VO>> PGA TOUR Champions Learning Center

VO>> PGA TOUR Champions welcomes back the Hoag Classic after a one-year absence, bigger and richer than ever. And taking us back to this early season gem on the schedule, Newport Beach Country Club.

OC>> Welcome to Learning Center, I’m Vince Cellini. World Golf Hall of Fame members, hot hands in the Charles Schwab Cup standings, all competing in this third event in three weeks on the schedule. And for a look back on Sunday’s action, let’s hear from the men who called it, George Savaricas and Lanny Wadkins.

VO>> Couldn’t have asked for a better day for the final round of the Hoag Classic. I’m George Savaricas with World Golf Hall of Famer Lanny Wadkins. Let’s check out the highlights, the story. Retief Goosen started eagle-birdie-birdie. Four-under his first three, kept it going on the sixth.

VO>>He did. Hit a drive down the right side of the fairway, in the rough, but a wide-open hole location. Takes this flag on, puts it there to about three feet to keep things going. Another birdie for Goosen.

VO>>KJ Choi now, 14th fairway.

VO>> Yeah, again, KJ going flag-hunting. This hole location up the right side of the green. He goes right after it. To heck with that bunker, I’m going flag hunting again. He does. Just a wonderful shot by KJ. It gets closer and closer.

VO>> KJ was hitting some crisp irons on the back nine. More from KJ on the 15th.

VO>> Good shots in here by KJ. This is a must make for his two-putt birdie. Really well done.

VO>> Now on the 16th. What a shot from the pine straw.

VO>> Yeah, I thought the tree might bother him. It did not. He hit a little abbreviated swing. Punches it, really controls the distance well. Great imagination to come up with that play and he pulled it off. What a shot.

VO>> So, for the moment, looked like KJ Choi would pull within two. But Retief Goosen, time and time again responded.

VO>> He hit a massive tee shot off 15 and just a mid-iron. A little to the right. Got a long two-putt for birdie. That one was for eagle. He rolls it up to about a foot and a half, makes birdie.

VO>> Retief Goosen getting to enjoy the walk up 18. And this, the finishing touches on the round of the week.

VO>> Yeah might as well enjoy the eight-footer, right up the hill in the center for birdie at 18. Let’s finish it off in style.

VO>>Eight-under, 63 on Sunday. Retief Goosen wins by four. That’s his second victory on the PGA TOUR Champions. KJ Choi in solo second. Stephen Ames and Lee Janzen in a tie for third. Ernie Els, who had the lead going into the final round, struggled on Sunday with a two-over 73.

VO>> Thank you, gentlemen. With the victory, Goosen moves up three spots and just behind Charles Schwab Cup Standings leader, Miguel Angel-Jimenez. Langer and Alker take a step back. While Stephen Ames vaults into the top-five with a T3 at the Hoag Classic. Back to the dashing Spaniard, Jimenez. It may appear to be a care-free game, but a lot of work goes into being The Mechanic, who won two of the first three events on the schedule.

OC/VO>>Miguel is working hard, man. I see him in the gym all the time. He’s out here a lot on the range. He’s just comfortable in his own skin. And he’s comfortable with his game. When a man with that kind of talent gets comfortable, he’s going to be a dangerous competitor. I think he’s going to be the man throughout the season now. He’s a had a couple of wins now and looking good.

OC/VO>> Last year especially and I think every time I was in the fitness trailer, he was in there. So, I mean, he works hard. He doesn’t, we see him come out here on the range and do all this silly stuff that he does to loosen up, but he’s done an hours’ worth of stuff before he even got out here and people don’t even realize that. Sure, he smokes his cigars, and he drinks his red win, but he physically takes care of himself as much as almost anybody out here, at least from what I’ve seen.

VO/OC>> Well, one he’s one of the best iron players that’s ever played. The week I won in 2019, honestly, when we came back out, that morning and he bogeyed two and three, it kind of gave me a little relief because he hits so many good irons. When he makes two hole-in-ones it doesn’t even surprise me.

VO/OC>>All aspects of his game were right on. He drove it long. He drove it straight. He shaped the ball with his irons. He didn’t make any mistakes mentally. You had Seve, you’ve got Jose-Maria. And you’ve got Miguel. And they’re all masters of the short game.

VO>>He must be having a lot of fun. He’s the envy of a lot of players at the moment.

VO>> Coming up on Learning Center. We will hear from three past PLAYERS Champions, discussing whether or not the event with someday be considered a major championship.

VO>> Fred Couples was scheduled to play with Jimenez in the opening round of last week’s Hoag Classic but withdrew before the start of the round with a troublesome back. Couples is looking forward to returning to competition later this season. He’s also looking forward to spending time with his new bridge Suzanne. Couples was married on a most memorable calendar date. Last week he spoke with Learning Center about the big day.

VO/OC>>I got married during Tucson on 2-22-22 to Suzanne. The Welches, who are phenomenal people, they came up. In their backyard. Suzanne invited a small amount, and I invited a smaller amount. And we had a great celebration. Her pastor from Torrance came down and married us. It’s been nine days. We’re still on the honeymoon (LAUGHS)

OC>>The honeymoon continues. Congratulations.

VO>>Still to come, three past winners talk about conquering TPC Sawgrass and the signature island green on 17. And on Wednesday, Tiger Woods will be inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame. His peers reflect on an incredible career and his impact on the game.

OC>>Okay, okay, it’s not a major championship. But there’s so much prestige that goes along with winning THE PLAYERS, this week’s test, and the PGA TOUR’s flagship event. So how big is a victory there? Well, we decided to put a finer point on things and talk to three former-past winners. An exclusive fraternity of those who have tamed TPC Sawgrass.

OC>>You won twice, right?

OC>>Once.

OC>> ’95?

OC>>Two Opens, one PLAYERS. I thought you had went two and two.

OC>>I had to look to see when you won yours.

OC>> ’95.

OC>> ’95, yeah I know.

OC>>I was sitting pretty good in ’98 and just

OC>> I know yours. Next year.

OC>> Yeah, you and I were back-to-back.

OC>> I actually forgot his name at the presentation.

OC>> oh, you were next year?

OC>> Well I was giving him the trophy and Finchem was sitting there, and I was going…

OC>>He was a bit flustered.

OC>> And I’m really proud of the way, you just played unbelievable great golf today. Obviously with the scoreboard, 14 and then 8. That’s a bit of a route there. Way to go Stephen, congratulations.

OC>>I remember.

OC>> But you played great that day, or that week. I remember that final round.

OC>> Final round was hard, as it always is.

OC>>If I’m not mistaken, you were a Monday finish

OC/VO>> A Monday finish and 32 holes I had to play on Monday. That’s how little golf we got in. Remember all the rain? We had rain after rain after rain on and off.

VO>> Who was on your heels?

OC/VO>>Well, we didn’t repair, and it ended up, leaders we’re all over the place. But it was Luke Donald, Scott Verplank, Tom Lehman was in the house. I had to par the last hole to beat Tom. And I had to wait for Luke who hit it over the green, barely over the green. And he chips in all the time, and he almost did. But he hit my hat indentation and he moved the ball off.

VO>> Hat indentation (LAUGHS)

VO>>I didn’t repair my divot from my hat. I still got the hat with me.

OC>> Were you like the second to last group then on the course?

OC>> No, I was third.

OC>> Well you know, that works out because you know you got all those no repair and all those holes, the winner could come from anywhere.

OC>> And they did, yeah, they were all over the place. I remember I had the lead. I wasn’t watching the leaderboard, which I usually do, but Mark said, “let’s not watch the leaderboard.” And the wind’s blowing like 30,35. And it ended up playing into my hands because the rough was playing like this and I’m playing with Adam Scott who had won the year before and Vaughn Taylor. And they’re hitting it up here and it’s going in the rough. I’m hitting my little pee shooter down low and hitting fairways and greens. Then I saw I had a three-shot lead on 14 green. I go three-putt, three-putt.

OC>> No you didn’t!

OC>> I two-putted from 20-feet for birdie on 16. I get to 17, there’s three groups on the tee.

OC>> And which direction is the wind?

OC>> A little bit out of the left, actually. A little bit out of the left, but it was howling.

OC>> SO strong west wind.

VO>> So three groups ahead of us, two guys hit in the water out of the three. Two groups head, two guys hit it in the water. The group ahead of us, two hit it in the water. We all birdie 16 and because I had my debacle, I was up last. Adam and Vaughn hit it in the water and I’m like Oh god. I’m like, how do you hit this green. So, mark says, “what are you thinking, eight?” And I go “I’m thinking five.” He goes, “five?! You’re not hitting five? You’ve never hit five?” I said, “I’ve never played in 35 mile an hour winds either.” I don’t play on days like today. I ended up hitting a 7-iron. It barely stayed from going long. But it was on the top of that ridge.

VO>>Fred Funk! I would have to say that’s the biggest pressure shot he’s ever played.

OC>>You won by one. Over?

OC>>Bernhard Langer.

VO>> Oh, no kidding.

VO>> I had to go back and look. He made a bomb on 18 to lose by one.

OC>> He did.

OC>> And then, you ran?

OC>>I won by six.

VO>> Yeah, I ran. I was coasting.

VO>> That’s a nice way to play 17.

VO>> It was.

OC>> If I had my three-shot lead on 18, I would have been the only guy. I would have hit wedge, wedge, wedge, wedge until I got there. I would have done it. I really would have.

OC>>Wedge, wedge, wedge, okay.

OC>>As straight as you hit it.

OC>>Why take a chance? Just go right, right right.

OC>> How about a 4-iron?

OC>>I did, I hit one of the best drives of my life when I hit that. That was probably the best drive ever.

OC>> So how many shot lead did you have on 17? Six?

OC>> I eagled 16.

OC>> Did it make it any easier to play the hole?

OC>>No.

OC>> No, it can’t.

OC>> It’s harder. I hit a good 9-iron. You know you’re going for the top half left

OC>> Left edge of the bunker.

OC/VO>> Correct, left edge of the bunker which will put you surface. Correct. Hits the top of the middle and it comes back to the bottom. Usually where the first day pin, tough two-putt.

OC>>So, do you think it should be counted as a major? I mean, for selfish reasons, I do. You got to change all the history.

OC>>Yeah that’s exactly, you’d have to do all that, don’t you?

OC>>Is that a media thing? Or is it a players?

OC>>I don’t know who decides. Who decides?

OC>>They keep talking about it.

OC>> Who decided that the invitational, the Masters in the old days, was going to be a major? The players actually did. Jack, Arnold, Gary. They decided to call it that.

OC>>Jack’s won it twice. He’d have two more if he voted for it.

OC>>Hard to say when you consider the fact that the perks of the whole thing, of winning THE PLAYERS, is exactly the same as winning the majors. Five years exemption. The money now is even bigger.

OC>> It’s ridiculous. I won the first 8-million-dollar purse. What’s now? 15?

OC>> 20!

VO>> 20?!

VO>> You won it at what, six million?

VO>> Three million.

VO/OC>> 540. Five hundred and forty thousand dollars. And you know, you don’t think the money matters, but I’m playing 18 and I’m like 540 is a lot of money.

OC>> Oh yeah of course it is!

OC>>But it’s also the exemption, too.

OC>> and you were ten years.

OC>> It used to be ten-year.

OC>>He’s ten.

OC>>When did they get rid of the ten?

OC>> ’98.

OC>> What did you do, a history study on this thing? You cheater.

OC>> No I didn’t. No, I just remember because I remember O’Meara when he won the two majors that year.

OC>>And he only got six years then.

OC>> Correct.

OC>> Five and the one.

OC>> That’s why I remember.

OC>> I think the ten-year ruined a lot of careers. They kind of just went okay, I don’t really need to concentrate.

OC>> We won’t name any players, but yes, I agree with you.

OC>>So a lot of people, they always talk about 17 being, should be on the front-nine, not the 17th hole.

OC>> Oh, no way. It should be the 17th hole!

OC>>It should be the 17th hole!

OC>> No you can’t change nines. 16, 17, and 18, there’s just disaster waiting at every moment.

OC>> Without a doubt.

OC>> I know every time I played THE PLAYERS, I played the 17th hole on the range, I don’t know, at least four or five shots.

OC>>I didn’t want to think about it that early.

OC>>You could say that. You could say Bay Hill the same thing. Finishing 18 there.

OC>> 18 there is kind of a gimme tee shot and the second shot is brutal.

OC>>The second shot is the hardest, one of the hardest in golf.

OC>> I agree. There’s not a big target. Shallow green.

OC>> Without a doubt. But you’ve got a bail out which are the left bunkers.

OC>> All depends on the wind though. You can get fooled in the wind at Bay Hill.

OC>> But the tee shot at 18 at Sawgrass.

OC>> You’ve got to man up unfortunately.

OC>> You’ve got to man up and hit that one.

OC>> You do. Without a doubt.

OC>>You must have hit driver when you won.

OC>> I hit 3-wood. But my year I played, we had three windy days going into Sunday. Sunday was pretty mild in comparison to the other three days, but it was a pretty good 10 mile an hour. Off the ocean. Downwind, right to left. So, 17 was almost straight down.

OC>> That’s wedge.

OC>> It was a 9-iron. But the ball didn’t go that far back then.

OC>> Of course, yeah.

VO>> Then 18 was a 3-wood, 7-iron. But they’ve lengthened the hole since then.

VO>>Oh that’s right.

VO>> The course was shooting fast. That might have been the fastest and hardest it’s ever played. You couldn’t hit, like the third green, you couldn’t hit the third green. Because it was downwind. I remember hitting an 8-iron and it ran right past the slope, right into the back bunker.

OC>>I think he won at five-under.

OC>> Yeah.

OC>>Duval, yeah, he was single digits too.

OC>>They didn’t grow the rough up in ’95 like they did the year Duval won.

OC>>Wow.

OC>>Where were you at?

OC>> 14. I won by six.

OC>>I joked that I shot five-under ever year in the tournament. It just had to be that year that he was a good score.

OC>>I definitely will remember this for a long time. And hold it very high. I think this is definitely one of the best accomplishments in golf, to win the PLAYERS Championship.

VO>>Tiger Woods is a two-time PLAYERS Champion, winning in 2001 and 2013. Those are two of Woods’ 82-career PGA TOUR wins to go along with his 15 major championships. As such, he is on any golf mount Rushmore and soon in the World Golf Hall of Fame, to be inducted on Wednesday. Tiger’s peers saw it up close and reflect on Woods’ remarkable career.

OC/VO>>There’s Hall of famers and then there’s folks that maybe change the face of the game or the way the game was played. So, Jones, Hogan, Sneed, Nelson, Nicklaus, maybe throw a Norman in there, Tiger. I mean they changed the way the game is played. And he changed basically our careers and the popularity of the game, the television. Then the finances. He changed our careers. So, quite amazing.

OC/VO>>What he did to this game and for this game, it’s irreplaceable. He’s the face of the game.

VO/OC>>He’s changed so much about the game. Changed who watches the game, who loves the game, who looks at the game. He’s brought excitement to the game. He has the Arnold Palmer to him. There’s something special.

OC>>I think he’s one of the funniest guys and he take a beating and gives it back and that’s what I love about him. But if you want to talk, I think when he won Augusta the last time is probably Nicklaus winning in ’86 and Tiger winning in ’19, the two greatest feats, really, I can’t go back and say Hogan winning after an accident. But in my time, I got to tell you, that was a tear-jerker. I mean we were bawling, my buddy, after he won. So, it’s a great honor, Hall of Fame. And he probably should have been in it five years ago.

VO>>And that is our time here on Learning Center. I’m Vince Cellini. The PGA TOUR Champions returns the first week in April with the Rapsican Systems Classic from Mississippi. See you there, y’all.