

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
November 4, 2020



LANTO GRIFFIN

JOHN BUSH: We would like to welcome our defending champion here at the Vivint Houston Open.

Lanto, take us back to 2019 when you won your first PGA TOUR title and then also your thoughts on defending that title here at a different golf course.

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, no, when I pulled up or when I got to the airport and saw the courtesy car with the Houston Open logo, it brought back a lot of really good memories. It's hard to believe it's been a year. 2020's been a wild ride for everybody and I'm just pretty happy and grateful to be back here in Houston having a chance to defend the Houston Open. It's really cool that Vivint has hopped on board supporting the event and the Tour.

New golf course this year. I would say the grass is somewhat similar to the Golf Club of Houston, but the golf course is very, very different. It's a tough golf course to learn in a week. It's got a lot of undulating -- a lot of movement around the greens. I think players will like it, it's going to be a really good challenge.

JOHN BUSH: How's the state of your game coming into the week?

LANTO GRIFFIN: It's good, I feel comfortable. I struggled at Shriners and then CJ Cup and ZOZO I played fairly well three days there and I was in the final group both weeks. It was a great learning experience for me.

One of my goals after winning the Houston Open last year was obviously not be a one-hit wonder and I wanted to put myself in contention and build off the win and I feel -- I'm proud of myself for doing that over the last year. I haven't won again, but I've had a few opportunities. Just try to build my game and experience. It's been a fun ride.

JOHN BUSH: We know you got to visit with Travis virtually at the TOUR Championship. Can you talk us a little bit about the visit you took to MD Anderson on Monday?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Yeah, so during the TOUR Championship we did a three-way, I think it was me, Leishman and I forget the other Tour player that was with us, I think it was Mackenzie Hughes, we sat with Travis and just hearing his story is pretty inspiring. He had cancer at the age of 11 and now he's cancer free and doing really well at the University of Texas. Just a really positive kid. He kind of acts like a CEO of a Fortune 500 company, just pretty -- all of his answers are pretty impressive, pretty mature kid. He's been through a lot. Seeing that perspective that he has on life going through something like he did at the age of 11 and now being cancer free, I think it's a lesson that everybody can learn from, especially

with COVID and the election and everything that's going on right now. It's nice to have a perspective like that that this kid almost died at the age of 11 and battled through cancer and MD Anderson really was there for him and still is and now he's doing great. Hopefully it's kind of a learning experience for everybody.

JOHN BUSH: Before we open it up to questions, you were the RSM Birdies Fore Love weekly winner in Houston last year en route to a second-place finish in the overall program. Can you speak to the impact those funds have had in starting the Lanto Griffin Charitable Trust?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Well, it inspired me to do it to begin with. I've always want to have a foundation or a charitable trust or have something to give back. I've had so many people throughout my career help me. When I found out Sunday night after the trophy presentation, I forget who it was, one of the media officials asked me to do a short interview and I had no idea I won \$50,000 for charity with RSM Birdies Fore Love. I couldn't believe it, it's a ton of money, and growing up in a place in southwest Virginia where \$50,000 is a lot of money.

So I immediately, my goal was to have a top 3 finish in that and I ended up finishing second and RSM donated another \$150,000 to a charity of my choice so we started the Lanto Griffin Charitable Trust and our goal is to give back to underprivileged youth in sports and also give back to families that are battling terminal illnesses.

And it's been great. We've been able to donate \$20,000 to a senior in high school to be able to go to college in my hometown. I was able to call him and give him the good news. Then we've also helped a few families that kind of out of the blue came down with terminal illnesses. Just trying to give some families hope that don't really have a whole lot at the time. Those are the two things that are important to me.

Because of COVID we had to cancel my first annual event just with all the uncertainty this summer, but in 2021 we have the date set for my first event, and I'm also hosting an AJGA event next year that's going to help raise funds. So we're taking the money that RSM Birdies Fore Love gave me and we're going to try and compound it and hopefully make as much money as possible for local charities.

Q. Lanto, welcome back.

LANTO GRIFFIN: Thank you.

Q. Good memories. So I guess you have great memories of No. 18 at the Golf Club of Houston after having horrible memories. Are you still somewhat relieved you don't have to see that hole ever again?

LANTO GRIFFIN: I just finished my pro-am with the Vivint guys and we got on the tee and they said, "So this is what an 18th hole on a PGA TOUR event looks like," and I said, "You know what..."

The 18th hole here at Memorial Park is very difficult, the green complex is crazy. It might be almost as difficult as last year at the Golf Club of Houston, but it doesn't have water all down the left. Yeah, if I had a one-shot lead coming up here, I think I would be able to breathe a little bit easier than I was last year.

Q. I've been asking the guys, how does playing in front of no fans -- you'll have a few this week -- how does that change how you feel on the golf course? Maybe kind of an odd question, you practice all the time with nobody, but even your pro-ams are going to have people around and practice rounds you'll have people around. Do you have to approach your shot preparation differently or is there any difference?

LANTO GRIFFIN: There's a big difference. I think sometimes when you're a little down, maybe you're not hitting it that well or you got off to a bad start, not having any fans there it's hard to kind of have that energy. I think a lot of players feed off the energy of the fans and the excitement, and then you can also look at when you're playing well and you've got the crowd cheering and the crowd going crazy, it's a heck of a lot of fun.

Obviously I played on mini tours for six, seven years, I played college golf, junior golf where we didn't have a whole lot of fans, so I've played a lot of golf in my life without fans, but the last couple years we've been spoiled out here or I've been spoiled to have large crowds and it's so much fun. I didn't play in Bermuda last week where they started having fans back, but I think the majority of the players are so excited to have some fans this week in Houston and hopefully get a little bit of energy going out there. That's the reason why we want to play on the PGA TOUR, we want to play in front of the big crowds and play on big boy golf courses like Memorial Park. I think everybody's excited.

Q. Kind of a quirky situation. You played your way into the Masters by winning year last year, but of course this is the Masters you played your way into, but this is the lead-in event. Have you bottled up your brain thinking about how ironic this is?

LANTO GRIFFIN: The funny part is for years and years if you won in Houston, you went to the Masters next week. The Houston Open was always before Augusta. It's ironic I won in 2019 and now I'm playing my first Masters after defending. It's different, but that's what 2020's been for everybody. There's no complaining going on here. It's been a wild ride, everybody's had to kind of adapt to a new normal this year and we're just going to roll with it.

Q. You have a chance to play in next year's Masters, right?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Luckily, yeah. I hope we have fans in April. If there's one golf tournament you want to have fans at it's Augusta because around 18 and No. 2 green and 9 green, the fans, I've watched every minute of the Masters for pretty much my whole life since I started playing golf. It's going to be weird seeing 18 without 10, 12 people deep. You think about the hill on 6 and right of the green on 16, even behind the tee box on 16 where you always see the holes-in-one, you see everybody going crazy. It's going to be weird, but at the same time

you're at Augusta National and you're playing for a Gene jacket.

Q. That's a great segue into my question. With your first Masters start just in such a weird climate, there's all these traditions that unfortunately you'll miss out on. The par 3 contest is one. We're doing a piece on that. Does it pain you that this is the one you finally get to be part of and you miss out on some of those things? Since I'm working on something specifically, who would have been your caddie at the par 3 if you had worked it through?

LANTO GRIFFIN: I'll answer the last part of the question first. Stuart Swanson, he's like a dad to me. He kind of helped raise me and he travels with me a lot, he's caddied for me a bunch. We threw a party at my home course after the Houston Open about a week and a half later and I actually presented Stu a caddie bib and gave it to him. He was going to caddie for me there. That's not going to be possible, but luckily with making it to the TOUR Championship I should be -- I'm going to be back there in April.

Hoping COVID kind of settles down and we can get back to where we can have fans and have the par 3 contest. It's weird, the par 3 contest and having -- skipping the ball over the water on 16, all those things are things that you sit back and watch during Masters week of year. It's going to be weird not having that, but at the same time you're at Augusta National playing for a green jacket. I think one thing down the road in 20, 30, 40 years you're going to look back and the first Masters was in November, the only Masters to ever be played in November. You can look at it from a different perspective. Having a Masters 2020 hat or shirt with that logo on it is going to be the only one played in November. From a positive standpoint, I guess you can look at it as kind of a unique experience that not a lot of guys are going to be able to have.

Q. I know you said not having the galleries deep on 18 will be awkward, but does it actually give a first-timer a little bit of an advantage because you do get to settle in instead of having nerves overtake you?

LANTO GRIFFIN: For me personally, I like the fans. I love seeing galleries. It frames the hole for me. I'm so used to seeing that on TV. I remember walking up No. 18 at River Highlands at the Travelers Championship on Sunday and I was probably, I don't know, the fifth, sixth, seventh to last group and there was nobody there. Two years ago I played with Rory and there were people just packed down either side. So it's different, it's not as exciting. Having the fans would be awesome and hopefully we can get them back starting in 2021.

Q. Just looking at the big picture, it's obviously been a crazy year for the Tour and for sports in general. How impressed are you with what the PGA TOUR's able to do to keep the show going week after week?

LANTO GRIFFIN: They've done an incredible job. Jay Monahan and his whole team have been -- I remember back in May or so we were -- my caddie was texting me, he was like

man, there's no way we're getting back, there's just no way with everything that was going on and other sports leagues not coming back. Jay and his team, I don't know how he could do any better personally. All the players have felt safe. From the charters to the testing, everything's gone really smooth. I haven't seen hardly any pushback. So I give the Tour and Jay -- I know they haven't slept a whole lot over the last several months, but those months from April and May, the amount of time they put into playing this out and to get us out on the golf course and to make us feel safe traveling the world.

It's not like we have a four or five game home stand where we can stay at home. We're traveling different places every week. Every city's had different rules and regulations we've had to adapt to, but it's gone incredibly smooth. There's nothing that they could have done more to help us feel safe and get back and hopefully give some of the fans at home, I know it's not the same as being at the events, but watching golf on TV but to kind of give them something to keep their mind off of what's going on.

Q. When you look at some of the guys that have broken through this year with Morikawa at the PGA, Bryson at the U.S. Open, Matt Wolff, it's almost like a new generation of stars has been born this season and the excitement the way the guys are attacking the golf course and the distance race?

LANTO GRIFFIN: Distance? Who's hitting it far? I haven't heard about this.

Q. It feels like there's a certain energy and excitement around the Tour right now from the outside looking in. Have you felt that, there's something happening on the Tour right now?

LANTO GRIFFIN: A hundred percent. What happened at the BMW with Jon Rahm, DJ made his putt and Jon made it on top of him, I couldn't -- I had an eight-footer for birdie on the 72nd hole from pin high left and it broke about eight, ten inches. When DJ had that putt, there's no way it goes in, and then Jon Rahm right on top of him, that was insane to me.

But it seems like every week there's a new story, right? What Bryson's doing is mind boggling, his golf, as far as he's hitting the golf ball. I've seen some other guys, Dylan Frittelli, I've seen him doing speed training with no golf club with the speed sticks just swinging as hard as he can. I saw Viktor Hovland yesterday testing 47, 48 inch drivers.

I mean, Bryson's bringing it up and what he's done is extremely impressive. At the same time, what he's done is not easy to do. It's not like you can just go eat 6,000 calories a day, work out and win a U.S. Open. Bryson's an incredible putter and the fact that he's as good as he is with what he's done is extremely impressive and he deserves to be rewarded for it in my opinion.

Q. You alluded to the challenges of taking the Tour to a different city every week. This year could have been a wash and instead it's been a huge success. I guess you talked about how the 2020 Masters, you're going to look back at something unique

and special. Do you think this season will be remembered as a really important one for the Tour as far as how it was able to sustain and grow in challenging times?

LANTO GRIFFIN: A hundred percent. The amount of money that we raise for charity in every market that we're at is unparalleled with any other sports league, so for us to be able to come to these cities and still be able to give charity dollars during a pandemic is huge. It's not just us we're playing for. I think we've raised over \$2 billion over the lifetime of the PGA TOUR and that touches a lot of people that need it. It's been a testament -- I mean, I can't imagine the conversations that Jay Monahan and his team have had to how are we going to do this. Bringing in Sanford Health, the testing has been spot on every week. It's really impressive what we've done. Not me, the Tour.

JOHN BUSH: Thank you for your participation, Lanto. Best of luck this week.

LANTO GRIFFIN: Awesome. Thank you.