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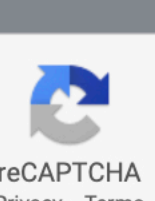
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investigation and found no evidence to corroborate her allegations and lifted the ban on the fan.

"We remain committed to rooting out racism wherever it is found," the school said.

Rebecca de Schweinitz, an associate professor of history at BYU who teaches African American studies and who is white, said many students of color at BYU identified with what Richardson described because of their own experiences with racism on campus. She also pointed out that some white people used the investigation to attack anti-racist efforts at BYU.

"There were many white people who concluded in the aftermath of the investigation that the charges were all a 'hoax,' and have suggested that the outcome confirms their belief that concern about racism at BYU is overblown," De Schweinitz told USA TODAY Sports via email. "They are using this incident to further attack anti-racism initiatives at BYU.

"That's been super discouraging for many in the campus community. Some black students worry that their experiences with racism at the university are now more likely to be written-off, and that 'rooting out racism,' as the school has recently pledged to do, will take a back-seat to other priorities."

De Schweinitz also said she would have liked to have seen a statement at the end of the BYU investigation that appeared less defensive. But she said she appreciated the university taking steps to investigate the matter.

"I was really pleased to hear about the conversations that BYU's athletic director, Tom Holmoe, had with members of Duke's team, his strong condemnation of racism and expressions of racism, and to see that he, and the University, have put in place some new practices designed to address racist and unsportsmanlike behavior among fans at home games – things like pre-game announcements and videos that promote anti-racism, and a hotline for reporting racist incidents," she said. "Some of that, I think, has gotten lost in all the focus on the specific outcome of BYU's investigation into the incident."

#### WCC commish: 'I believe Rachel heard what she heard'

In fact, the outcome of the investigation triggered intense reactions.

Richardson's godmother, Lesa Pamplin, called BYU's investigation "a cover-up."



Enrollment at BYU is about 33,000 students, nearly all of whom are Mormon and less than 200 are Black. RICK BOWMER/AP

Critics of Pamplin called Richardson Jussie Smollett 2.0.

Amid the mudslinging, a middle ground emerged.

On Sept. 13, the West Coast Conference – a 10-school athletic conference of which BYU is a member – issued a statement saying it believed BYU had conducted "a transparent and thorough investigation." But the conference also added, "BYU's inability to locate perpetrator(s) does not mean the remarks were not said and does not mean BYU did not put the appropriate resources, time, and effort into their investigation."

Gloria Nevarez, commissioner of the WCC, compared the investigation to those involving sportsmanship or a bad officiating call "in that you rarely find the clean answer or the piece of video that unequivocally answers whether the call was right or not."

"I believe Rachel heard what she heard," Nevarez told USA TODAY Sports, "I also believe BYU conducted a thorough and transparent investigation and could not pinpoint perpetrator or perpetrators. And a lot of folks aren't of the mind that you can have both truths.

"So for me that's a starting place. And what guides me in working with BYU, I really did not feel they were trying to hide the ball. If I had sensed they were conflicted and maybe not doing enough or trying to sweep it under the rug or not going far enough to in questioning witnesses or involving law enforcement, then I would have suggested an outside firm or additional outside review."

"I can't say what they investigated and what they didn't investigate," said Silvia Johnson, director of the Metro Volleyball Club in Washington, D.C., for which Richardson played for about six years. "I can just say I definitely believe Rachel because I know her character.

"Really great kid. Really great family." Richardson is one of six children, including two other sisters who played Division I volleyball. Her mother, Gloria, is a graduate of Howard University, and her father, Marvin, is deputy director of The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Two days after the BYU match, Marvin Richardson spoke to the NBC affiliate in Dallas-Fort Worth and referenced his wife when he said, "We grew up in

Fort Worth during the 1960s and '70s during desegregation. You know, I'm able to share those experiences with my children about what we went through.

"The same hateful rhetoric is still being spewed in 2022, in college athletic arenas? That's not encouraging. But the fact that it is being called out and the fact that it will not exist in the dark is encouraging."

Marvin Richardson did not respond to interview requests from USA TODAY Sports left by voicemail and text message.

Some discussions were taking place in private.

With the image of a volleyball in the background, A Long Talk advertised a Zoom meeting for Sept. 14 entitled, "Let's Talk About ...what happened at the game." There is no recording of the Zoom meeting available on the company's website, no record of who participated or if the meeting addressed not just what happened at the match but also before and after.

It could require a very long talk.

Contributing: Brent Schrottenboer, Mike Freeman

## PROFESSIONAL GOLF TOURNAMENT PREVIEWS

### DP World Tour (European)

#### Estrella Damn Andalucía Masters

Course: Real Club Valderrama in Sotogrande, Spain. Yardage: 7,028. Par: 71.

TV (ET): Thursday-Friday, 8 a.m.-1 p.m. (Golf); Saturday-Sunday, 7:30 a.m.-noon (Golf)

Notes: U.S. Open champion Matt Fitzpatrick, the defending champion, leads the field and at No. 10 is the highest-ranked player. ... Ryan Fox of New Zealand is coming off a win two weeks ago in the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship that moved him into the top 25 in the world. ... Sergio Garcia won the Andalucía Masters three straight times. He is playing the LIV Golf Invitational in Saudi Arabia this week. ... Along with cork trees in some fairways, there are a few vistas of the Rock of Gibraltar from the course. ... Two Europeans with PGA Tour cards, Thomas Detry and Matti Schmid, are playing in Spain. They were not eligible for the Zozo Championship this week in Japan.

### LIV Golf

#### LIV Golf Invitational-Jeddah

Course: Royal Greens Golf & CC, King Abdullah Economic City, Saudi Arabia. Yardage: 7,010. Par: 72.

Streaming: 5:15 a.m. ET Friday-Sunday (LivGolf.com)

Notes: This is the seventh and final LIV Golf Invitational event for individual and team play. The final event is strictly about teams. ... Six players have won the six LIV Golf Invitational series – Charl Schwartzel, Branden Grace, Henrik Stenson, Dustin Johnson, Cameron Smith and Eugenio Chacarra. ... Johnson leads the money list with just over \$12.7 million and has clinched the points title for the \$18 million bonus. ... The field includes 27 players who were at the Saudi International in February, including winner Harold Varner III. ... Hudson Swafford has made \$860,000, the least of players who have competed in all six events. ... Johnson's streak of being in the top 10 at every LIV Golf event ended in Bangkok when he tied for 15th.

### PGA Tour Champions

#### SAS Championship

Course: Prestonwood CC in Cary, North Carolina. Yardage: 7,237. Par: 72.

TV (ET): Friday-Sunday, 2-5 p.m. (Golf)

Notes: This is the final tournament before the PGA Tour Champions postseason begins. Steven Alker has a \$178,712 lead over Padraig Harrington for the Charles Schwab Cup. Both are playing. ... Steve Stricker leads the tour with four victories after his win in the Constellation Furyk & Friends. Stricker plans to take off the next month so he can bow hunt for deer at home in Wisconsin. He said he might consider playing the season-ending Charles Schwab Cup Championship. ... Ten players have crossed the \$1 million mark in earnings this season. ... Sponsor exemptions were awarded to Paul Stankowski and John Huston. ... Notah Begay III made his Champions debut last week.

– Associated Press

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# US Grand Prix in Austin revitalized F1 in America

Chris Medland

RACER magazine | USA TODAY Network

When the checkered flag fell on the final United States Grand Prix at Indianapolis in June 2007, Formula 1's relationship with America couldn't have been much lower.

The tire debacle of two years earlier had proved too tough to recover from, and with the only American driver on the grid (Scott Speed) soon to lose his seat after having failed to score a single point, interest was slumping.

So when the concept of Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas, was raised – with the idea of it becoming the home of F1 in the U.S. – it was a big, big gamble.

But five years after the last race on American soil, F1 went racing once again at COTA, and 10 years later the event is one of the biggest on the calendar.

"Incredible," COTA chairman Bobby Epstein reflects from behind his desk. "It went by fast, and I think if we had drawn where we wanted to be at the end of 10 years, this would probably have been our goal. The path to get here would probably not have been drawn the way it happened, but we're pretty happy with it. One of the things you can't buy in terms of big events is history or tradition. When you have a decade under your belt like this and you have sold-out crowds year after year – which we now have – you've reached that point where your event is something really special.

"People want to keep coming back each year and put it on their calendar and look forward to it. When we first started, we were certainly a novelty and I think we've learned and grown and adapted to what people like. We're pretty happy to be here."

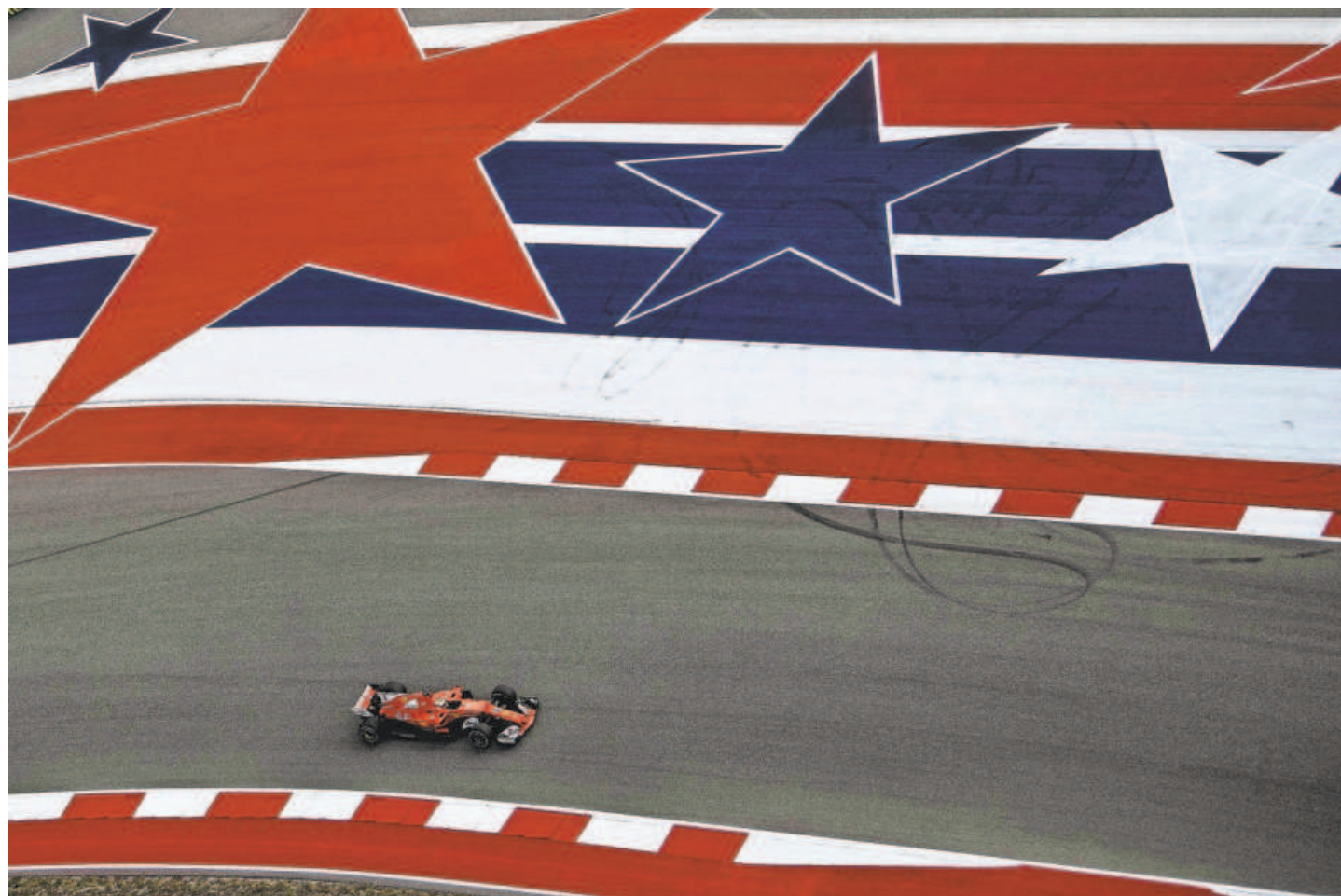
The path between the inaugural race and this anniversary has not been a smooth one. While Epstein is now spending some of his time trying to find more metal for additional bleachers – "demand has been incredible, we sold everything we put into the system the first two days" – that wasn't always the case.

"This is how big we thought it would be when we started," he says. "I couldn't believe how few fans there were at one time, and it makes it all that much more rewarding to have the sold-out crowds today because it wasn't always that way. We thought this would be the response we would get, but a few years into it was admittedly very tough."

Despite the struggles that COTA has sometimes faced, especially when it comes to putting on a grand prix that features a hefty race hosting fee, Epstein insists he never felt like he wanted to cut and run because of the way fans were responding to the event and making it a regular part of their sporting calendar.

"Well it was always big, but we wanted to be bigger," he says. "I just think we always felt 'What can we do next year so that more people will want to come back?' It's a slow process, and if we continue to do that then people will continue to come back and the campgrounds will keep growing. I love that we keep having to expand those every year, because those are people that really in many cases this is their time off, and people's time is absolutely their treasure. We appreciate that they're choosing to spend that with us.

"The campgrounds are a lot of fun, and those are people telling other peo-



Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel of Germany drives during practice for the United States Grand Prix at Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas. JEROME MIRON/USA TODAY SPORTS



Red Bull driver Max Verstappen, center, Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton, left, and Red Bull driver Sergio Perez celebrate following the Formula 1 U.S. Grand Prix in Austin. DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

ple 'I'll meet you back here next year,' and the same thing that's happening there happens with people that are staying in hotels but are coming back to Austin each year. Austin's been a great host city and we knew that it would be, but we just needed people to experience it."

There will be at least five more chances for fans to keep coming back, too, after a contract extension was signed earlier this season. It was timely, coming in a year when Miami joined the calendar and Las Vegas was confirmed for 2023, meaning Austin is now doubling down on its position as the race that provided the platform for F1's growth in the States.

"We always felt like we were going to get a five-year extension because we built this to be here for Formula 1 and I think it'll be here for a long time," says Epstein. "So we were always invested in the circuit. I think we can just focus on delivering a great experience. And also with Miami and Las Vegas each being the destination cities they are, it gives

us the chance to focus on being truly the United States Grand Prix, and represent the great things about our whole country ... with a little bit of Texas – OK a lot of Texas – thrown in there. But we really want to be the 'United States Grand Prix.'

"We're very proud of that, we're very proud that's part of our identity and our title. We've been that for a decade and we'd like to see that for decades to come."

To be a permanent fixture, you need demand to stay high because fan confidence allows a circuit to invest. COTA was criticized for some of the logistical problems when it welcomed a record attendance of over 400,000 a year ago, and Epstein says that preparations for the 2022 edition have not been solely focused on marking its anniversary, but also on ensuring the overall experience improves.

"We are going to celebrate our birthday a little bit," he says. "We're working on that. We think we've got the music

right again this year with Ed Sheeran and Green Day, and we're upgrading a lot of things around the circuit for the fans just in terms of service and things we've learned in the past that I think we can do better. Our food service is going to be a lot better than it's been in the past, our transportation. ... We've increased the public transit to 600 buses this year, which is 200 more than we've had in the past, and the goal is really to make the overall experience really easy as well as fun. That's what we have to focus on.

"Then we're batting around the fact that we'd love to find a way to celebrate Sebastian (Vettel) and recognize him for his contributions before he retires. We're talking about that and we've got some ideas we're going to come out with soon."

Vettel himself is a fan of the circuit, having finished second at the inaugural race as he chased his third drivers championship, and taken victory the year after.

"Obviously, I made my debut in Indianapolis five years before that, but I think there's been a different vibe in Austin right from the get-go," Vettel said. "It's been really exciting because the whole city was happy to have the race and welcomed us. Obviously, the interest across the U.S. has grown in the last couple of years. But Austin has always been exceptional. So probably more a question for Austin, how they handle it now with more requests or people. But I also feel that Austin isn't your 'typical America' if such a thing exists.

"So I think for us, it's been great to go there right from the start. And it's been a highlight of the season for many years now, for 10 years."

After what went before and the hole F1 had dug itself in the States, you'd have been brave to bet on this milestone coming around. But a 20th anniversary? Now that feels a lot more like a sure thing.

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