

Trump Criticizes PGA Tour and Praises Saudis for Backing LIV Golf

The former president, who is hosting two LIV Golf events, including one this week at his course in Bedminster, N.J., made the remarks before teeing off in the pro am.



By David Waldstein

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BEDMINSTER, N.J. — Donald J. Trump praised the Saudi Arabian backers of a controversial new golf tournament Thursday, calling them his friends, while criticizing the traditional PGA Tour.

The former president, wearing a white golf shirt and his signature red baseball cap emblazoned with his familiar campaign slogan, spoke briefly before teeing off in the pro-am segment of the LIV Golf event at the Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster, N.J., which he owns.

“I’ve known these people for a long time in Saudi Arabia and they have been friends of mine for a long time,” Trump said after taking practice swings on the driving range. “They’ve invested in many American companies. They own big percentages of many, many American companies and frankly, what they are doing for golf is so great, what they are doing for the players is so great. The salaries are going to go way up.”

The LIV Golf series is bankrolled by the sovereign wealth fund, which is overseen by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. In 2018, during Trump’s presidency, American intelligence officials concluded that Prince Mohammed had authorized the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi dissident and journalist with the Washington Post. Trump, who criticized the Saudis on the campaign trail before his election in 2016, resisted their conclusions.

The Bedminster club had previously been scheduled to host the P.G.A. Championship in 2022, but the P.G.A. of America moved it to Oklahoma after the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol, saying that holding it at Bedminster would be “detrimental to the P.G.A. of America brand.” (The P.G.A. of America, which is separate from the PGA Tour, later reached a settlement with the Trump Organization.) Since then, Trump has sided with the upstart golf tour.

It is not known how much LIV Golf organizers paid Trump for the use of his club for the 54-hole tournament, the tour’s third event. But players who have defected to the lucrative tour have been guaranteed large sums and have resigned or been suspended from the PGA Tour for

playing in it. As of now, LIV golfers can still play in the four major tournaments, which are not run by the PGA Tour, although that could change in the future.

“The PGA was not loved by a lot of the players, as you know, for a long time,” Trump said. “Now they have an alternative and nobody ever would have known it was going to be a gold rush, like this. I think nobody ever knew that they were going to be paying signing bonuses. The prize money was going to be much higher, you know, four, five, six times higher. So, instead of a million dollars you win five or seven or eight. A lot of money and it’s even going up. But the PGA Tour hasn’t acted well.”

During a brief interview with a handful of reporters before he went to the practice putting green, Trump was asked about protests involving the families of victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The protesters, who plan to stage a counter event on Friday at the same time the main tournament starts, believe, along with others, that the Saudi government backed the organizers of the attacks.

“Well, nobody’s gotten to the bottom of 9/11, unfortunately,” Trump said. “They should have. As to the maniacs that did that horrible thing to our city, to our country, to the world, so nobody’s really been there.”

Trump was scheduled to play in Thursday’s event in a group that included his son Eric Trump; the professional golfers Bryson DeChambeau and Dustin Johnson; and Yasir al-Rumayyan, the head of Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund.

“I’ll never feel like a long hitter with that group,” he said.

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