

Final Round Interview: TOM LEHMAN (-20)
March 19, 2017



DAVE SENKO: Well, we would like to welcome the 2017 Tucson Conquistadores Classic champion, Tom Lehman. This is your 10th career win on PGA TOUR Champions and I believe this gets you another two-year exemption to Hualalai next year.

TOM LEHMAN: Oh, that's great. I didn't realize that, that's fantastic.

DAVE SENKO: Maybe just get us started, this has got to feel special coming off your surgery and also winning, just kind of a short jaunt from your home.

TOM LEHMAN: Well, yes. I haven't been playing a lot of golf. Had surgery in early November. Had a great doctor and had a great physical therapist, Tom Bratcher, who kind of really put me through the paces over the last three and a half, four months getting ready to play. I give him a lot the credit.

But I've been working hard to get in shape. Since I couldn't play golf I spent a lot of time just trying to get in better shape and I think that really paid off this week. I feel much better over the golf ball, hit a lot of good shots, made some good putts, had a lot of energy.

But to win is always special, and I think to win in Arizona feels great. To beat a great player like Steve Stricker, who had the lead. He played quite well himself. He has nothing to be ashamed of. I can assure you, he played outstanding golf and I just made a couple more putts. So all in all, again, to win is special.

My youngest son Sean is here. His birthday was yesterday, so I told him this is going to be a birthday present. Of course, no guarantees, but it turned out pretty nicely as a nice gift to Sean.

DAVE SENKO: Do you recall being in an event like this where it kind of seesawed back and forth like it did today?

TOM LEHMAN: Not that many, no, but you do kind of get into situations where it's a two-man race at times. That's really kind of what it was. But this one kind of ebbed and flowed. He had a three-shot lead to start. He got off to a little bit of a shaky start, he bogeyed 1 and then didn't birdie the second, and I went par eagle so we were even right. Off the bat we were tied. Then I went ahead and then he went ahead, and then he went further ahead, and then I came back and tied it. Then we both made birdie and then we kind of came down to the last hole.

I think the beauty of this golf course, one of the strengths of it is there's some great tee shots that you have to hit, and under pressure they're not easy. So having to put the ball in the fairway on 18 is a big deal. Being able to hit first was a big deal, I think. Me being able to go

first and put it in the fairway, it made his shot a little bit tougher. He hit actually quite a good 3-wood. I don't know what he said about it afterwards, but when he hit it, I thought it was going to be perfect just on top of that knob. The fact that it went in the water was a little bit unlucky, he just hit it too well.

DAVE SENKO: Tom, maybe just take us through your birdies. Start out with that eagle with the shot sequence.

TOM LEHMAN: No. 2 I hit a really good tee shot and I don't remember exactly the yardage but it had to be about 190 or 192, right in there somewhere. I hit a 6-iron, was downwind and hit it in to about four feet maybe; three and a half, four feet and knocked it in.

The next birdie came on No. 5, a good 3-wood and a gap wedge to about probably seven or eight feet and made that.

The next hole, No. 6, I drove it in the fairway bunker but hit a really good out 8-iron out of the fairway bunker to about six or seven feet again and knocked that in.

Next birdie was on 10. Hit a night little 9-iron. The wind shifted. Actually got a little bit lucky. That hole should have been downwind, but it turned back in our face and I was able to kind of hold the ball up and land it softly and hit a 9-iron to about 12 feet and made that. Right after he had made his, by the way. He made his putt first and I made it right on top of him, which was I think a momentum builder for me.

Next birdie was on the par 4. I get the numbers wrong with the rerouting. 12, I guess it would be. Hit a pretty good tee shot and hit a good 3-wood that just slid down the left slope just left of the pin and then hit a pretty good pitch up the hill from a muddy lie, and went about 15 feet by but I made a good putt for birdie there.

The next hole I made a bogey. I hit -- just hung my drive a hair to the right, had a bit of a flyer lie. Tried to hit it up high and soft and it came up about maybe a foot short of carrying the bunker. There was no sand in the bunker at all. The club just bounced through and I knocked it way by and made a bogey.

Then 16 was a pivotal hole. Steve hit a 7-iron, it was downwind or seemingly downwind and it looked like he hit a pretty good shot but it ended up being quite a bit short. And I hit a gorgeous 6-iron, it just never left the flag. Looked to me like it was going to be 20 feet, and I think it was about a 20-footer. Made a really good putt just up the hill. I knew it was going to be slow and could kind of get aggressive and at the very end it was going to break a hair right and did exactly that. It was straight up the left edge of the hole and it got to within a foot and it just kind of curled to the right and went in the left side of the hole for a birdie, and then he missed a putt. A two-shot swing was pretty big.

No. 17 made birdie, I think was set up by a really great tee shot. Hit driver, which was a bit aggressive but just hit a perfect line just right at the edge of that big tree and put it down

there on the right. I had 194 to the pin. The tree kind of was in my way so I had to try and hit a cut and I pulled it a bit so I had about a 50-foot putt and ran the first putt about six feet by and then made that putt coming back and then made par on 18.

DAVE SENKO: What was your second on 17?

TOM LEHMAN: 6-iron. I had to aim left and tried to let it slide to the right and it really kind of went straight more than anything. It's not an easy shot for me. I am not great at making the ball go left to right, but hit it solid and put it in the middle of the green and had a chance for birdie.

Q. Can you kind of go over all the things you're talking about on the 18th green, where your wife is, where your daughter, your son's name?

TOM LEHMAN: Yeah, yeah. So my daughter Rachel, who's 26, is getting married on April 15th, tax day, so shouldn't have a problem remembering that. If she remembers to pay her taxes and forgets her wedding, things are really messed up. I could see like going out and having a great dinner and then forgetting to pay the taxes, that would be more like it.

Anyway, so yes, she's getting married up in Scottsdale, Cave Creek actually, on the 15th. So she and my second daughter who's the maid of honor, they're all in New Orleans for their bachelorette party. My wife and her best friend went along to kind of be pseudo chaperones. I'm not sure if that's -- if you knew my wife, it's kind of like the inmates running the asylum. But they're in New Orleans doing that, having fun. I haven't heard from them in three days, so I sent her text message that said the fact that I haven't heard from you I assume means is a good thing, that you're having a great time. And she texted back, "Yes."

Anyway, **so they're there and so that left my some Thomas, who went off to Florida to play in the Azalea Amateur he's playing there this week. He's a college golfer at Cal-Poly. He was at TCU, he just transferred.**

That left then Sean, who's 14, to hang would me and yesterday was his birthday, so we had a birthday party. He said, "Dad, for my birthday I want you to win this thing." I'm go, "Well, I'm three shots behind Steve Stricker, the chances are slim, but I'll do my best." Anyway, so my best ended up being good enough.

I do want to talk about Steve a little bit. He hit some great putts that didn't go in early. He had some chances, he played well and didn't get the score that he probably deserved to get. He played well enough to win and I know he's disappointed. I thought he hit a really good 3-wood on the last hole and I thought he'd have no problem being in play and the fact that it went in the water was I though a little bit unlucky, but he is a such a great champion.

So part of what makes wins special is where they're at, the location. So the win in Arizona, that means to a lot to win in Arizona. You won the Phoenix open, now to win here in Tucson is kind of -- you know, you kind of get the duo, the duo win so I'm pretty happy about that.

And then also who you beat.

So where you win and who you beat, those two things are really the things that you think about when you think back on victories. So to win here in Arizona, here in Tucson, and then to beat Steve Stricker, who is probably if not -- he's got to be one of the top two or three players on this tour. The fact he's only played one event is meaningless. He almost made the Ryder Cup team last year. He's been Top-50 in the World Ranking up until the last eight months or so. So there is no question that Steve Stricker is still a word-class elite player, so to beat him is something that I'm very proud of.

Q. You also had different caddie today than usual. Can you explain that situation?

TOM LEHMAN: Yeah. I had a caddie for 22 years, Andrew Martinez. He worked for Johnny Miller all those years when Johnny was owning this place back in the '70s I think it would have been. In fact, he caddie for Johnny when he won by 14 shots or 15 shots or whatever he won by.

So he ended up getting an opportunity to go back on the PGA Tour last year. So he's back on the PGA Tour caddying for the younger guys for a little more money, so I think it's a good opportunity for him. So since then I've just kind of been having a series of friends and family caddying for me.

This week in particular, I've had a personal assistant, Joanie Sommers, who's been working for my wife and I for 20 years probably. And her husband Doug is just a great guy. He's a sports guy, he's an umpire. He umpires college and high school baseball, he's a real estate guy, he's a jack-of-all-trades kind of guy. He's always wanted to caddie so I said hey, this is the week, let's just make it Tucson. You and Joanie can come down and I'll pick up your hotel. You're doing all this work to get this wedding thing put together and sending out invitations and kind of taking all the calls. You're doing so much, so this is on me. You guys come down and Doug can carry the bag.

So Doug carried the bag, and starting last week he's like, "I want that helmet, I want that helmet, I'm not going back to Phoenix without that helmet."

Oh, Doug, I haven't played since October. Easy, pal.

But sometimes when you put those thoughts into somebody's head, but definitely got me thinking about hey, there's no reason why we can't play well and let's go try and get that helmet.

It's funny, too. I've got to make one comment aside. Because he is a baseball guy, think about a guy who's a baseball guy. Hey batter batter, hey batter batter, swing batter batter.

That's the way he was. I would go into my routine and I'd get over the ball and he'd would go, Okay, c'mon, c'mon, good hands. c'mon, c'mon.

And I'd go, Whoa, whoa, whoa, Doug. Once I get in my routine, that's just kind of -- you can spit the chew in the cup, just don't do it on my backswing, whatever you do.

No, he was a very good caddie because he's a sports guy. People who understand competition and love to compete, you know, can be a great caddie no matter whether you know the game that well or not and that's what he did for me this week. He understands competition, he understands kind of mano a mano, and therefore he was very comfortable under the heat kind of with the pressure of basically a match play type thing going on, so he did a really wonderful job.

Q. Your strategy on the tee on 17 and 18 was what?

TOM LEHMAN: To be aggressive. The two-shot swing on 16 I thought was a real -- it was a -- I stole all the energy walking off that green so I kind of felt like even though that tee shot on 17 is dangerous with the driver because it's so easy to run out to the right in the trees where you're kind of dead. Hitting a driver and hitting a good one would put me in a really commanding position, and I absolutely just ripped the perfect drive, the absolute perfect line and I just had a 6-iron left. So it was a really good time to be aggressive and it worked out really well.

And then 18 the same thing. I didn't like 3-wood. I knew 3-wood was the safe play, but it was going to leave me a really long second shot and I kind of felt if I could hit a really good tee shot and shorten the hole just a little bit, again hitting first, it would be an advantage to me.

So I hit a decent drive. I would never say it was my very, very best, but I tend to aim at the top of that knob and just try to swing and that driver that I have that I'm using, when I just try to just swing, it tends to tail a hair to the right. So I just hit a really good shape right down the center, a slight little cut. Ended up with 5-iron, which is I think a good club for that back pin. I hit really quite a good 5-iron, too, just pin high left putting straight up the hill. It was just a really good spot to be in.

Q. Are you trying to make the putt on 18 or are you trying to lag it in? The other thing I want to ask about was how big was this turn of events in the first two holes?

TOM LEHMAN: I was really trying to make that second putt on 18. (Laughter.) The first putt, really, I was just trying to lag it. It looked to me like it was a little bit uphill to start and then pretty flat, so it would have been easy to knock it by, I thought, so just roll it up to the hole. Hit a pretty good putt, just kind of curved under the hole a bit, so I had about a one-foot straight up the hill.

So I will be honest, I was nervous, there's no doubt about it. I was nervous. I haven't been in this situation to win in a while, I really wanted to get it done, so I was a little nervous. But one-foot putts I'm usually pretty good at.

The start to the round was, that was a big deal as well. To be three shots down and to erase that entire lead in two holes kind of put everything on an even level, just like okay, we're starting over right here now, we're tied, but the only thing about that is I have momentum and you don't. So Steve had to fight to get it back and he did. He had to fight pretty hard to kind of get his momentum back. He started to play pretty good golf and he had some great chances that didn't go in and he started making some birdies, and I kept on making birdie on top of him. But eventually kind of got two shots ahead, so that was the uniqueness of this round is he was way ahead, we got to tied, then I went ahead, and then it got back to tied, then he went ahead and then we got back to tied and then I end up winning. It was just a very mercurial type of golf, up and down, up and down.