





Golf's Olympic OPPORTUNITY


An estimated 200 million people worldwide watched Olympics golf from Tokyo. Are we **truly maximising the potential impact?**

WITH the Paris Olympic Games little more than two years away, now is the time when the details are being finalised.

Could a format tweak make our sport more appealing and what options are realistically on the table? To find out, GBQ spoke to **Antony Scanlon**, the man ultimately responsible for delivering golf in the Olympics in his capacity as the executive director of the International Golf Federation, and **Sir Clive Woodward** a former director of sport for the British Olympic Association as well as the coach of England's World Cup-winning rugby union team back in 2003.

“The IOC insist that the Olympic Games is not a lab rat. They insist on tried and tested, measured formats of our competition. So we’re pretty much limited to 72-hole strokeplay”





Antony Scanlon is executive director of the International Golf Federation, which makes him **ultimately responsible for golf in the Olympics**. He explains to GBQ why he believes 72-hole strokeplay and the world's best players are non-negotiables – but that there is scope for a team element in the future

ANTONY SCANLON became the executive director of the International Golf Federation in 2010. Prior to that, the Australian had worked for the International Olympic Committee (IOC), where he headed up Olympic Games Operations and Services, managing and organising both the winter and summer games. He joined the IOC having worked on the Sydney Olympics in his home country.

"I had a bit of a background in golf," he said. "Some of my best mates were golfers and agents and my uncle was a professional golfer in Australia.

"I was not a great golfer but I played a bit of cricket and a bit of rugby league so I knew the world well enough to not be an outsider, but to also understand the sport and its organisations and how we could integrate them into a delivery of an Olympic Games."

What constitutes success? Is it about rivalling and even overtaking the majors in time? Or inspiring people who haven't seen the game before to try it?

"It's reaching audiences that we don't normally have. As you stated correctly in the last issue of your magazine, around 60% of our audience are people that are not golf's usual viewers. We've got exposure to a much younger audience, and a much more gender-neutral audience. So more females and more kids. For Tokyo, we reached around 210 million people, which was a massive footprint, and much different to the usual footprint that we would have in a major. We're not competing, we're complementing. Our board is about

collaboration. The way the IGF is set up is collaborating with the major tours and the major organisers to add an extra bow to our communication string to get more people interested in the sport to become long term fans and then hopefully convert into participants."

How do you assess golf's Olympics return so far?

"I think you can learn from different metrics. The first one is athlete acceptance. We had some difficulties leading in, obviously Covid with Tokyo, and Zika and other issues with Rio. I think the events themselves were credible and well watched. There were 210 million watching the events worldwide in Tokyo.

"The players themselves saw the uniqueness of the event, to participate as a member of a team as well as an individual. And secondly, the players really appreciate the uniqueness of the experience at the Olympic Village. We had a huge take-up at both Rio and Tokyo of our athletes staying at the Olympic Village, rather than a hotel to participate in the games. My interactions with the players suggested it was a very humbling experience for them to be around the best athletes in the world and to realise how fortunate they are that they are able to make as good a living as they are out of their sport and realising the sacrifices that these other athletes make to be at these games, the pinnacle of their sport, without the financial reward. "They're excited by being around the vibe that's within the Olympic village.

"The way we have set up the courses has created a challenging theatre for them to show their skills off. We've had the best people in golf supporting in terms



ANTONY ON HIS ROLE

"You could put it into three spheres.

"One, representing the sport within the Olympic movement: Interaction with the IOC and the International Paralympic Committee, plus other groups within the Olympic movement, such as the association of Summer Olympic International Federations. I attend all those meetings and also chair a number of committees. Similarly with the General Assembly of International Sport, I represent golf and look after our interests when they're discussed within an overall sports point of view.

"For the World Anti-Doping Authority, we're signatories. We write the code for golf, and our athletes come under our code at the Olympic Games. Our professional anti-doping codes are now pretty much in-line with the anti-doping codes in the professional and amateur world. Other bodies include Interpol, Integrity of Sport, and betting. "Prior to us being part of the Olympic movement, we were isolated from these bodies. Now we're able to influence and also lead other sports. That's how we were able to take a leading role of helping sport get out of Covid.

"Two, we have the Youth Olympic Games, and the World Amateur Team Championships every two years. We're involved in the inside-the-ropes management of the Asian Games, the Pan-American Games, the World Masters games, and a number of other multi-sport events.

"Three, the administrative part is writing these codes to conform with the requirements of IOC membership, and assisting our membership in terms of coaching and development work through Olympic solidarity to improve coaching around the world of golf, and to try and grow the sport at both grassroots and elite level."

of refereeing, course setup and medical.

"They come from a very weird environment of accommodation in the village – they're staying in a dormitory, eating in the cafeteria. They're not travelling in a private car.

"But when it comes to competition, when they get there, they realise this is set up to challenge them and to meet their high expectations for an event of this quality. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

"It's 12 years since we became part of the Olympic programme, and these athletes are now growing up with golf being an Olympic sport. It's not something new now, it's taken for granted, it's becoming aspirational among our amateur athlete players to represent their country.

"Obviously, they're aspiring to play in majors as well. But this is one extra avenue for them to achieve.

"I think we're creating that desire and that uniqueness in the event to make it high on just about every athlete's agenda to participate there.

"In terms of the metrics, we're achieving a much broader, more gender-neutral audience than what we would normally have week-in and week-out on tour.

"From a television, social media and digital point of view, the number of articles and interactions in markets that we would not normally be in is bringing the game to that greater audience and justifying us being part of the programme and making room for this event every four years."

Do the IOC insist the Olympics needs to involve professionals?

"I think all of us, when we watch a sport, we want to see the best athletes in the world participating in it. In an Olympics, there's an expectation from the audience to have the best athletes there. From our point of view, and the way we've set up our qualification system, we're doing that but balancing the strength of field issue, because there are certain countries in the men's and women's game that dominate. There's no point having 20 Koreans in the women's event and 10 or 20 Americans. We're balancing that strength of field with diversity across the field.

"We've had the best golfers there with the exception of a minimal number now. We had all 15 women there, and on the men's side, we had seven of the eight that would have been eligible from the top 15 based upon the restrictions on nationality. Overall, with a limited field of 60 men and 60 women, so 120 athletes, we had 42 countries represented.

"If you look at the men's and women's events, both in Rio and Tokyo, we're getting drama, we're getting stories. We had that seven-man play-off, unheard of before. Rory said he's never played harder for third place ever. We've got to have the top athletes there. When we get to Paris, we'll see they will be there. There'll be some that have reasons not to participate but so be it. They'll be missing out on something."

|| Prior to golf being part of the Olympic movement, **we were isolated.** Now we're able to influence and also lead other sports ||

Is the Paris format going to be the same as Tokyo?

"We had a pretty in-depth review after Rio. We're doing the same right now in terms of feedback from the players, as well as the National Olympic Committees and our national federations. I'd be lying to say that there isn't a desire from the athletes to have a team event, but at the same time they still want the individual event. They see the 72-hole individual event as the way of determining an Olympic champion. And they don't want that to change. "If you recall, when the IOC made the decision last April, to put the Olympics back on at a similar timeframe this year, the schedules had already been set in stone for golf for two years. So we had to do a bit of a workaround just to fit it in. All credit to the tours and to our membership for catering because that was a big ask. And that shows the commitment. "One solution we're going to be looking at is how can we fit a team event in – but at the same time still have an individual event. One of the opportunities is similar to what the World Cup used to be – within the individual event, which is a 72-hole strokeplay, that two members of that country's combined scores would create a team event. "I think in terms of television it will be compelling because you've got multiple stories happening. You've got someone that may be out of it in terms of the individual event, but really needs to perform to get the

team medal because their other player's doing well.

"If we took the Tokyo qualifications, and the Rio qualifications, we'd have 22 to 23 countries both in the men's and women's that could have competed for a team event without changing anything in terms of it being a 54-hole event, which the players don't like."

Is this about the players then, rather than the fans and what they might want to see?

"The IOC insist that the Olympic Games is not a lab rat. They insist on tried and tested, measured formats of our competition. So we're pretty much limited to 72-hole strokeplay. "But also, if we want the best athletes there, we want them playing in events that they're comfortable playing in, and they see the value of the gold medal. What we don't want to do is cheapen the value of the gold medal in this event. The competitors really do insist on 72-hole strokeplay. "It's balancing that with how do we reach out to new audiences. We've had four competitions that have been very compelling in terms of the finale. How can we add to that without compromising this? It's a balancing act. And at the same time, it's not up to us to choose what events are in the programme. It's the IOC. "When we come to them with these things, they have to agree on it. The litmus test is where's this been held? How's it been held? And that's where we get hamstrung each time."



28

The number of current Olympic sports – of which golf is one

If we proposed an exciting new format, would the IOC just say no?

"We would have to come with a compelling argument and proof of performance that that event has been staged successfully a number of times. It's not a matter of 'guys, we just thought this up on the back of a coaster yesterday and let's go ahead and do this, because this is going to be fun.' There are requirements that they have as to the type of disciplines or event formats that can be admitted to the programme. That's why we're restricted to 120 athletes."

Do we have to convince the IOC that golf is worth more medals?

"I don't think that's an issue. The first two factors are proof of performance and the acceptance of the athletes. "The third thing is number of athletes. Fourth would be venues, and we'd be using the same venue. And the fifth thing is the IOC would consult with broadcasters to see whether or not this fits into their scheduling and the scheduling within the Olympic programme itself. "Once we've finished our review and we go to a proposal for LA, it needs to be ticking those boxes to ensure we maximise chances of success."

What about mixed gender events?

"The challenge we have is trying to fit this into the men's and women's schedules. We're limited to 16 days of an Olympics. We take up eight of those days just in competition, and then at the same time players can't just turn up and play, they also have to practise, they need at least two days. So straightaway, we've taken 12 days up so how do we then fit in a mixed teams event that's credible? The time period when these events are happening is straight after the playoff series of the tours. Sure, it would be a compelling event but it comes back to how would we fit that in. It's certainly something we'll discuss."

Even if it was kind of a bolt-on?

"I don't make that decision. It's the IOC that would make that decision and say 'is a bolt-on event valid in that it hasn't been tried and tested.' "Long term, you have to really think ahead for formats to change. The Olympic Games is a massive undertaking, Effectively, you've got 320-plus World Championships happening in 16 days. Then we want to add another World Championship effectively for golf in mixed. I'd love the opportunity. It's just how we make it happen. That's the challenge."

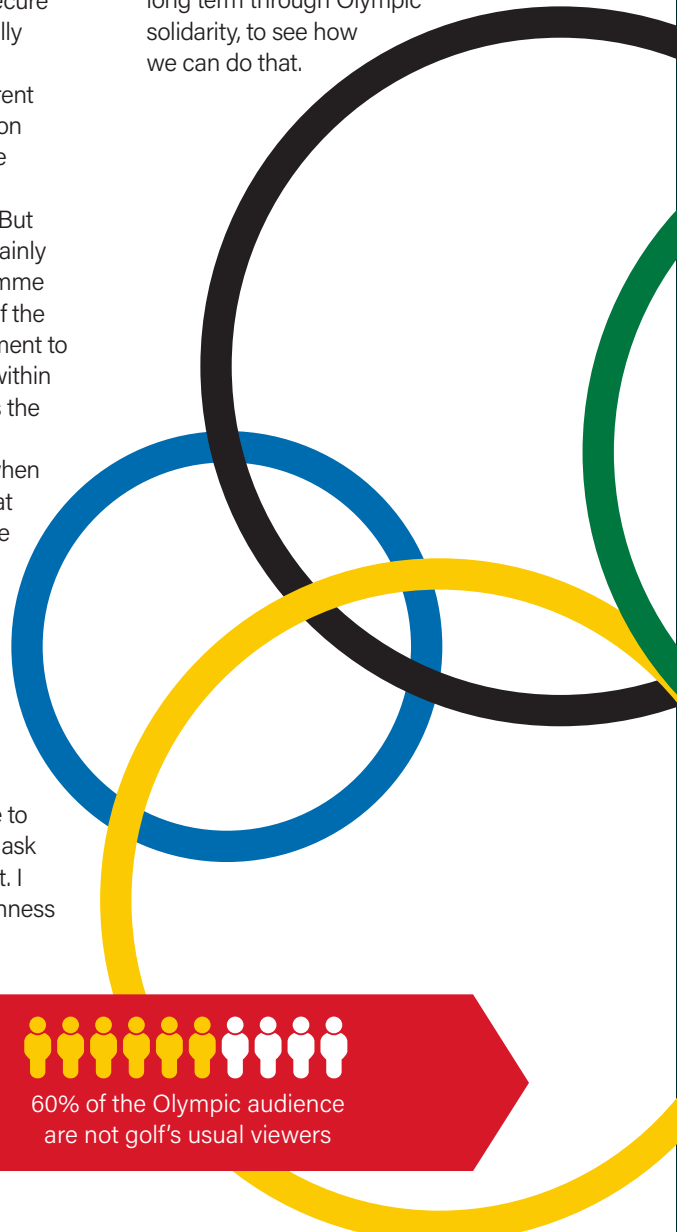
How content are the IOC?

"Go back to 2017, straight after the Rio Olympics, when the IOC changed the Olympic Charter, and added rugby and golf to the list of sports that are on the Olympic programme. I think we ticked the box straightaway in Rio. "That effectively made us as secure as any other sport. Automatically were seen as the one of the 28 Olympic sports. We're no different to the other 27 sports that are on the Olympic programme. We're accountable in terms of our performances at each games. But both of those games have certainly entrenched us into the programme and the athletes' acceptance of the games also brings good testament to that. We've got great support within the Olympic movement across the membership. "I'm not talking out of school when I tell you a great experience that the IOC President had when he came to the men's event. He said it was the first time ever he was speaking to athletes while they were playing in competition. They walked over and discussed something with him while waiting for the players to move on. "Similarly, one athlete was able to come over to him and me and ask how can we have a team event. I think he appreciated their openness

and the commitment to the Games, and it gave him a unique experience. "We never take anything for granted. The one thing about the IGF and one thing about golf is that we always want to improve, we always want to do better and obviously see how we can take our sport to a broader and different audience to what we have week-in week-out.

What does success look like?

"To get more countries participating in the long term – a broader church. That would also show that we are growing in newer markets and also at the grassroots level to create those players. "I think our long-term goal is to have as many countries as we can participate in those games at that elite level. And that's something we're looking at in terms of our role long term through Olympic solidarity, to see how we can do that.



210,000,000

The number of people who saw golf in the Tokyo Olympics



60% of the Olympic audience are not golf's usual viewers

A brief history of the IGF

In the words of the executive director, Antony Scanlon

"The IGF was founded in 1956, to create the Eisenhower Cup. A number of nations wanted to challenge the US, similar to the Walker Cup.

"It was decided to get 40 or 50 countries together and they all met at the White House under the auspices of President Eisenhower to create this amateur teams event.

The first Eisenhower Cup was held at St Andrews and Bobby Jones was the first US captain. From that, the Espirito Santo was created. The secretariat of that organisation was a joint one between the R&A and the USGA. The World Golf Council continued to hold the events every two years.

Back in 1993, golf made an attempt to be part of the Olympic programme in Atlanta. The head of the Atlanta Organising Committee was Billy Payne (of Augusta fame). There was a view to have amateur golfers participate at the Olympic Games in 1996.

That fell through because of the then president of the IOC, Juan Antonio Samaranch. The Olympic Games

was coming out of the amateurism age and progressing into wanting the top athletes in the world of each sport participating at the Olympics. Discussions continued with the IOC until 2003 when the World Golf Council changed its name to the International Golf Federation. There was serious discussion between a number of national federations – the amateur bodies – of the need for golf to be part of the Olympic programme.

They started to look seriously and work with the IOC to come up with the best proposal.

Just prior to that they had further discussions with the IOC, which insisted that the best golfers in the world should be the ones participating in the Olympic Games. The amateur bodies saw that Olympics golf is a great opportunity for the sport to get recognition within their countries.

As it stood at that time, most of the national federations did not have any recognition by government, or national Olympic Committees, as a sport. It was not getting any funding because of that. By becoming part of the Olympic movement and on the Olympic programme, straightaway we got that recognition which is what

we're seeing.

So the IGF was created, and a bid was put together in 2009. And with that came a collective of the professional game and the amateur game to deliver that bid – with a commitment of the top players in the world participating at the Olympics. We were admitted to the programme.

In 2010, the IGF's constitution changed to have two strings of membership: One reflecting the amateur bodies, the existing members of all the national federations; and the other reflecting the professional tours and a number of the major PGAs around the world. It was important that we had the organisations that run the major events, as well as the professional tours, as members of the IGF. The IGF then brought me on board to set up the organisation here in Switzerland.

The IGF represents golf, both the amateur and the professional game, within the Olympic movement and the Paralympic movement, and also takes the lead role in terms of anti-doping and other agencies where internationally we need to be represented and represent both phases of our sport.

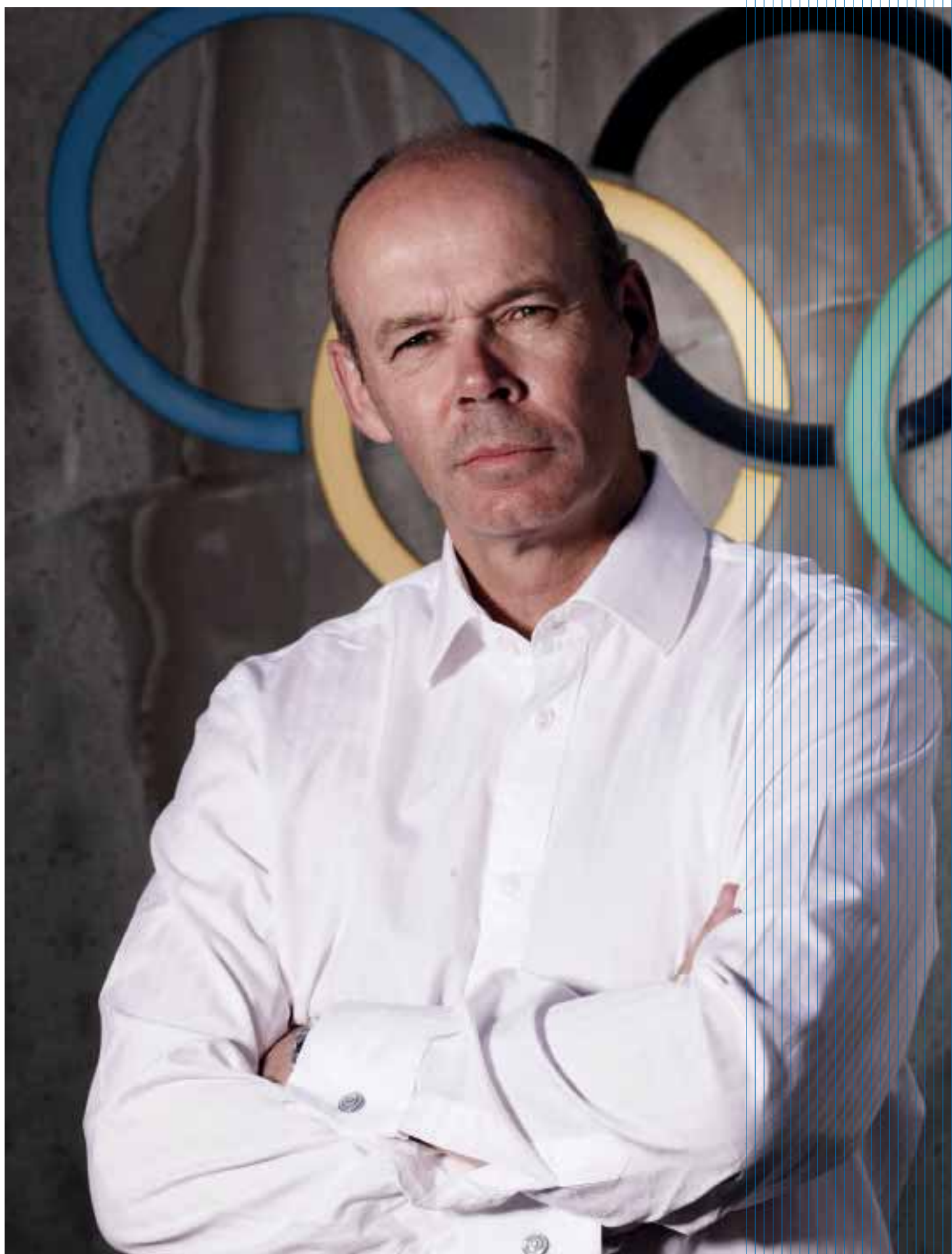
WHO IS ON THE IGF BOARD?

Who is Antony Scanlon answerable to from an IGF perspective and if the sport of golf wanted to propose something different for future Olympics, who would be the voices in that room?

"I call our board the gods of golf. It includes all the major organisers, and then we have representation from our national federations from Mexico and Japan. We've got a pretty broad church there representing all interests of golf. "Whatever decisions are made would come from our Competitions Committee, which is the people that actually run all the majors. We have the best people in golf work for us and collaborate with us to deliver our events and deliver our mission. They will come with a proposal, which will be then approved and submitted to the IOC."

The IGF board

- Chairman: Jay Monahan, commissioner of the PGA Tour
- Annika Sörenstam, IGF President
- Ty Votaw, Vice President
- Martin Slumbers, chief executive of the R&A
- Keith Pelley, CEO of the European Tour
- Molly Marcoux Samaan, commissioner of the LPGA
- Seth Waugh, CEO of the PGA of America
- Mike Whan, CEO of the USGA
- Will Jones, executive director of Augusta National
- Claudia Garduño, Mexican Golf Federation
- Nobuko Hirayama, Japan Golf Association
- Antony Scanlon, executive director of the IGF



A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of the Olympic rings logo. The rings are interlocked and colored blue, yellow, black, green, and red from top to bottom. The background is dark and textured.

**SIR CLIVE
WOODWARD** OBE
was the coach of the
England rugby team
from 1997 to 2004,
masterminding their
victory in the 2003 Rugby World Cup.
Sir Clive went on to become director
of elite performance and director
of sport for the British Olympic
Association. He is also a five-
handicap golfer at Lambourne, who
speaks as passionately about golf as
he does rugby.

**Now golf is back in the Olympics,
what does it need to do to take full
advantage of the opportunity?**

"I was so pleased to see golf come back in the Rio Games. I love playing golf. It attracts great people and I love the game. I think golf's got to understand – and sometimes you just need somebody to tell you the obvious – that the Olympics is the most watched sporting event in the world. It's forgotten by so many people.

One goal is to get a lot of publicity, but also a lot of funding for sport comes from if you participate to get your sport attached to the Olympics. It's huge.

"When you look at a sport like squash, they do so many things right to try and get the accreditation to be an Olympic sport, but they've not achieved it yet.

"It's so, so important for the game. So once you've got that status, as golf now has, you've got to really go for it.

"My only slight disappointment with golf was I think they could have made more of it. I really think that people have got to say that every four years we've got to kind of redo the rules. People have got to really help here.

"Some of the great games in golf that we play at the weekends are mixed. We play alternative shot. It's finding a format that maybe is even more interesting.

"Tokyo was fantastic and the players are all saying all the right things. So it's gone well, it's great, but how do we make sure for Paris we get to do even better? How can we improve on this?

"I'd love to see a different format, to make it different from the norm. Can we persuade the Olympics that,

"Every four years we've got to plough every effort into this golf tournament. Can we make golf even bigger? Because the ramifications in terms of participation alone are huge"

As a former director of sport for the British Olympic Association and a mad-keen golfer, **Sir Clive Woodward is uniquely well qualified** to talk about the game's return to the Olympics and the opportunity it presents

yes, it's fine to have a strokeplay competition but can we also have a mixed tournament, or a Ryder Cup style event? Can we play a mixed team event? Because the mixed events have gone down so well. There's a bigger picture here – to see both sexes playing together and playing well together.

"I just think they missed a trick in terms of the actual format.

And they're probably up against scheduling because of events in the UK or America or Europe or Asia or wherever. But you've just got to go, guys, we've got to forget that.

"Every four years we've got to plough every effort into this golf tournament.

Can we make golf even bigger?

Because the ramifications in terms of participation alone are huge."

Is it right that golf's best players are playing or would it be better to give amateurs the experience of a lifetime?

"I think you've got to have the best players there. I think it is a showcase. Do you want the Usain Bolt of golf playing? You want McIlroy there.

You want your superstars all playing. But at the same time seeing them in a different environment, outside what they're normally playing in the majors, would have been even better.

"I just think the opportunity for the men and women's games to mix for this one moment in time would be fantastic.

"And if you had a Ryder Cup situation, that could carry on for almost the whole two weeks. Where you go knockout, knockout, knockout so it becomes more like the football or hockey tournaments that literally go on for the full two weeks.

"But is golf prepared to sacrifice something for that? And my

answer to these professional players is: come on, this

is your moment to give something back. You're all incredibly lucky. Just for two weeks every four



16

Days an Olympic Games spans

320+

Events in the Olympic Games

42

Countries participating in Olympics golf in Tokyo

years, those who are selected, let's really give this something so we get even more coverage.

"Let's have a different format where the people who win the gold medal may be a mixed pair.

"The Olympics is such a big thing. But we are being very picky because I'm going to say well done to golf for getting back in in the first place.

"I thought it was great that McIlroy was big enough to say he made a mistake not going to Rio and he loved being at Tokyo. And that he's never tried as hard to come third in his life as he did in that seven-man playoff.

"You can see it's great viewing: seven players in the playoff for the bronze medal. And the six players that didn't make it were absolutely distraught they could not get that bronze medal. This podium thing at the Olympics is huge. You all want to win the gold medal. And golfers more than anybody are used to trying to win – not to bring one medal for your country in the medal table is huge. "I just think golf could do a lot more in terms of format to make it more fun and enjoyable. To see the boys and girls playing together would be brilliant – and when you're putting the

rings on it makes it even more fun.

"There's a lot of talk around mental health and wellbeing at the moment. My take on this is with sport, even at the very top level, this word enjoyment has got to be attached to it.

"Golf is a game I love playing. I enjoy it. It's fun. I enjoy seeing my fellow players at the weekend. I really look forward to it. So whatever format you come up with, let's make it fun and enjoyable watching on the TV.

"The BMX sports we have been watching – wow, you look at that, and it looks a fun thing to do.

"So whatever you do, create something that's going to be really competitive, yes, but so people can see it's a really enjoyable game when it's played well.

"Golf is a great game because the values are good – the respect for rules is absolutely incredible. But let's create something for the Olympics that shows men and women enjoying playing the game. That's the number one thing. I love seeing the sports where you see real enjoyment on faces, even those who don't make the podium." [GEO](#)

“ I was lucky enough to live in Australia for five years. We think they're mad on sport but it's only when you live abroad and come back here that you realise we are absolutely a sports nuts country”

SHOULD GOVERNING BODIES IN SPORT BE JUDGED ON SUCCESS AT ELITE LEVEL OR IS THEIR PRIMARY ROLE TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION AT GRASSROOTS?

"It's a really good question. I first started to really think about it when I had this great role with the British Olympic Association. I was the director of sport for three Olympic Games: Beijing 2008, Vancouver in the Winter Olympics and then London 2012.

"It was the first time I was able to look at sport as a whole. It's fascinating, because you've got UK Sport, and their funding is very much geared around medals. They make no apologies for that. That's what they get the funding for. Then you've got Sport England, where the funding is all based around participation, which I think is a great model.

"To answer your question succinctly, I think it's both. It simply is both.

"My only caveat is that I think sometimes we could do a lot more at grassroots level for sports that are cheap and easy to play, like basketball and table tennis. I think there are some sports that really are great fun and are great opportunities.

"But let's be clear, at the Olympics, all everyone talks about is the medal table. And that's where UK Sport does a pretty good job. It's not an easy job because they allocate funding based on where they think they're going to win medals.

"Let's be brutally honest, we're not going to win a gold medal in basketball or table tennis in a four-year cycle. So you've got to invest a lot of money at the bottom level. I think when you see the amount of money the government has spent on Covid, there needs to be a lot more money spent on both medal sports, and also participation sports.

"I was lucky enough to live in Australia for five years. We think they're mad on sport but it's only when you live abroad and come back here that you realise we are absolutely a sports nuts country. I'd love to see far more money going into basketball, table tennis and these kind of sports that I think are great fun. It's so good for our society, as a country, that we get a lot of people active, and the ongoing benefits in terms of health are clearly obvious."