



## UNDERCOVER TOUR PRO

# INSIDE ONE OF OUR CLOSED MEETINGS

very year we have a closed meeting. No public, no media, no sponsors, nobody but players and senior people from the PGA Tour. If you're in the field that week, attendance is mandatory. They check your name off a list when you walk in, and the player liaisons — guys like Ross Berlin — sit by the doors so no one can slip out early.

Our meeting this year was in January, in a ballroom at the Hilton where most of us stay during Torrey Pines. Er, I mean the Farmers Insurance Open. That was actually a main takeaway of the meeting: Whenever we're being interviewed, let's be more conscious to properly cite the tournament.

Usually, the focus of the meeting is financial, and so it's an opportunity for our bosses to tell us what a bang-up job they're doing. Lots of slides with impressive numbers and charts. I've been to about 20 meetings, and I can't remember one that went quicker than this past edition.

The big change, of course, is that it was the first overseen by our new commissioner, Jay Monahan.

The guy who introduced Jay, a banker who has been on our policy board longer than I've been on tour, said that although Tim Finchem did an amazing job, he was confident Jay would bring fresh energy and do an

amazing job, too.

Jay then stood up and basically said, "I'm going to talk about these three things for 10 minutes each. Then I'm going to leave 30 minutes for questions. If there are no questions, this is a half-hour meeting."

Now, players can be a whiny bunch sometimes. Who else would get so quickly bored listening to how big their retirement pot is growing?

Traditionally, we've always been allowed to leave once the floor opens for questions — and a chunk of the room always does empty — but never was the promise of brevity put forth so sharply.

I saw ears perk. I always stick around for the Q&A in case I might learn something, but there is a contingent that cares about only one thing — how they're playing — and everything else is just noise.

Jay's first point — that when we find ourselves near the lead, we all ought to do a better job talking specifically

about the tournament at hand, as opposed to the arch of our individual season or career — resonated with me.

Whenever I'm making birdies and have reporters sticking microphones in my face, I'll get excited and start blabbing about what another win would mean for me generally. Like securing my spot in the Masters, locking up my status on Tour for another couple of years, or getting me into a WGC event and altering my schedule, and so forth.

Rookies, understandably, tend to get overwhelmed by the implications of winning. But given how generously title sponsors support us, the right thing to say is, "It would be very special to win the \_\_\_\_\_," and leave it at that.

And if the interviewer really pushes you to broaden your narrative, Jay suggests talking about the FedEx Cup points race.

Jay's second point was about possible changes to our schedule. To com-

pete less directly with football for TV ratings, for example, events could get rearranged so that the PGA Championship would be played in May.

I understand the logic, but I'd be concerned about losing a lot of the classic Northern venues, like Baltusrol or Medinah, that wouldn't be reliably playable that early in the season. I guess I'm a bit of a course geek.

Jay's third point was fairly innocuous, but I will report that the Q&A was lively. It didn't kick off with a question, rather a statement made by one of our sharper guys on the disparity of pay in tournaments.

Particularly, the fact the US Open purse hadn't risen proportionally with Fox's new \$1.1-billion TV contract with the USGA. Jay said he was aware of the situation and was looking into it.

Two weeks later, news hit that the US Open purse is getting a \$2-million bump. Pays to attend the meeting.

— with Max Adler