

Barracuda Championship

Wednesday, July 29, 2020

Truckee, California, USA

Tahoe Mountain Club

Lanto Griffin

Press Conference

LANTO GRIFFIN: We'd like to welcome Lanto Griffin into the virtual media center at the Barracuda Championship. You played this event two years ago and finished T26. We're back at a different venue. How would you compare the two venues, and what do you like about Old Greenwood?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, so I just finished playing the course. I got in yesterday afternoon, and I like it a lot more than -- I really liked Montreux before, and I heard good things about Old Greenwood, and I heard it's maybe a little easier and definitely a lot of birdies out there. But it's definitely -- it's got a lot of character. The greens are -- there's some good slopes on the greens and a couple drivable holes, and there's a lot of holes where you've kind of got to think whether you want to hit 4-iron off the tee or you want to hit driver and push it up. 16 is a good example of that. It definitely makes you think.

It seems like a really fun course to play, and the forecast seems like it's going to get kind of windy in the afternoon, so with the ball flying short in the morning, shorter, probably 7 percent versus a little breezy in the afternoon flying 10 to 12 percent, it'll be tough to judge wedges and all that stuff.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously there's a number of reachable par-5s and a couple, probably two or three reachable par-4s. Do you feel given the Stableford format and the nature of that that you'll be taking a little more risk than you typically would with the opportunities that are out there?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, for sure. I mean, it's one of those things where you don't want to get too far out of your game plan from a normal week because it can kind of just get you in a different mindset. So I'm not going to change my strategy a whole lot, but at the same time, obviously a bogey won't kill you as much this week. Two birdies and a bogey is better than three pars.

The key for me is just going to give myself a lot of looks and get the putter rolling. I play my best when I give



myself a lot of birdie looks and I can get the putter hot. Obviously those drivable par-4s and the par-5s are going to be important to take care of, but at the same time you don't want to change too much and kind of get out of your normal routine.

THE MODERATOR: You had a great start to the '19-' 20 season with a win in Houston and a slew of top 20s early in the season to get your season underway. Since the pandemic happened and the return to golf, how would you assess your form since we've come back to playing? This is, what, the sixth or seventh event.

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, I felt really good before the pandemic, and it was a little bit of a bummer that that happened just personally for my game. I'm not talking big picture with everything that's going on. But during the quarantine I worked really hard. I hung out with Vijay a lot and worked out a lot with him, and we played a lot of golf. It's kind of unfortunate about a week and a half before Colonial I strained my QL (quadratus lumborum) which is kind of in your core, kind of attaches to your rib cage and goes down to your hip, so I've been battling that. I played -- I probably should have taken a week off, but it was one of those injuries that was kind of just barely nagging enough to where it can kind of affect your swing but it's not so much that you feel like you should take a break.

I've been -- that kind of set me back a little bit from all the work I put in the first three months that I quarantined, so that's kind of a bummer, but the last week or so, I'm seeing a lot of improvement. I had a really good lesson with my coach TA on Monday, and that was kind of when I decided to play this week. We made a little change, and I felt a lot closer than I'd been the last six weeks. I wanted to get up here and get on the West Coast and test it out. I love Tahoe. This whole area, Truckee, Reno, it's one of my favorite spots in the country. I actually came here on vacation last summer with my girlfriend and some other friends. That's part of -- I love it here, so it was an easy decision to come spend a week here.

THE MODERATOR: Well, you are a California native after all, so probably didn't spend a lot of time as a kid but at least you're returning to your home state.

You're the highest ranked player here in the FedExCup standings at No. 10, and obviously when we talk about No.



10, anybody that finishes in the top 10 at the end of the regular season has the Wyndham Rewards to look forward to. What do you feel like you need to do to either maintain that position or elevate yourself in that position, and how important is that to stay in that top 10 or elevate yourself?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, it's very important for me. I mean, obviously this is my second year on the PGA TOUR, so I'm in a little different boat than the Rorys and those guys that are maybe not thinking about it as much. It's not really one of those -- it's a bonus, right, so it's not something if it doesn't happen, I'm going to feel like I lost something.

But it's a substantial amount of money financially, and that's definitely part of the reason why I'm playing this week is I didn't get into Memphis, I think I'm fifth alternate for the WGC, and I really didn't want to set myself back because I know there's going to be guys moving up, and there's a lot of guys right behind me, so I know I'm going to have to be on offense.

I'm going to need a couple good weeks, and I'm going to play Wyndham, too. I grew up in that area in Virginia so it's about a two and a half hour drive to Sedgefield. I want to give myself opportunities to stay in that top 10, and if I can and I can move up, great, and if not, I know I gave it everything I've got. But it's a fun little prize, little carrot to kind of strive for, but at the same time I'm pretty much locked up for East Lake, so if I'm chasing the Wyndham, then I've got three more -- probably three of the biggest events of my life right after that.

I went back and forth last week on whether it was worth playing this week energy-wise, as much as I wanted to come, and ultimately I felt like I'll be more prepared for the PGA by playing this week than at home in 115-degree heat index sweating my tail off there.

I'm happy to be here. I'm happy I made the right decision.

THE MODERATOR: 300 FedExCup points for a victory would be a nice addition to the total you already have. One of the other interesting things this week given the changes in the schedule with the U.S. Open and other tournaments is that there's an opportunity for you to reach a spot in the U.S. Open with a top 10 finish if you're one of the two non-exempt players that finish high enough in there to earn a spot in the U.S. Open. Is there in the back of your mind, also, playing these next few events, to get a spot there?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, it is. I mean, I won't be thinking about it on the course so much. I'll be thinking more FedExCup -- my main goal right now is to get as high as I

can going into East Lake. If I can somehow be in the top 10 and get 3-, 4-, 5-under par starting that week, that's my main goal, and then my second goal is the Wyndham Rewards, obviously, and then the U.S. Open is great, but there's also the top 5 on the final FedExCup list that aren't already exempt get in. So I think that's probably my best opportunity to qualify for the U.S. Open. So hopefully that'll work out. Obviously I'd love to lock it up this week and lock up the Wyndham Rewards. That would be a dream scenario for me. But we all know how golf works. You can't really go into a tournament and set your expectations that high because there's so many variables.

I want to come out here and have some fun, prepare for the PGA next week, try and get some feels and try and get into a little bit of a groove with my swing since I've made some changes, and if I play great, obviously I'll be happy, and if not, hopefully I found something this week that's going to lead me into the PGA next week down the road.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned Vijay Singh being an influence on your game. How did that situation come about? I know you guys live in the same area and you practice together, but how did that happen?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, so his son Qass, I got to know him pretty well out at the golf course, and Vijay is one of those guys where if you don't know him, you kind of think he's different than he is, I guess. He's an extremely generous guy and a lot of fun to be around. I started hanging out with his son a lot, Qass, and we went out and played a little bit, and then when the quarantine hit, he invited me to come over and work out with him. I think it was 10 days after PLAYERS, so maybe the Monday after PLAYERS week when they canceled it on Friday. I went over and worked out at 9:00 a.m. thinking I'm just doing one or two workouts with him, and 10 weeks later I spent every single day with him.

Vijay is one of my favorite guys in the world. I mean, he's extremely caring and generous with his time, and he wants to help other players. He wants to -- he's probably spent six or seven hours with my girlfriend helping her with her swing. I never once asked him to do that, either. He just goes over and he likes helping people. I think in the media he's got a little bit of a bad rap, and it couldn't be further from who he is as a person.

I really enjoy playing practice rounds with him and just being around a guy that's won 34 times. He's a Hall of Famer, and I've learned a lot. Without him -- he's helped me with my swing a little bit and he'll give me little pointers, but just watching the way he carries himself and his mental -- the way he talks about himself, I've learned a lot just being around him, so it's been a lot of fun.



THE MODERATOR: The next question was going to be having hung out a lot with him, World Golf Hall of Famer, what is maybe the one thing that really impacted you that you learned from him in the time you spent with him?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Well, I definitely know I'm not the hardest working player in golf or at TPC because that's Vijay. You can't get him away. He loves the game. I think he probably loves the game more than anybody I've ever met, and it shows. He does the stuff that people don't want to do, doing little drills and working on swing changes and doing the stuff two, three hours of doing the same little drill, maybe it's a one-handed just using your right arm or whatever it may be, but he puts the time in. I would imagine at his age now it might be a little bit less beneficial just because he's 57 and it's not as good on his body, but for somebody that's won 34 times and a Hall of Famer, and being around a guy that much every day, you kind of learn why he got there, because he's outworked everybody. I think that's probably one thing that just seeing his work ethic firsthand, I've always heard how hard he worked, but until you see it in person day in and day out, and he's 57, and if you saw him in the gym, he can outwork a lot of people, a lot of young guys still. It's pretty cool to watch.

THE MODERATOR: And finally, you mentioned the generosity that he shows, but you're a very philanthropic individual yourself, and I remember talking with you last year at Bermuda about starting a foundation and wanting to give back and benefit. How is that progressing? Where are you at with that right now, and just speak to that a little bit.

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, so we have the foundation set up. It's actually a charitable trust. I didn't know how much went into starting a foundation with the IRS and everything. Charitable trust is basically the same thing, it just works a little different. But we had an event planned, our first event, and due to COVID, it just didn't seem like the right time to have our first event in September with all the schedule changes and not really knowing what would happen, so we pushed it back. We have our date picked out for next year, and it's actually during the Ryder Cup, so hopefully I'm not going to be there.

But we've made a couple donations. We did something with the Houston Golf Foundation, where I won in the fall, and I have a scholarship in my hometown, and we're actually working with a local hospital, working with Carilion in Roanoke, Virginia, and trying to find some families that were impacted by COVID and other diseases to kind of help them directly.

Me and my team and my management group, we've all

been working on it. It's taken some time to set it up, but we're moving in the right direction, and hopefully next year I'm actually going to sponsor an AJGA event in my hometown. I was part of their Pell grant program, which is when I was in the AJGA, so it's kind of cool to see the full circle where they helped me play junior golf when I couldn't afford it and now I'm going to be able to do the same for other juniors. That's going to be early June, I think June 10th. That will be cool to be on-site with all the juniors, the best juniors in Virginia and North Carolina and on the East Coast and hopefully raise some good money for my foundation in the local area. We've got a lot of good stuff going on.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. All the time and effort you've put into it have got to be worthwhile and obviously all the young people that you're going to impact with that going on, so congratulations, and thanks for spending some time with us. Appreciate it. Play well this week.

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