

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
September 19, 2018



TOM BYRUM

CHRIS RICHARDS: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us for the inaugural Sanford International presented by Cambria. I'm pleased to be joined by Tom Byrum this morning, South Dakota's own from Onida.

TOM BYRUM: Right.

CHRIS RICHARDS: Tom, first of all, what does it mean to you to have a PGA TOUR Champions event here in your home state?

TOM BYRUM: Well, it's exciting. As you can see, it's a great spot for this. I wish my brother was here, too, to kind of enjoy it. I think it's fantastic. I think the people are behind it and it's great to see the excitement and the buildup to it. I love it, I think it's great.

CHRIS RICHARDS: You grew up and went to high school in Onida. What do you remember about South Dakota's passion for the sport of golf?

TOM BYRUM: Well, it was definitely there. It was a very competitive time when my brother and I were growing up. My dad was on the South Dakota Board of Golf, so he took it pretty serious.

It was just -- you know, professional golf's one level, but when we were amateurs, this is what we lived for, some of these tournaments. And lot of them were here in Sioux Falls, so have a lot of memories here.

CHRIS RICHARDS: You were telling me yesterday you still have some family connections, your family is still very much connected to the state of South Dakota.

TOM BYRUM: Oh, yeah, my mom lives in Pierre and I have a sister here in Sioux Falls, and cousins and aunt and uncle here in Sioux Falls. A lot of relatives scattered around the state.

CHRIS RICHARDS: So it's safe to say you'll have a lot of family and friends out watching you this weekend?

TOM BYRUM: Well, family-wise, I'm not sure who all's coming, but yeah, there should be a few. And there will probably be some surprises that I didn't realize were going to show up, so that will be exciting to see everybody.

CHRIS RICHARDS: I'll open it up to questions.

Q. Tom, this is kind of almost your tournament. A little extra pressure, more fun? I mean, how do you look at this?

TOM BYRUM: Well, why is it my tournament?

Q. Because it's your home state.

TOM BYRUM: I don't know, I'm not looking at it like that. I'm just excited to be back in my home state playing golf. I think it's great that the guys that I play with every week get to see the people that I grew up with. You know, all this excitement. They're coming around and they're kidding with me a little bit about being the home boy, but this wasn't where I grew up even though I played a lot of golf here. If it was in Onida, yeah, I would feel pretty good about that as far as getting out there on the sand greens. Probably not. You're right, the course is gone. Anyway, I'm excited to be here and I think it's just going to be a lot of fun. I hope I can handle it all.

Q. With the pheasant hunting and all the rest that's at least planned for this week, that's going to be kind of cool because you're getting a chance to showcase where you grew up?

TOM BYRUM: Right, yeah. There's already a couple guys went yesterday and they just -- I guess it was a great hunt. They were excited about it. Yeah, they get to see what that's like. I wish more guys could go, but with the pro-ams and everything and what's going on with the rain, it's kind of made it difficult to do both. I think they would really enjoy it.

Q. Did you ever imagine that there would be a PGA TOUR or PGA TOUR Champions event played in your home state?

TOM BYRUM: Well, not growing up obviously, it didn't cross my mind, but my brother and I had imagined it when we were getting closer and around our 50s, yeah. We knew Sioux Falls would be a great spot for the Champions event and it is. So yeah, we saw something with the potential and we kicked a few tires, but just nothing happened on that end of it. But when these guys got involved, it took off, so that's great. I'm glad it's happening.

Q. How is it having a brother as an analyst on Golf Channel? Is he harder on you?

TOM BYRUM: Well, luckily he's on the PGA TOUR and he's not on the Champions Tour. He doesn't get a chance to be too hard on me then. He knows how hard this game is and all I have to tell him is, hey, come on back and make your five-footers, too. They're not all straight in like Johnny Miller says.

Q. How much of an influence was Curt on you? When I first moved here you were more of a rodeo guy and he was into golf, although both you guys played a lot of different sports. When he started to really emerge as a great golfer, how much of an influence was that on you to really focusing in on the sport you love now?

TOM BYRUM: He was definitely an influence. I think at every level he showed what I could do possibly, and all I saw was the work that he was putting in. I didn't look at that he was, you know, bigger or stronger, faster, kind of more talented deal. I just thought with the way my dad raised us, you put in the work, you're going to get where you want to go.

So I just worked hard and we both would be out there at the same time, so it was -- we were competitive, so in a way that was supportive. He would just enjoy beating me every step of the way because, you know, I couldn't beat him, but he didn't mind that. But as I got better, he was there to help me get better and he made me better because we had that competitiveness and I wanted to beat him at some point.

But when we did get to a level where we were both playing well, he was always very supportive. We would help each other with our swings and equipment or whatever it was. We were both very supportive of each other.

CHRIS RICHARDS: Tom, we've got three more events in the regular season before the Charles Schwab Cup Playoffs. How's the game trending as the Playoffs are approaching?

TOM BYRUM: Well, it's showing signs of being good. I mean, I was playing pretty well last week, just had a bad stretch of holes. I feel good about it. You just never know in this game. But I like all the courses that are coming up on the Tour here and I look forward to playing well at some point here, but you just never know.

Q. Tom, can you talk about the level of play that you see on a week-to-week basis with the Tour here? I don't think people here realize how good the players still are.

TOM BYRUM: Yeah, well, I think they're going to. You know, the people here will get to see some of these guys hit the ball and what they can do as far as putting and still chipping and all the aspects of the game, I think. But yeah, I get to see it every week. A lot of these guys, like Kenny Perry, he's taken his all-time money exemption on the Tour and going back and going to play some events next year. I mean, that shows you right there who I'm playing against every week. And there's Fred Couples, who could probably go play any Tour event he wanted to and still be competitive. He's got the length. When these guys like him, Bernhard, go play the Masters, seems like they always pop up. You know, they're always making the cut or competitive.

So there's plenty more of those, too, that just don't have the names. There's a lot of competitive guys and still play well. Not everybody's as long as the Tour players obviously, but there's still plenty of length and a lot of great shot-making and just all aspects of the game, we'll get to see that.

Q. Wouldn't you say you're probably playing some of the best golf of your life right now?

TOM BYRUM: Yeah, I think once I got into my mid 50s I started playing pretty well. I don't know why, but golf got fun again.

Q. I was going to ask you why, but if you don't know.

TOM BYRUM: Yeah, I think moving -- part of it was we lived in Houston a long time. I think I just got stale over there and we moved to San Antonio and there's a golf pro over there named Cam Beckman, who's a Tour winner. He and I play golf every day and I think just playing with him and being competitive with him every day kind of got me, instead of on the Tour when I would come home, home, take a week off, not play any golf, go back, play against all those guys. I had time in between events and played a lot of golf with him and he's a fun guy. Like I said, he kind of made golf fun for me again and gave me the desire to want to play again, to go out and compete. He helped me, too. He was there kind of like Curt, helping me with my game, making me better. It was just perfect timing to go over there. New courses, just a lot of changes that made it better for me.

Q. This tour, I find it fascinating that there's a lot of guys playing the best golf of their life as Champions Tour players, including some guys who never even played on the PGA TOUR who decided to give it -- like Mike Goodes, for example, he's done quite well. That's got to be kind of fun for you to see that around you?

TOM BYRUM: Yeah, it's amazing to me that these guys, maybe they played amateur golf or did something else or ran a business. Even Rod Spittle, he played in college, but then he went off and made himself an insurance guy and came back and he did the same thing. He had to qualify through his way up in there and played well, won on the Champions Tour. Yeah, Mike Goodes the same thing.

These guys, I don't know if it was the timing or what it was for them, but they're competitive guys and they play well.

Q. Tom, what is your experience here at Minnehaha, and are guys kind of picking your brain a little bit? When did you most recently play?

TOM BYRUM: It's been 1985 I think was the last time, so they're not picking my brain too much. There's holes out there that I can't recognize because they weren't there and I don't remember -- I can remember some of these holes, but not like it was just the other day.

I used to play this course really well. I came down here and I would stay with Ray Laird, who's a member here, and we would just move into his house and play every day. Terry Crouch, the pro that was here, he was great with letting my brother and I come out and practice and play. So it was a big help for us to have this, to be able to come to when we were younger and get our games ready for, you know, courses that were in this kind of condition that we would have tournaments on. We were here a lot.

Q. I joined this a little bit late, probably already answered this, but how great is it to

be back playing in your home state, a pro tournament, for the first time ever?

TOM BYRUM: Yeah, it's really exciting. Like I said, I can't -- well, these guys are getting to see it. Unfortunately, it's raining, but I'm happy that my fellow professionals get to see a slice of South Dakota and the hospitality and the excitement that's coming with all them here. I think they'll get to see it this weekend, so I guess we're expecting a lot of people out there. I'm excited just for the whole tournament and just to see what happens, and I'm just hoping I play decent.

Q. Looks like you're going to have a nice following out there on the course, too, with being the home-state kid?

TOM BYRUM: Yeah, we were just saying, you know, I know a few family and friends that are coming, but I'm sure there will be some surprises that will be fun to see.

Q. The state of golf right now with -- I guess I'm not even talking PGA TOUR, pretty exciting time to be a professional golfer, wouldn't you say, with Tiger back and some of the great young talent we see coming up?

TOM BYRUM: Yeah, I agree. I think it's fun to watch golf right now. You're right, the talent, the young talent, it's amazing to see how these guys play. It's a different game than I think when we were playing when we were younger, that age. It is what they're doing. And I think with this Ryder Cup coming up, that's just going to be quite a Ryder Cup to watch because both sides have such good people that are playing well. I'm looking forward to seeing what happens there.

Q. I was going to ask you about the fact that it's over in France for the United States because it's almost hard to say who is the favorite to win. I think the United States would be, but can you talk about from what you've experienced and seen how exciting that kind of venue is for the game of golf?

TOM BYRUM: Well, I've never been to France, but I have a feeling -- I've been to a couple British Opens and the fans are a little bit different than -- it's not -- you know, they clap -- they just seem like they know a little bit more about it because they play it on those courses or whatever it is.

I don't know about French people, how they're going to handle this, but I'm sure there's going to be a lot of other Europeans there and it's just going to be -- from what I understand, the venue is just packed in there and the first tee is just like nothing else. You know, with my brother being there and he's going to be there this year, I think it will be exciting to hear what he has to say again about it. I'm looking forward to it almost as much as this.

Q. Do you think the United States will win?

TOM BYRUM: Well, they should, right? Don't they have the -- is Justin Rose No. 1? No,

Europe maybe. No, I'm just kidding. I'm pulling for the United States obviously. I think it will be a tough -- how do you know? I don't know.

Q. There's so many players on both teams that everybody knows.

TOM BYRUM: Right, right. I think supposedly the U.S. has an edge, but it's not here, so we'll see.

Q. I've asked a number of guys this about the Champions Tour. The atmosphere, how is it different from your days on the PGA TOUR? It's still competitive, but it's more relaxed, almost like the camaraderie's a little bit better?

TOM BYRUM: Yeah, it is, it is. You know, two pro-ams and 78 guys, it's a lot -- and tee times usually start around 10:00, 10:30, so it's definitely a different atmosphere. The golf's the same pretty much as far as what you're doing out there. You might be a little more talkative or friendly with your playing partners, you know, where on the Tour you're maybe a little more focused on everything all the time. A little more interaction probably, too, with the fans during a tournament versus maybe afterwards or not at all, you know, back in the Tour days. I don't know how they kind of roped it off and get you out of there around 18. These, you're very approachable just about everywhere on the Champions Tour, and they make it that way, fan friendly. The people can come out and get close to Bernhard Langer and Fred Couples, just all those guys. They want to see them up close and they can get there.

CHRIS RICHARDS: We'll close with if you were to try to get fans out here, what would you say fans should expect when they come to their first PGA TOUR Champions event?

TOM BYRUM: I don't know. I would expect them to be a little surprised at the quality of golf if they haven't been to one before. I don't think they've probably ever been around -- that's kind of what I gather from people that haven't seen it a lot, they're pretty amazed at the way the ball gets hit. They see it on TV, but until you're right there seeing it live, it's not quite the same.

And maybe they've played the course around here and they're not going to -- you know, they're going to see it played a little bit differently with some of these guys. I just think it's going to be -- and the atmosphere for somebody that's not been to a tournament before is going to be exciting for them. I don't know. If they've never been to one, this is their chance and I would just say come out just for a day and see it and I think you won't be disappointed.

CHRIS RICHARDS: Thank you very much, Tom, and good luck this week.

TOM BYRUM: Thanks.