

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
February 24, 2021

GOVERNOR RON DeSANTIS



MARK WILLIAMS: We would like to welcome Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to the interview room here at the World Golf Championships Workday Championship at The Concession.

Thank you for joining us, Governor. As a golf fan, what was your reaction to this World Golf Championships being moved to the Bradenton-Sarasota area this year?

GOVERNOR DeSANTIS: First let me just say our prayers are with Jupiter Island resident Tiger Woods. When I saw that news I was scared. Obviously he has some things to deal with, but fortunately not life threatening. Our thoughts and prayer sare with Tiger. He's a great champion. We're really proud that he's a Florida resident.

I'll tell you, The Concession, this is a fantastic facility. Bruce Cassidy's done a phenomenal job, obviously designed with Jack Nicklaus and Tony Jacklin. I think that this is one of the very best facilities in the state of Florida really, one of the best I've seen anywhere. So I think this is going to be a great venue for the World Golf Championship back in the state of Florida. We loved having it when we did all those years. So I think there's a lot of excitement.

This is a great area to be able to do this in. This is one of the fastest growing areas in the state of Florida, heck for the country probably for that matter, so it's really, really good.

But we also really appreciate all the PGA TOUR has done for the state of Florida, the role that they play, having their headquarters of course in Ponte Vedra Beach, my old stomping grounds. And then we're looking forward to this tournament being a kickoff to a number of great events coming up with Arnold's tournament, obviously the Honda Classic and THE PLAYERS. Then we're also happy that Valspar was able to stay in the schedule. Obviously it's going to be after the Masters.

So we think it's going to be a really great stretch of golf here in the state of Florida. This is kicking it off, and I think the folks tuning in seeing this golf course and seeing the challenges presented, I think there's going to be a lot of people that are going to be really impressed.

MARK WILLIAMS: Absolutely, that four-week stretch is a great kickoff point here at The Concession. And speaking of The Concession, how familiar are you with the '69 Ryder Cup and the situation that inspired the course name here?

GOVERNOR DeSANTIS: Obviously I know it. And Jack Nicklaus is the ultimate sportsman and for him to make that concession was something that's really lived on in golf lore. For

him and Tony Jacklin to collaborate with that moment being the inspiration for this facility, it's really a neat thing and I think it adds -- it's a great golf course. It's in a great part of the country, there there's a lot of great people that are part of this club.

But to have that and see -- I was walking in, I saw all the paraphernalia from Ryder Cups past and to really have that theme, it's really, really a unique club and a unique course.

MARK WILLIAMS: Just golf in general, Governor, have you been surprised by the increase in the golf participation since the pandemic began?

GOVERNOR DeSANTIS: Not at all. In fact, one of the things I told -- I remember talking with guys at the Tour, golf has to go on. When everything was happening, everyone was freaking out in March, I said we have to give people outlets to be able to do things.

The fact is, when you're doing things outdoors, that's one of the safest environments you could possibly have when you're talking about the infections. So what we saw in Florida was people going to the golf course more than they ever have. If you look at a place like The Villages, one of our largest retirement communities, they set their record for golf rounds during the pandemic. And it wasn't even close, it was over and above anything they had ever seen. I think more and more people got into golf. I think that that's been a very good thing.

We actually, Florida, you're seeing now new golf courses are being planned to be built. That was not something that was happening for a long, long time. So it's been -- it's a terrible thing to have to go through obviously, but when you're dealing with something like that, you want to deal with it in the most productive way.

I really believe that if you look at Florida in terms of the COVID, we have probably the most vulnerable population and yet we're 28th in per capita COVID mortality. I think there's a lot of reasons for that, but I do think the fact that people weren't just sitting at home every day, that they had outlets to be able to go and enjoy themselves, that does contribute to more mental health, it contributes to more physical health and I think it's been a huge, huge positive for the state of Florida.

I was never going to allow golf to shut down, we had to keep it going. And you know what? There's so many great people who work in this industry in the state of Florida from top to bottom as well as a lot of these caddies. I really wanted the caddies in there. There was a fear that if they handed the club, we know that that's not a significant risk, so to have caddies employed -- I know that not all clubs have them but many do, many of the facilities like TPC Sawgrass offers them and they're an important part of our state as well.

MARK WILLIAMS: Finally, Governor, there's a limited number of guests on site this week, but obviously this event, its stature, it's broadcast globally, what can it do for an area like Bradenton-Sarasota?

GOVERNOR DeSANTIS: Well, I think it's great. People are going to look at the beauty here, it's going to be fantastic. But I would also say I know as we go forward in the schedule the Tour's going to have more and more fans and galleries and we support that in Florida 100 percent. We think that it's a safe environment, we think that people can make decisions about whether they want to go. So hopefully by the time we get to PLAYERS we'll have a pretty significant gallery.

We're doing a lot with senior citizen vaccinations here. We're going to have two and a half million seniors vaccinated within probably the end of the week and we're going to continue going on from there. So I think it's going to put it on the map.

I would just say finally, if you look around golf in the United States, the state of Florida, and there's great clubs like The Concession, obviously people understand that, but for public access golf, you look at TPC, THE PLAYERS, you can go play there. You look at Arnold Palmer's tournament, you can go play at Bay Hill. You look at Valspar, you can go to Innisbrook. PGA National, you can go down there and play these courses. I think our public access offerings, some of these resort courses are really the tops in the country. And I didn't even mention things like Streamsong and all these other ones that are really good.

Florida's open for business. If you want to get out and have a vacation or relax, this is a place you can come. We've obviously got a lot of other stuff going on, but this will be a place where you can enjoy really top-notch golf that's accessible to the public and we think that that's important.

MARK WILLIAMS: Well, we can tell you're a big golf fan with the number of names you just reeled off there. We appreciate your time this morning. We know you're a busy man, so thank you for joining us here at the Workday Championship.

GOVERNOR DeSANTIS: Thank you, take care.