

THE CLOSER PGA TOUR CHIEF JAY MONAHAN

ON GIMMES, SLOW PLAY,
CELLPHONES, BOBBY ORR
& MORE

WITH
GUY YOCOM

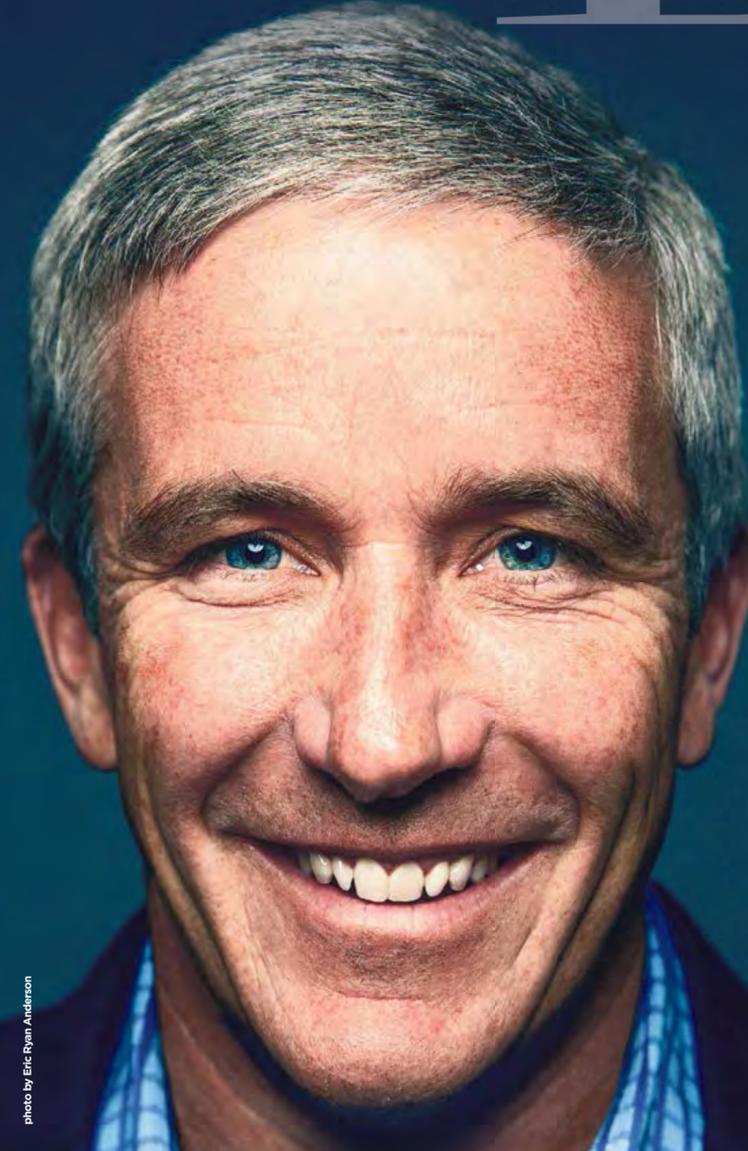


Photo by Eric Ryan Anderson

Before I came to the PGA Tour, I was in sales for the Fenway Sports Group, known primarily for owning the Boston Red Sox. I even have a World Series ring from when the Sox won it all in 2007. When I came to the Tour in 2008, I went to work in marketing, which really is a branch of sales. Here's what I know about selling: If you're asked to sell something, and you look at it as moving a product, it's going to be far more difficult than if you see what you're selling as the answer to someone's problem. You want to explore how it can fit a need they have. You need to listen to them, help them rationalize ways the product can help them. If you care about that person and are passionate about the product, it doesn't become a "sale," per se. It becomes part of a relationship, something mutually beneficial and larger than the product. And then comes the most important part, which is the follow-up. How your product is performing, and what you can do to help the client further. I'm still in touch with people I sold to 15 years ago. The idea is to keep the relationship going, as it can help you both in ways that maybe didn't exist at the outset.

I'm Joseph William Monahan IV. The first Joseph William Monahan was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1888. His family immigrated from County Mayo in Ireland in the mid-1800s. He went on to become a State Senator and highly accomplished attorney. After him, the one thing every Joseph Monahan had in common was golf. My great-grandfather played in the US Amateur and, legend has it, one year made it to match play. But the most remarkable golf person was my grandmother, whom we all called Granny Annie.

Growing up outside Boston, my parents would drop my brothers and I off at her house in Hyannis. We would lap a nine-hole course all day, then feast on wings and quahogs [clams] at night. On the course she was a force of nature, competitive and filled with all kinds of body English. Off it, she was the undisputed family matriarch, the magnet in the room at our large family get-togethers. She would drive good distances to watch her grandchildren play golf. At a junior tournament when I was about 9, I played lousy and spent the day pouting, getting frustrated and overreacting to bad shots. When I came off the course, Granny Annie was there with some very direct conversation about my behaviour. A lecture from her was not something you forgot.

If you go to Japan and see how Hideki Matsuyama is revered – or the way Li Haotong is regarded in China – the possibilities will make your mind boggle. With the enhancements being made to broadband,

there will come a day when Hideki's fans will not only be able to watch him but to see every shot he hits. Obviously that goes for our players and the US audience as well, but it's especially enticing as the PGA Tour expands globally to places such as South Korea. It's a global game and marketplace. We have 85 players from 22 countries on our Tour. Growth is occurring everywhere. The opportunity for us is to lead the way.

Arnold Palmer objected to hats worn indoors. I get it. My father, grandfather and Granny Annie weren't thrilled by hats worn indoors or untucked shirts. Thus, my whole life I've been pretty proper. But I've relaxed in one respect: cellphones. Five years ago, seeing people taking pictures and using their phones at our tournaments secretly bothered me. I disliked them when I played, too, because I felt they disrupted the social experience. My view has changed—a lot. We have to be open to change. Watching fans get happy and excited about sharing their experience across their networks is a cool and powerful thing.

Everybody has a boss. I was fortunate to learn early on who mine really was. I played on the golf team at Trinity College in Connecticut. My junior year, we were driving back from a tournament in Massachusetts. My little brother, Brendan, was also on the team and had lost in a play-off. He was in the back, silent. Our coach, Bill Detrick, said, "Brendan, you all right back there?" Brendan said, "No, Coach, I'm not. I'm mad at myself for the way I lost that tournament." Coach Detrick said – to all of us, really – "Brendan, whether you know it or not, every single day when you wake up, your family name is emblazoned on the back of your shirt. It's your job to go out every day and represent your family, and do it well. In my opinion, you accomplished that today." That made an impression on me. As commissioner of the PGA Tour, I report to a board of nine directors, including four player directors. But I'm guided by my accountability to the other Monahans, especially my wife, Susan, and our two daughters, Sophie and Phoebe.

What do I admire most about other major-league sports? Two things. One, the way the NFL, MLB, the NBA and the NHL conclude their seasons. I love where we are with the FedEx Cup, but keep in mind it's only 10 years along, is still evolving, and we're always on the lookout for ways to sharpen our postseason-playoff structure. Two, I admire the way they build and market their brands through their own networks. Having a 24/7 presence has served those sports very, very well.

I like people. I enjoy all forms of human interaction. Talking with people, listening to them, often just observing them. Even unpleasant people, I enjoy discovering what makes them tick. It's sort of a requirement of the job I'm in now because the range of people is so broad, their situations so dynamic. Their needs and goals can be material, but it's the human interaction that gets us there.

It's odd that I majored in history, because my real strength is math. Interest, cost projections, returns on investment—for some reason I can run a lot of those things in my head. Sometimes, when I wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep, I'll spin financials around in my head. It relaxes me. You know how there's a guy in the group who gets the scorecards to figure out what everybody owes? I'm that guy. Except usually I don't need the scorecards.

The sleep issue is a gift or a curse, not sure which. I'll wake up at 1 a.m., enjoy the quiet of the night for a while, then can't go back to sleep. Worrying that I'm not sleeping just makes it worse, so I just say to heck with it, stay up and then go straight in to work the next morning. The last time I slept eight hours consecutively was coming off a trip to Asia. Even then the sleep came at weird hours because of the time change.

Back to the Red Sox. Our family has had season

tickets for over 50 years. Section 25, decent seats. I was 8 when Bucky Dent broke our hearts. What you learned from so many years of not winning the World Series was loyalty and perseverance. You also learned something peculiar to Red Sox fans. In 2004, holding a 3-0 series lead over St. Louis, we took a 3-0 lead in Game 4 into the bottom of the ninth. With two outs, one man on and our ace closer, Keith Foulke, on the mound, I saw a lot of very nervous people. They knew that in baseball, business and life in general, you just never know.

Every kid who plays hockey around Boston has done the famous Bobby Orr-flying-through-the-air pose. But there's something about Bobby that's even better to copy. Our family has been close with the Orrs. One of my first jobs was working for Bobby's company, and my mother and Peggy Orr, Bobby's wife, were dear friends. When my mother passed away in 2007, the wake for her was packed, the line extending far down the street. We got word inside that the Orrs had arrived and were at the end of the line, which was tough because it was cold, damp and Bobby had just had hip surgery. Knowing the distress he'd be in, my Uncle Tom went outside and discreetly invited Bobby and Peggy inside. Bobby looked at him like he had two heads and said, "We're going to treat that woman with the same amount of respect everyone else is showing." Two-and-a-half hours later, the Orrs arrived at the front of the line.

Be careful not to let the best moments pass you by. The year after high school but before I started college, I went to New Jersey and attended The Lawrenceville School, to grow up a little and learn how to study better. I played on the golf team, and at the Eastern Interscholastic Golf Championship, played at Yale. I started the final round with a five-shot lead over my brother, Brendan, and a kid named Billy Mann. Preoccupied with how Brendan and Billy were doing, I squandered the lead and wound up in a play-off against the two of them. I fell away on the third hole. Brendan lost on the sixth hole, and we spent the drive home feeling utterly despondent. We didn't know it, but it really was one of the great moments of our lives, sharing an experience that brought us closer together.

Immediately after college, three of my friends were telling me about a cross-country bike ride they were leaving on in two days. My dad, overhearing the conversation, said, "Seeing as how you failed to have a job lined up, you might as well go with them." I said, "I can't. I don't have a bike." My dad rolled his eyes and said, "I'll buy you one." I hadn't been on a bicycle in 15 years, but two days later, there we were in Kennebunkport, pedalling west.

We planned on spending nights at campgrounds, but that got expensive. So we began knocking on doors late each afternoon, asking the residents if we could pitch our tents in their yards. We promised we'd be in bed by 9 and gone the next morning by 6, and needed only water. Every door we knocked on, the resident said yes. And more often than not, they'd invite us for dinner. A lot happened on that trip, but 55 days later, we rolled into Seattle. We all learned the basic goodness of the American people. It was an awesome experience then, but even more amazing as I look back on it because I doubt I could duplicate it. Who can spare 55 days?

I come from a Kennedy household. As the years pass, people increasingly seem to appreciate what John F. Kennedy accomplished in less than three years as president. From civil rights to standing up to Russia to wanting to put a man on the moon, he was an extraordinary human being. He's my hero. Everyone from Massachusetts knows where I'm coming from, even if they disagreed with his politics.

Some of my friends assume that my being commissioner will cause my handicap to rise. I'm not so sure that's true. I'm a 3.9 Index and intend to keep it there, at least. I intend to play my share of golf, because it's my passion and I'm going to need that outlet. It also is unmatched for meeting people, building relationships and making things happen.

I'm in the group that doesn't think President Obama playing more than 300 rounds of golf was excessive.

My pet peeve in golf: gimmes. I take them and I give them, but I don't like them. When you play in a tournament, you spend a fair amount of time worrying about the three-footers for par. You more or less get used to it. Then, in the Saturday games, suddenly everything is good. The change in attitude doesn't make sense. What's more, the time it adds to a round is negligible if you go about it briskly, and worth it. I'm just not a believer of gimmes in golf. Or in life.

Which takes us to the subject of slow play. I don't see a problem with rounds on our tour taking four hours, 45 minutes, because it's been consistent around that number for a long time. What drives the small amount of criticism is the impulse in the modern world to do everything faster than we did it last year. So am I going to push for faster rounds? As it stands, no.

Be nice to people in the service industry. Over-tip when it makes sense to do so. Be like my dad, who was known around the club as "the player every caddie wants to have." As you travel up and down the food chain, treat everybody equally.

Disruption is a part of every business. Today especially, you have to be mindful of trends and understand what the consumer wants, so your product can intersect with their desire. That is clearly the case—and always will be—with live sports. There is nothing better than watching an event build towards a tense conclusion. The days of televised tape delays are waning; I really dislike trying to keep my phone turned off so I can watch something later as if it's live.

Is working for the PGA Tour glamorous? Here's a story. When golf was welcomed back to the Olympics, the reality of having to build a course set in. Our staff—Rich Brogan, Cal Roth, Steve Wenzloff and Michael Johnson, to name a few—did unbelievable things to bring the course in Rio to reality. They used 130 round-trip tickets going down there to work with the landowner, developer and, of course, the designer, Gil Hanse. And the most amazing thing was, they did it in addition to their day jobs. They were working on improvements at TPC Scottsdale, TPC River Highlands and elsewhere. The result, when the Olympics finally came off, was exhilarating. I know the guys found their mission stimulating, but glamorous? No.

In 2004, a friend of mine, Brian Oates, and I formed a 501(c)(3) called Golf Fights Cancer. A couple we knew, good friends, had a child with neuroblastoma, and another adult friend had died of cancer. When my mum passed away from cancer in 2007, this cause became deeply personal for me. We knew that golf is a terrific vehicle for charity in general. So Brian and I appealed to golfers through the Boston Marathon, then did golf marathons, then a tournament called the Good Guy and Gal Invitational. So charity is personal for me. For all the talk about the machinations of the PGA Tour, I don't want to lose sight of the fact that our tournaments are essentially about charity. We've raised US\$2.3 billion for charity, and I'm confident we can add considerably to that. I'm good at numbers, remember?

I've lived in circles where I've been privy to very good advice. The best came from a golf buddy and mentor, Mark Flaherty, a former vice chairman of Wellington and current board member at Goldman Sachs. He said, "Don't ever be intimidated or impressed by anybody. We all came into the world the same way, and we're all leaving the same way." Carry that attitude and you'll encounter very few situations that are too big to handle. Also, I love Arnold's guidance. He said, if I can teach a young person to leave the game better than where they found it, then I've been successful. That certainly applies to my new role. This game is unrivalled in developing complete and inspired people. It's our job—including everyone reading this—to celebrate and bring its greatness to more people. **G**