More memorable moments: PGA Championship returning to Ocean Course at Kiawah

- **By Jeff Hartsell jhartsell@postandcourier.com**

The Ocean Course on Kiawah Island has been the site of some of the PGA Championship's most memorable moments in recent years.

In 2012, a young Rory McIlroy beat the field by a stunning eight shots for his second major championship, confirming his place as one of golf's biggest stars.

And in 2021, another of the game's biggest stars added to his legacy when a 50-year-old Phil Mickelson became the oldest golfer to win a major championship at the PGA. He memorably led a horde of fans up the 18th fairway as Jim Nantz of CBS intoned, "Phil beats Father Time."

Who knows what the Ocean Course will have in store for the PGA Championship in 2031 when the tournament returns to Kiawah Island?

The PGA of America announced April 17 that the 113th playing of the PGA Championship, one of golf's four major championships, will be held at the Ocean Course in May 2031.

In addition, the 2029 Girls and Boys Junior PGA Championships will be held at The Ocean Course and Turtle Point Golf Course at Kiawah Island Golf Resort.

"I think that it validates us as a great championship site," Roger Warren, president of Kiawah Island Golf Resort, said. "The tournaments in 2012 and 2021 proved that the golf course, which is the core of the decision to hold a major championship there, certainly is a very, very valid test of the skills of the players and puts forth great champions.

"When you have Rory McIlroy and Phil Mickelson as the past champions on the golf course, I think that the PGA coming back says that the Ocean Course needs to be part of PGA championships in the future because of the performance in the past."

The PGA ticket registry for spectators interested in attending the 2031 PGA Championship is expected to begin in the spring of 2030.

The Ocean Course has hosted other significant golf events, starting with the "War by the Shore" Ryder Cup in 1991. The 2005 PGA Professional Championship and the 2007 Senior PGA Championship also were held there.

With the 2031 event, the Ocean Course will become just the ninth course to host three or more PGA Championships and seems to have earned a spot in the PGA of America's future schedules.

"That's not something that we take lightly," Warren said. "I think that it's a lot of work and effort on the part of a lot of people to bring the championship and

deliver an experience for the players, for the fans, for the people around the world who watch it on TV.

"I think you have to continue to not lose sight of the responsibility of producing a great event. The players are going to play great, and we have to make sure that everything that surrounds it is done in a way that's memorable to everyone. And that goes to conditions of the golf course, the quality of the experience with people coming to and from the event. All of that is something that we are cognizant of, and we're going to work very hard to make sure it continues to be at the highest standard possible."

Warren estimated the economic impact of the 2012 PGA on the Charleston area at around $200 million. That impact was somewhat less in 2021 due to COVID attendance restrictions, but Warren said the tournament will be back to its "full complement" (about 25,000 to 30,000 daily) in 2031. The tournament also relies on about 3,500 volunteers.

Warren said he hopes the current divide in professional golf between the PGA Tour and LIV Golf is long in the past by 2031.

"I would say to you as a president of a resort, that golf is a big part of what we do, and tournament golf is a big part of people's excitement about the game," he said. "I would hope that it would not take seven years to get this worked out. I think the professional game as well as the game of golf, which we all play, will benefit from more stability than what we have right now.

"I take the parties at their word that they're working on it, but I think that sooner than later is going to be what's needed for a solution to this problem. Because it's really not working the way it is right now, in my opinion."