

Presidents Cup to offer Charlotte recruiting boost with companies, CEOs attending golf event



U.S. Team Captain Davis Love III and International Team Captain Trevor Immelman discussed the 2022 Presidents Cup at a press conference at Quail Hollow Club last year. Melissa Key/CBJ



By Erik Spanberg – Managing Editor, Charlotte Business Journal - Aug 11, 2022

The best American and international men's golfers will arrive in Charlotte in just over a month when the city hosts the Presidents Cup for the first time. For business executives and consultants, a long-range question will remain unanswered for weeks or months after the match-play event concludes on Sept. 25 at Quail Hollow Club: What kind of impression did we make with visiting companies and CEOs?

John Boyd, principal at site selection firm The Boyd Co., based in Boca Raton, Florida, told *CBJ* that civic leaders and economists should skip economic impact debates and focus on economic recruiting.

“Sports and economic development are indivisible,” Boyd said. “Every year or so, there’s always fallout when cities bid to host the Super Bowl and academics come out of the woodwork and say, ‘Well, when you do all the math, we actually lose money.’”

Indeed, economists have consistently found spending and jobs benefits touted by organizing groups in commissioned studies to be inflated and overstated. Such arguments, in Boyd’s view, miss the point.

The public relations value of a major sporting event is, in his words, “incalculable. The relationships, the networking opportunities for hosting a premier global PGA event — the benefits go beyond the mere projections of hotel rooms and other factors that academics will look at.”

Quantifying the value of such relationships and impressions is difficult. Boyd and local leaders noted that, because professional golf already stands out as one of the most corporate-friendly sports, the larger potential benefit of hosting the Presidents Cup is the uniqueness of the event. It’s played once every two years and is played at an American course once every four years.

And, as a team competition, the Presidents Cup has a format that is rarely seen, like the older, more established Ryder Cup, which pits the top U.S. men’s pros against the best European players every other year. The international competition affords more interest and exposure, and will likely put Charlotte in front of corporate executives who may know little about the region.

Drawing a straight line between that awareness and doing business here is all but impossible. Skeptics cry corporate boondoggle; believers, including Boyd, say the intangibles of sports-related recruiting and hospitality remain valuable.

The Presidents Cup is owned and operated by the PGA Tour. To date, the Tour has not disclosed which companies are coming to Quail Hollow Club. But we do know there will be a lot of them: Club and PGA Tour executives have said for months that all corporate and general ticket sales and sponsorships records have been broken, based on advanced sales and commitments for Charlotte.

Adam Sperling, Presidents Cup executive director, told *CBJ* on Wednesday that corporate revenue is 150% higher than the previous best while the number of corporate partners has grown by 200%. Overall ticket sales have doubled compared to the previous high for a U.S. site.

“The international (aspect) is way more impactful,” Quail Hollow Club president Johnny Harris told *CBJ*, comparing the Presidents Cup with the 2017 PGA Championship played at the same course. “It’s just a different product altogether. Certainly, the scale that we’re getting ready for

and the impact that it will have on the market is significantly larger than the PGA (Championship).”

The PGA Championship is one of men’s golf’s four major tournaments and is played annually. It is not a team competition, but it is one of the most coveted individual titles in the sport. The PGA of America, an entity separate from the PGA Tour, owns and operates the PGA Championship.

When the tournament was played here in 2017, it, too, broke previous revenue and sales benchmarks. Organizers estimated the PGA Championship generated \$100 million in spending. Again, independent economists routinely swat away such estimates; several have told *CBJ* in past interviews about sports impact studies that the real number tends to be 10% of what’s estimated.

CBJ will be following up soon with a rundown of various organizations’ economic development plans and strategies for the Presidents Cup, but it’s safe to expect a large turnout. In 2017, for the PGA Championship, Gov. Roy Cooper paid a visit, selling the state to prospects. A spokesman for Cooper told *CBJ*, “The governor’s attendance has not been confirmed at this point but events like the Presidents Cup are significant showcases for our state.”

Regional, state and local economic developers often recruit at these kinds of events, too. But not everyone: A spokeswoman at the South Carolina Department of Commerce told *CBJ* they “will not have a coordinated economic development presence” at Quail Hollow in September.

“I think this helps us reach people that are nontraditional, meaning ones that we would not think we were reaching,” Harris added, when asked about who companies might target. Harris, in addition to running the club and serving as a golf powerbroker, leads real estate firm Lincoln Harris.

Sperling, the executive director, pointed out that international companies are not just coming for the Presidents Cup week, several have made intermittent visits to Charlotte in preparation for the event. On Friday, he added, representatives from will be in town from the event’s automobile sponsor: South Korea-based Genesis.

Beyond international companies coming to the Presidents Cup, Sperling said there are plenty of local and regional sponsors who will be bringing their international customers to Quail Hollow next month.

“These events are what we call the crown jewels for economic development, but they’re also platforms to showcase new development happening in Charlotte,” Boyd said.

Mohammad Jenatian, president of the Greater Charlotte Hospitality & Tourism Alliance, drew comparisons with the 2012 Democratic National Convention, when many companies and executives spent several days in town, fully seeing the city for the first time.

Jenatian added that he is hopeful economic recruiters and local CEOs will provide constant reminders of North Carolina's recent No. 1 ranking by CNBC as the best state for business. And he hopes for testimonials, too: "When the CEO of Honeywell says the best thing he's done is move to Charlotte, we need to take that and send it to everybody."