don't think I can hang with her.

THE MODERATOR: I think she'd cut you some slack. But she mentioned how much it ties into her love for the Drive on campaign. That has certainly been a big talking point for you and for the LPGA this year, and if you could tell our media here about the Drive on campaign and how you see that promoting the growth of women's golf.

MIKE WHAN: Happy to do that, but since I don't follow directions very well, let me bounce off a couple things you said, which is I don't know if we've talked about this, but we're starting Q-school now, I think the largest Q-school entrance in LPGA history, and outside of the U.S., Canada is the second largest country represented in Q-school. I haven't said that in the last seven or eight years that at least I've been looking at it, so that's nice to know in terms of a pipeline coming.

Yeah, we have forever kind of advertised the LPGA, but I remember having this conversation with Nancy Lopez, and she said, I like the LPGA ads, but I think the LPGA ads are really the way you see us, Mike, and the more we started talking about the way you see us versus the way we see us, I realized when we showed our Tour players the Drive on campaign and our new commercials, which obviously when we launched it Brooke was the lead spokesperson, and as a lot of players were coming up to me afterwards, including Nancy Lopez's voicemail, which I sent to the entire staff, said thank you. I've been -- she said, Thank you, I've been out here a long time, and that's the first time you sent a message to the fans. That's the way we think about ourselves.

And really what that meant is these players out here, they obviously play for a lot of reasons, but there's a responsibility that they feel that I'm not sure male counterparts feel. I've said this many times. I played sports growing up. I've been in businesses. I never really felt the responsibility to leave it better for the next generation, but every one of these players knows that they're out here because women were out here before them, as our founders have said many times. We knew we weren't going to get rich. We knew we probably weren't going to change golf then, but if we stayed with

it and we were persistent, we might just leave it better for our daughters. As they tell us all the time, make sure your players know that their job is to leave it better for their daughters. So they're driving on because of the women that came before them, but they also are leaving a mark going forward.

What's really fun is at the LPGA in the last four years, we've had more sponsors join the LPGA than in any four-year period in our history, and I would say the overwhelming majority like us as a sport, love our global coverage, like the fact that our players come from all over the world, but really like what we represent, not only on a golf course but in a boardroom. We come from all over the world, we come in every shape and size. There's not seven-year contracts with three-year extension and no trade clauses. You make what you make out here. And they like the fact that they're all running their own businesses. They're not employees, they're not contracted; they hire and fire their own teams. They decide what they play in. If they don't make money, they don't make money, and they're still paying their staff. We can relate with that.

So they're really a living, breathing example of diversity and leadership and inclusion and doing it their own way. I'm excited that we were able to share that story, and we showed at the women's conference here yesterday a new spot coming soon, and we've been slowly rolling out individual stories, and soon we'll roll out Mariah Stackhouse's story, as well. And those are all important.

Now to completely not follow your guidance, I would just say for the folks here writing or reporting for the greater Toronto area, if you could just do me a favor. We play in a lot of cities all over the world, and I love coming to big cities, but the one downside of big cities is you've got the Raptors, you've got the Maple Leafs, and a lot of your fans sitting at home are probably thinking, I've got a lot of sports to go to, and some of our smaller towns don't have the same options.

But if you can reach out to that base for us, if you sit home and miss this because you went to every playoff game of the Raptors or because hockey season is right around the corner, huge mistake. I mean, you're talking about the best female athletes in the world playing right here in your backyard, and honestly one of the most beautiful venues I've ever been in, and I've been around the golf business a long time, and obviously you've got the most -- the winningest professional Canadian player of all time in the prime of her career here. But even if you don't come to watch Brooke, all the other athletes that are out here, it would be a shame to play on a stage this pretty, on a stage that means this much to them, and the folks in Toronto not

get a chance to see this because we don't swing through here every year. We're not an annual retreat.

So it's going to be a good week. It's going to be a good weather week, and for whatever reason, I would just encourage you to encourage the people that follow you, don't miss this one because this is -- what we've got going on at the LPGA right now is pretty special.

It might be cool to be in Toronto, but 170 countries will also be paying attention to what goes on here this week, so I really hope the fans come out and create the kind of atmosphere that Magna could really create.

**Q. Laurence, you're here at the Magna Golf Club. It's a private course, it's beautiful. How difficult or how long did it take to kind of convince them to open up their course because the members lose their course for several weeks I'm assuming, maybe more than that, or did they approach you?**

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: This was the fastest, most efficient, most fun collaboration that I've had since the took the job for a new golf course to come on to the rotation. So I have a little bit of personal history. I lived in Aurora for a long time. I know the GM Stu Brindle pretty well, and previous to Stu was a guy named Rob Roxborough, who was GM before Stu. And we had always talked about how great a golf course this is, how wonderful a place it is, how special it is, and Magna was always on our radar.

And then a supplier of ours, which is really kind of an interesting story, the guy who runs marketing for Levelwear, a guy named Vitty Gomes, resurrected that chat with me probably about 18 months ago, 20 months ago, and said, It's time, and we took that conversation, Stu and one of his colleagues Mike Hardman, we put together a great deal, and it's great for our organization, it's great for the membership. The membership open up their arms. And what's exciting is for the people from the area, just to get a chance to walk the golf course and to see how beautiful this Doug Carrick golf course is is spectacular.

**Q. Michael, you talked about how important this tournament is to the LPGA. There are 33 events or 34 I guess it is. It does have the highest purse other than the five majors, and I think your year-end one is a little bit bigger. How important is that? That really shows how important this tournament is I would say just from the purse amount, as well.**

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I mean, I've said this many times. I never sit across the table from a CEO and tell them what their purse should be. I always say, purse is personal; you decide what kind of statement you want to make to these athletes. And what's happened in my 10 years on the job is our average purses have grown

quite a bit, and our overall purses, as well.

But that's really just come from when people join us they want to be among the best, and CP doesn't do anything halfway. When they do it, they do it right. It's nice; I think they set a bar.

Back when we -- the first time I walked into a room like this with Golf Canada 10 years ago, I think CP was sort of the only one setting itself away from all the regular tournaments, and everybody else has raced to kind of catch up, and I think that's great. That's what you need a leader to do.

**Q. You hinted at this when you talked about what sets the LPGA apart from the PGA, so my question is when the golfers finish, they sign their cards, then there's often a gauntlet of fans there wanting autographs, selfies and so on, and every player no matter if they had a good game or a bad game, if they're hot, they're hungry, they run that gauntlet, and Brooke Henderson in particular is super at that. My question is is that a requirement of the players when they join the Tour, that they're kind of taught this is one of the things that you have to do, or is it voluntary?**

MIKE WHAN: Absolutely not. It's not required. We don't take attendance. I mean, there are certain things we take attendance on, and there are certain requirements for a player to participate in an event like this. They all get a five-by-seven card Tuesday night when they sign in that tells them the most important things this week, what's important to Laurence, what's important to Keith and CP, but we certainly don't talk about fan autographs, that kind of stuff. As I always say, that's built right in. I've learned more from them about how to handle the fans than they've ever learned from me.

I've taken a lot of pictures over the years, and people always find it strange the pictures I take, but I always take a picture of the person who lost the tournament, right down to the end, maybe the putt didn't go in or somebody else rolled one in top of her, and I'll just sit and watch how long that player, sometimes with tears coming out between the sunglasses, will sit and sign autographs, and I think to myself, pick any other sport in the world and tell me when the player doesn't win one of the biggest events in their lives, they sit there for an hour talking to the fans. You just won't find that in any other sport.

I usually have taken those photos, which players find strange that I'm not taking a picture in the pressroom or the trophy, but I always find it impressive how people handle when they don't get to the top of the mountain in that moment, and it would be really easy to slam the minivan door shut, take off to the airport, but it's pretty

rare to see that out here, and I'm pretty lucky.

**Q. One thing you don't have to worry about, Mr. Commissioner, is the fact that the Blue Jays suck this year, but I wanted to ask you, Juli Inkster was in here yesterday talking about she won it 35 years ago. Do you think there's enough emphasis that's put on the history of this tournament? I know that CP has been with it how many years now, Laurence?**

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: 2014.

**Q. Dating back to when it was a major championship, so that history seems to have a lot to do with it, as well, just for the way it treats players.**

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I think the best thing about this, the history of this event is we -- at least I'm talking about the LPGA now, I can let Laurence talk about Canada, we don't promote it, because it gets promoted all by itself. You can sit in player dining and have people talk about the CP Women's Canadian Open, and I never have to write a memo about it, I never have to talk about it. The anticipation and the expectation level is high, and it just got higher this year with some of the other things they've added.

The nice thing is if you're a rookie out here, and this is what happens, you're a rookie, you're in player dining and you've got the calendar out and you're circling something, some veteran will sit down and go, circle that one, circle that one, and circle that one, and CP is always in the circle-that-one category because that's history speaking for itself.

**Q. What are the early returns on having the back-to-back majors over in Europe?**

MIKE WHAN: Well, back-to-back majors wasn't a strategy, it was a one-year fix. I mean, the players and I talked about this probably for a year before we talked about it in the general audience, but we really wanted to move Evian back to the summer. I made the incredibly brilliant move of moving Evian to September, where we lose two and a half hours of daylight and I put 50 more players in the field, so I had exactly 40 more minutes of daylight than golf play when we were in September, so we really wanted to get it back to the summer. The only week we could put it in the summer that worked in the schedule was the week we moved it to.

The AIG Women's British Open wants to move back a week, but they can't move back a week until next year. So we always wanted to go Evian, Aberdeen Ladies' Scottish, and then the AIG British, and that's what we'll do going forward. But we knew we couldn't do it this year, so the question is do you wait to do it in 2020 or

do you do it in 2019.

The credit to both of the sponsors and the tournaments, they said, we'll do what you want to do, Mike, and I said I want to move it to the summer, and we're lucky we did. We had rain again this year at Evian but it wasn't a crisis because we had hours to sit and play when the weather was good.

**Q. Are there any other changes coming up to the schedule?**

MIKE WHAN: New events?

**Q. Yeah.**

MIKE WHAN: So we've announced we have a new event in St. Petersburg. It's really called -- is it Hollywood? It's by St. Pete, just south of Tampa, new event called the Dex Imaging Pelican Women's Championship, a new golf course design, new opening of Pelican.

THE MODERATOR: Boca.

MIKE WHAN: What else did we add? Yeah, we're adding a new event in Boca Raton. Our second event of the year, so we'll start in Orlando with the Diamond Resorts Tournament of Champions, then we'll go down to Boca for the Gainbridge. It's at Boca Rio Golf Club, and we'll play that as the second event of the year, then we'll take a week off before we go overseas.

MODERATOR: Moving Blue Bay to the spring.

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, we've moved Blue Bay. We won't play at Blue Bay, which is in China, at the end of this year. We'll move it to the spring of next year, so we'll have essentially three new events in our schedule for next year.

**Q. This may be a sensitive topic, I don't know, you tell me, but as far as the China event goes, obviously there's some political things going on over there. Any concern about that from an LPGA point of view?**

MIKE WHAN: Nothing that's really got into the way of golf. We've had bigger challenges to be honest with you as it relates to golf in China than tariffs, if that's what you're talking about.

We play with Buick in Shanghai, and then we play in Blue Bay, which is in Hainan Island, kind of the Hawaii'i of China. Both of them are kind of removed from some of that stuff. So yeah, nothing that's been an issue, at least to date.

**Q. I know we've still got the Hong Kong thing going on, plus as far as Canada goes, we've got a few**

**people being detained over there, so that's what I was referring to.**

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I don't think a lot of us will be transferring flights in Hong Kong this year, which has been a typical path in the past, but I think we might be avoiding that stop this year.

THE MODERATOR: Before we wrap up, Laurence, I believe you had one more thing to mention.

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, this is the only chance that we had to address this sort of media formally, Mike and myself, so on behalf of our two organizations, the LPGA Tour and Golf Canada, we wanted to thank all the media for taking the time to come up, for covering golf, for women's professional sports. It's incredibly important that we continue to work with your organizations and make it available and possible for you to be here, so I wanted to say thank you on behalf of Mike and I.

And as you always know, I like to help you with your stories, and I'll tell you the one story that I feel hasn't been written is the guy on my left as a commissioner. So he's going to celebrate his 10th anniversary this year as the LPGA Tour commissioner, and I don't have to make up the numbers. You can read the numbers in the bio that Christina provides, but what Mike and his team have done for the LPGA Tour is nothing short of spectacular. Their growth, their global expansion, how they're bringing women's sport to new heights is a story that needs to be told, and I encourage you to dig a little deeper on that. Mike is a humble guy. He's a hockey player, and it's just a wonderful thing that's happened in golf and the LPGA. I just wanted to say thank you.

MIKE WHAN: Thank you, Laurence. That was nice of you to say.