

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
May 30, 2019



TOM LEHMAN

CHRIS RICHARDS: Good morning, everyone. I'm pleased to be joined by Tom Lehman, 2018 champion of The Principal Charity Classic. Welcome back to Des Moines.

TOM LEHMAN: Thank you.

CHRIS RICHARDS: Tom, what's it like coming back to a place that not only did you win last year, but you've played very well here historically?

TOM LEHMAN: It's true, I have. Is this working by the way?

CHRIS RICHARDS: Yeah. It's for the TVs.

TOM LEHMAN: There's certain courses that I think every player tends to look forward to every year; for whatever reason you have success on it. Usually it's because you like the area, you like the community, the golf course fits your eye, the style of play works well for you, you have an understanding of the strategy. I mean, there's all kinds of different reasons.

What I do know for a fact is ever since college when we started playing here, I've played well here and I think it plays to my strengths. I think it's a tricky golf course. You have to keep it in play, you've got to put it in the right position, you've got to keep it below the hole, you have to know where to be cautious and where to be aggressive, and I think it's all those things over the years have really kind of played into what I do, and I've had good success.

Like I always say, past success is no guarantee of future success, but I do know every year when I come here I come in with a really positive feeling and high expectations.

CHRIS RICHARDS: You mentioned the community aspect of tournaments that you enjoy coming to. What can you say about the Des Moines community and the fan support that this tournament receives and the charity dollars that it generates?

TOM LEHMAN: Well, it's such a -- it's a great place to live, great city. My mother was born here, I lived here for a while. The support that the tournament gets from the fans is sensational. I think this is like a place like Des Moines, a place like Omaha are I think the perfect fit for the Champions Tour. I do think that we do our very, very best in communities like this which are big cities, they're important cities, but they're cities without -- it's not like Phoenix with five different professional sports teams and a PGA TOUR event. So we're a great fit for a place like this.

But we have an amazing title sponsor, great community support, raise a lot of money for local charities. It's all a big part of the teamwork to do something that significant. So it's just a perfect fit for the Champions Tour. I think it's a perfect fit for the community, too.

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

Q. With Wakonda being an old-style golf course, opened in 1922, are there fewer and fewer courses like this that you play, and do you like playing this type of course?

TOM LEHMAN: These courses still work really well for the Champions Tour. The length, while it's a little on the short side, it makes up for it in trickiness. You know, the PGA TOUR, of course you couldn't play here; the length would just be too much to overcome, they hit it way too far. So they've out grown a lot of these courses, they've moved beyond it, but the Champions Tour, we have not. It's still perfect for us.

We don't play enough of these, I totally believe that, and the more that we do play, the happier the Champions Tour guys are.

But old-style courses that are wonderfully quirky in a way, like these fairways have a lot of slope. So this week with the wet conditions, it's going to make the course play much easier because the slopes in the fairway are not going to repel many tee shots the way that they can sometimes. So when it gets soft here, the scores get better. When it gets firm here, the scores go up.

But old-school golf is all the same thing; don't short-side yourself, keep it below the hole, drive it in the fairway. Those are all important things that really matter around here.

Q. That said, if you have a particularly uneven lie that you may not get because the way that the fairways would roll out, how does that affect things like spin control, which I know would be a big concern in particularly soft conditions?

TOM LEHMAN: Well, I'm almost 100 percent certain we'll be playing the ball lift, clean and place, which theoretically should resolve any spin issues.

What's difficult is when it's wet but not muddy, so the ball is wet all the time so you do get squitters and jumpers, and all kind of things like that. But if you can put your hand on the ball and clean it, place it, usually resolve -- but there's a reason for that. Mud on the ball is an unnecessary evil, you don't need to deal with that. There's nothing worse in golf than having a big gob of mud on the ball and the guy right next to you doesn't have any, and your ball does a 50-yard snap-hook and his goes perfectly straight.

Mud on the ball is a really unfortunate and unnecessary evil in golf, and to play lift, clean and place is the only way to resolve it.

Q. Do you have any guess on what a winning score would be? You played two really

good rounds last year.

TOM LEHMAN: Yeah, I don't know. It's hard to say. Scores, we've been around golf a long time, so you know any kind of lack of wind and any kind of softness promotes super low scores. Any kind of breeze and any kind of firmness shoots the scores way up. So you could go out here and have zero rough anywhere and have rock-hard conditions and a breeze and the scores would be really high. You can come out here and put the rough eight inches high, have soft conditions and not much wind and the score's going to be really low. Just the nature of the beast.

Q. Being back in Des Moines, have you had any flashbacks to the craziness that was last year in the mall and getting the phone call?

TOM LEHMAN: Look, everybody loves to win, there's no doubt about it. I would never trade in a victory for any reason or to win any way. However, it's a hollow ending for everybody. For the fans, for the players, for the guys who are chasing.

The only person who probably really felt good about it was my daughter, she really liked it. She didn't really care how I got the victory, a W's a W. But for me, I felt bad for the tournament. I don't like to win -- I think part of the deal with golf is to sleep on the lead and go out and then win it. That's all a big part of what you have to do to win, that's a part of the process, and to kind of short circuit that is a very hollow feeling in some ways.

The flip side of the coin, though, is I played two extremely good rounds, had a nice lead, so it wasn't like they drew my name out of a lottery and I'm the winner. I earned it for two days, just didn't have the chance to earn it for the third.

Q. Will your daughter be back caddying for you?

TOM LEHMAN: No, she will not be. She's in a wedding this weekend. She's a bridesmaid down in Oklahoma, so I think she's very torn. She wishes she could be here.

Q. Who's going to caddie for you?

TOM LEHMAN: Oh, a buddy of mine named Dudley. He's caddied quite a bit in the past, and I have a couple of people who are always my fallback positions if the person that I want to caddie can't. I usually make one of two calls and get somebody just to show up.

Q. I think you're the only guy who's won with your daughter and then son-in-law on the bag?

TOM LEHMAN: I can't imagine too many others, yeah. And my son-in-law's one for one. He's caddied one time and one time only. I told him, "You've got to retire. You've got a perfect record, why don't you leave it at that?"

Q. Is there a particular refreshing feeling I guess that comes maybe from being at a place where you've had so much success this week in light of just how much of a grind last week even was at Oak Hill? Does coming to a place like this with that refreshing process after what was such a tough week for just about everybody?

TOM LEHMAN: Yeah, last week was really strange. I don't know what the best finish of anybody who played late on Thursday and early on Friday was, but I don't think it was in the top-15. I don't know, I don't know the answer to that exactly, but it was one of those weeks which probably had the most significant differential between morning and afternoon for the first two days than almost any tournament I've ever played in.

There was a point on Friday where only three guys in the top-47 played late on Thursday and early on Friday. So it wasn't that you couldn't make the cut. A bunch of guys made the cut, but they're all guys who shot 9 over, 8 over, 7 over, 6 over, and that's the group that I played in.

Then it got windy again on Sunday, so played three days in pretty good wind, and it was just disappointing to me because there was almost no way to win the tournament. Almost had no chance to win. I played my butt off to finish like 25th. So that's the nature of the beast.

Q. Does the game feel good?

TOM LEHMAN: So the game is good. I played well. I shot 8 over par the first two days and it felt like I played well. So anyway, the grind that was last week was one of those ones I just kind of want to forget about.

This is no easy pushover course. You can find plenty of trouble out here, so it's not like you walk out there and fall out of the car and shoot 65. You can't. You've got to play good golf to do it. But it's just shorter and there's more opportunities.

The thing about a course like last week is like I started the second round off, I was 3 over after four holes and I'm thinking to myself, Okay, I've got 14 holes to play, I don't see one hole out there anywhere where I have a chance to make up a shot, where I just, oh, that's a real opportunity there. There was none. There are no opportunities. You have to hit great shots to make a birdie, whereas here you have some holes where you really feel like there's some great chances because they're short, you're hitting wedges or lob wedges, or par 5s you can reach in two. So there's a lot of opportunities mixed in with some real tough ones where you can make up shots.

Q. Does Wakonda kind of feel like the bookends of your career? You were here as a collegiate, now you're here on the PGA Tour Champions playing. You've kind of seen a lot of golf in between. It's kind of like where you really started making a name for yourself and where you're really maybe finishing your career on this tour?

TOM LEHMAN: A little bit, yeah, there's definitely that. I think one thing about the course

that we haven't really -- you asked what I like about the course, you bring up college. When I was in college, I drew the ball a lot more. I've always been a right-to-left, and in college I was really a big swinger. Almost all the trouble here is on the left, so OB on the left on 5, on 6, on 7, on 8. All the trouble is left really. So I set up on the left side of the tee and I hit these big old things away from the OB, I hook back into the fairway and I think that's one of the reasons why I liked the course from the very beginning is that I felt like a lot of the tee shots really worked well with my shape. So I typically hit a lot of fairways here. I think to this day it still feels that way to me, it feels very comfortable off the tee to me.

So in that regard, bookends, it's like my game really hasn't changed a lot. I don't hook it as much, but it's still the same mentality, the same style of play, the same strategy. The same things looked good to me then as they do now. So to me it kind of feels good knowing that my game has consistently kind of stayed the same and never wavered. I haven't ever gone away from what worked.

CHRIS RICHARDS: Anything else for Tom? All right, thanks very much.

TOM LEHMAN: Appreciate it.