

### ALL SYSTEMS GO FOR GOLF'S RETURN TO THE OLYMPIC GAMES

Several prominent figures behind golf's eagerly-awaited return to the Olympic Games joined forces with Major Champions, Graeme McDowell and Suzann Pettersen in Florida, in providing an upbeat assessment of the state of play with only 19 months left until the first tee shot in Rio de Janeiro.



Peter Dawson, Ty Votaw, Suzann Pettersen, Graeme McDowell, Amy Alcott and Gil Hanse speak during the Olympic Golf Forum at the PGA Merchandise Show

Peter Dawson and Ty Votaw, respectively the President and Vice-President of the International Golf Federation – the body charged with the responsibility of bringing golf back into the Olympics – took to the stage at the IGF Olympic Golf Forum which launched the 2015 PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando, alongside the respected Rio course design team of Gil Hanse and Amy Alcott.

There was a palpable air of excitement among the packed audience who heard first-hand about the considerable strides being made in ensuring that the pioneering 60 men and 60 women who will represent their countries in August 2016 will find a stunning challenge awaiting them in Brazil.

A delegation of IGF Board members visited the course in Rio last weekend to witness for themselves the progress being made on site and Dawson told the Trade Show visitors, and the TV audience live on the Golf Channel, that “excitement is really mounting” as the countdown continues to Rio 2016.

He said: “We began this project of bidding for golf to return to the program of Olympic sports because so many small countries, small in golfing terms, who really needed some help to grow the game. They said to us, look, if we could get golf into the Olympics it would give us extra exposure, extra government support, extra popularity for golf, and that’s already beginning to show through in so many countries that I visit around the world.”

Votaw talked about the significance of Olympic golf in the United State by saying: “When we embarked upon this process we knew it would grow the game around the world, and we also know that anything that could bring golf to more eyeballs and to more kids in this country would certainly have an incremental effect here. We think it’s going to do nothing but help grow the game here in the United States.”

Norwegian Pettersen, a two-time Major winner and seven-time Solheim Cup player, was closely involved with golf’s Olympic renaissance in 2009 as an IGF delegate in Copenhagen when the International Olympic Committee vote was taken to include golf in the Olympic Programme for Rio 2016.

Growing up in Scandinavia, where the Winter Olympics ruled the roost, she could never conceive of the day – now just around the corner – where she, too, could dream of capturing the first gold medal in golf since the start of the previous century.

She said: “I grew up seeing all my role models, heroes, competing on TV for the gold, silver and bronze medals. Now I can have that dream myself and it is quite inspiring for me. And being a part of this process, you can see how much work it took to get golf back in and I think golf, as one of the biggest sports in the world, should be on the Olympic Programme.”

McDowell also recalled his youth in Northern Ireland, commenting: “One of our most famous Olympians was Dame Mary Peters, pentathlon gold medallist in the ’72 Munich Olympics, and I think my earliest memories probably came from watching the Olympics on TV and – being a purist – were of the 100 metre sprinters, and Linford Christie, a phenomenal British athlete, winning gold in ’92.

“I think the Olympic Games is the pinnacle of sport. It’s the ultimate achievement for a sportsman and athlete. Nothing will internationalize the game more than golf being part of the Olympics and bringing the game to underdeveloped parts of the world, bringing golfers to this great sport that we all love. I don’t think the timing could be more perfect. We’re all very, very excited and very passionate to be part of it.”

Hanse and World Golf Hall of Fame member, Alcott, provided a series of slides displaying the type of golf course the players will encounter in August 2016. Hanse explained: “We were blessed with a very sandy site (offering) the opportunity to create a golf course that looks and feels a little bit like the sand belt in Melbourne, Australia. I think these images will hopefully resonate and show people that there is grass, it’s growing, and there is a real golf course in the ground down there.”

Alcott added: “Gil and I have created a real links-style course with a lot of diversity and the mandate was playability for all levels of golfers (although) obviously I wanted to see it as a real challenge for the elite players in the world. We will leave behind a course for the people of Rio to enjoy in perpetuity.”

Pettersen said: “From what I’ve heard it’s going to be a fantastic course. It’s going to be links style, which is probably not what I had on my mind thinking about Rio, and having played some other courses down there.”

McDowell commented: "I think seeing these images certainly heightens the excitement level to be part of it. We still have a bit of work to do to make sure we are on the teams to go and compete as an Olympic athlete. I'm very passionate about seeing the golf course in Rio – it's definitely amazing.

"I believe that the Olympic Games will grow into the game of golf as players get a chance to experience it. Golf has not been part of the Olympics since 1904. We have got a lot of learning to do. We have got a lot of understanding to do. As players we are excited to be part of it. The game will grow as we witness the first golfers standing on the podium with gold medal around their necks listening to their national anthems."

#### **About the International Golf Federation:**

The IGF was founded in 1958 to encourage the international development of the game and to employ golf as a vehicle to foster friendship and sportsmanship. Recognised by the International Olympic Committee as the official international federation for golf, the IGF is comprised of 133 Federations from 127 countries. The IGF serves as the International Olympic Committee's recognized International Federation for golf.

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