**2024 PGA TOUR CHAMPIONS LEARNING CENTER SHOW #25**

VO > PGA Tour Champions Learning Center.

VO > A regular season that began on the Big Island of Hawaii back in January concluded in North Carolina. Prestonwood Country Club, hosting the SAS championship for a 24th consecutive season.

OC > Hello, everyone, and welcome to PGA Tour Champions Learning Center. I'm Vince Cellini, and just like that, 25 regular season events are in the books. Back on Sunday, it was a final chance for some players to make a move to the playoffs. And oh, by the way, we crowned another champion. Our John Swantek has the call and the wrap up.

VO > Okay, Vince, what a dramatic conclusion to the final regular season stop of the year here in Cary, North Carolina. Padraig Harrington had a big lead late on Saturday, but Jerry Kelly was pushing him on Sunday John Cook.

VO > Yeah nice outgoing nine holes. And here at the 10th for long distance. Perfectly read right in the center. Perfect speed.

VO > Harrington would answer with a birdie at the par five 12th.

VO > Only seven iron into this par five in the left bunker, but a nice up and down to keep the pressure on.

VO > Could have used a few more of those because Kelly would pick up birdies at 12. And here at 13.

VO > Yeah. Bonus birdie at the 13th. Birdies at 10 and 13 on his way.

VO > Now Kelly had finished. He had bogeyed the 18th and Harrington back at 17. What a shot.

VO > And has to take advantage of the par fives Padraig does. Beautiful pitch shot.

VO > And he would make four there. And this was the Kelly par putt to get it in with a 66.

VO > Both Jerry Kelly and Padraig Harrington have driven it in the right rough with no angle. Jerry ran his first putt a good six feet by.

VO > His only bogey of the day. How costly would it be? Harrington had this to force a playoff.

VO > He looked good for a while but just swung away.

VO > Bogeys for both players, but it didn't cost Gerry Kelly a victory hug there for his first win in a couple of years out here, and his 12th victory on the champions Tour.

VO > Very emotional win for Gerry Kelly's. Been battling rheumatoid arthritis throughout his body. It doesn't feel very good but what a great win.

VO > And Vince is with the champion now.

OC > Thank you John. Well, this was one in very much Jerry Kelly fashion in my opinion with a little bit of a grind on Saturday. But you gave yourself a chance. Then you come into Sunday, you open up three back of Padraig Harrington. What what's the strategy there?

OC > Well, I played when Freddie won a few years ago and he absolutely blitzed us all. I think he shot 60. And I was trying to channel that a little bit, but, really, we just had a memorial service with for, Jon Trasamar, Trazy, last Saturday. I just I can't tell you he was playing through me today, and he came to me last night, and I'll never forget it. It was a gift from God. I just played for him as much as I could today. That is that is it. That's. That's why it happened.

VO > So what does this mean now, moving forward for you, it's going to be a tremendous boost.

VO > Yeah. I mean, this all started after I won three out of five and then picked up an electric sport about 80 pounds. And that's that's when I think things started to go south for me with the back. So, you start questioning whether you're ever going to win again. You know, I certainly didn't think it would be this quick after what I've been through the last, five months. But yeah. I can't believe it. It wasn't me. That was. That was Johnny playing through

VO > The journey begins this week in Richmond and the Country Club of Virginia, the Dominion Energy Charity classic host the top 72 players in the Schwab Cup standings. 54 will advance to the next tournament, a new event that hits the playoff chase as the Simmons Bank Championship debuts from Pleasant Valley Country Club in Little Rock. Then the top 36 qualify for the Charles Schwab Cup championship there, a champion will emerge in the event and overall season. So, the playoffs are here, a season long goal was met for those who qualified, but it was disappointment for the players who did not.

OC VO > I've played my ass off this year and played really crappy and just, you had to miss an event due to my back injury and, you know, there it is. I mean, you cannot you cannot come out here and expect to play well, injured. And you have to come out here and you got to be firing on all cylinders because you get swallowed alive. And unfortunately, you know, got swallowed alive. I spent three years out here with, you know, some of the top players on the planet got to know everybody. My game got better. My short game got better. Putting is always getting down. I've made some friends, and learned a life, you know? And, I had a good three-year run. What are you going to say. I am a club pro.

VO > Yeah. But having a run out here, don't you feel like you have unfinished business here?

OC > Yeah, I know I can win out here. That's what sucks. And I don't get another opportunity to do it unless I get through Q school again. So, Yeah, I'm I'm hurting right now. As high as I was when I won Q school. I'm as low. I'm as low as low as it is now.

OC VO > I mean I'm I'm glad that I get to at least play one more tournament. I can't I can't stress how well I hit it. I mean, I hit it so close to the heart today, I didn't, you know, have to happen. So, you know, I had to make 4 or 5 players, and I just couldn't make them. So, it's just it's just depressing.

VO > Charles Schwab Cup standings the top eight remain the same. Winner Jerry Kelly moving up two spots into the mix and SAS runner up Padraig Harrington rounds out the top ten as regular season play comes to an end.

VO > Speaking of playoffs, Major League Baseball is deep into it and these men lived it at the highest level. The Atlanta Braves, Big three of Smoltz, Glavine, and Maddux together again. Pitcher perfect on baseball and golf. That's next.

VO > The Major League Baseball playoffs have reached the championship series in both leagues, and it's stacked with both baseball heavyweights and surprise teams. Playoff mainstay Atlanta was eliminated in the wildcard series by San Diego. But for Ex-Braves pitchers John Smoltz, Tom Glavine and Greg Maddux, two things were always guaranteed a deep playoff run and lots of golf between starts. We explored both sports during an April visit at the Invited Celebrity Classic near Dallas.

OC > Well, they were. And are the Braves Big three, arguably the greatest pitching trio on one staff in Major League Baseball history. Among them seven Cy Young Awards, all first ballot Hall of Famers, 26 All-Star appearances. Smoltz wanted me to read the entire resume, but I don't think we have time for this. Gentlemen, it's great to have you together. Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine, and John Smoltz. It's kind of cool because I don't know how often you guys actually get together, right?

OC > At least three times a year.

OC > A little bit more now. Yeah, yeah.

OC > Mostly golf.

OC > Yeah. Always.

OC > Yeah. Yeah.

OC > Mostly golf and then the Hall of Fame when we get to go to Cooperstown.

OC > And who picks up checks at dinner?

OC > We try to vary it. Yeah. But, you know, you were right. Reading that resume. I always speak wherever we go. Collectively, we won 16 Gold Gloves together, too.

OC > That's right.

OC > Yeah.

OC > It doesn't matter. That one guy had all of them collectively.

OC > Yeah. But I think combined for over 600 wins, we can go on and on. It's it's pretty amazing stuff. And, you know, it was understood then when you guys were on the Braves staff that you would have time to play golf. Right? So, that you were pretty fortunate back that Bobby and Leo, Bobby Cox, Leo Mazzone with you guys basically were autonomous, right right?

VO OC > Absolutely. I mean, you know, Smoltz I mean, I've said it 100 times. He's a pretty good pitcher, but an outstanding golf coordinator. And he had he I mean, he had the golf set up for us. I mean, it was, talk about making your life easy. I mean, you'd pitch your game, you'd be on the bus, it'd be 10:00 at night, and he'd go, hey, 7:00 lobby and everything is all set up.

OC > And, and it was, you know, definitely, definitely a great teammate.

OC > Yeah. And that had that had to be fun. I mean, to be able to have that kind of freedom. Right tom?

OC VO > It was. I mean, it it it had to work the way that it did in the sense that Bobby knew that we were going to get our work done, and golf wasn't going to get in the way of preparation and being ready to pitch and do all those things. So that was first and foremost. But, you know, I say it all the time. I think it it helped me in my career, probably gave me a little bit more longevity because we had that outlet. I don't want to speak for these guys, but I would venture to say they felt the same way. And, you know, it was just an opportunity to get out of the hotel room, get away from baseball. Even though half our conversation were about baseball anyway, it was just great to be outside and play some great golf courses and, just kind of get away from what we were doing.

OC > Yeah, I never thought of it that way. But Smoltzy was it more competitive in golf than it was ever in pitching stats or wins and losses for you guys?

OC VO > No. We keep that balance. It was an outlet for us. Look, thank God we didn't have social media then because, you know, in sports and in life, everyone looks for a reason why you're not successful. And early on in my career, I was unfortunately predicted to do x, y, Z and would fall short on other people's predictions. So, golf was the number one blame of why I didn't do it. And then it became the balance over time of consistency that allowed us to say we can get away from the game and do a healthy balance instead of let's just do the cool thing and stay up till two three in the morning and keep hitting repeat and cycle. It did lengthen my career and collectively we had a blast. When you pitch only 35 to 36 times a year and you're watching baseball, the rest of the time, you can go crazy. And this allowed us to have that that balance. And I say this all the time. Spring training, forget about the position players. They were they were like really mad at us because we would show up and be gone by 11. But to Tommy's point and Greg's point, we had already done our work before they even got there. And so, when we were gone, we were playing 36 a day and having a great spring training while they were grinding away.

OC > It's so interesting because pitchers like football kickers seem to gravitate and play play well in golf. And I wonder if it's because within the team sport is this individual aspect. And Tom, I always think of you because you're so stoic on the mound, like I, I could tune in a game and I don't know if you're up for runs or down for runs, but did that sort of personality or being able to shake off a bad pitch? Does that help here in golf?

OC VO > I don't I haven't seen the find that translation to my golf game. But you know, it does. I mean, listen, I was just saying to somebody earlier, I think for me, anyway, I tend to golf the way I pitched, you know, I, I, I'm probably fairly conservative like I did. I didn't try to make a pitch in a crucial situation that I didn't think I was good at. And I'm not going to sit out here and try to hit a shot that if you give me a bucket of balls, I might do it twice. You know. I think I'm pretty methodical on the golf course, like I was the way that I pitch. But if I could ever figure out how to that how to have that same trust factor that I had with the bases loaded in a 3-2 count on the golf course, I'd probably be a whole lot better.

OC > And, Greg, I think I've talked to you about this before. Like you, you would have pitches and you say, well, that's not working, so I'm just not going to throw that anymore. A lot of guys don't have that option pitching, but how does it work out here for you if something may not be working? Are you an analytical guy in your game?

OC VO > I don't know enough about it to be that analytical, but, you know, I understood my delivery. I understood what I had to do to throw certain pitches and what adjustments I had to make to throw em properly. And I don't know that about my golf swing, so, like, if it starts to go bad, it can go bad and I'm not quite sure how to fix it, so. But I love playing and, you know, I like playing. Good. I don't have to play well to have fun, though.

OC > Yeah. John, you understand the depths of this because you played in so many PGA Tour Champions events. You weren't U.S. open, qualified. So, the difference between playing casual golf with friends and actually playing at the highest level is.

OC VO > It’s night and day. The casual. You know what I hope to have done more than anything is to get the guy that thinks he's a six or better in the clouds going watching a tournament. I can do that. And I'm here to tell you, no, you can't because it is the most out of body experience. Now, that's not my office. It's not what I trained for. I'm competitive as they get. I'm more of a Happy Gilmore player. You know where I've shown my emotions and riding the, you know, doing what he would do. And then casual golf. When it comes to tournament, I'm not. That's something I have to learn. You know, Tommy and Greg, all taught me things individually. Tommy taught me how to fake it on the mound and faking it out on the golf course is one thing, but the reality is you can't fake being uncomfortable when you don't have the resources or the knowhow. And events like this is the only way I learn how to get better. The U.S. open was one of the greatest accomplishments of my life. It exposed my golf game. It's very humbling, and I learned a lot. And I think I became better for it.

OC > Yeah, well, I enjoy watching you play. It's always great when you're out at events like this. Tom, I wonder if, hockey helped you, in your golf game, because so many of the guys who play in the NHL and come out here say there is a transition.

OC VO > I think there I mean, look, every hockey player I've played with bombs the ball. So, I think there's I think there's some correlation there. But you know, I think it's just, you know, this is a tough game to be good at or even respectable at if you don't have some sense of athletic ability. Right? I mean, there's a lot of components as, as Greg was saying, you know, we can break down our pitching delivery all day long because we did it. We understand it. There's a lot of components to a golf swing that it's like, I don't know why that ball went straight and I have no idea why it hooked. So, it's it's hard to it's hard to fix it when you don't know it. But I think, you know, the crossover of of just being an athlete, I think that has a lot of translation out here in golf. I think if you an athlete, you know, you can kind of get it a little bit. And I think that's what I end up doing a lot of times is when I'm when I'm when I'm not playing well, I get too mechanical, which I never did in baseball. And I and I always revert back to just be just be an athlete, just go after the ball as an athlete. And I think that's where for me, the transition, the transition happens.

OC > Before I let you guys go, I think I have to ask you about what you've been asked about. I'm sure many, many times that's the arm injuries that are happening in, in baseball with these pitchers. What's what's going on with that? Greg, what do you what's your theory?

OC > I mean, you know, they're chasing velocity and they're chasing spin rates. And I know they they practice a lot faster than we did, I think. And I think they throw a lot more in between starts than we did. You know, we would throw a game and, I mean, our bullpens were we had a lob in the ball half the time. I mean, we, tried to let our arms buildup so we could pitch five days later, but it it just, you know, just watching, watching how much they throw between starts. It really surprised me when I saw that. But, you know, I don't really have a real answer for you, but it's they they throw it a lot harder than we did, that's for sure.

OC > No, they do. And I think it's twofold. It's and they're hand in hand to Greg's point Velo. And with velo becomes max effort. And I think that unlike when we pitched and even John John was, you know, obviously a strikeout guy. But it wasn't max effort. He had feel he had touch. And I think that's what, you know, to Greg's point with our bullpens. You know, we didn't go out and bullpen in or out in between starts. We learn how to throw 60% and make the ball do everything we wanted to do. So, when we got in the game, it was that much easier. And I think a lot of these guys today, it seems every time they pick up a ball and they're trying to make it do something, they have to max effort. And when you do that, over time, I don't know how your arm is going to hang on. I know I just don't.

OC > First of all, it's not the player's fault. They're chasing the reward system that they're given, and management has come out with a way to do the game that is flawed. It's the definition of insanity. Asking them to do this over and over again without getting hurt. I've been saying it for ten years, and the illustration, just to use a golf analogy, we have become so technical and so advanced that athleticism and feel is gone. We're trying to create robotic dominance, and you go to a range today and it's no longer do they hit a ball, and they get the feel of what they look right to a monitor. And every pitcher is looking right to a monitor. They have no idea of how to throw a baseball and come up with their own information. They have instant technology to give that. And so, it becomes robotic. It becomes everything they do. I hate it, I selfishly hate it. I broadcast a sport that has so many, nobody looks like us anymore. And that's great. Their bodies are unbelievable, but they're breaking down left and right. I hate it for their careers. I hate it for the industry. And something down the road will have to be a rule change to enact something that causes a philosophical change. Because in and of itself, this will not self-correct.

OC > But at this point, for golf, I think it's too late, probably for you guys to do the Scottie Scheffler thing. You're not going to move forward and try to try to see how far you can on the dog. You know those stats that's out the window.

OC > My feet move sometimes, but not like this.

OC > Yeah.

OC > Well guys it's been great to spend time with you. Thank you so much. And the three of you here. And thanks for all the baseball memories.

OC> Thank you.

OC > Play well.

VO > Much more ahead on Learning Center. The president of PGA Tour Champions joins us to share what will make this year's playoff so exciting. And he looks ahead to what we can expect on our tour next year.

OC > And we're spending some time with PGA Tour Champions president Miller Brady and Miller. What an amazing 2024. Unpredictable, fun. How did you assess the season?

OC > Oh my gosh. Has probably been one of our best ever. Most exciting. Our events have all been elevated. Each week is is better and better than maybe the week before. The year before. So, for us, it's been a fantastic year.

OC > What does that say? And we talk about this every year. The fact that it's that wide open. What does it say about the talent level on PGA Tour Champions?

OC VO > Well, look you look at the talent level. You look at the names that are at the top of that list right now. It's amazing. They're grinding. They want to play. They want to win. They want to compete. And at the same time, they're out here on the Champions Tour to have fun. So, it's it's really special for us.

OC> I think really one of the cool things I've kind of observed is the fact that you can go from 50 to 60’s on this tour now.

OC> Bernhard

OC> Right? I mean, well, there's a lot of guys moving into that 60 range too, and that says a lot. Now you've expanded the possibility of winners.

OC > Oh, absolutely. I mean, you used to think that before it was 50 to 53 or 54, but you look at the guys that continue to play well as they're moving into their 60s, it just shows you how competitive it truly is.

OC > So, we have a new playoff event, a new event on the schedule, the Simmons Bank Championship. What can you tell us about that and what's going to make this special for the tour?

OC VO > Yeah. Well, when Simmons bank came to us and they wanted to partner with the Champions Tour, we knew right away that we needed to find a way to to partner with Simmons Bank because they're already involved with the Korn Ferry Tour. Really successful event in Nashville. So, taking sort of that model, their enthusiasm for that, taking it to their hometown and little Rock, we knew was going to be special. Can't wait to get there because they've done an amazing job in that community. It's going to be a really big event for us.

OC > Yeah, it's breaking new ground. PGA Tour Champions has never been in that state, which is hard to believe really.

OC VO > It is hard to believe, golf enthusiast in that, inlet state and that community, really, really excited to get to little Rock.

OC > So, we talked about the talent level. And each and every week, there are people that try to Monday qualify, but there are there are a lot of, players who are looking to get in and somehow get into these fields. Miller, has there ever been any talk about either expanding fields or a new way to try to get more people involved to tournament to tournament?

OC > Yeah, it's a good question. We probably get the question asked a lot, but we actually feel that our model right now of, you know, 78 players week to week, the name recognition that we have the event qualifier leading into the week with Q school, you know, coming into the years is really the right, model for us. And we're going to continue that for now.

OC> Okay. So, I know we're in playoff mode, but what excites you about 2025? I always ask you to look to the future. Get your crystal ball.

OC VO > Look, it's hard to even look at 25 right now when I'm so excited about these playoffs. And what's going to happen over the three events in the playoffs. But when we looked at 25, you know we're going to announce our schedule soon. Really excited about what's coming next year. It's going to be very similar in nature, to what we had this year. But all these events continue to want to elevate. So, we're going to do that. We're going to make it better for our players every year.

OC > So, from a personal standpoint, what do you think has been the most rewarding thing for your aspect in terms of your position with the tour?

OC > I think, I say this a lot when we have good tournaments, then the rest of it takes care of itself. So, when we're able to go and have a conversation with a title sponsor about extending and renewing that partnership, and it's an easy conversation that's rewarding because that tells us that we're doing something right. Our players are doing something right, and our tournaments are fantastic.

OC >All right. Getting ready for the big finish.

OC > Yeah.

OC > Thanks, Miller. Appreciate it.

OC > Thank you.

OC > Take care.

VO > And so we bid farewell to another sensational regular season on PGA Tour Champions. Stand by for an anything can happen playoff run, and we won't let you miss a moment I'm Vince Cellini. As always, thank you for watching.