

ROUND 3 INTERVIEW
October 12, 2019



LANTO GRIFFIN (-11)

AMANDA HERRINGTON: We would like to welcome Lanto Griffin into the interview room after Round 3 of the Houston Open, our clubhouse leader in with the low round of the week.

What was going right for you today?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Everything felt pretty good. Got off to a good start. I struggled at the end of the second round this morning, so getting off to -- hit it to an inch on three and then made about a 15, 18-footer on four, which kind of settled me in. I doubled 18 to finish the second round. Kind of erasing that kind of settled me in.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Eighteen has not been kind this week. Tell us a little bit what it's like to finish your second round this morning and then go right into the third round.

LANTO GRIFFIN: I feel like we've done that eight or 10 times this year alone, so we're all used to it. We kind of planned on it from early on in the week. We knew the weather was going to be bad on Friday, so I saw early-late, I figured we would be finishing on Saturday, so it wasn't a surprise.

It was just cold and windy this morning and played tough. It kind of settled me in, though. I was frustrated and kind of pissed off, but I kind of turned it into a positive, I feel like, and kind of played well today. Freed me up pretty good.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: And before we go into questions, after a year on the PGA TOUR, back at the Korn Ferry Tour last season, but coming out strong back on the PGA TOUR, where would you say your game is right now and what's changed?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, my game's the best it's ever been, for sure. I'm playing really smart and short game's improved a ton. That's always been kind of my Achilles heel. Me and my two coaches, we've really worked on it hard the last month and a half and it's been showing. When you can chip around the green, it kind of frees you up from the fairway, too, knowing that if you miss a green, you're not going to make bogey or double.

But it's the best my game's ever been, for sure. Beginning of Korn Ferry, we were down in the Bahamas and at the pro-am Greg Norman made a comment that he doesn't look at the guys that are winning or finished third and missed three cuts, he looks at the guys that are finishing 10th, 15th, 20th consistently. That really stuck in the back of my mind. I think about it all the time. It's been a goal of mine this year and I think I had 10 or 11 top-25s on the Korn Ferry, and then obviously the start this year, I've had four top-20s. So you don't have to be a hero necessarily to have a good, solid week. So that's been a big -- I'm glad I

went to that pro-am dinner.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Well, not to mess with your head too much, but you are the only player here to finish in the top-20 in all four starts this season.

LANTO GRIFFIN: I'll take it.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: With that, we will open it up to questions.

Q. So how do you walk off the course with a double finishing a round and you're cold, because you didn't have a lot of time to turn it around?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Ask my girlfriend. Yeah, I wasn't too happy, but then again, it's just a really hard hole. Honestly, I hit two really good shots. I hit a solid 3-wood that just barely crept in that bunker and the ball was below my feet, then you've got a 4-iron from the bunker from 220 into the wind. You know, you don't really want to bail out all the way right. I hit a good shot, just the wind got it and it landed on the hill and just barely went in the water. It wasn't like I felt like I choked it off or anything. I hit two really good shots and just -- that's 18 at the Golf Club of Houston.

Q. Is this your first 54-hole lead in a PGA TOUR event?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yes, for sure on the PGA TOUR. Korn Ferry Tour, that was one of my goals at the beginning of the year, me and my coaches sat down and I wanted to be in the final group on Sunday. It's nice to knock it out week five.

Q. So, you probably have the most interesting bio on PGA TOUR.com. Everything from former vegetarian to parents were hippies to you went to VCU. Just kind of talk about your background and what makes you unique from the cookie cutter Tour pro out here.

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, like you said, I'm not your typical country club kid growing up. You know, I had a great childhood, I played every sport. I wasn't a golf nerd growing up. I loved baseball and soccer and basketball. Unfortunately, I wasn't very good at all three of those, so I started playing golf. But I think those three sports really helped me with hand-eye coordination and just the athleticism. But about 13, that's when I really got into golf and I've been addicted ever since.

Q. What's the story behind Lanto, the name?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Oh, man, that's a good question.

So my parents named me after a spiritual master, so I've accepted it and we have good laughs about it. Never met another one. Never seen one on Google, either. It's been a solid name, good conversation starter.

Q. And you've had to -- you know, you've had some disappointments, there's probably been times where you thought, man, is this really what I need to be doing? Can you talk a little bit about personally, spiritually mastering the --

LANTO GRIFFIN: You never master it. Honestly, out here you're a bad week away from feeling like is this what I want to be doing. But luckily, those are usually temporary, a couple hours' thoughts. You wake up the next morning and you're hungry and you want to be better than you were the day before. You have that feeling of what was I thinking the day before and I need to go to the range and practice or whatever it may be. Two years ago it was really tough losing my card and three months off to think about it. It's been a heck of a year for me, for sure.

Q. Taking a follow up on that, what was that first year out here like on Tour a couple years ago? Obviously probably a different feeling this first month?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, it was overwhelming a little bit. My short game and tee to green, I just wasn't ready. You can't get away with what you can on the Korn Ferry Tour. Taking nothing away from the courses there, it's just the PGA TOUR, they set them up really tough.

Even two years ago on the Korn Ferry Tour, I had a win and a couple Top-10s, but I had a lot of 50th, 60th, 70th place finishes. So this year my goal was to really be consistent and I had I think four or five top-10s and a lot of top-20s. So I wasn't sure how that would carry over to this tour, but it has and I just kind of am trying to ride the momentum.

I'm playing smart. That's what I've learned the most the last couple years is you don't have to attack every pin to win golf tournaments. I'm a really good putter and if I can give myself a lot of looks, whether they're 15, 20, 25 feet, even 40-footers, it's better than short-siding yourself, making a silly bogey and then you feel like you have to fire at every pin. So tee to green I've gotten way more mature. I mean, I'm 31, that's not saying a whole lot, but I'm glad I finally learned from some of my mistakes and it's showing in my results.

Q. You mentioned your improvement in short game. Can you talk us through the bunker shot on 17 and what you were facing there?

LANTO GRIFFIN: I mean, honestly, when I looked at that, I told my caddie we were just honestly just trying to get a 15-footer. It was sitting down a little bit and somebody had just been in there and they raked it well, but it kind of sat down so there wasn't a whole lot of sand under it. I was kind of trying to use that left slope and just trying to -- I told my caddie, I was like, "Let's not get cute with it, give ourselves a look."

Me and my coach have been working on bunker shots, too. Usually on that shot I have a hard time hitting it soft. I usually have too much speed and I hit it -- I land it 10 feet past the hole. We worked on just real tempo and it came out just perfect. Obviously I didn't expect it to go in, but that was a big bonus. Probably by far the best bunker shot I've ever hit, though.

Q. You talked about consistency. I was just curious if you had to choose between a season in which you were consistent all year and had a lot of top-10s and top-20s versus one great week where you had a win, which one would you rather have?

LANTO GRIFFIN: I would rather have the win, obviously, but quality of life, I would take the consistent year. It's tough out here when you're missing cuts and not playing well. Everybody goes through those spurts, but it's frustrating when you finish 60th, too, because it feels like a wasted week.

Yeah, winning out here is life changing. Obviously everybody knows what it gets you, lifetime exemption Masters, PLAYERS. That's a big goal of mine. I live in Jacksonville beach, I would love to play at home. So, but to answer your question, probably take the win, but either one would be great.

Q. And just for the record, so you are eating fish and chicken, but you're still not eating red meat?

LANTO GRIFFIN: I don't eat red meat except pepperoni. Every once in a while I'll have some pepperoni on pizza. That's it, though.

Q. How tough is it when you come to the state of Texas and there's a lot of barbecue around?

LANTO GRIFFIN: I played the Latin Tour for two years and going to Argentina and not eating red meat is a sin, so people looked at me like I was crazy. Luckily, everywhere I go has good fish and chicken, so I've never gone hungry.

Q. When you and Rafa were roommates that freshman year, did you ever sit around and talk about, you know, winning on the PGA TOUR?

LANTO GRIFFIN: I mean, I think we all had those days where you have a putting contest, this is to win on Tour. We were good, but we weren't ready for this. Look at us now, we're at 31 and this is my second year and his first year. We had the perseverance, but I don't think our games were ready.

So Rafa's had a lot of success on the PGA TOUR from the Puerto Rico open, he had a top-10 here, I think he top-10ed at Hilton Head that same year. He maybe made the cut, but he's had a couple top-10s.

But no, we weren't -- I can't remember us sitting around -- we didn't go to Alabama or Texas like the young gun superstars. We were more like just staying at hotels, flying commercial, driving a lot with our team. But we had a great team, we had a great time. Rafa and I roomed together freshman year and we played all four years together, so it's cool being out here with him and seeing him every week. I think John Rollins is the other player, so we

have three players now out here, which I think is pretty cool for a university like VCU.

Q. He said he was shocked that you never won in college. Do you agree with him and why was that, do you think?

LANTO GRIFFIN: That's a good question. I'm not shocked because mentally I just wasn't comfortable in the lead. It took me, man, I think I had 15 top-5s, something like that and never got the win. I don't know, it just never happened. I think I went a couple years as a pro without winning. Obviously I learned how to do it, I won on Korn Ferry twice and I feel comfortable with the lead now. I almost feel more comfortable with the lead because you have room for error, whereas if you're in 20th, you have to make six birdies to get near the lead, whereas if you're in the lead and you make a bogey, you're still right there.

Willie Wilcox is a really good friend of mine, he's been on the PGA TOUR four or five years and he kind of taught me the mental side, how he handles the pressure, that you don't have to win. If you're up there, top-10s are great. People at home feel like if I miss a five-footer to win tomorrow, it's not like my life's over, it's still been a really good week. Thinking that way helps me take pressure off.

Now, granted, I want to win bad and when I'm in that situation it's not like I'm not trying to, but when you can play with your mind games and kind of -- kind of makes you comfortable in uncomfortable situations.

Q. About when did that, you know, switch flip for you?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Probably 2013 to 2015. Actually when I won in Uruguay on the Latinoamerica Tour, I was playing with Rafa on Sunday and we played in the final group and I think we were tied going into the final round, I can't remember.

But I won and he finished third or fourth, but it locked him up for the Web.com Tour or the Korn Ferry Tour the next year, which was huge for him. So that was a pretty special moment for us; I won the tournament and he got his card. That was a big day for me, being 10 hours flight from home and, you know, man, it's an awesome tour, but it's tough to travel. So getting a win down there was pretty emotional. That was probably one of the happiest days of my life.

Q. Was there a tournament in college where you had a big lead and you remember --

LANTO GRIFFIN: No, I didn't have a big lead, but it was our, VCU Shootout, our home tournament, and I was playing with Wake Forest and Wichita State and I had on the last hole -- we play shotgun starts, so you don't really know where you're at, but I was tied for the lead. I think I was 6 under on the day and I had like a 20-footer from the fringe, but it was a huge mud ball and it was right where my putter was hitting, so I had to kind of blade a wedge and the greens were aerified, two things you don't see on the PGA TOUR very often. I had like a two-and-a-half, three-footer downhill left to right with aerification holes and it lipped

out. I would have tied for first, which would have counted as a win.

But I don't think about that very often. It was our home tournament, so that would have been cool, but that was a long time ago.

Q. Was that freshman year?

LANTO GRIFFIN: That was I want to say either my junior or senior year.

Q. So you talked about getting the thoughts from Norman and you got a putting tip from Vijay earlier this summer. Are you hobnobbing with any other Hall of Famers at the moment?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Just got to take all the advice you can. They've been out here for so long. Vijay, I was so scared of Vijay for two years on the back range. He's an awesome guy, though. We get along great now. I just stay out of his way. Not that he ever did anything for me to be scared of him, just he's intimidating. He hits balls for 12 hours every day and works out like a 20-year-old football player. He's helped me a ton. I like to watch him practice, seeing his work ethic. Can't do anything but kind of inspire you to be like that when I don't know exactly how old he is. He's over 50 and he works harder than anybody at TPC back home.

Yeah, but that putting tip, he told me to tuck my right elbow in and I won the first week doing it. I'm not going to give him all the credit, but it helped.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Thank you, Lanto, for your time and good luck tomorrow.

LANTO GRIFFIN: Thanks a lot.