

Tom Cade: Good morning. This is a Pod for the Course, and I'm Tom Cade, the Senior Director of Communications for Washington Golf, and today we have with us, Mike Zinga. Mike is the director of sales and sponsorship relations for the Charles Schwab Challenge. The PGA Tour event is happening this week at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas. Mike, thanks so much for taking a few minutes this morning, on the first day of the tournament.

Mike Zinga: Good morning, Tom. Thank you. Appreciate it. I look forward to spending some time with you today.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Mike, it's been a bit of a journey. I have known you personally for 10 years or so. You were the tournament director for the U.S. Senior Open, which was held at the Sahalee Country Club in Sammamish, Washington, 2010. Long time ago.

Mike Zinga: Yeah, but I spent almost three years there, if you recall. I moved there in the fall of '07.

Tom Cade: That's right.

Mike Zinga: And loved it. My family loved it.

Tom Cade: Yeah. So was that the first tournament that you were really that heavily involved in to that degree, Mike? I can't remember.

Mike Zinga: No, Tom. I'd graduated from a master's program in Florida, in the mid 90s, believe it or not, and worked with the Champions Tour event in Key Biscayne, Florida, called the Royal Caribbean Classic, which led me to Doral. Then I worked at Doral for a while when it was the Doral Ryder Open, which then led me to a great champions tour event on the West coast called the Toshiba Classic, and now it's called the Hoag Hospital Classic, I think is what it's called. From there, I actually went home. I got married and moved to Canada where I grew up and worked with Golf Canada for a number of years before accepting the job in Seattle to run the U.S. Senior Open.

Tom Cade: Okay. Yeah. I do remember you were there for a few years just prepping for that championship there at Sahalee, that senior open.

Mike Zinga: Yes. It was Freddy's 50th, if you recall, and he was our honorary chairman for the event and it's probably the most well attended junior clinic of all time during the senior open at Sahalee, when he did that with Jay Hoas, if you recall.

Tom Cade: I do. Yeah, that was a great day and actually a really good week, and you're right. That was his first event as a senior, and it came down to the wire between him and Bernhard Langer in the final round.

Mike Zinga: Incidentally, Langer is playing this week here at Colonial. There's a couple of guys from the Champions Tour because of the relationship with the Charles Schwab Cup championship. So we've got a few guys from that tour playing this week and some over 50 guys like Tom Lehman. I just watched tee off a moment ago who are former

champions at Colonial. So, a lot of... The game of golf just kind of stays, there's a linear side to it, I guess, it just keeps going.

Tom Cade: Yeah. So just real briefly, what has been your journey from 2010 to 2020? I mean, just a quick rundown. What have you been doing?

Mike Zinga: Sure. Real quick. When I left Sahalee in August, September 2010, I went to the PGA tour, championship management, and I moved back to Florida to work with the Doral event, which was the WGC Cadillac Championship. From there, I was recruited by Colonial Country Club. They wanted to really grow their sales, the product opportunities. They've had a lot of history, 75 years next year at Sahalee, sorry, at Colonial, and they knew my experience working in a private club setting like at Sahalee, and I brought a lot of innovation. I was able to do that and we've really grown the business and added a lot of amazing products, and with a setting here at Colonial that's passionate, we have loyal fans. Texans love to go out, and with that type of canvas, we've just been able to really take this event to a new level and thus attract a great title sponsor in Charles Schwab.

Chuck was actually out here last year, himself, and was playing in the pro-am, and so that's really been... I know that I've been here eight and a half years now, so it's been great. I work with a great tournament director. He's a Canadian, his name is Michael Tothe, and the club is obviously very supportive. The executive committee, the members, the city of Fort Worth, unbelievable support for the event. So, and that would be, I would say, a big reason why the PGA tour looked at Colonial as an opportunity to return to golf.

Tom Cade: So I did want to ask about that. So today is June 11th, on March 12th, almost exactly three months ago, was the last round that the PGA tour had played. That was when the Players Championship was canceled because of the COVID pandemic. So you there at the Colonial Country Club for this Charles Schwab Challenge, this is the first tournament on schedule, or back on schedule. I'm sure it was a little bit nerve wracking for you folks and you and your team and the whole staff there about whether the event was going to be held at all and what was the future going to be and the whole thing?

Mike Zinga: Well, I mean, you all recall where you were when the pandemic became obvious that it was more than just a flu. This was big. We started to get more reports from China obviously, and other parts of the world, so that probably would have been right after the super bowl, but we didn't really know yet how it would affect, not only the business, meaning the revenues, but how it would affect the operations, and then, obviously, once the Player's Championship was canceled, right in the middle of the event, we knew that there was a change coming and we right away were on phone calls with PGA tour leadership, our leadership, to come up with a plan to still host the event and our typical dates are Memorial Day weekend, so it would have been May 18th through May 24th with Memorial Cay on the Monday, the 25th.

Originally we were looking at a plan where we would scale back hospitality, but still have ticket buyers maybe. Then it was no ticket buyers and maybe do pro- am's. Then it was, we decided about 60 days ago that to really plan this well and make it safe for the

players and be conscious of expenses and be conscious of the safety, and, obviously, the health concerns, not just for the players, but in general, we decided to just have no fans whatsoever and make it a media only event. That's how we started really planning it from that point on, and even when we were given the opportunity to open up to 25% fans from the governor, the governor of the state of Texas, we decided to just stick with the plan and go with what we knew was prudent.

That was really the collective plan all along. We were staring at calls about sanitization, thermo testing, using technology to have a bubble of a small amount of people that would be interacting with the professionals, and then having a hybrid volunteer collection of individuals that was much smaller than what we typically have. Them getting tested, coming through separate entrances, the amount of detail that started as a three page document, which is about 30 plus now is being looked at by the NBA. It's being looked at by the Dallas Stars hockey team here, the World Games has called us.

We've been looking at it since March. We haven't been waiting, delaying. We've been trying to figure out how to do it. So when I talked to friends from college football, VCU, or some of the sports that are happening in the fall, they're just staring at the issues in detail, and they're realizing how many challenges they have. Six feet apart in a stadium, how do you thermal test 30,000 people? You can't. I mean, I don't see it. I don't see it happening, Tom. I think it's going to be a hybrid version.

Tom Cade: So that's a really good point, too. Not only is this the first PGA tour event to be held again, this really is the first major league sporting event to be held, not just golf, but all sports.

Mike Zinga: Right, and not just one event, it's going to be the first of many, the Heritage, the RBC Heritage returns next week in South Carolina, and then it's the Traveler's up in Connecticut, or I think the Rocket Mortgage in Detroit, I don't know one of those flip flop. Then it goes up to the Memorial in Ohio, and then there's a new event that's being played at the same location the following week at the Memorial, because the John Deere had to cancel due to the state regulations from what I understand.

We were fortunate because our governor, our city mayor, the country club, the PGA tour leadership, and our title sponsor, Charles Schwab, were all in favor of trying to come up with a plan to make it safe and bring some resilience to the American way of life, something back. A return to golf is just a small way saying let's try to return back to normalcy.

Tom Cade: So with the restrictions of the no gallery situation, no grandstands, it sounds like people were on board to say, let's go ahead and do this Anyway. Doesn't sound anyway, like there was really any hesitation about whether or not the tournament should be held, correct?

Mike Zinga: Correct. There's a lot of tradition here at Colonial. We're going into our 75th year next year. Ben Hogan obviously was a big part of the development of this country club from the beginning, and there's a statue right at our entranceway and his name is all over the

place. He won five times. Just him alone and how he conducted his life is woven into how Colonial operates. That was a big deal to make sure that we continued in the tradition regardless of the obstacles.

Tom Cade: Okay. So for you, just from a personal standpoint, walking around the grounds, I'm sure you've been... You're there all the time, but earlier this week during practice rounds and things like that, just walking around from a personal standpoint, how different does it feel to you, because you've been around so many tournaments and this tournament every year, how, other than obviously the lack of a gallery, how were the players attitudes? How are the volunteer attitudes, things like that?

Mike Zinga: Sure. Well, just look at the field. 17 of the top 20 in the world. The top five are here. In fact, Monday and Tuesday, most were wearing shorts during practice rounds. We're fortunate, and typically it's really hot in June, we're a month later than we were originally scheduled, but we've had some temperate weather. I'd say that with Mickelson, obviously, it's a high profile player being here and saying a lot of great things, golf course is in tremendous shape. The players have been fantastic. The volunteers that were fortunate enough to not get axed, because most people, most 1600 of them, even with the potential risk to COVID-19, they wanted to be here. There's a lot of passion in our community, our part of the country, for this event because of the history, and there's a lot of upset people outside, but the range is vibrant.

The guys want to play. They want to win. They want to contribute to providing some entertainment for Americans and for people throughout the world. We had a lot of international players here that live in the country. Obviously Rory McIlroy is here. So it feels a little different because you don't have stands and we usually get 15,000 people for the Wednesday pro-Am and we usually have a few celebrities, like Coach Patterson, who's the head coach of TCU, and we've had Bill Murray for a number of years come out, but that's okay. Everyone has sort of the same purpose in mind, and that is to do what we can to say thank you to frontline workers, try and return to the normal American way of life. So everyone's on board. All levels.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Nice. Mike, I know you've got a lot going on this week and I appreciate you taking the time today in particular with the first round being today at Colonial there for the Charles Schwab Challenge, and it's great to see tournament golf again.

Mike Zinga: Yeah, I think it is. I mean at 1:06 today, Tom, it's Rory McIlroy, Brooks Koepka, and John Rahm. So fantastic group, and actually at 12:55, Justin Thomas, Ricky Fowler and Jordan Speith. So some tremendous golf to be seen today on... PGA Tour Live is a great place to get it. So you go to [PGA tour.com/live](https://www.pgatour.com/live), and it's free today on Thursday. Nice. Okay.

Tom Cade: Nice. Okay. I just read a bunch on that. Mike, thanks again so much for taking the time and great to catch up with you. It's been many years since your time at Sahalee and glad to hear that things are going well there at Colonial for the Charles Schwab Challenge.

Mike Zinga: I appreciate it. Thanks, Tom. I miss the Northwest, the great Northwest. I love it.

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Tom Cade: Yeah. Well, some day, we'll get you back here for a round of golf or something.

Mike Zinga: Yeah. If you don't play in the rain, you don't play.

Tom Cade: Exactly right.

Mike Zinga: All right. Thanks Tom.

Tom Cade: All right. Bye.