

Tom Cade: Hello, this is Pod for the Course, and I am Tom Cade, the Senior Director of Communications for Washington Golf. On March 21st of 2020, the U.S.-Canadian border was closed to all non-essential travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That's been over five months ago now, and I know that they're still closed on a month-by-month basis. This has greatly impacted some of the golf courses up near the Canadian border, both on the Washington side and on the British Columbia side.

Today, we're happy to have with us Josh Williams, who is the General Manager of Loomis Trail Golf Club, which is located in Blaine, Washington, which is about five miles from the Canadian border. Josh, thanks so much for being on with us today.

Josh Williams: Yeah. Thanks, Tom. Thanks for having us. We're excited to share some knowledge and talk about the future of golf up here.

Tom Cade: Again, March 21st, the border closed to non-essential travel, and unfortunately, that did mean closure to golfers who are trying to go back and forth across the border to play golf, both from the British Columbia side and the Washington side. Was this a bit of a shocker to you and your staff?

Josh Williams: Yeah. For us, kind of gearing up for the season in March and to have COVID-19 impacted, obviously, everyone. For us, in the golf side, we were kind of first focused on how we could create a safe environment, and we were hoping that we were going to be able to access our customer base in Canada. As you know, Loomis Trail, being so close to the border, we relied on about 70% of our traffic that came from lower mainland and in the BC area. I give a lot of credit to my staff and the area courses to work on how we were preparing to welcome Canada back, as we still are today. We saw significant shock when we first heard that the border was to remain closed for a long period of time.

Tom Cade: Josh, how long have you been at Loomis as general manager?

Josh Williams: I came to Loomis Trail when we were acquired by the Lummi Nation in October of 2018. It was a semi-private club before the purchase by the Lummi Nation, and we've opened it up to resort traffic and public play. And so we were excited, we had a great 2019 and then moved into this year with the pandemic. We've had to pivot. What I love seeing is our local players, so now what we've seen is we've picked up about 33% of the local play. And local for us being all the way down, oh, I get visits from King County, Pierce, Snohomish. So we've kind of picked up in the state and really helped us get about 33% more business from localized play.

Tom Cade: As strange as it may sound, the rounds played in golf this year is actually up over last year. And I think a lot of it has to do with golf being seen as a healthy outdoor activity to do, and lots of people are playing more golf just because of that. There's not much else to do, to be honest with you. So, for you, for Loomis,

you've lost quite a bit of traffic from British Columbia, but you say you've gained from other places. Are you doing anything specific to gain from the southern reaches of Washington state?

Josh Williams: That's a great point, Tom. I do believe golf has had a little bit of a surge here with the way that we can create a safe environment. All the leaders in our industry really stepped up. We worked with the governor's office to get open. A lot of things that we've pivoted on as a staff for Loomis Trail, we wanted to offer value, that we were something someone could experience. We know there's some hardship along with this pandemic, and we wanted to make sure that we were at a price point that people could come experience Loomis Trail. So we partnered with Cleveland-XXIO-Srixon to promote a special that we started at noon every day, which was \$45 for 18 holes with a cart and a sleeve of the new XXIO golf ball.

What we thought was important, being that our vendors are also seeing a hard hit in retail and other things through this pandemic, we reached out to our partners and tried to come up with some special bundle activations where we could offer tremendous value across the state.

Tom Cade: So the border closed on March 21st, and then golf courses themselves in Washington were shut down for a while for about a six-week period. When did you reopen after that shutdown?

Josh Williams: Yes, we had about a two-month closure. What we wanted to do is not open without a safe environment. We were lucky enough with some resources that we had with the Lummi Nation to lean on our health department. We worked with state representative, Debra Lekanoff, with the governor's office on how we could make sure that we were providing a safe environment for guests first. And that process, I believe we streamlined that. We had a document ready and prepared for operations within the first 30 days of closure, and then we got the governor's orders about 22 days after.

So our facility itself was closed for about 60 days. We were in a preparation mode for opening and knowing that some of these practices we're going to keep long term. The way that we're sanitizing some of the carts and just creating a cleaner environment has yielded itself to some practices with maintenance and agronomy and even the pro shop level that it's things that we're thinking we're going to keep long term.

Tom Cade: Did you meet or put your heads together with the other golf courses in the area who were facing the same situation that you were, being so close to the border? Did you all get together and sort of brainstorm, or how did that come about?

Josh Williams: We did. I mean, I got to say throughout the golf industry as a whole, I'm proud of everybody kind of coming together. We didn't really have a structure to overcome this, as many did not, and so we kind of came together, say what may

work for Loomis may not work for, say a Homestead or Semiahmoo. We did some really good work with General Manager, Bill Shea, at Cedars at Dungeness. We worked with him on some practices and protocols that they were really progressive in coming out with a model. So we had a lot of Zoom calls, a lot of phone conversations, and everybody used the information to tailor fit what would work for each facility. So we did a really good job of all working together, and it was really great to talk to people and use the tools that were beneficial for Loomis, and I think everyone else did same.

Tom Cade: Is the Department of Homeland Security, who is sort of heading up the border control situation, are they in touch with you? Do you reach out to them, or how does that work?

Josh Williams: Great question. We have some customers and clients that are on the U.S. side of the Homeland Security that we talk to. We do stay in constant communication with our members, guests in Canada. What we are prepared for, for the future is, obviously, we want to make sure that when we come back, we provide the safest environment. So our planning on this right now is we're really focused on 2021. We hope that we get this open sooner. We hope that there's a vaccine, but our internal planning is to hopefully welcome back our customers from Canada and for us to be able to go back and enjoy the great golf in BC. We're focused on that happening, maybe as late as spring of 2021, or maybe there's an outside chance it could happen in '20. But our planning is to make sure that we're ready to offer some strong offers come spring of 2021.

Tom Cade: So then you are already in the planning stages for next year, for next season. I know, again, we're heading into the fall here and lots of people in this area, lots of folks and facilities, I know that they're making those same kinds of plans. Has there been any indication at all from the Homeland Security team about when the borders might reopen? I know that they're taking it month by month, as they have been doing. But, again, has there been any indication? Are they just playing it by ear, just like everybody else?

Josh Williams: I think a little of both. I think the month-by-month targets are kind of evaluation from what we're hearing about how the vaccine is progressing, when we may have access to something like that. The good news is we're seeing some communication, right? We're starting to get some ideas about, "Hey, maybe we can open in January." We haven't seen a lot of those targeted dates. We are kind of looking at the information coming from Homeland Security as month to month, as everyone is. I look at it is if we can continue to show that our numbers are dropping and that we have a vaccine on the way, all the positive things that we can hope for and that we can see in the future will resonate to that border being accessible.

Tom Cade: Well, all in all then, it sounds like after the initial shock of the closure, you've kind of figured out a way to make this work to a degree, yes?

Josh Williams: Yes. I mean, credit to the industry as a whole, I think we were able to step up and show that we can control touch-points and we can provide a safe recreational environment for families. I think we can hang on to this. We can grow. We've definitely seen a growth in the demographic of players that we have, more families, everything we want as an industry to grow the recreational sport and entertainment. We're excited about what we see, and when we add Canada back to this, it's just going to be awesome. So we're optimistic about this.

Tom Cade: Well, Josh, again, I appreciate you taking a few minutes today to talk about this. I know that you and all of your colleagues up there along the border or even close to the border are really trying to figure all this out, just like everyone is. But I think, in particular, you folks have had a particular challenge just because of that. Thanks again for taking the time Josh, and best of luck to you this fall.

Josh Williams: Yeah. Thank you so much, Tom. Hope to see you this fall, huh?

Tom Cade: Yeah, I'll try and make it up there, no question.

Josh Williams: All right. Thank you. We appreciate it.

Tom Cade: Bye-bye.