

MEDIA DAY
May 6, 2024



TOM LEA
STEVE STRICKER
NATE POKRASS

TOM LEA: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to our media and other guests who are here today for our 2024 PGA TOUR Champions American Family Insurance Championship media day.

My name is Tom Lea, associate vice president of communications at American Family Insurance. I know many of you are used to seeing Jim Buccheim standing on this podium. Jim announced his retirement back in December. The good news I'm excited to report is Jim will still be visible during tournament week. In fact, he's here in the back of the room as well, so he'll be involved in several different capacities throughout the tournament.

This morning golf certainly has meant a lot to a lot of people and it's been incredibly rewarding to see what a fantastic event the AmFam Champ has been and continues to be not just for golf fans, but also for the local community.

I'm excited to be here today. We're just 26 short days away from our first tournament event, which is the UW Carbone Cancer Center Race for Research which is scheduled for June 1st.

As we get started today, I do want to start by just kind of taking a look back at some of the highlights from last year's tournament, so we can roll the video.

(Video played.)

TOM LEA: That video certainly brings back some great memories and we certainly look forward to creating more in June.

I would like to introduce our news conference participants today: Tournament host, player and defending champion, Steve Stricker, and tournament director and executive director of the Steve Stricker American Family Insurance Foundation, Nate Pokrass.

Steve and Nate, if you can join me up here.

I would also like to announce Stricker Foundation board members in attendance today as well, I see Jan (indiscernible) is in the back. Thanks so much for everything each of you do as part of our Stricker Foundation board.

It's hard to believe, but we're in year eight of the AmFam Champ. We're very proud to host

this world-class golf tournament for fans and its positive impact on the greater Madison area both economically as well as for charitable organizations and the meaningful work they do in our communities. As you saw on the video, in 2023 the tournament raised \$2.4 million, our best operational year ever, and since the inaugural event in 2016, \$17.2 million has been donated by way of 847 grants to the American Family Children's Hospital and other deserving nonprofit organizations.

We continue to be amazed and grateful for the community and sponsor support the AmFam Champ has received since 2016.

And to our media friends who are here with us today, thanks for your ongoing interest and coverage of the championship. We are certainly grateful for your involvement and it certainly helps drive some of that success that we've seen over those last eight years.

Now we can go ahead and get to the reason we're all here, to talk more about this event with tournament director Nate Pokrass. After that we'll have a couple questions for Steve before opening it up to questions from the group.

So Nate, good morning. There's always a lot that goes into tournament week. Can you kick us off by sharing some event highlights that people can expect as we approach tournament week this year?

NATE POKRASS: Yeah. Thanks, Tom. As you touched on earlier, we'll kick off tournament week Saturday June 1st with our UW Carbone Race for Research out at University Ridge cross-country course with over 500 runners. We'll be out on the course, so a fun way to start off the week.

Then as we get into tournament week, we'll continue to have a number of sponsor events. We continue to have great community and statewide and national sponsorship support and we have two days of sold-out pro-am competition as well.

And then the fun Friday evening on June 7th down at Breese Stevens Field hosting Grammy Award-winning artist Train. It will certainly be a great show and a fun evening in downtown Madison on that Friday night.

Also touched on as well PGA TOUR Champions events and PGA TOUR events, the backbone of all these events are our volunteer support and we're certainly thrilled, honored and proud to have nearly a thousand volunteers again this year supporting all the tournament efforts this week and we couldn't do it without them and we're excited to have a great group of volunteers to help all week long.

TOM LEA: Thanks for those highlights and special events during the week, Nate. every year the team has also implemented new amenities for the fan experience. What can you share about those new amenities as we head into this year?

NATE POKRASS: Yeah, certainly the fan experiences have been front and center of what we do throughout tournament week. We've implemented a number of great venues throughout the golf course and they'll all continue to remain, but doing some expansion as well.

First from the fan experience, a number of our parking lots are offsite. This year all bus transportation for our fans will be on coach buses, so having that nice amenity for our fans as they ride into the course, they'll be riding in comfort.

Eighteen green is certainly an exciting spot to watch golf, especially on Sunday afternoon watching our champion finish. We're expanding the 18th green bleachers as well so that will provide more space for our fans to watch all the exciting action on our final hole. Having that expanded bleacher on the 18th green will be a nice opportunity for our fans.

And then finally, we know a lot of our fans are coming to watch this gentleman to my left. Certainly those fans, as they go on the back nine and watch from those venues that I've talked about, they're watching the leaderboards to see how Steve's doing, but until Golf Channel gets live on TV, they're not actually watching him compete. So what we've done in partnership with the PGA TOUR Champions this year, we will have a camera crew following all of Steve's rounds all three days, all 18 holes. So if you're out in the venues on the back nine, our video boards, our televisions all will be covering his action live so you can see all of his competition live.

STEVE STRICKER: Do we want to do that?

NATE POKRASS: Yes. That way so if the fans who don't choose to walk all 18 holes with you, if they go right to the venues on the back nine, they can certainly watch him until TV catches up and you can see him live in action.

So great partnership with the PGA TOUR Champions to carry that live on our video boards and all the venues with televisions, and then certainly Golf Channel on television will pick up his round, but to be able to see his action throughout the day, we're certainly excited to provide to our fans.

TOM LEA: To build on that, a final question for you. We know Steve's playing in the tournament. What can you share about the rest of the field as it's shaping up here in the final weeks?

NATE POKRASS: Yeah, historically we've had one of the best fields on the PGA TOUR Champions. This year we'll continue on that. We've already announced five of our six past champions will be competing during tournament week. We'll have more announcements as the month goes on as we approach the tournament. Having our invitational format certainly sets us up to make sure we have an extremely competitive field. Certainly having Steve and Jerry Kelly back as we previously announced is great, but we'll have a number of outstanding PGA TOUR champions here in Madison.

TOM LEA: Thank you to you, and not only you, but your team as well. Much of your team is represented in the back. They do an amazing job in setting up the tournament for our fans.

No doubt we're in for another great week of golf, so all that will culminate on Sunday night as we name our 2024 champion.

Speaking of champions, let's hear it for the 2023 AmFam Insurance Championship winner, Steve Stricker.

Steve, if we can go back to Sunday June 11, 2023, you shot a 3-under 69 to claim a five-stroke win at the AmFam Champ. Can you share your thoughts on what winning that event, the event that you started back in 2016 and continue to host each year, what did that win mean to you?

STEVE STRICKER: Good morning, everybody, first of all.

Yeah, it meant a lot. It was something that I wanted to do since year one and get my name on the trophy, us being so close and have so many ties to this event. Obviously our foundation, the reason why we put it all on, you know, for the charitable dollars given to the children's hospital. Just to have all that in the back of my mind and then to try to win that since day one has been a challenge. To finally do that was really a dream. Here we are, the dream bank, or dream -- it is dream bank. So it was a dream come true. Nicki on the bag is always a special time. To do it right here in Madison in front of a lot of family and friends was really cool.

TOM LEA: In addition to winning the AmFam Champ, you also had just a phenomenal year in 2023, so I'm going to rattle off a few things here, Steve.

You won an additional five PGA TOUR Champions events, you were named the 2023 Charles Schwab champion, you were the recipient of the 2023 Jack Nicklaus Award, which is awarded to the PGA TOUR Champions Player of the Year, the Arnold Palmer Award given to the season money leader, and the Byron Nelson Award given to season scoring money leader. You were inducted into the Wisconsin Sports Hall of Fame, and then Golf Writers Association Senior Player of the Year. I'll take a breath. That's quite a list. What insights or observations on last year's success can you share with us today?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, it was just one of those years where it all went right the entire year. To try to do that again this year, it's been a challenge so far. I haven't really played my best. Looking to get that ball rolling shortly.

Yeah, it was just one of those years where I was in contention a lot, a lot of opportunities to win. Could have won a few more times, could have probably lost a few of those that I did win. It was just one of those years where each and every time I teed it up, I had an opportunity to get in there. It was fun.

And yeah, you don't realize how difficult it was until you start off like I have this year so far, not really had those opportunities. So it was a special year.

TOM LEA: Kind of building off what you were just saying, how do you feel your game is right now as we're about a month away from this tournament? Obviously you've played in a handful of events so far this year.

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, played OK, not great. Had a chance to win early on in Hawaii, finished third there. Some top-10s but not really striking on all cylinders so far.

Had a little equipment issue at THE PLAYERS Championship. I broke my driver, which has been a little bit of a headache to try to find a new one of those.

So things are looking up, though. I'm kind of settled on my equipment for a change and moving forward. I've got a busy stretch coming up, so hopefully get some good golf in.

TOM LEA: We'll come back in just a minute as we open it up, but before we do open it up for questions, just a couple reminders for our media in attendance today.

The deadline to apply for media credentials for access to the media center at U Ridge during the tournament is Friday, May 31. You should have received an email from Janet Masters with a link to the AmFam tournament credential site through the PGA TOUR. If you did not receive that email or if you have any questions regarding media needs or the media center, please contact Janet. Janet's right here on the left. She can help you out with whatever you need.

And of course coming out of today's event, you can visit the resources page on the tournament website at AmFamChampionship.com for additional information and a transcription of today's proceeding.

So again, find that information at the bottom of the home page at the AmFamChampionship.com.

Now, at this time we'll take any questions from any of the members of the media in attendance. I do ask that you grab the handheld mic when asking a question so those on our livestream can hear what you have to ask.

Q. Steve, when we break a drive, we go look for one on sale. What's the process like when you guys break a driver or equipment? How do you go about changing and how long does it take to find what you want?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I switched -- it was a Callaway driver that I was playing for about four or five years and yeah, second round of THE PLAYERS Championship and had a little hairline fracture going vertically in there towards the sweet spot, towards the toe of the sweet

spot.

Yeah, it's basically just trying a bunch of different drivers. I tried some more Callaways, I have a Titleist in the bag currently and I've actually driven it pretty well the last few weeks that I've put it in play.

And then it got me thinking, well, I've been playing my irons for so long too, I've been playing those for quite a few years and grooves are getting a little thin on those. Kind of a boring story, but I've been trying a bunch of different irons, too. I literally played two different sets in the last two tournaments just trying to get through what I want to see, what I like, how the shot is, how it looks up in the air, height, draw, all that little stuff that is important to me. Maybe not so important for you guys, but for me to see it in a certain window and that's been a challenge.

So I hit my old stuff yesterday, my old irons, and I think I'm just going to put those back into play.

Spent a lot of time for no reason, I guess. Put the old ones back in there. But we'll keep moving forward on that part and just see if something looks better to me moving forward. But new driver, same old irons.

NATE POKRASS: If you want my left-handed driver, I'll loan it to you.

Q. There will be a change in venue coming up, so what has it meant to have the tournament at U Ridge and just over these years, build it up and maybe what's exciting to move forward to a different place.

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I think it's been a great run, right? Is it eight years? Eight, is that what it is? This is number nine coming up?

TOM LEA: This will be eight.

STEVE STRICKER: This will be eight. Yeah, I mean, to see it from the very start from a, you know, the vision that I had with Jack Salzwedel in his office one day, it was all over the board on what we could do for charity. To see it come to light and see it where it is today is really special. I mean, to raise that type of money year in and year out and have the support of the community. People look forward to the event, they look forward to the concert. It's something that people put on their calendar to look forward to. That's really special for all of us involved.

But I also think moving forward next year we're going to a new place, there's new things. I think it will provide a little shot to the tournament. It's something different. Excitement level will probably go up again for us to go to a different area. We may even do something different there, right? Who knows.

So there's some things in the works that we want to try to keep raising this bar and providing experience for the fans and for the players on a yearly basis to come to Madison, to have a good time, to show the people that we're having a good time. Yeah, that's on the docket for moving forward.

NATE POKRASS: To add to that, too, when we started at U Ridge, they've been a great partner from a tournament operations standpoint, from logistics. Just really great collaborative, great to work with, and every year the golf course itself has gotten better and better. We hear that from the players every year, that the conditions keep improving and improving. From that standpoint, from a competition standpoint, phenomenal shape.

And just how we've been able to build the hospitality venues, and that golf course wasn't built for fans and having 50,000 people coming out there for period of a week. So they've been really collaborative on how to evolve their space to be able to accommodate all our hospitality venues and the fan experience and transportation and logistics.

And they've continued to be great partners even this year in the final year. They're excited to work with us and sad to see is transition as well.

As Steve touched on, in 2025 we'll be excited for the new golf course co-designed by him as well, so that'll bring a unique element to it. We've certainly got a full plate ahead of trying to build the logistics and all those elements, but first and foremost we've got a great tournament here in 2024 and we're certainly gearing up for that.

Q. Steve, in years past when you're chasing the AmFam Championship, you kind of always talked about maybe this year I'll not have as much fun at the concert or try to balance friends and family, you're stuck with that. But last year you must have done a pretty good job with that to win it. Does it feel any different knowing that you're the reigning champ this year? Maybe there's a little pressure, a little less pressure, or is there more pressure now because you kind of figured out how to balance it?

STEVE STRICKER: You're right, I stayed home from the concert last year because I think that was the key.

Yeah, no, it's a monkey off my back really. It was something that I wanted to do, like I said, from day one that we put this tournament on that I wanted to be the first champion. So there was that pressure each and every year that I wanted to play to win. So each and every year that went by I felt a little more pressure to do it. Obviously after winning last year, kind of a relief, so hopefully I can go out there this year with a little bit easier approach on myself attitude and see if I can't get right back in there to do it again.

Q. Steve, a couple years ago obviously some documented health issues. The incredible year you had last year, did that make it that much more special considering how far you had to come back to have the kind of the season you had a year ago?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, it really does. The last couple years after feeling better, you know, I've gotten stronger, I've put my weight pretty much back on. Yeah, I gained a totally different perspective from what I went through and things that I took for granted before, like my health, right? Something as simple but important as that.

So yeah, it was a special year. And yeah, I don't know what else to say is that I felt fortunate to be able to continue to play, to continue to play at a high level for our age group and to continue to do what I love to do. It's been a blessing.

Q. Steve, you've got I think three straight major championships coming up, you're defending in two of them and then you're defending your own tournament. I don't know if anyone's ever had a stretch like that in golf. I know you've had some time off recently. How prepared are you and would you say the next five weeks will be the most important stretch of the year for you?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, it's a big stretch, for sure. Like you said, three majors, a week off and then the AmFam Championship. And I feel good, I feel rested, I feel ready. I've been working on my game the last few days quite a bit, seeing a lot of good signs there. So I've got, I've definitely got some reps in the next five weeks to see where I sit.

The important part of all that is to make sure that I get my rest, too, because it's harder to play two weeks in a row at our age let alone three and then four out of five weeks. It will be a busy stretch, but I'm just going to have to make sure that I stay ready.

But I feel good. I'm excited to go play, I'm excited they're majors, I'm excited that I get to play in the PGA Championship in the middle of all this with the young guys. That's a huge challenge just to try to get in there, make the cut will be a good thing. Excited for all of it.

Q. Steve, you were just in Milwaukee for the Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame ceremony. It seems like every month you're getting an award or going to a banquet or whatever. You're not a (indiscernible) guy. How are you dealing with all of this, though?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, (laughs) I really do. Yeah, I'm very uncomfortable just sitting up here, but it is what it is.

You know, great honor to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. I'm actually glad Gary was there with me and the question and answer, if I had to get up there and speak, no chance, right? It was a pretty good evening, I thought it went pretty well. Gary kind of threw me some softball questions and we got through it.

What Donald Driver has done there to kind of revamp that Hall of Fame is pretty cool and a lot of excitement around that. It was actually a wonderful evening, but I don't want to (indiscernible.)

Q. Steve, are you surprised, just grateful how much Madison and this area has embraced this tournament? Because when you and Jack sat in the office many years ago, you just don't know what will take and what won't, but Madison took to this tournament and really grabbed onto it and just loves it.

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, a little surprised, you know, I guess, but we also felt like it was the right demographic for what we wanted to do. With no professional golf here in Wisconsin anymore, we felt like Madison area and University Ridge was a good spot for us. Having Jerry here in town, myself here in town, and then have the age group come back that a lot of Wisconsin people spent a lot of time watching them down at Brown Deer in the Greater Milwaukee Open, we just felt like it was kind of a good situation.

But to think that and to watch it all come together is another thing. It's all -- I can't thank AmFam enough, and Jack and Jim. Just everybody that had this vision to get this going and the resources and the money involved, the people, Gail, the volunteers, it just all came together so nicely that it's a pretty special week.

And to see Madison rally around it is pretty cool, too. Like I said, to have all you guys here just for a media to get it going is impressive. There's a lot of good being done with it and that's what makes us all feel good and why it's working, I think, too.

NATE POKRASS: To add to a story to that, as we looked back on the first year, I think it was announced late May of '15. Our team came together July '15. We got volunteers opened up I think September 1ish, something like that. We had about a thousand volunteers sign up in six weeks.

When we told the PGA TOUR Champions that, they were like, boy, that's kind of unheard of to get that much support that quick. So that was a quick testament to the passionate fan base here in the state of Wisconsin and the surrounding communities.

And then from there it was just a tremendous ride, and day one to have a traffic jam. You don't want traffic jams, but to have that much passion and interest in attending, and then to figure out those traffic logistics by the end of the day and we've been running ever since.

So there have been many a moment our team has been around sitting there saying remember 2015, remember 2016? So there's still a lot of walks down memory lane as Jocko's described and Steve talks about. It's certainly been a good ride to get us to here and the ride ahead, too.

Q. Just going off that the community support and how everyone follows you hole to hole, and now we're going to be watching it live, well, maybe (indiscernible) that livestream. Just what does it mean to you that so many people really just love you so much in this community?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, it's nice. Obviously this is our home; Nicki grew up here, I just

grew up in a small town not far from here, so we're Wisconsin people. We feel a lot of love and support when we come here. I bring a lot of love and support to all the other Wisconsin teams throughout Badgerland, you know. It's fun, it's fun to be a part of Wisconsin. It's a great fan base, there's knowledgeable in all sorts of sports, they enjoy their sporting activities and they get behind local athletes and I'm no different, either. It's fun.

Joe Pavelski was playing hockey last night and my daughter went to the game. I texted Joe at the end of the game and, you know, it's fun to get behind Wisconsin people. It means a lot to us and maybe that's why it works here, too, maybe why the tournament works because we feel the love and hopefully we provide some of that back.

Q. Steve, one question about Valhalla. You played the Ryder Cup there, you played the PGA there, 2014 finished tied for seventh. What's changed in your game over 10 years? How do you have a different approach going for this PGA?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I'm sure the course has gotten longer for me going back there. I mean, I think they've added some tees, made it longer. I've probably gotten a little bit shorter, so it's going to play longer.

Yeah, I'm excited to go back there. I've had history there. My first Ryder Cup, like you said, was there. We were a winning team there in 2008. Another PGA Championship there. So I'm excited to go back. I enjoy the area, enjoy the course and looking forward to that a lot.

Q. How do you deal with the pressure or is there pressure with the season you had last year and then also with so many people knowing what you did last year? It's almost like having a target on your back, I guess, at different events?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, and I think you're right, but I've also -- I mean, 57 and you kind of just this is all bonus and all gravy. We're trying to have fun with it. Obviously I want to play well and play well enough to get into contention to try to win, but it's more about having that desire to be competitive still, to go through the process, to practice, to get ready. I still enjoy that part.

It's waning, I can see the end is coming. I don't know when that's going to be, but I still at this point enjoy the process of doing it and to play well is kind of a bonus on top of it. But I think that's why I've been playing better, too. I just kind of go in there a little bit easier on myself attitude and try to have more fun to it and see where that leads.

Q. Steve, you and Jerry, obviously good friends, He's a two-time champion, you won your first one last year. I guess I'm just curious when the two of you play together, whether it's a competitive situation or a practice round or the two of you just getting out on the course and playing, what is that like? Is there trash talk, is there good natured jabbing, do you trade pointers? What's a round with you and Jerry Kelly like?

STEVE STRICKER: There's always some little jabs, and he'll forecheck you into the tree or

into the wall sometimes, he's got that hockey mentality. But we really catch up. We don't really see a lot of each other as much as we should probably, but we'll catch up, you know.

And I love him and his family. It's more about talking about making sure everybody's healthy lately it seems like. But yeah, we always have a good time together and root each other on. But I know when one person does well, it kind of spurs the other guy on to try to do better.

TOM LEA: Any other questions? All right. Well, if not, both Nate and Steve will be available for ongoing questions here as we wrap up. I just want to say thanks again for attending our media day today and we look forward to seeing all of you at the 2024 PGA TOUR Champions American Family Insurance Championship. Thank you.