

RBC Canadian Open

Press Conference

Saturday, July 29, 2017

Laurence Applebaum



DAN PINO: Welcome to Saturday of the 2017 RBC Canadian Open. Pleased to be joined by new Golf Canada CEO, Laurence Applebaum. Certainly a busy few weeks, started officially with us July 10 and has managed to visit nine provinces, wrapping it up here with his first visit to RBC Canadian Open.

I'm going to turn it over to Laurence for some opening remarks and we'll open to some Q&A.

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Thanks, Dan. A really warm welcome to everybody coming out early Saturday morning. Thank you for your time today and for all the work that you do in covering the event this week. It's been a spectacular week, our first few days and our first week of the RBC Canadian Open 2017.

For me personally, it's the first month on the job, and this opportunity to observe and experience all the great things that the team has put together for the fans and for our partners has been exceptional.

My outlook was to sort of take it all in, really enjoy it, participate, pitch in and really just be there to enjoy the incredible golf we've seen so far.

On Tuesday, many of you were there for just an outstanding Canadian Hall of Fame induction ceremonies. We had 17 Hall of Fame members up on the stage. It was so good to induct Bob Vokey. Bob, has many of you know, legendary craftsman, Canadian born. Was so thrilled to have him and his entire family and his support group be there with us. Along with Judy Darling Evans; she probably stole the show with her speech and was a wonderful, wonderful experience for her family.

And to top it all off, we had Mr. Jack Nicklaus there, and being gentleman's can in connection to Canada and his design of this golf course was so tight and so many people seem so affected by Jack's presence.

It goes without saying that with the support of our partner, RBC, and their incredible support of golf and their amazing investment into this tournament, has made this week such a tremendous success, and we're thrilled to share with everyone our six year extension together, and we couldn't be more pleased.

I have Mary DePaoli here from RBC and I just want to

recognize Mary here in the front row. Thank you, Mary.

On top of that, we have so many great partners here at RBC Canadian Open. But I do want to acknowledge our standing host, the host course, Glen Abbey, hosting this event a record number of times, and I'll speak to that in a second.

But to have Rai Sahi here and to see him out on the golf course, and also seeing him enjoy himself in the Pro Am, along with one of the most famous caddies that we have in our country, John Finlinson (ph), was a real pleasure. So thank you Ray, and thank you for joining us this morning.

After the first two days, I'll tell you what has been a success story. Not only the play on the course, but No. 7, the rink. And RBC Canadian Open was really about celebrating our Canadiana, celebrating our community, and of course the competition. We had 17 Canadians in the draw and teeing it up with so many fans following them around. It was just exceptional to see the special moment that we have in Canadian golf.

So thrilled to see Graham DeLaet and Mackenzie Hughes making the cut with ease. They came in at minus eight, tied for 15th. So both are in a great position to compete over the weekend.

Mr. Pat Fletcher was the last Canadian to win this event in 1956, and his two sons were out here this week, Alan and Ted Fletcher, and I am hoping they are both Montréal based. They were here for a couple of days, and I'm hoping to make a call to them tonight to get them on the plane tomorrow morning for the trophy ceremonies to award our next Canadian winner.

Outside of that, we've had some incredible scores on the golf course. The course is in incredible shape. That final cut line of minus four is the lowest cut line in the Canadian Open since 1971.

There were some incredible scores out there. For the people that I've spoken to, the players that I've spoken to, when you have that many guys within shooting distance, people are going to be aggressive out there. They have to be aggressive if they are going to try and go after the title. So I think you're going to continue to see some really low scores and it's going to be an

exciting weekend ahead.

At this moment, I'd like to make an exciting announcement. Many of you have commented or there have been some mentions of it in the press earlier. But on behalf of RBC, Golf Canada and our host partner, ClubLink, I'd like to officially announce the 2018 RBC Canadian Open will be hosted at Glen Abbey.

This is a long time discussion, and we're so thrilled about 2018. We will be coming back to the media with some more great news in the short and mid term about the site of the Canadian Open. We are so excited to be working with ClubLink. Being out here with feet on the ground and seeing it is an incredible stadium golf experience, one of the best in the world.

We're going to continue to work with RBC and ClubLink about our future home. We're working with them directly, and others, about potential permanent future sites, and this is a great moment of Canadian golf to celebrate.

I just want to let all of the media assembled here know that it's wonderful to have you here and host you properly in Glen Abbey, and 2018 is an exciting moment for us to look forward to.

As Dan mentioned, for my last two weeks, I've been on a bit of a mission. On day two of taking over the position, I visited nine of our ten great provinces, with the only exception being Manitoba, which I'm looking forward to going to the Canada Summer Games and participating there. And I saw and worked with over 60 of our golf clubs directly during that ten day period. What I can tell you is, it is a magical time for golf in Canada at the moment.

We have over six million players playing this game and a little known fact is that more people in Canada play golf than any other sport. More than our friends over at hockey; Tom Renney at Hockey Canada, and soccer. Golf is the most played sport in our country, and gives over half a billion dollars in charitable donations through events like Pro Ams and charity events. It's an incredible vehicle for donations and giving.

Working with these clubs, working with the pros, working with the owners, the supers, the club managers, Golf Canada is stepping into a new moment, a new direction, where we will be an incredible inclusive and diverse organization. We have incredible partners who feel that way at the same time, and we are going to be growing golf in Canada in a real demonstrable way, through junior golf and our work with future links and other programs, through golf course owners who are doing their best to make incredible playing environments for everyone to come

to; golf is at a special time.

I spoke a little bit about our 17 male Canadians on the PGA TOUR. We also have four, if not five, LPGA Tour players who have their full time cards, and many of you know Brooke Henderson and the amazing lightning that she's created on the LPGA with her play.

And finally, I'd like to clarify a situation that has arisen during the tournament and came up yesterday during the afternoon news cycle. It's unfortunate the timing of this news and that this development occurred during this great event, and it's something I wanted to address directly.

Now if you'll allow, I'll read the following statement: Unfortunately tournament director Brent McLaughlin is no longer involved in the 2017 Ryder Cup. Effective yesterday, Bill Paul took over as our interim tournament director of the Canadian Open. Our entire tournament team will be reporting to Bill, and he has my complete and full support.

This decision is a confidential Golf Canada employee matter. Given that, I'm unable to provide further details. What I can tell you is that Bill is a 35 year employee of Golf Canada, and over 22 years of experience running this great tournament. I have complete confidence in our Golf Canada Championship staff, and our team of more than 1,300 volunteers to continue to conduct the tournament right through to its conclusion in the same fantastic way that it started.

I will not be taking questions regarding this private matter. However, I am more than pleased to answer any questions regarding our exciting tournament here and anything regarding RBC Canadian Open.

Q. Just to double check, not to do with RBC Canadian Open, but will Bill also be handling the CP Women's Open?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Well, it's wonderful to have Bill here because he has experience with the CP Women's Open event. We'll be making some review through the duration of this week, and next week we'll have an announcement regarding the interim tournament director there, as well.

It's a fantastic event in Ottawa, last week of August at the Ottawa Hunt. The beauty of that event, it's right on the border and women so many people from our Quebec Golf Association and Ontario Golf Association joining, but we'll be making that announcement later next week.

Q. You mentioned that you'll be making an announcement as far as the future of the Canadian

Open goes. Is there a timeline on that?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, I think our plans are to announce 2019 imminently. We have had incredible dialogues with Ray and his team and that should be shortly forthcoming. On a mid to long term strategy, we're going to take the rest of this year to work on it. We have got incredible collaboration with the PGA TOUR and with RBC and what we're going to be doing.

Our hope is having a long term site strategy and something that we can really have all of our golf fans enjoy and get behind is really what our goal is.

Q. Is Mr. McLaughlin continuing with Golf Canada in any capacity?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: As I mentioned at this point I'm unable to address that matter any further.

Q. Regarding the event in a few years, is it possible to see the Canadian Open going through all Canada's provinces, maybe a little like the U.S. Open?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: So on my tour, it's incredible how many people nationwide are connected to this event. I saw so many faces I saw in the parking lot walking through, I saw a license plate from New Brunswick, and they are connected to this event as a National Championship.

In talking with Jack and why he feels connected so well; 108th running of this event, third oldest championship, but it's a National Open championship.

Our goal with this event is to give it that national flavor and bring people from all over the country. We have so many events that we run across Canada, but really we feel as an operational staff, as a world class facility, it's really important to be in the central core of the GTA. It's really something that's important fundamentally to our business and our partners. And so that's our outlook.

That being said, one of the team's goals is to really celebrate our national heritage and having people be part of that. As you can see, the CP Women's Open does a wonderful job. Ottawa this year, Wascana Country Club in Regina for next year, and it travels really well.

That being said, there's a ton of interest for places around the country but we're really happy here in the GTA.

Q. Any discussions going forward about maybe moving the date so it's not right after the British Open? It's a very tough schedule. What's going on with any discussions on that front?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Thank you, it's a great question. What's so incredible about being here as RBC Canadian Open is the relationship we have with the PGA TOUR and having a title sponsor like RBC.

We are in very, very close dialogue with opportunities and future calendar changes that may occur in the PGA TOUR schedule. Jay Monahan, the PGA TOUR Commissioner, was here this week. It was great to see him. He's got his hockey roots. He feels very comfortable in Canada, and I can tell you that we are at the top of his list in looking at opportunities for future move dates or future dates for the event.

It's the hardest job as the Commissioner to manage his over 50 events and what they are doing. I can tell you that this event and the field we have, has really been fantastic. It's a combination of support of RBC and the kind of environment that guys like to play in. They love playing the course.

But we're open to opportunities. We're open to options and we know as Canadians, we have a short window to really put this event on, and we're looking forward to further discussions with the TOUR about opportunities.

Q. Before the pieces were put in place to develop this golf course, were there any intentions to move headquarters?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Well, I'll tell you, I'm still pretty new on the job, so I can't speak to the long term past. I can tell you about the recent past.

We love being here. Golf Canada, called Golf House, is a great neighbor, for having the clubhouse. And Alan, who runs the head of operations here at Glen Abbey, it's a great partner for us to be here.

We have our staff in a really tight proximity, so they are very happy. It's so fantastic to have the course nearby to host people.

I think in our mid term to long term strategy, having Golf House as a part of that, along with the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame, is a priority.

Q. What's the impact of Mr. McLaughlin's departure, given it's in the middle of the tournament?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: As I mentioned, we're not going to be speaking about this matter at this point. I can tell you that we have such a young, dynamic staff that are doing such a fantastic job. Bill Paul at the helm is already in flight and doing a phenomenal job with an incredible weekend ahead.

We are going to have a wonderful weekend and I'm

looking forward to superb scores, maybe a record. If you saw Gary Woodland, he was one shot off the tournament record yesterday. It's just a phenomenal chance to celebrate golf and really enjoy the weekend here in Glen Abbey.

Q. You mentioned philosophically you're comfortable staying in the greater Toronto area with the Canadian Open. Is it your preference to have, as has been discussed, a future permanent site or rotation among courses who have previously hosted the tournament?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yeah, great question. I think that's available for really solid discussion and review with our teams. There's a lot of weight to a rotation like they have had before. Similar to what used to be called The Barclays, or The Northern Trust now; it rotated around the greater New York area to phenomenal courses.

We've done that here a little bit. Being at St. George's was a place that the players absolutely loved, as often ranked the No. 1 course in Canada, and other courses are strong in the GTA. That's certainly an opportunity in the mid term.

Our hope is to have a permanent long term strategy and long term site. Some of the things that we discussed, something that could encompass junior golf and a development area; could be multi purpose; phenomenal first rate facilities for a PGA TOUR event, parking, efficiencies, egress, an entrance for fans.

It was wonderful to have Mr. Nicklaus here as a sounding board for what he had for what his outlook has been, and nobody has a greater outlook for what he'd like to see with the future of golf, and we took a lot of pride in being able to hear his words about what we want to do.

But really, we'd love to be the permanent home, and getting there in terms of the timing and what we can do and that process is going to be determined.

Q. Is there any chance that maybe Montréal could receive the Canadian Open again, or maybe a golf course in the province of Quebec, like Royal Montreal?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Am I detecting a Quebec accent?

Q. Oui.

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: We never say never to anything, of course. It's our preference, our preference and our operational staff and our business is very founded here.

I know our friends at Royal Montreal hosted one of the great Presidents Cups in 2007. Many people remember the iconic match between Mike Weir and Tiger Woods when he took Tiger down 1 up on 18. Not a lot of people remember that the Americans actually won that Presidents Cup, but that Mike had an amazing he was here this week. Mike was fit, in shape, looking very focused. He fought it and unfortunately he didn't make the cut, but I'm going to tell you that you're going to hear more from Mike Weir in the next year.

Mike's 47 now. He's the assistant captain of The Presidents Cup. He's working with Nick Price and Geoff Ogilvy as a vice captains. He's going to have a really impressive impact on The Presidents Cup in September. And Mike's being inducted into the Canadian Hall of Fame, the All Sports Hall of Fame in November, and Golf Canada is going to be supportive in the next part of his career which is pushing, pushing for the next few years on the PGA TOUR. He's playing on The European Tour right now. As Mike likes to say, going to the Champion Tour and lighting up the Champions Tour when he turns 50 is something really exciting.

Back to your question. Royal Montreal, incredible experience of The Presidents Cup. Was a previous host of the Canadian Open. But our outlook, as I mentioned, we really see a good home here in the GTA.

Q. If you're looking at possible development and you've had Nicklaus in here, there must be a sense of budget for what such a property would entail, and second, how much have you guys got in the bank for such a development?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: Yes, so it's not an inexpensive endeavor. Obviously a permanent site would require significant financing and partners. It's not about our bank account to be quite frank. It's about the kind of partners and plan that we have.

I will tell you that in being firsthand and feet on the ground, there is so much corporate interest and fan interest in this game, and our goal is to ignite and engage with those partners and those fans to make the Canadian Open a long term success.

As I mentioned, we have a six year relationship with RBC. I could not imagine a better partner to go into these discussions with the TOUR and with the future of golf that we feel so positive about.

Q. It seems that most of the fans, and I would say the players, as well, have embraced the concept of the rink hole at No. 7. Has it met your expectations, will it be back next year and are there

plans to bring it back next year and expand to other holes?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: The rink was an amazing idea conceived between the Golf Canada and RBC teams. It became a must see event on the course, and I think that's what world class events are all about: You show up, what do you need to see? You maybe want to see the first tee, you want to walk with players and you want to go into the valley, but everyone came to the rink at one point at No. 7.

The surprise was, and you probably saw it, is the fans that lined up and this weekend, I think we're going to be ten deep around the tee box, is the banging of the boards when people are hitting good shots.

I was over on No. 17 green and I heard it for the first time, and I asked one of the guys: Are we bringing a semi through the course? Are we delivering something? And then it happened again and again. And to sort of see that organically happen was really great.

I hope we can really build on it. Our plans are to build on it. We've got some special plans, if Mr. Hughes or Mr. DeLaet win regarding that hole and some things we've got planned. So hopefully we're talking about this tomorrow when we're talking about a champion.

But we've loved it. It been engaging for the fans. And again, for us, this golf tournament is not so much about the drives and the chips and the putting. It's about making it an event. It's a place where you can bring your family. It's a place where you can come, have a drink or have lunch, walk. If you haven't seen professional golf before, it's an incredible experience. These guys hit it like crazy.

So that's our goal: Make it a world class sporting event and having it on everyone's calendar in the summer.

Q. You mentioned Jay Monahan. You discussed, I'm sure, a number of things with him. I was wondering if one of those discussions was about the FedExCup being moved forward before Labor Day and what impact that's going to have on the Canadian Open?

LAURENCE APPLEBAUM: So I think as I mentioned, the calendar management is maybe the toughest job of a commissioner. They have come out publically and said the FedExCup is going to be moving in front of Labor Day as you mentioned. They have a number of really interesting developments that they have taken us through in how they are continuing to make it really exciting.

What they are going to do, as you get into the fall, it

becomes a little bit more competitive with the NFL broadcast and the games that are going on. I can tell you this: That there will be some forthcoming announcements with regards to the FedEx playoffs and the FedExCup. FedEx Canada is here today. It's great to have them involved and so much a part of what we're doing. But I think you've probably read some of the reports about some of the movements of some the big events, including the PGA Championship.

So I'd say watch this space. I think it's going to be quite interesting.

Thank you all very much for coming out and I look forward to seeing you out on the course.