

Golf and the Olympic Games

What they are saying...

The Officials:

Mike Whan, Commissioner, LPGA Tour: “When I think about the Olympics, I think about opportunity. There will probably be more eyeballs in terms of worldwide fans ever before. Most Olympics sports will tell you they sort of live off their every four year dose of awareness; whether it’s kayaking, table tennis or diving. You get to see it then you have to wait four years to see it again.

I like women’s gymnastics but outside an Olympic year I really don’t get to watch it. If you like women’s golf and you stumble into it as a casual fan which happens a lot at the Olympics, unlike most Olympic sports, we’re on TV the next week, the next week and for 34 week the next year. We have a chance to capture the casual fans and I think it’s a huge opportunity for us to introduce ourselves to a broader audience and give them somewhere to go with that new enthusiasm.”

Billy Payne, Chairman, Augusta National, announcing that the Olympic Gold Medallist will be invited to all majors in 2017: “We believe the game’s visibility will be dramatically elevated by the global platform that only the Olympics offer. New audiences from all over the world, some for the very first time ever, will be exposed to our great sport and come to know and appreciate the amazing athletes and heroes in golf.”

Ivan Kodabakhsh, CEO of the Ladies European Tour: “I think golf is one of the most historic sports with a long tradition that has developed very much over the last few decades within golf itself and in its own niche. The Olympic Games provides us with an opportunity to go beyond millions of people watching but billions of people watching, reaching new people, new fans. This puts golf into the same structures within countries where there is a National Olympic Committee, where a sport federation will put more effort behind the game’s grass root programmes because we are in the Olympic programme. So I believe it’s going to be a game changer.”

Keith Pelley, CEO, the European Tour: “The Olympics provides us with an incredible platform, and we’re very keen to seize the opportunity. To showcase the game globally is terrific, and should help highlight the unbelievable skill of male and female golfers. Perhaps most importantly, it is a great chance to engage with and attract the casual sports fans, who might not otherwise have considered getting into the game of golf seriously. We have billions of people worldwide tuning into the Olympic Games, and if we can appeal to even a tiny fraction of those viewers, then golf in the Olympics will have served its purpose. Any chance to expose our game to a global audience can only be a good thing.”

George O’Grady, President of International Relations of the European Tour: “The crucial meeting for golf to go into the Olympic Games took place during the Ryder Cup at Valderrama in 1997 with Juan Antonio Samaranch, Ken Schofield, Commissioner Tim Finchem from the PGA Tour and myself, with the presence of the European captain Severiano Ballesteros.

Mr. Samaranch said: ‘If golf is going into the Olympics it must have the best professionals in the world to lead and inspire all the other countries’. From that meeting the world’s leading administrators came together.”

Tim Finchem, PGA Tour Commissioner: “When you look at the reach of the Olympics - London reached 3.6 billion people globally. A billion people watched the opening ceremonies alone. It's a platform that is unique in sport and one that we wanted to take advantage of from the standpoint of growing the game.”

The Men

Justin Rose (Great Britain): “It's exciting for golf to be in the Olympics (and we hope) that it does grow the game. The Olympics has a broader appeal. I'm excited to go to Rio and have the opportunity to play. It is a once in a lifetime opportunity and we're going down there, taking a full week at the opening ceremonies just to feel what it's like to be a member of 'Team GB' and just take it all in. So yes, I'm excited about playing. If I was to win, I think that would just be one of my career highlights.”

Rickie Fowler (USA): “I kind of look at it as a once-in-a-lifetime experience to actually be part of the Olympics, with it being the first time back in over 100 years. So if I have the chance to go down there and play for Team USA and walk in the opening ceremonies and be a part of the Olympics, it would be pretty special.”

José María Olazábal (two-time Masters champion): “It has been a long journey, and we must remember those who started it. I arrived after a group of professionals that dared to compete abroad and paved the way for me. We must also thank younger players such as Tiger Woods or Sergio García, the current standard-bearer of Spanish golf, for inspiring the new golfers.

“Olympic golf will be a crucial turning point that will enable us to reach new generations of golfers and countries that are unthinkable right now. We will reap the results in 15 or 20 years' time. When you hear top sportsmen like Rafa Nadal or Pau Gasol say that the Olympics are a unique experience, you get a sense of the extent of the Olympic spirit.”

Sergio García (Spain): “I couldn't be prouder of representing my country and become an athlete besides a golfer. The players who preceded me never had this opportunity and I wish to thank all those that made it possible. My father taught me that besides playing well and trying to win tournaments, I must try to leave a little something to make things better. When I retire, I hope to have given my small contribution to golf.

“I don't know the feeling of actually being in the Games, but I am a big fan and I follow them on TV. I very much look forward to the experience of living at the Olympic Village. These might be my last games, so I want to live them fully. The opening ceremony and actually meeting the athletes that I admire on TV will be awesome.”

Thorbjørn Olesen (Denmark): “It's one of my big goals this year to qualify for the Olympic Games and I'm in at the moment. I think it would be awesome to be a part of it. It's something I've grown up watching, seeing all the different kinds of sports. There is so much history and it's so special, it is great that golf is now a part of it, so now that I have a chance to play in it, it is definitely a big goal to go there, get a good feel for the atmosphere, and try and win a medal for my country.

“In golf, we never really play specifically for our country, so to go there for the Olympics and play not only for myself, but also for my country, trying to win a medal, I think it would be very special. Hopefully, I can be there and compete. It would be a great experience.”



Felipe Aguilar (Chile): "I'm into the Olympics now representing my country. There are too many positive things just to worry about one bad shot. It's going to be fun. I'm going to have my wife as a caddie and my team is going to be travelling with me so it's going to be a really good experience. I'm looking forward to everything that is happening now."

SSP Chawrasia (India): "The thought of playing in the Olympics is very exciting indeed. Other Indian sportspersons have been to the Olympics. When I used to see them there, I always got a great amount of joy because I used to think that since I play golf I would never get the chance to go the Olympics. But finally, it seems that my Olympics might just come true".

Graham DeLaet (Canada): "We go down there (to Rio) and we're playing for pride. There's something really special about that. It's an unbelievable opportunity. It's something that from the time it was announced was really important to me to try to be on the Canadian team, and I hope to be able to do it. As we were saying about growing the game, if we can get ten extra kids involved in sport because a Canadian wins a medal, (then) I just think it's great for our game."

Byeong Hun An (Korea): "I'd love to play in the Olympics. They (my parents) played in Seoul. They got silver and bronze medals in table tennis. I've got to try to get gold then. Just by playing in (the Olympics) is really special for me, so I'll do my best to try to make the team."

Henrik Stenson (Sweden): "I think it's going to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, something very new for us as golfers. I've never been to an Olympic venue (city) so it's going to be good fun to be there, feel the atmosphere and watch some of the other sports and, of course, to try to make my country proud by hopefully competing for medals. If you can do that, why not go for the ultimate one?"

"It (gold) would be huge. Sweden is a proud and strongly supportive nation but we're not spoiled by winning heaps and heaps of medals in the summer Olympics, so that would be very big. I haven't won any of the four grand prizes in golf, but I would put it (Olympic gold) right up there next to it."

Danny Willett (Great Britain): "I think it would be fantastic to be able to be in and around Olympians. They wait four years to be able to compete for their country, and fortunately, golf's in it this year, and I think it would be a fantastic honour to go play."

Padraig Harrington (Ireland): "Ever since golf was first mentioned as a possible Olympic sport, and my involvement in golf's presentation to the IOC in 2009, it's been a primary goal of mine to qualify for the Irish Olympic Team for Rio 2016. Therefore, I am very excited by the prospect of playing and representing my country in the Olympic Games, should I qualify and gain selection in two week's time. I will work very hard over the next few weeks to achieve this selection as it would be a huge honour for me to represent Ireland at the Olympic Games, having played an active role in golf's bid to be re-included in the Olympic Games programme."

Alex Cejka (Germany): "I may only have this opportunity (the Olympics) once in my lifetime. I am almost at the end of my career, so if I was nominated I would definitely go."

Francesco Molinari (Italy): "I think the Olympics are the essence of sport. My favourite memory is Stefano Baldini winning the marathon gold for Italy in the Athens Olympics. Now I am looking forward to sharing the experience with the athletes from different disciplines and seeing what the environment is like. If I wasn't involved in the golf I would like to take part in the 100m because it's the highlight of every Olympic Games."

Thongchai Jaidee (Thailand): "The Olympics is the greatest sporting event in the world so I'm grateful to be a part of it. To be honest, I'm proud and excited to represent Thailand. I really can't wait to be there. If I do win a medal, it will be a plus but representing my country and Asia is what I'm really looking forward to. I've won many events in Asia and Europe and play in all the Major tournaments. The only sporting event missing from my career is playing in the Olympics so it really ranks on top of my list. The ultimate goal is to



win in any tournament which I'm playing in but if I do win a medal at the Olympics, it will be an entirely different story. When you win for your country, the feeling is definitely better than winning it for yourself."

Martin Kaymer (Germany): "It's about the pride and the hard work that other athletes put in as well. Coming from your country, you all work as one team -- it's a little bit like The Ryder Cup, but a lot bigger, and there's a lot more heart with it. You know, Ryder Cup is a lot of passion and a lot of heart, but if you play for your country, and you see the people from your country sitting next to you having lunch, getting prepared for the Olympic Games, for their moment, that they prepared for four years; so that's super inspiring. The Opening Ceremony? It's huge to be part of that and walking in there. I don't know what my chances are to carry the flag, but it would be massive. I mean, what a pleasure that would be."

Bubba Watson (USA): "I can't wait. My wife played professional basketball and she missed out on the Olympics because of a knee injury the one time she had a chance to make the team. ... So for me, it's an amazing sporting event that I get to be inside the ropes at. I get to see some of the athletes I've always wanted to see. I get to go to some of the events I've always wanted to watch and then I get to play in it."

Camilo Villegas (Colombia): "It would be a huge honour for me to represent my country there. I've been kind of dreaming of being at the Olympic opening ceremony, that would be pretty cool. The very first thing that I thought was that if I happen to compete at the Olympics, I want to stay in the Olympic village ... I want to experience the whole gig, the opening ceremony, everything."

"The Olympics is the greatest sporting event in the world so I'm grateful to be a part of it. To be honest, I'm proud and excited to represent Thailand. I really can't wait to be there. If I do win a medal, it will be a plus but representing my country and Asia is what I'm really looking forward to. I've won many events in Asia and Europe and play in all the major tournaments.

Jaco Van Zyl (South Africa): "This (decision to pull out of Open and US PGA) definitely wasn't a decision I took lightly, but something had to give and I decided to forego the majors in July in favour of the Olympics. I expect that there will be a camp that will criticize me for withdrawing from the Majors, but I feel very passionate about golf's debut at the Olympics. Rory (McIlroy) said in a recent press conference that we play four "Olympics" a year because Major titles are what we play for, but I don't agree.

"To me, the Olympics is the pinnacle of all sporting events and to have the chance to represent Team South Africa on sports' biggest stage is an honour I don't take for granted. I need to go to Brazil with the rest of the South African team knowing that I am in peak mental and physical health and that I can give my best over four rounds. The Majors will still be there next year, but I don't know if I will get another chance in 2020. To be part of the first South African team at the Olympics is a massive honour."

The Women

Lydia Ko (New Zealand): "Ever since they announced that golf would be in the 2016 Olympics in Rio, I said I want to get myself to Brazil. That was going to be my ultimate goal, and I can't believe it's already around the corner. It's just been a dream. I feel so fortunate that we're getting this opportunity to be in the Olympics. Golf isn't the most physical sport. It's not the fastest sport, but it takes a lot of skills, a lot of hard work to get here and get to be in this position. So I think it's great that golf is returning to the Olympics."

"Just to be able to compete in the Olympics and play for your country in front of an international stage, I think that will be a dream come true for all the athletes to say, 'Hey, I'm an Olympian'. If you end up getting a medal that's great, but to say I'm an Olympian, I think that's a pretty proud thing to say."

Charley Hull (Great Britain): "I think it will be a buzz to say you've played in the Olympic Games and you're an Olympian. Hopefully to come away winning something would be great. It's not like it's a team event, but you feel if you come away with a medal you are putting it towards the whole GB thing."

Sandra Gal (Germany): "I think it's very special to have that amazing platform to just reach a lot of kids. They might see golf for the first time ever and to maybe have the possibility of them wanting to win a gold medal through golf. I think it's amazing. Obviously there are so many kids nowadays that play lots of video games and don't go outside, so I'm all for pushing golf and kids going outside, starting a sport and getting inspired. So a great opportunity for us."

Shanshan Feng (China): "I was not that happy with my performance the first few months of this year after I changed my clubs and my putting has not been that good. It was a slow start but I'm making steady progress. Winning the Buick Championship has really picked up my confidence and with around three months to go to the Olympic Games, when we get to Rio I hope to be in my best shape."

Caroline Masson (Germany): "I think it's very special to have that amazing platform to reach a lot of kids. They might see golf for the first time ever and to maybe have the possibility of them wanting to win a gold medal through golf. I think it's amazing and a great opportunity for us. Everybody is really buzzing about the Olympics. It's a big deal for everyone and for me personally too, being from Germany, where golf is a big deal. Being able to represent my country on the biggest stage in sport is just absolutely huge."

Ariya Jutanugarn (Thailand): "I feel good. I think last year I had chances to win a few tournament but I didn't learn like how to play with pressure. But this year, especially the last few weeks, I have learned and know how to play under pressure. There is an expectation for me to play well, especially in the Olympics because I represent Thailand. I always have my target. I want to be better and better. Any (medal) would be good, but gold is the best."

Anna Nordqvist (Sweden): "Well, playing in the Olympics has been a dream of mine since it (golf) got introduced to the Olympics back in 2009. It's been a big goal for me, and it's going to be huge getting the honour to represent Sweden in the Olympic Games. I know there's a lot of concerns with the Zika virus, but I trust the doctors. I know the Swedish Olympic Committee, they have a lot of great doctors and medical team behind them. I'm going to listen to them. But other than that, I'm going to go and I'm really excited about it, and I'm doing my best these last couple months to prepare for it."

Brooke Henderson (Canada): "The Olympics to me is kind of like the sixth major on the LPGA Tour. The LPGA has five extremely strong events on the schedule and every time you mention a major championship it kind of sends shivers down your back little bit. It's really important to me (to play in Rio) and I think everybody else competing this week. So to choose one over the other, I don't think I can do that."

Lexi Thompson (USA): "I think it's amazing. I think it shows how much golf is growing as a sport. It's an amazing experience to be able to say you're an Olympian. The team is picked July 11th, so I still have some golf to play. It's an honor to represent your country in any tournament, but to be an Olympian is the highest honour."

Nanna Koerstz Madsen (Denmark): "Emily and I are playing for the Olympic Games and it would be the biggest experience to go there. I haven't thought about the Olympic Games yet because I'm thinking about how to get there. This week, of course, was very important to me."

Noora Tamminen (Finland): “This is the last tournament that counts so it’s really important for everyone in contention to go. I really want to play and I’ve been dreaming about the Olympic Games since I was five years old.”