

**ROUND 1 INTERVIEW**  
**June 9, 2023**



**JUSTIN LEONARD ( -10)**

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**Q. Justin, great playing today, new course record, 62. Just what was going working for you today and how do you feel atop the leaderboard right now?**

**JUSTIN LEONARD:** Everything was working today. I've been driving the ball very well. You know, my iron game for a few weeks wasn't as great. I found a little something the weekend of the Senior PGA and was able to go home last week and kind of really get used to that. Just something very simple in my setup and kind of getting my shoulders back a little bit.

I did, I really didn't hit a shot -- I feel like I hit every shot just about the way I wanted to today and that's pretty rare, it's obviously the goal, and then make a few putts on top of it. The greens are so good. Playing earlier today, the greens were a little bit softer. As I mentioned before, I played in the Wednesday pro-am with a bunch of hooligans -- Jocko, you're one of them -- and the greens were so firm and so fast playing late in the day, I thought this golf course was really tough. Then playing yesterday morning where it was a little bit softer, I thought OK, there might be some good scores out there.

Today I just -- I didn't play with any kind of score in mind. In fact, I got in the scoring trailer and the group that finished on 9, Tom Lehman asked me what I shot, I said I don't know. That's kind of the goal is just to get lost in the round. I was able to do that kind of on the weekend of the Senior PGA and fortunately it bridged over that two weeks into today.

**Q. Overall thoughts just on the American Family Insurance championship, Steve Stricker being the host, coming out here, just what have you seen from him and how well he's playing this year, too?**

**JUSTIN LEONARD:** Well, first, to be here in Wisconsin, I knew this tournament would get a lot of support, but I mean, the fans are great. I've got people honking at me as I'm driving down the road to get to the golf course, they see the logo on the side of the car. So people are very welcoming here.

And then I played with some of the American Family guys again on Wednesday, which was great and a real treat.

Then for Steve to throw his name coinciding with the event in his hometown, people think he's a very nice guy and I'll take their word for that, but he's great, family's great. For him to put on just -- it's no surprise it's such a great event, let's put it that way.

**Q. When you made the transition from TV back to playing a regular schedule, what was the hardest thing about that transition that you had to make to go back to**

**competing?**

**JUSTIN LEONARD:** You know, I learned a lot watching and watching the best players in the world, then trying to carry some of that into my own game. Because I'm not the longest player, I'm not a lot of things that the best players in the world are, but I certainly did learn a little bit as far as preparation, watching guys practice.

Being in Florida now, any given day I'm hitting balls next to Jessica Korda, Shane Lowry or Patrick Cantlay and I'll pick their brains and fortunately they all like to talk. So ask them about certain things, whether it's numbers they see in a launch monitor or whatever it may be. Being around, watching a lot of good players and now practicing with them, it's been fun.

The hardest part I think, though, has been just finding out what really works for me. It's taken some tinkering as far as practice, how much to practice, you know, because at 50 like you can practice too much. So finding the balance, I think, and I'm starting to get there.

**Q. How much fun -- was it a good time out there? You were having fun? When you shoot like that and everything feels good and there's a good crowd out there, fun day?**

**JUSTIN LEONARD:** Yeah, it was fun. I mean, I'm normally not much of a reactor, but 17 I made a putt and before it went in I turned around and I wanted to hear the crowd. I don't normally do stuff like that, so yeah, I was having fun.

But really this golf course, it's certainly -- there's a lot of things visually that can kind of like help you decide what's the best shot. I was able to use all those little elements, whether it's trees or slopes or whatever it may be. Yeah, it was a fun day, for sure. Much more fun than Wednesday.

**Q. When's the last time you've taken it this low and what does it take to get in the zone you were in today?**

**JUSTIN LEONARD:** I don't -- I mean, I shot a couple of 61s way back in the day, like early 2000s. And I don't play a lot with, you know, friends and stuff at home. I find myself, you know, I don't have the same real intensity during if I'm playing with, you know, a few buddies here or there or whatever it may be or even a pro-am.

So yeah, so this is probably my lowest round in 20 years or so. I'd like to think -- I'd like to think that I can put myself in this kind of state of mind, if you will, I'd like to think I can do it every day. I don't know if I'm going to hit the ball as well every day as I did today, but certainly put myself in the mindset where I'm able to do this much more often than once every 20 years.

**Q. You mentioned that you pick the brain of people that are at the top of their game on other tours. How about the guys on this tour? In the time you've been out here,**

**what have you observed about the people who have played at the highest level during this era and have you tried to incorporate any of that into how you approach the Senior Tour?**

**JUSTIN LEONARD:** I have. Talking about Steve Stricker, every week I'll find him or a lot of weeks we have dinner together and I've kind of -- I'm only -- I only allow myself to ask three questions about a golf course, about a tee shot, those kind of things.

By this point, he knows it's coming. I say, look, now this one doesn't count, this, that. Then I ask my two or three questions.

So yeah, fortunately out here I'd say the competition is still very high, but it's probably a little more friendly, if you will. We're willing to help each other whether it's look at a putting stroke.

Harrison Frazier and I, we were roommates in college and a couple weeks ago he was talking about chipping and I gave him some thoughts and ideas. I think that happens much more out here just because there is more of a casual atmosphere.

**Q. Justin, didn't you make one of your first pro starts in Milwaukee back in the day?**

**JUSTIN LEONARD:** I did. That was like kind of my rookie season in '94, yeah, yeah, I did play. And I played there I think a couple times after, yeah. It was a good spot. The custard is really good there. I'm sure it is here, too, I just don't eat that stuff anymore.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about that break you were talking about when you were going to the TV announcing role. Were you still playing on your own or with friends or whatever or did you take a more extended break from the game physically?**

**JUSTIN LEONARD:** So I stopped playing in 2016 and really the next three years or so I might have played a handful of times a year. Most of that was like corporate stuff; hey, you know, this company called and they want you for a day. I would basically go out and hit balls the day before.

I was living in Colorado and we were in -- you know, up in the mountains, so I couldn't touch a club for like six or seven months out of the year, so I played very little.

Then I think it was around, right around when I turned 48 I thought, OK, if I am going to go play, because it wasn't like, oh, yes, this is what I'm going to do, I said if I'm going to go play, I probably need to start getting back into it. And that's what I did is kind of, what would it be, summer of '20 and then '21 I worked pretty hard.

Again, I was living in Colorado, but I would go play a charity event here or there and I would get in a day early, so I'd get out once a month or so and put two or three days in. That's certainly not enough to compete at this level, but it kind of piqued my interest a bit.

Now we moved down to Florida last June, so able to go at it year round. If anything, my tendency is to over-practice. I've got to temper that and keep my eye on how many days and all that in a row.

**Q. Would you like to have been on the air this week given all the things that went on or are you glad that you're on to a different role?**

**JUSTIN LEONARD:** Well, my guess is if it was an NBC telecast, we would not be talking about anything PGA TOUR, PIF. We wouldn't be going there at all. I read a little bit of the transcripts, NBC did their kind of media stuff with the announcers and Dan Hicks and they said flat out we will not be talking about it, it's going to be about the U.S. Open and the USGA and somebody trying to win a national championship.

Now, if this was like a Live From week, yeah, that would be a busy one for sure. Yes, I'm glad I'm not doing Live From this week for sure.