**P. G. A. Tour Champions Learning Center Show 5/12/2021 Transcript**

VO>> What a success story of the region's tradition Alex Cejka. A Monday qualifier for his first two PGA tour champions starts. Playing here as an alternate finds himself in a playoff with defending champion Steve Stricker. First extra hole the eighteenth Cejka’s third from fifty-nine yards and leaves it just under the hole. Cejka now for birdie and the fifty-year-old is as good as gold he was simply clutch. Stricker birdied eighteen in regulation to force a playoff trying to extend this to another hole but does not. Alex Cejka makes his first victory a major in just his third event on PGA tour champions. More from our winner now in what's your age.

OC/VO>> I knew if I want to play great and be in contention on the last hole, I still have to play aggressive. You know there's a lot of great chances on the back nine. But I didn't really I knew I have to make great shots give me good chances and obviously make the putt and that's what I was doing and I give me a lot of chances and made a couple birdies coming in and.

VO>> Told me I got to fight till it’s over. On the last shot I was lucky I had a pretty decent lie and I had a great yardage for me what I like for those pitch shots.

OC/VO>> And I know if I just execute what I've been practicing over and over again for the last couple years then it's going to be great. And I hit it solid then I skipped out nicely then I want to keep it the below the hole side of a uphill putt. And that's what I did.

OC/VO>> After twice being canceled in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic a major championship returned to Greystone Golf and Country Club. Hello and welcome to learning center I'm Vince Cellini. Limited attendance but unlimited enthusiasm for the Region's tradition as Alabama fans and Auburn fans for that matter came together as much as possible for the thirty third edition. With a recap of the men who call the action Bob Papa and Lanny Wadkins.

OC/VO>> Well thank you so much Vince. The Region's tradition the first major of the year for the PGA tour champions ends in dramatic style and Lanny how about Alex Cejka in after Jay Haas withdrew. First alternate and in his third start of the PGA tour champions he gets a win.

OC/VO>> Well he does Bob, but I got to tell you I'm so impressed with the way he continues to play each and every week. He's put himself in position every time he's been out here. All of a sudden this is not looking like a fluke. Alex Alex Cejka can play golf and he plays at a very high level. Didn't get flustered at all down the stretch it was kind of fun to watch.

VO>> Steve Stricker started the final round with a one-shot lead after a birdie at the eighth Stricker second into the par four ninth.

VO>> Yeah perfect tee shot in at this stage he is on the go with everything taking dead aim at a great shot in here by Strecker to about four feet

VO>> Yeah, he’s going to make birdie. He had a three-shot lead making the turn. Stricker bogeyed eleven so the lead was two and then Alex Cejka goes on a little birdie run his second at the par four twelfth.

VO>> Well he did he was couple back at this point time felt like he needed take dead aim he did. Wonderful little iron shot landed to about eight feet.

VO>> The easiest hole on the golf course in this final round was the par five thirteenth and Steve Stricker playing his second in the thirteen.

VO>> Yeah just six iron in his hand and he blocks this out to the right side of the penalty area to the right of the water and really opens the door for Alex Cejka.

VO>> Cejka would birdie thirteen So now Cejka leads by one and then steps on the tee at the par three fourteenth.

VO>> And makes another really quality swing right at the flag never leaves it in there to about four five feet.

VO>> He’d make the birdie so now Cejka leads by two through fourteen they each pared fifteen and then Stricker for birdie at sixteen to pull within one.

VO>> Yeah sixteen-footer that has to go has to go and it does.

VO>> Alex Cejka had a good look at birdie at seventeen he didn't make it. Then at eighteen Steve Stricker has this putt for birdie to get to eighteen under and tie Cejka.

VO>> Yeah twelve feet straight up the hill and he just rips it right into the center.

VO>> Alex Cejka in the playoff has this putt for birdie. Cejka had pared eighteen all four rounds but in the first playoff hole makes birdie and then Lanny Steve Stricker had a tougher putt here with little break to it.

VO>> Yeah, he hit it outside the edge just over over hit it too hard right through the break never had a chance.

OC/VO>> When you think about you know Alex Cejka winning, he first of all he's beats the defending champion Steve Stricker who won here two years ago. There’s ten world golf hall of Famers in the field Ernie Els was in contention Bernard Langer was in contention Jerry Kelly was in contention he didn't beat a soft field either.

OC/VO>> No he beat one of the strongest fields you'll ever see on PGA tour champions. And Alex has played convincingly he is the way he responded the last two days in the final group was very very impressive he got a little ahead of his rhythm yesterday but came back in the final round and really stayed in control and I thought really was under control the entire day especially the second nine.

VO>> He’s traveled every tour around the globe and Alex Cejka is now a winner on the PGA tour champions as he beat Steve Stricker on the first playoff hole with a birdie to win the Region Tradition as we send it back to Vince.

VO>> With his first victory in over twenty-two hundred days going back to the 2015 Puerto Rico Open. Cejka goes from no status to fully exempt for the remainder of this year and next. A tremendous breakthrough earning a five-year exemption into the Region’s tradition and the season opening Mitsubishi Electric Championship at Hualalai.

VO>> The day before play began in Hoover Alabama the Region's Tradition pro-am brought out Alabama's biggest sports celebrities including Crimson Tide coach Nick Saban who is very serious about his golf. Playing partner Ernie Els called Saban quote “A rock star” and said it was like playing with Elvis Presley. Saban’s former Alabama defensive coordinator and current University of Georgia coach Kirby Smart also in the mix. He played alongside defending champion Steve Stricker. Auburn was also well represented as tiger legend Bo Jackson quenched his thirst and generously put down one hundred dollars for his lemonade. A donation to the primary charity recipient, Children's of Alabama Health Care. Well played Bo. And fellow Auburn product Charles Barkley showing off a new swing which was retooled by his instructor Stan Utley. Charles loves the game again and the fans love him as well war eagle.

VO>> Coming up on learning center the schedule keeps us in the southeast this week the legends face one of the toughest tests on tour in 2019. And we'll hear from a guy who's conquered it on more than one occasion and on more than one tour.

VO>> This week's PGA tour champions moves one state to the east for the Mitsubishi Electric Classic just outside of Atlanta, Georgia. TPC Sugarloaf as host of the Mitsubishi Electric Classic every year. The venue used to host the PGA Tour's Atlanta Classic until 2008.

VO>> Scott McCarron is a two-time winner of the PGA tour event at TPC Sugarloaf and made it in over fifty wins here in 2019. McCarron led wire to wire to finish a modest seven under par good for a two-stroke win. I spoke with the former Charles Schwab Cup champion about his success at this venue and why it has been a happy place.

 OC/VO>> That's a good golf course and one that I've had success and won twice on the PGA tour of one once now on the PGA Tour Champions. it's a golf course I love and even though the one I won at was the one we didn't play I was even built we're playing on the PGA Tour that so we go back to the the golf course that I'm very familiar with which I'm I'm happy about.

VO>> And you know again that's really special I should've bought a place there a house there should’ve when I won back in 97’ because I've had so much success there, I just love it there.

VO>> Furyk mentioned that you said to him as he got on this tour that there's no substitute for winning anywhere and now that you've had this great success as a Schwab Cup champion is it win or nothing at this point? I mean how do you look at it now?

OC/VO>> You know it's not win or nothing.

VO>> It’s it's for us it's I love the day to day practice and working out and eating right all the things that you need to do that process to give yourself the best opportunity.

OC/VO>> Winnings great obviously but it's not what it's all about it's about putting yourself in position playing well having fun because when you have nine holes to play and you have a chance to win a golf tournament I don't care if it's the Champions Tour, the PGA Tour or your club championship it doesn't matter we still go through the same feelings and still a lot of fun to have that opportunity.

OC/VO>> There are twenty-seven holes of golf at TPC Sugarloaf. The stables, the meadows, and the pines. The stables and the meadows are typically used for tournament competition but in 2019 the pines replaced the stables and as a result it was a much more difficult test. TPC Sugarloaf played as the toughest non major venue that year. it certainly has the respect of the players including a two-time masters champion.

OC/VO>> I believe Sugar Loaf is a very tough golf course and reminds me a little bit of Augusta with the same grasses same terrain very early on related get a lot of side hill uphill downhill lies.

OC/VO>> It plays long because of the elevation you're going in the in the pitching in the slopes and balls not going that far. And then you’ve got uphill second shots where you can't really see the bottom of the flag and that makes it very difficult. So, it's just a lot of tough shots to be hit there and that's what makes it play so difficult.

OC/VO>> It places a premium on every aspect of your game. You got to drive the ball well the fairways are somewhat generous but it's a tremendous second shot golf course.

VO>> You know there's some subtle angles on some of the greens. Pulling the right club can be tricky with the wind there sometimes. We battle some rough weather the last couple times we've been there too so having a May date obviously better for us.

VO>> Coming up on learning center. The Big Easy and The Rock lead a golf clinic to make you better and to make you smile.

VO>> April was autism awareness month and the day after the Masters Black Diamond ranch in Lecanto, Florida help make an impact. Raising money for both the Ernie Els autism foundation and the Black Diamond foundation. It featured top stars from PGA Tour Champions playing at a shotgun scramble. And the first annual was a rousing success. Prior to the competition fans soaked in a special clinic with instruction from Ernie Els and Rocco Mediate.

OC/VO>> Rocco myself we work on things all the time just like you guys. At the moment I'm on my ninety-four strokes the two point zero five swing thought. As you get older these these there's a lot of things going but what at the end of the day what you want to do you want to hit the golf ball right in the middle.

VO>> Somewhere in that area.

OC/VO>> If you do that how you get there is up to you you know. But that's what you want to actually ultimately hit the golf ball is right out of the middle of the face so. We all got different sizes that we born with them a little bit taller than most. So, I'm going to get to that middle of a golf ball middle of the club face maybe in a different way than you guys do. But the basics basically is the same you got to play an iron shot inside your your left heel. That's that's basically what you need to do short of the club is the more goes to the middle all of that stuff. I think you guys understand that you guys I consider you played this game long enough.

OC/VO>> Excuse me, you make a good point though that you know swing so you don't have to imitate someone's with swings are you are your own right they can be a like a fingerprint.

OC/VO>> I mean we all want to swing like Freddie Couples. Freddie is here this morning and I mean he's he's having breakfast I think I think I saw him having breakfast. But sorry Rocco.

OC/VO>> We're all still all of us from on this tour on on the the the the kids tour we’ll call it. We're still trying to figure it all right or wrong.

VO>> We still don't we're still trying to figure out how can we get a little bit better we never stop basically ever. Its koo koo.

VO>> Yeah well what I'm working on at the moment is you know like Rocco says you know when you start the game early, we don't have the luxury to be fitted to good equipment. So, I started with big clubs so when you're young and little bit weak you know. To get the club back I had a really strong grip then I'll leave the club inside and then it'll be on the inside coming down. I'm fifty-one years of age and I still work on trying to get the club up and then straight down so what I'll do when I come to the range, I get close to the throat. Okay but if I get a little on the inside, I'm going to be heading this route that means I'm going to draw I'm dropping the club too far in and I'm doing this. But if I'm straight up and down I'm going to come down right onto the golf ball. That almost feels like I'm getting every golf shot into the wind.

OC/VO>> On top.

OC/VO>> So I'm staying on top of the we call that on top of the ball so that's kind of what I'm working on at the moment. I know it's very simple, but it keeps me from you know falling inside of the line.

OC/VO>> You know one of the things that's a hot topic now is distance in the game. And I can understand if you're Bryson DeChambeau and by the way Bryson gained fifty pounds.

VO>> Rocco you lost fifty right to?

OC/VO>> I was too long I hit it too far. So, I had to get out the back down because you couldn’t just tame me on the courses we played it was just ridiculous what that would do to them so. I want to give everybody else a chance.

VO>> I understand that benevolent.

OC/VO>> Do you feel like even even we as amateurs we kind of get caught up in that a little bit with with this this-

OC/VO>> Way too caught up in it, correct or incorrect I mean it's insane.

OC/VO>> Absolutely I mean yeah if you can hit it long and get it in the short grass that's a real benefit to have but if you hit it long and it all over the place. Might as well go hit it short again because getting at other trees to score you know that's not going to last. There's a couple of things that don’t last in this game or in life. A dog chasing a car and a (INAUDIBLE) it does not last. Okay and if you don’t play it out of the fairway you know you're going to have a have a tough time. But the game has evolved again. You know we were talking at breakfast this morning. Back in our day if you could get it over the bunkers on eighteen at at Augusta into that valley there. That's where you want it to go. Again (INAUDIBLE) hit it over there in 91’. Yeah now the guys are starting to get it over the bunker from the back tee. So it's it's it's three twenty

OC/VO>> It's it's silly, it’s absolutely silly but they they cut the fairways are. They spent a lot of money on these mowers and stuff to cut this grass real pretty in tight like this it's a really nice place to play from. There there for a reason. Fairways and greens usually bring home the silverware what we're always taught. And back in we've been back in the in the old days we'll call it. It mattered. I mean it mattered. Any tour event if you missed fairways you had an issue. Nowadays it’s just different. Every athlete in every sport has gotten bigger stronger and faster golf has that now and you're seeing it. But to chase distance you're going to lose. A lot of guys even on the tour right now chase it and gotten beat up over it.

VO>> And what is that some of the things that you lose along the way?

OC/VO>> You lose control your swinging a hundred and thirty miles an hour. That that's wonderful love to be able to do that but you don't get a lot of fairways because no one's that good to swing that fast and hit it straight, no one. You know great drivers when you drove and won majors you drove in fair ways you had to. Oakmont congressional right?

OC/VO>> Yeah.

OC/VO>> If you miss and you didn’t hit it eight thousand yards long we get really long for the time we were in. You're one of our longest players correct?

OC/VO>> Yeah, we-

OC/VO>> But you were straight you hit otherwise you can't win those events that you won especially especially the US open especially that.

OC/VO>> And as Rocco says you know you you want to hit it long but you want to have control of of the of the ball and then you have to find a shot that works for you. You know Rocco is a natural drawer of the ball. He’s done it his whole life and he's one of the best drivers out on the Champions Tour and even back in our day on the regular tour. I mean with length and straightness you know he was one of the best and that's really it ultimately what you want to have. You want to be able to control the ball and have some power in it. We talked about Freddie he's he was always available and still is today. And what I was trying to say earlier there's many ways of of scoring in this game and you kind of just got to do it your way. If we had Jim Furyk here this morning you would have seen another element of how to swing a golf club and absolutely play unbelievably.

OC/VO>> Unbelievable. Consistent.

VO>> So one of the tenets of-

OC/VO>> I started flighting the ball with my driver. Just to keep it in play. And I'm actually a drawer of the ball with the irons.

OC/VO>> That's no good.

 OC/VO>> How did you ever play any good with that?

OC/VO>> Yeah how do you get around?

OC/VO>> I just hurt my back.

OC/VO>> Yeah but you were always obviously your big and tall and strong but you always hit the ball far. Farther farther than most no, but farther than most. But most of the time fairly controlled wasn't it?

OC/VO>> Yeah.

OC/VO>> I mean he drove pretty darn good and and for all those years Kind of like that. How much farther do you want to hit it though? Can you you want to take a chance on gaining ten yards and missing three or four more fairways a day no. Ten yards is what a club maybe right? Who cares if it’s a six or seven iron? It doesn't really matter in our what we do. The guys chasing, chase chase chase.

OC/VO>> Absolutely I mean that's why it was so surprising to hear Rory say that he got caught up and he hits it-

OC/VO>> How much further do you want to hit it? I mean good lord.

 OC/VO>> Very cool to see Rocco and Ernie working together for such a great cause making all of us better and growing the game. Well that's going to do it for this edition of learning center but coming up next week two players discussed their PGA championship victory anniversaries. Twenty years ago, David Toms broke through and thirty years ago John Daly shocked the golf world. I’m Vince Cellini so long.