

# [***Talor Gooch sees his PGA Championship invitation as evidence sanity may prevail in LIV/PGA split***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C1P-0KG1-DYMD-6468-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Talor Gooch wasn't planning to be at Valhalla this week. He and his wife, Ally, had scheduled a trip to Las Vegas to take advantage of a break in the LIV Tour schedule.

Then Gooch checked his inbox and found an invitation to the PGA Championship. Just a simple note. No ***politics***, just tacit recognition from the PGA of America that it was serious about assembling the best 156-player field for golf's second major of the year.

For Gooch, among the first wave of defectors to Saudi-backed LIV and winner of the league's individual championship last year, it offered hope that at least when it comes to the sport's biggest stages, sanity may ultimately prevail.

“This is the first time that LIV play has been recognized, which I hope is a step in the right direction,” Gooch said after wrapping up a practice round on Wednesday.

The 32-year-old, wearing a white hat of the “Smash” team he represents on LIV and Jordan low golf shoes shaded with the black and orange of his alma mater, Oklahoma State, signed autographs and posed for selfies while walking off the ninth green.

It all felt normal, a welcome reminder for Gooch of what the game can still be.

While the future of any reconciliation between LIV and the PGA Tour remains very much in the air — Gooch said anyone who knows how things will turn out is guessing — he believes how the PGA, the Masters, the U.S. Open and the British Open view LIV players potentially can speed up the process.

“I think the majors have a chance to be on the forefront of that and that’s why it’s so cool seeing what the PGA of America did because they were the first to say, ‘You know what, we’re going to rise above all this; we’re going to hopefully be that beacon of hope for the rest of the game.’” he said.

A total of 16 LIV players will tee it up on Thursday. The other 15 have exemptions or fit PGA's criteria in some other way, be it through a top 100 world ranking or recent performances at majors. Gooch — currently ranked 668th in the world because LIV events don't qualify for ranking points — is the only one who received an invitation strictly for what he's done at LIV, where he won three times in 2023.

The PGA Championship likes to boast it has the best field in golf.

“We are not bound to world rankings,” PGA of America CEO Seth Waugh said. “We are not bound to special invitations.”

So Gooch happily switched up his plans, trading Sin City neon for Kentucky Bluegrass. He hopes to play well, though he admitted he's not quite where he was in 2023.

Just don't expect him to alter his schedule going forward to chase a spot in the majors. He has declined to try to get into the U.S. and British Opens through qualifying, and he has no plans to play elsewhere in the world to make it to Augusta National [*as Joaquin Niemann did*](https://apnews.com/article/joaquin-niemann-masters-liv-hisatsune-olesen-a94ea31e6bd2f291c3b518f95a831f1e).

Gooch enjoys that there's an actual offseason in LIV, in part because it allows him to spend time with Ally and their two children back home in Midwest City, Oklahoma.

And in part because it lets him expand his horizons.

Like, say, running a Professional Bull Riding team.

Gooch is the owner of the [*Oklahoma Wildcatters*](https://thewildcatters.com/team), who begin their inaugural season in the PBR this summer. Gooch, who admits he's never been on a bull, was turned on to the reality TV series “The Ride” that profiles some of the top bull riders in the world.

That led to one discussion, then another until Gooch found himself writing a check to own one of two expansion teams that will push the number of PBR clubs to 10.

Brandon Bates, who has served as an announcer for the PBR for 20 years, is the general manager. Two-time PBR champion J.B. Mauney will serve as the head coach. There's already been an expansion draft and the rest of the roster will be filled out through free agency and an NFL-style draft in the coming weeks.

Gooch sees some similarities between LIV and PBR, particularly when it comes to creating a team atmosphere in an individual sport.

“I’ve told people, ‘Imagine if the PGA Tour had started (the way) LIV (has) and we didn’t have this fracturing of a sport in different ways,’” Gooch said. “The team part would be killing it, crushing it, but the chaos has held that back as of now. ... PBR has potential to boom and be something really cool, be something to be a part of.”

And something for Gooch to do whenever his golf career ends. He's seen other professional athletes move into other arenas as owners. He saw no reason why he couldn't do the same. Rodeo and bull riding are big in Oklahoma, and sports of all stripes play an outsized role in the state's identity.

“We rally around our own you know,” he said. "It’s a crazy story for a longer talk, but it’s been a perfect storm.”

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