VO: PGA TOUR Champions Learning Center

VO: A Day after setting the tournament and course 18-hole scoring record at Grand Bear Golf Club, Steven Alker pulled away from the pack on championship Sunday, winning the Rapsican Systems Classic in convincing fashion. Rarely a miss in Mississippi for the fifty-year-old from New

Zealand, who is now a multiple winner on this tour. Our men who called it, Bob Papa and Lanny Wadkins, have the final round highlights.

VO: Well, thank you Vince. After a two-year hiatus, PGA tour champions

back in coastal Mississippi for the Rapsican Systems Classic. And Lanny Wadkins. Steven Alker after shooting a 62 on Saturday to take a one-shot lead into Sunday, dialed in. A birdie at the second and then his third at the par-5 fifth.

VO: Yeah, he did this a lot all day. Hit a lot of quality shots. Drove the ball well. Just great playing by Steven Alker.

VO: That would get him to 13-under. Then, gets off to a hot start on the back nine. His birdie at the difficult tenth.

VO: Yeah, two perfect shots, leaves himself an up-hill 20-footer and he buries it.

VO: He would birdie the par-5 11th and then his birdie putt at the difficult 12th.

VO: Again, leaves it in a wonderful position and putter really on fire for Steven Alker.

VO: That would get him to 16-under. Par at 13 and then at the difficult at the par-3 14th, this is nearly perfect.

VO: Yeah, this is a statement shot here. This is like okay boys

I am not going backwards. Great shot here by Steven Alker.

VO: He set the tournament and course record on Saturday with that 62. Then his second into 18.

VO: After a perfect tee shot, maybe the best second we saw in here all day. A really tough hole location to get close to. Gets it right in there, and what a great way to finish for Steven.

VO: Then Alker would finish it off in championship style with a birdie at 18. Finishing at 18-under, besting the tournament 54-hole total of 16-under, set by Tom Lehman in 2011. And Lanny, Alker moves up in the Charles Schwab Cup standings and he’s here to stay.

VO: He is, he’s got a lot of game. He’s not going anywhere

VO: And a nice final round for Padraig Harrington as he heads to the Masters this week as we send it back to Vince.

VO: Thank you gentlemen. Steven Alker has been a force of nature on PGA tour champions. He started in a sprint and has not

slowed down. A second career win and has never finished outside

the top twenty in fifteen career starts. Twelve of them top tens. Here in his first full season on the tour, Alker is clearly one

to watch.

VO: The presidential golf was again in the news two weekends ago as 45 carded a one. Donald J Trump aced the 7th hole at Trump International in West Palm Beach Florida surrounded by PGA TOUR Champions players Ernie Els, Ken Duke and Gene Sauers. Trump described the 5-iron from 181 yards as sailing quote “magnificently into a rather strong wind. With approximately five feet of cut.” End quote. But don’t just take his word for it.

OC: President trump got on the tee, was first to play and he made this beautiful swing.

OC: Hit a beautiful 5-iron in there, just cut in there with the wind. We all know when it’s a good shot. We were all just eyeing it.

OC: So, when it was on-line. There’s not many times amateurs hit it dead on line, on the right curve. So, we all watched it carefully.

OC: Took about four or five bounces and went right in like it was a putt.

OC: Disappeared right in the hole. He didn’t even really see it. He hit is shot, walked off and all the sudden the rest of us go “Hey! It’s in the hole!”

OC: We went nuts, we threw our clubs

OC: We all got excited, clubs were flying in the air

OC: He turned around and goes number seven, boys. Haha it was awesome.

OC: We didn’t even want to hit, and he said come on guys, hit, hit.

OC: How many times do you get an opportunity to play with a former president of the United States of America and you’re playing social golf with him, and he makes a one. So, it was pretty exciting.

OC: What a special day for all of us. It was something I will never forget. Unbelievable day.

VO: Some news outlets initially questioned the ace, but the seventy-five-year-old former president again made sure to deliver his side of the story via a March 28th statement, calling it quote “one hundred percent true.”

VO: When PGA tour champions learning center returns, Steve Stricker shares the shocking details of his mystery illness. The Ryder Cup captain was literally fighting for his life.

VO: Just about a month after serving as the winning U. S. Ryder Cup captain, Steve Stricker faced a much greater battle, one for his very life. In late October a mysterious illness gripped his body, starting as a cough and then turning it to inflammation around his heart and liver issues that set the 54-year-old to the hospital. Stricker described his frightening ordeal.

OC/VO: It started on like the 23rd of October. I had this severe sore throat. I thought it was a Covid, got tested for it a couple times. It wasn’t. I think around the 10th of November, somewhere around there, I started developing a fever. Felt awful. Went into the hospital. I think it was on a Friday. I spent a couple weeks in there. Still to this day, don’t know why and all these things that were happening. I had gallstones, which a lot of people have gallstones, right? SO, I don’t know if that was a little bit of an issue. My liver was in trouble. I mean, I turned yellow. I had Jaundice. I was literally peeing colored stuff out of my body. That’s how dark it was. Yellow eyes, yellow skin. It wasn’t a pretty sight. Let me tell you, the hospital is not a good place to be. I went in on a Sunday night and I had this coughing attack on a Wednesday. And my fever, it was starting to go away. It sent my heart out of rhythm. It jumped up to 155, 160. It was sustained at that number. It stayed out of rhythm literally for a month and then kind of sporadically went in and out of rhythm from time to time. But it wasn’t until Christmas Even, ironically Nikki’s birthday, she’s a Christmas Eve baby, that it stayed in rhythm for the most part. I had a couple episodes after that. It stayed in rhythm from that point on. But there was an inflammation, either myocarditis or pericarditis around the heart that led to this flutter, they call it, an atrial flutter. That was the scary part. I always felt like I was going to get out of the hospital, but you just don’t know. Taking a shower and getting downstairs in the morning was a challenge just because of what was going on with my heart. But then all the sudden, all this liquid started coming off me and that’s where I lost 25 to 30 pounds, just water weight. It went in a hurry. Lost all my muscle, all that kind of stuff. But knock on wood, I’m feeling great. I’m excited for another come back opportunity. It’s just a roller coaster of a ride in this golf game. I’ve been on that roller coaster and now I feel like I’m trying to work my way back up again and trying to get stronger. I’m playing a little bit more golf. So, I’m excited to see what this next chapter will bring.

VO: We are so glad Steve is on the road to recovery. Straight ahead, a trio of past Masters Champions discuss the thrill of winning at Augusta. It’s life changing and menu changing at the Champions dinner. Olazabal, Weir and Langer coming up next.

VO: Spring in Georgia returns as a does a tradition unlike any other. As this week means the 86th playing of the Masters tournament. Recently, Learning Center sat down three past champions who discussed their experience of winning one of the game’s most prestigious events.

OC: Hello everybody, good evening. I’m sitting here with Mike Weir and Jose Maria Olazabal, and we’ll talk a little bit about the Masters. Why don’t you guys share your favorite past champions dinner that you’ve had in all the years you’ve been there. Mike, how about you?

OC: Well, I’ve been then probably the shortest of you two guys. I thought Adam Scott’s was really good. That Wagyu Steak was really great. That was an awesome meal. For myself, the year I won, I had a good friend of mine that I grew up with from the time we were ten years old that’s a chef now. And he came in and cooked the meal so that was really special for me to have my friend Allister come in and cook the meal for 2004. Those are a couple special ones for me.

OC: I’m surprised they allowed a foreign chef in the kitchen.

OC: A Canadian in the kitchen

OC: They’re pretty good themselves.

OC: How about you, Jose?

OC: From my perspective, we’ve had wonder dinners, as you know. I think the one from my point of view that stands out is Vijay’s. I think that was extremely special. It was Thai food. It was very tasty. We had all different dishes.

OC: I agree. I was going to say the same. So now I have to pick out a different one. They were all good, weren’t they? The only thing I didn’t like was the Haggis. I’m sure you agree with me. When Sandy Lyle won, he served Haggis, which is typical Scottish but that was not big

OC: Glad I missed that one.

OC: Everything else is really phenomenal. The chefs in that kitchen do an incredible job. I threw at them a German dish, they said “we got it.” And it was just like my mother made it, almost. Just really spot on. How has the Masters changed your life? Like when you slipped on that Green Jacket, has anything changed from that day onward?

OC/VO: For me, I think it definitely changed. When you’re recognized as Masters Champion everywhere you go around the world. My life didn’t change a whole lot, but I think wherever I’ve gone, all the other tournaments, I’ve been fortunate enough to win. No one remembers those things, but they remember The Masters. They’re fond to tell you the stories about where they were when you won. I’m sure you guys have had the similar things. SO, in that regard, it changed a little bit. Just to be able to be there with you guys on the Tuesday night dinner. That’s a dream come true to be in that room on Tuesday. For me, every year, we go back, that’s the thing that sticks out in my mind. That’s the real change. You’re a part of this great fraternity of Tuesday, the low 30s of guys that are still around, that’s a pretty small fraternity of guys that have won the event.

OC: You’ll be a major winner, as well, for the rest of your life. It’s a special group of people.

OC: I totally agree with Mike. I want to believe that personally, I’m still the same guy.

OC: You are (LAUGHS)

OC/VO: Pretty much the same guy. No question that at the end of the day, our careers are defined by majors, how many majors you win. By winning obviously The Masters, it is one of the greatest achievements you can have as a golf player. That regard, as Mike said, you are recognized around the world, wherever you go. My family is still the same. They believe I haven’t changed, but when I look back at my career, I think that winning the Masters, without a question, was the pinnacle. And somehow it defines you as a player.

OC: And financially very beneficial because you get bigger contracts. You get into tournaments that you wouldn’t get in to. When I won, I got a ten-year exemption on the PGA TOUR, that’s worth something. Do you guys remember anything specific from when they slipped on the jacket? When you probably first walked into Butler Cabin, right? Most of us don’t ever go in there until we’re in. Anything that you remember?

OC: That was, for me, the first time I went there. Obviously, the reason was a pretty obvious reason to be there. But I had never been there before. And when you see the Green Jacket, the past champion ready to put the Green Jacket on you. I got emotional, I have to say. All of the sudden, I remember my young days playing golf. I remember practicing with Seve and Seve telling me you know, one day I had the game to win over there. I recollect all that in a few seconds.

OC: All the hard work you put in for many years and it finally paid off.

OC: Yes, and I said, for me it was a very very emotional moment.

OC/VO: You didn’t say where’s the trophy. You were okay with the Green Jacket. (LAUGHS) I had a sort of unique experience, when I first got moved into Butler Cabin in ’85 and the first question I was asked was Bernhard, were you watching the leaderboard. I said something like no, I was trying not to watch the leaderboard, I’ve learned over the last few months or years, if I see my name at the top, I play more defensive and protect my lead. If I don’t see my name at all on the leaderboard and I’m 12 shots behind, I kind of get down on myself. So, I was said, I was trying not to watch the leaderboards at all and just play as good as I could. When we came off the 9th green and walked to the 10th tee, I had a quick glance to the right. And there’s this big leaderboard on number 18. I really said, “Jesus Christ I can’t believe I’m four shots behind Curtis Strange”. I started two behind and I thought I gained on him, and I was actually doubling my deficit. So, later I went to Hilton Head, played Houston, and came home and I had hundreds of letters. I saw they were all congratulatory letters for me winning the Masters, but actually about four-fifths of them were actually “who are you to mention Jesus Christ in vain on national television”?

OC: Really?

OC: So basically, hundreds or many many millions were hearing this, I was not very proud of that. Fast-forward eight years became a believer, a Christian. I was able to win again in ’93. The question was which win was more important to you the first one or the second. And I said, they’re both very special, but this one means more because it’s Easter Sunday today and we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I mentioned Jesus Christ on national television, international television twice. Once in a very bad way and once in a better way.

OC: You redeemed yourself.

OC: I think I did.

OC: For me I remember, same as Jose, my first time going into Butler Cabin. They kind of hustle you in there because they have to do the TV things. I remember having a quick chance to splash some water on my face before I go in for the TV ceremony. And Tiger’s going to put the jacket on me. I remember just looking in the mirror and just saying “Holy you know what”. I actually did it. It was my first time. I let my guard down. You know, how it is, you have to be so focused all the way through 72 holes. It was the first time I got very emotional too. I had just given my dad a hug. Then I had to go in the room and compose myself before. Luckily Tiger kind of gave me a couple little needles to loosen up the mood before I went on there. So yeah, it was really special.

OC: We all know what Augusta is about, that corner, those back nine holes, that’s where you win, or you lose a tournament.

OC: Very special holes, but a lot can happen.

OC: Tons can happen. I’ve seen it.

OC: Good or bad, right?

OC: Mmmhmm.

OC: It’s clearly one of the most special places in the world.

OC: Yeah, we all agree with that.

OC: Yeah, never gets old to play there. Every time is so great.

OC: It’s always great to be back.

OC: Yes, for sure.

OC: Even though, at my age at least, you know you can not compete.

OC: Hey! You made the cut last year. You played well.

OC: Maybe we close this little chat with a funny quote from Seve. We all love Seve, a great champion. Double winner there, two or three times at least. He four-putted number 16 one year, the par-3. He was still in the hunt, so he went into the media center and got interviewed. One guy had enough guts I guess to say so Seve what happened on 16 green? And Seve goes “I miss. I miss. I miss. I make”. Next question. (LAUGHS) Let’s have a toast. No four putts

OC: No four putts this year at Augusta. Cheers you guys, that was fun.

VO: Golf Channel’s live from the Masters coverage can be seen all week long. Major championship season is officially in bloom at Augusta National. Until next time, I’m Vince Cellini and this has been PGA TOUR Champions Learning Center.