

**PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: STEVE STRICKER  
TIM FINCHEM**

**June 22, 2016**



**MODERATOR:** We'd like to welcome PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem and Steve Stricker to the American Family Media Center. Before we open it up for some questions, Tim, maybe just talk about the PGA Tour coming back to Wisconsin for an event here with American Family Insurance as our sponsor after seven years of leaving Milwaukee.

**TIM FINCHEM:** Well, the idea that one of our more popular players in the country, Steve Stricker, would undertake the notion of hosting an event was pretty special from the get-go to us. I mean, very few players have successfully gone out and helped structure a tournament and lend their name to it, and he's in rare company when you think about Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus and Byron Nelson and Tiger Woods. I mean, so what he means to Wisconsin, using that to help grow the event is a formula that obviously works with Steve, and we kind of knew that but candidly we are impressed that just this very first year that the tournament is taking off in a very strong fashion. You know, we were in Milwaukee, Greater Milwaukee Open for 42 years, so there's a rich history of PGA Tour golf in Wisconsin. I think eight, I think seven or eight players who were champions over there are in the field. And when you couple that with a major championship coming to Erin Hills with the U.S. Open next year and also a continuing string of big events at Kohler, it really sets Wisconsin out as a really strong golf state.

I want to thank Jack Salzwedel and his team and American Family, they've turned out to be just a terrific partner and sponsor. It's already sort of become part of the culture of that company and that's what you like to see because that means probably longevity for the sponsorship. But we're very pleased. I know Greg McLaughlin and the Champions Tour, PGA Champions Tour team is very pleased that we're off to such a great start and I'd happy to answer your questions.

**MODERATOR:** Steve, maybe you could just share your thoughts. I know you've talked about it previously, you know, with the event coming to your hometown, but now that the event is here, just your thoughts on that finally coming to fruition.

**STEVE STRICKER:** We're very excited. It's been a great three days already and this year went by pretty quickly, but Nate Pokrass and American Family Insurance, the teams that they put together have done an unbelievable job and doesn't seem like we're missing anything up to this point. And the course is in great shape. We seemed to dodge the weather today, so that was a good thing, but, yeah, we're all very excited to be here and to be part of this and the community seems to be over the top excited. Everywhere I go -- I keep saying this, but everywhere I go I seem to hear something very positive about this event and the week. So that's great to hear and I'm excited to start watching golf on Friday and see how the guys like the course and how they play it. And that too, I've heard nothing

but good things from other players, so all positive stuff so far. So we're very happy and excited to be here already during tournament week.

**MODERATOR:** Okay. Questions. Rob?

**Q. I suppose you're pretty eager to play in this next year after what you shot today, huh?**

**STEVE STRICKER:** Yeah, I am excited to play in it next year, but that's a whole year away. You know, I turn 50 and I was trying to convince Tim inside that we should let 49-year-olds start on the Champions Tour, but he wasn't buying it.

**TIM FINCHEM:** I'll buy it, I'll just be --

**STEVE STRICKER:** Yeah, it was fun. I had a great group today, made a bunch of birdies and it was fun to be out there. Like I said, the course is in great shape, a lot of easy pin placements today so I'm sure it will be more difficult once the tournament starts Friday.

**Q. Do you remember when you first saw this course and did you ever think you would be able to host an event by the PGA Tour?**

**STEVE STRICKER:** You know, I never had thought about it I guess, but they've had other high profile events here over the years, college events, amateur events as well. So we always liked the idea of coming here. I mean, it makes a lot of sense, it's a public golf course, it's a university golf course, it ties in our whole community, and it's a good golf course. So you put all those things together and it just makes sense for our whole community to be right here. And the relationship with the university I think is important to help tie all this together. So I'm really happy at the condition of the course. It's as good as I've ever seen it and that's what everybody's saying too, so that's really a good thing.

**Q. When you hear the names ticked off of people who host tournaments, Arnold and Jack and Byron Nelson and Tiger, does that even hit you even more when you see it in that context?**

**STEVE STRICKER:** Well, I'm not in their group at all. I mean, I'm fortunate enough to play golf for a living. I've had a good run over the last ten years or so and have enjoyed a long career in the game of golf. But really it's the sponsor, American Family, and me obviously playing the tour and having a relationship with Tim and the people of the tour that I do is what made all this work. But American Family Insurance has been the star in this whole deal. They've really put everything together and created this team and, you know, I've tried to help out as much as I could have over the last year, but the people that are here on a daily basis are deserving of all the credit. It's been great and they've been wonderful to work with and so those are the real people behind the scenes that are doing all the hard work. I just put my name on it and get to sit up here in front of you guys, but it's been fun to be a part of and to go along in the process. It's a learning process for me too to see how this is

all put together.

**Q. For Tim, what are your thoughts so far on the whole thing, the city, fans so far, the golf course, what are you seeing?**

**TIM FINCHEM:** Well, we're hearing back from the players that the golf course is very popular already. So that's, in any tournament that's a big percentage of what you're concerned about. So we've got a great golf course for these great players to play on. I would take a little exception with Steve saying he doesn't belong in that group I was referring to for the following reasons: One, he's an extremely popular player. He is a recipient of the Payne Stewart Award, which is given every year to a player who best demonstrates his representation of sportsmanship and his contribution to the image of the tour, award that was won by Jack, Arnold, and he's about to be assistant captain at the Ryder Cup and captain of the Presidents Cup and it's based -- those things are based on what players feel about him as a leader and somebody that really represents those competitions well. So I put him right up there.

**STEVE STRICKER:** You should be on my PR team.

**TIM FINCHEM:** Steve, I was on your dad's radio show a couple years ago, it was very funny.

**STEVE STRICKER:** Yep.

**TIM FINCHEM:** So as I said earlier, we're not surprised about this getting off to a really strong start and based on what I'm hearing that maybe perhaps over half a million dollars will be raised in the very first year of a tournament, that's unusual on any tour. It really demonstrates the extent to which the community has sort of looked at this and said this can be really something special and we're prepared to invest in it. And so when you have that from the get-go, it means it will -- usually means it just gets better every year and we're really, really looking forward to that.

**Q. Steve, from what you saw of the course today and what you know of the guys in the field, who does this course favor, what's it going to take to play University Ridge well?**

**STEVE STRICKER:** The course is playing pretty fast on the fairways, the fairways are really rolling out. The greens are somewhat receptive. So you put those two combinations together and that usually leads to some good scoring and good scoring because the course is in great shape too, the greens are perfect. So there's going to be some putts made. You know, a guy who can keep it in play off the tee, hit a lot of fairways I think is always -- the par 5s are real reachable. I think I knocked down four out of the par 5s today in two, so I think your little bit longer hitters are going to do well here that can drive it straight. You know, I see good scoring here unless I'm missing something, you know, but I hate to put a score to anything, but I see some really good scores here this week.

**Q. This is for you, Steve. What is Wisconsin's reputation outside of the state as a golf state and how does holding core events kind of help further the popularity of the sport in Wisconsin?**

**STEVE STRICKER:** Yeah, the golfing community looks real favorably on the Wisconsin golfing community and I think we owe a lot of that to Herb Kohler up at Whistling Straits and Blackwolf Run. He's kind of put major championships and Wisconsin on the map and that's not translated into having a U.S. Open next year at Erin Hills, another great golf course. So a lot of that goes Herb's way and what he's done for our game and the relationship he has with Tim and the tour and the PGA of America, he's been a great ambassador for golf in our state and holding a Ryder Cup in 2020, which is right around the corner too. So when people talk to me outside the state, they normally bring up Blackwolf Run or Whistling Straits or Kohler, Wisconsin. So that's what I normally hear and people have always said very positive things about it and, you know, I think us doing that here is another good thing for our community or doing this tournament here is another great thing for our community and only can add to that. So like I said, we're very excited and very much looking forward to the start of this.

**Q. For Tim, a lot of players have said that they liked the course, but also the downtown Madison area and the city itself. How important is it for when the tour is scheduling events to take into consideration players' fondness for a specific city or area?**

**TIM FINCHEM:** Well, I think it's certainly not up there with the golf course, but it's important because these players are independent contractors, they're not under any requirements to play, and if they grow fond of a community, if you just look at any of the tours, they come back. So it's tough to beat this area in the summertime. I mean, I just flew up here from Florida. So I think it's helpful, you know, because you want to -- I know we've got a great field, but we don't have everybody. We have a couple guys that aren't here. So the word of mouth will be very positive. Players are enjoying the hospitality here. I noticed that when I was up here for the announcement. People here are very nice people, so it's helpful. And it also helps for sort of the feel of the week and the texture of the week, it will carry over into the telecast and what people see on television. That's good stuff. Going back to the question about, you know, what people around the country, around the world think about Wisconsin, this is a great -- we like to think that in addition to the tournaments helping the communities where we play, they also are a platform to showcase the communities around the country, and that will happen this week and it will be very positive.

**Q. Tim, as you wind down your time as commissioner, do the community relations that you have built between the tour and the places you go, are those some of the special things that you'll remember as kind of legacy building and things that have really improved over the years?**

**TIM FINCHEM:** What do you mean by wind down? What's this? You know, here's the

thing about working in this sport. I've been doing this for 27 years, and thousands and thousands of people, and everybody in golf is great. I mean, the number of people I've run into, sponsors, volunteers, fans, that are not great people I can put on one hand, and that's a zillion tournaments, a million miles of travel. It's just a wonderful -- people in golf are great people, so I'll always remember that. And, yeah, the communities where you go and you see people come out that really love watching these players but also love helping their community, it's really unique and special and I'm glad to see it's finally getting to a point where people are paying attention to what it really does. We raised almost two and a half billion dollars for charity and, you know, my predecessor used to say, Deane Beman, he used to say, you know, golf, PGA Tour golf raises more money for charity than all the other major sports combined. And when one of the other major sports wants to raise money for charity, what do they do? They have a golf tournament. It's just a great testament to the other part of what this game is all about. And nowadays, the young players coming up who come to us as rookies have studied Steve Stricker and his colleagues, they see what Steve's doing this week, and they come out of college and they come out to the tour and get their card and they want to start their own charities and start their foundations at 21, 22 years old. It's really, really becoming engrained in what the sport is all about and starting to grow. I think it's got to a tipping point where it's really taking off too so it's all really very rewarding.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you all very much.