

Mike Whan: The Man Who Revitalised Women's Golf

By Jonathon Fleming

When Mike Whan took over as Commissioner of the LPGA in 2010, the women's game was in dire straits. Television audiences were dwindling, sponsors were pulling out, and the future of women's professional golf was hanging by a thread. In just over a decade, Whan didn't just steady the ship—he propelled the LPGA to new heights, revitalizing the tour and securing its future in ways no one could have predicted.

By the time Whan announced his resignation in early 2021, he had transformed the LPGA Tour from hosting just 24 tournaments to an impressive 34, with the total playing purse nearly doubling to over \$76 million. His departure has been met with a wave of well-wishes and sadness from players, sponsors, and fans alike, a testament to the unprecedented strides he made for the women's game.

A Marketer with a Vision

Before stepping into the role of LPGA Commissioner, Whan had already built a formidable career in marketing, holding positions at Procter & Gamble, TaylorMade, and Wilson. But it was his time at the LPGA that truly defined him as a visionary leader. Upon taking the reins, Whan made it his mission to restore the tour's prestige by increasing television exposure, securing lucrative sponsorship deals, and putting the LPGA back on the map.

His strategy was simple but effective: communicate openly, build trust, and bring corporate partners into the LPGA's vision for the future. Whan understood that sponsorship wasn't just about dollars—it was about alignment. He worked tirelessly to forge meaningful relationships with companies, convincing them that the LPGA was worth investing in. This approach breathed new life into a tour that had lost momentum and allowed the LPGA to thrive in a competitive sports market.

The Players' Commissioner

What truly set Whan apart was his relationship with the players. Known for his transparency and open-door policy, he earned the trust and respect of every golfer on tour. His communication style was a breath of fresh air, and his genuine passion for the game made him an advocate for the players both on and off the course. Whan didn't just lead from the boardroom—he led from within the community, always accessible to players and staff alike.

It was no surprise, then, when Whan publicly stated that the LPGA would continue to be run by women in the future. His belief in empowering women to lead the sport was one of his lasting legacies, and it will be fascinating to see how the tour progresses in his absence.

Investing in the Future

Perhaps one of Whan's most significant achievements was his focus on growing the game at the grassroots level. Under his leadership, the LPGA-USGA Girls Golf Program experienced exponential growth, climbing from just 5,000 participants to nearly 90,000 in a decade. This initiative has not only secured the future of women's golf but has also inspired a new generation of female athletes to take up the sport. Whan's investment in junior golf is monumental. He understood that the sustainability of the LPGA relied on its ability to nurture young talent and ensure the game remained accessible to girls of all backgrounds. By expanding the program, he laid the groundwork for the continued success of the women's game, ensuring that future stars will have the opportunity to rise through the ranks.

The Next Chapter

As Whan prepares to leave the LPGA, rumors are swirling that his next stop could be the USGA, where he is tipped to become the next CEO. Wherever his career takes him, one thing is certain: Mike Whan's impact on the LPGA will be felt for generations. He leaves behind a tour that is not only thriving but positioned to grow even further in the years to come.