

PGA Tour Champions Learning Center

VO / OC / VO > For nearly three quarters of a century, the iconic Firestone Country Club served as a beacon of outstanding golf here in Akron and all of Northeast Ohio. This past weekend at the Kaulig Companies Championship, PGA Tour Champions bid farewell. Hello everyone, and welcome to PGA Tour Champions Learning Center. I'm Vince Giuliani, and over the weekend, a 72-year run of PGA TOUR presence at Firestone Country Club came to an end as the Kaulig Companies Championship will move to Newport Beach in 2027. So in effect, it was a Firestone finale. As well as being the second to last major of the season with more our men who called the action Bob Papa and Paul Azinger.

VO > Well, thanks, Vince, and we take you to the 11th Zach Johnson leading Jimenez by four. Jimenez is in there tight for birdie. And you know if Johnson doesn't get up and down and Jimenez makes his birdie putt, he got a two-shot swing. Instead, Zach pitches in for birdie. And that got him to 14 under. Jimenez left the birdie putt short then at 16 switched to yesterday's glove and sticks the landing with his third shot Zinger.

VO > This sealed the deal. This was it. So last really scary shot. And he did that with it. That was that was it. And there's the relief sigh of relief. The birdie at 17 was really made the walk-up 18th fantastic for that.

VO > Because he had bogey 12 and 13. So now you got birdies at 16 17 and then like a champion he finishes it off pitching in for birdie. Didn't have his best stuff but he still shoots a 2-under 68 after shooting a bogey free 63 yesterday in route to the victory. So, take a look at the final leaderboard. Zach Johnson wins for the third time this year and captures his first major and has earned a spot in the Players next year. Boo weekly gets solo second. Sabbatini with that 66 a solo third. Let's hear from our champion.

OC / VO / OC > Well, first of all, I mean, I felt like I mean, I kind of said this last week, I've said this in Des Moines. I mean, I feel like I've already won. I mean, and I mean that in the sense that, like, regardless of what happens today and like my game's good scorecards are relevant. You know, I just know I'm at peace with whatever comes my way. I mean, I mean that sincerely. Well, the wedge shot and the birdie you made at 16 was, I mean, the real, real turning point, but you said you made an adjustment just before that shot. Can you tell us about it? I'm not superstitious. I'm not. I don't have any sort of, you know, superstitions of any sort. Now, that to say, it was one of those situations there where I'm like, man, I feel like there's sunscreen on my glove. So I switched to yesterday's glove and I hit a good wedge shot. Oh, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know. But at the same time that hole I actually actually executed and 17 for that matter. So, you know, it gave me some freedom on 18. And I finally hit that fairway. That was that was a that was a bonus too.

But (INAUDIBLE WORDS) and I are doing great things. My coaches and I are doing good things. I just kind of stay stay the course. Now with this win, it does get you into the next year's Players Championship. Will you add some a week to your schedule? I am, I think it's been voiced that I love this place. You know, it's kind of bittersweet if it really, truly is last year, I'm going to hope it's not. But I have a I have a very much a love for Pete Dye. I have very much a love for TPC Sawgrass. And that tournament, if they

extend the invite, I think I'll humbly accept. I'll check with the wife, but she loves it too. She's a Jacksonville girl. So amazing if it comes my way.

VO > Zach Johnson's win and Stewart Cink's fourth place finish in Akron. Keep them one and two in the Charles Schwab standings. Johnson less than a million off the pace. Boo Weekly up six spots into the top five as runner up at Firestone Country Club. What a race as July is heating up literally here on PGA Tour Champions.

OC > PGA Tour Champions officially hit the halfway mark of the season. It was a time for players to take stock in their games and to finish up strong. But what exactly are the keys to doing so? We spoke with several players and asked them to give us their definition of personal success for the second half of the 2026 campaign.

OC> Every tournament that I tee it up in I try to finish in the top 25 every tournament, you know, and so far this year I've done pretty well at that.

OC > Same as I had at the start of the season. I really I like to win. I haven't had a win before. I certainly I'd like to put myself in a position more to do that.

OC > I just want to play well, I think I think, you know, you could you could put down, you could say wins. But if you play well and get beat, what are you going to do? So I just think I'd like to play well a bit more often.

OC > I've got some things in my mental game that I really need to improve, just get lazy sometimes I think as I get older and think that I'm doing something that I'm really I've just gotten a little bit lackadaisical with it all.

OC / VO > If my body can stay and get better. I mean, I'm doing stuff in the gym, I mean, all aspects. It's not just golf like, I want to get better in the gym, work on my deficiencies there. I want to get better you know, ball striking, chipping, putting, all of it.

VO / OC > Yeah. I've had a decent season up to now. Cannot complain too much. It's been quite a lot going on, you know, been changing clubs a little bit here and there in my bag also caddies again.

OC > So far the results for four and a half years have been a little less than I thought they would be. But I'm playing good golf and it seems like it should just add up at some point.

OC > Yeah, there's a couple of venues that I really like to do well at you know, Pebble Beach is iconic, obviously. So hey, if we can squeeze a couple of wins and it'd be nice.

OC > The ultimate goal is you know, top 36 again. So I've done that a couple of years in a row. I'm on the cusp of that right now, so I'm close. So I just need to play some good golf between now and the end of the season.

OC > Senior British would be great. So can I focus in on them? You know, the game hasn't been quite there so working hard at it.

OC > It'd be getting more into contention. Certainly. You know it is. There is obviously a little bit of a Phoenix or bust kind of mentality. Surprised that I haven't gotten there in the past.

OC / VO > I'm really satisfied with what I'm playing. I just I need to get over the winning line. You know, I want to get the checkered flag, you know, so to speak. And I need to to win some tournaments. So that's my main goal is things are really coming together nicely in my game that I really want to get winning.

OC / VO > A few tournaments I kind of, you know, haven't had my heart in it or just ain't really been refused about my playing and but I hope the rest of the year that I can just finish up, like I said, finishing up top 25 and maybe throw another win in there, you know, top ten or whatever, which you can put the icing on the cake you know.

VO / OC > Getting top 10s really means that you are playing solid golf, but it's getting the trophy in your hand.

VO > When Learning Center returns. So do the blueprints for course designer Ernie Els, who continues to develop across the globe. The Big Easy invites you to Cabo, and rising PGA tour champion star George McNeill takes to Firestone to hit his swing checkpoints and perhaps yours. We listen in as George offers tips to make any player better. Or is that make better?

VO > Just as smooth as the swing of Hall of Famer Ernie Els is his pivot to a booming golf design portfolio. Els designed golf courses ranging from England to South Africa and even China. The reach soon stretches to the Baja California Peninsula and Los Cabos, Mexico, set to open in November of this year. Here's a peek at this 18-hole link style layout juttud up against the Pacific.

VO / OC > Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. One of the golfing meccas in the world. And, you know, just enjoying the summer growth season, so to speak. And then we'll open Oleada in November. Greg and the team has done a hell of a job of identifying where everything should be. You know, meeting with the rough and the natives and everything else meet each other.

VO / OC / VO > Today we're five months out to our opening in November, and we're focusing on our punch list items, cleaning up the periphery. You know, lower heights are cut. You know, the tie ins around their cart paths.

OC / VO / OC / VO / OC > Great to see all the work that's been done, bunkers, everything's been done. It's really just it's basically just growing it in now, you know, growing in the grasses the native areas keep that glean from from the fairways and some of that us. And basically just seeing what we envision.

VO / OC / VO / OC / VO / OC > We finished our construction are shaping bunkers and greens, tees, fairways. And now we're managing growing the grass. And it is challenging because of my left I have the ocean, I have the dunes and which really is pure links land. right. So, what we're managing is our salt spray. We're working with one of the newer Bermudas that's very salt tolerant. So, you know, we're pushing the envelope and that, you know, the standard we're really trying to achieve is, you know, it isn't equal to the other courses. We want to have our greens to be the best in Cabo and Mexico. Right. It's

just not a status quo. You know, right now we're 85%. But Ernie, you know, the next few months are crucial to get to that 100%.

OC / VO / OC / VO / OC / VO / OC > I believe the view is and people interested will come and see the type of land we have there. You know, we have basically where the clubhouse and the and the range and the, you know, the first, 10th and ninth and 18th also is really where the cactus land is, you know, the desert, you know, and then the desert land meets the dune, you know, the sand down by the beach and obviously the holes down by the beach. We really wanted to to keep it as natural as possible and really just move a bit of dirt to the and, and put grass on top. That was kind of the plan, you know, and and it's really worked out that way. We just moved some of the dunes around and created greens and fairways and and and tee boxes obviously. And you know, that's what it is. It's just as natural as we can be.

VO > George McNeal is part of a stellar rookie class on PGA Tour Champions, and is making his way among the tour's elite seven top tens and 11 events entering Firestone and a third at the U.S. Senior Open, giving him a steady climb into the top ten in the Charles Schwab standings. We went up close with McNeill in Akron and looked into his recipe for success. From drives to divots.

OC > So it's kind of like yesterday when we drove, we wanted to see if you can get it up and go at the corner of the fairway. Okay. Are you good with that or. Yeah. No, this is fine. So just keep it up the left. Yeah.

OC / VO / OC / VO / OC / VO / OC > Tom and I obviously were talking about what's a better angle on the fairway and stuff this slopes way. Right. So I'm trying to keep it up the left. I'm just picking a spot about ten feet in front of me and just trying to hit that spot. I'll hit foul balls and we all will. So yeah, trying to keep it simple. I've always been a field player. I'd say my pretty much my career. The last few years I've started paying attention to more where my hands are, where my clubhead is, where my shaft angle is with pertaining to the swing arc and everything else, and trying to be conscious of that. My my tendencies are to get steep, and I know that I've always done that. So I'm aware of what's going on. If I, if I start seeing divots that are a little deeper, going more left versus square. So I'm trying to pay attention to that. Two all the way to pin. Yeah. So wedge. I do this on about every hole I look down and see watch my divot. I'll obviously hit the shot. I'll come back and I'll look see where it's divots going pertaining, you know with where I was think I was aiming, how deep it is, how shallow it is angle whether it's going right, left, you know, a square. To me that's a pretty good divot. We're on a little bit of a downslope. So in the ball a little below my feet. So I was aiming a little more left trying to play for that shot coming off the hill. And it's not super deep and it's not going to far left. So for me that was a pretty good shot a pretty good swing if I get steep. I know a lot of times it's because of my set or not really my setup, but the way I clear the ball when I clear my left hip back and out, that drops the club down and shallows it out when I get stuck and I slide too much when my left hip going left and forward and then my hip comes forward like that. Then I get steep, I stand up, the club stands up, and so I'll go. I'll get up here and my hip will come forward like this. Then I have to stand the club up and it gets real steep and the divots going hard left. When I get to the top and my left hip clears this way, kind of my my butt or my left cheek kind of clears back and out of the way. Then the club can just drop down and it clears this way and the club will shallow

out on its own. Just again, the body takes over and it'll shallow out. And the club, usually the ball comes out kind of where I'm looking.

OC > This guy's a divot fiend. Yeah I like yeah I go, you know, well you go out, watch this. How you put it back to, you know, all these guys always heard when I was playing all these pros, all had a bunch of laughs. He loves the banks.

OC > Well, I take a big chunk out of the earth and it goes out and you'll put it back again. Immediate satisfaction. You get it back. You're going all right. It's nice. Nice to new again.

VO > So still to come on Learning Center setting you up on the Senior Open and Open Championship through the eyes of a player who has won both. Darren Clarke offers a firsthand preview and his fondest memories in victory. Some of those memories a bit fuzzy.

VO > By now, you know. Padraig Harrington is built for majors, coming off his third U.S. Senior Open win in his last champ start. Patty returns to the tour next week in the Senior Open as he defends the title he won at Sunningdale. Harrington's 16 under total and three shot victory made him the fifth player ever to win both a senior Open and Open Championship.

VO > Next week's Senior Open stop Gleneagles King's course in Scotland. It will mark the 39th playing of the event, where host Gleneagles opened in 1924, will again play to a par 70 over just under 6900 yards. It has also played host to a Ryder Cup, Solheim Cup and DP World Tour events. When last the legends visited, it was a major to remember.

VO > This was the Senior Open played back in 2022, when Padraig Harrington was edged by a former Ryder Cup teammate who preceded him as a Double Open winner. Darren Clarke's one stroke victory was his only win of the season, but it came an impressive style as neither rain nor the pressure of the finish prevented a two-putt birdie at the last and two hands on the jug.

OC / VO > It is that time of year, time for the Senior Open and the Open Championship and we have Darren Clarke. You must take great pride in that to win both.

VO / OC > When you make records and especially when you join the list of the people that I joined winning the the Open and the Senior Open. You know, a pretty, pretty special thing.

VO > Describe what it's like to compete in those events.

VO / OC > Well, the Open Championship to me, obviously being Irish and over that part of the world, The Open Championship is the biggest, best tournament in the world. You know, we've got all the other special majors and everything but the Opens, the one. When I was a young kid practicing at home in Dungannon, you know, thinking this five-footer to win the Open, it was never to win the Masters, never to win the U.S. open, the U.S. PGA or whatever it was always to win the Open. And, you know, it's always been a very special tournament for me. I've had chances to win before and then could never quite do it. But then I managed to get over the line in 2011 and my Claret Jug, my replica sits at in Royal Portrush Golf Club on the way in there. That's where it is. If I added home would have been a draw, someone wouldn't be out anywhere. So it's in a in

the Cabinet at Royal Portrush when they walk in, all the visitors said. So the Claret Jug there and then the senior, the senior open jug is sitting right beside it. So it's a pretty good thing when I do go back there and walk into the Royal Portrush and see them both sitting there.

OC / VO > That's very cool. You mentioned 2011. That's when you win The Open Championship. 11 years later, you win the Senior Open, which had the most impact on you at that point in your life, would you say?

VO / OC > It's a pretty good question, Vince. You know, it always. I played in so many majors and contended in quite a few of them, but then actually do it and win The Open Championship. And it just it was a dream and it was the one that I was able to to win. I would have liked to have won more, but unfortunately I didn't play well enough to do that. But I won the one that I really wanted. And then as soon as I turned 50, you know, one of my first things was always thinking about winning the senior bracelet would be pretty cool to have the pair. So, you know, the The Open Championship will always be, you know, the biggest and the best. But to actually fulfill another thing that I really wanted to do and win the Senior open to go on top of the The Open Championship, was there both very special. It's hard to differentiate them, but if it was Royal St. George's would be a little bit more.

OC > It's just like children, right?

OC > Yeah, exactly. Exactly. They're all the same.

OC > So the Senior Open returns to Gleneagles where you won kind of handicap it for us there. What can we expect?

OC / VO / OC > It depends what the weather is going to be like. It's more. It's more. It's when we're playing the King's course, which is old school sort of heathland, the sort of different, really firm, hard turf. If the conditions are good, it's a one with you got to drive away, you got to drive well most weeks. But if you start missing fairways around Gleneagles, you're you're going to have no chance. So you got to keep in the way. You gotta you gotta drivable par four there on is it 14 I think it's 14 which a lot can happen to two three shot swings could happen there and then. Then a good finish 18 par five you got to miss those two cross bunkers three cross bunkers and give yourself a chance. But it's a beautiful Gleneagles really is a very special place. So to be able to go back there and play in the tournament again is going to be a fun week.

OC > And you'll be headed to Royal Birkdale, right, for The Open Championship. So break, break that one down for us too.

OC / VO/ OC > Yeah well going to Birkdale so it's a while since I've played Birkdale. So we leave here in Sunday night and fly over to Dublin and Dublin over to over Hoylake I'm sorry over to Manchester and then the Royal Birkdale. So again looking forward to it. Flew down with Pdraig last week from, from Dick's up in Endicott down to two last week to say (INAUDIBLE WORDS). And he did a corporate there there a couple of weeks ago and he said everything you got to lay up short of all the trouble is really taking driver out of your hands. So you're going to have a lot of second shots from 180 to 220.

And so that would be a number that certainly I'll be looking to practice this week. And you know, you know what Padraig like he thinks a lot. Unbelievable player. But he thinks a lot too. So if he's saying you need to be good at 180 to 220, you need to be good from 180 to 220. So we shall see.

OC > You can bank on it. Players must expect, though, that there are going to be certain weather conditions that can be adverse. So I mean, you go in there accepting that. How do you embrace that?

OC > Yeah, well it's links golf. And that's what that's what happens. You're going to have you're going to have maybe one good side of the draw, one bad side of the draw. If you get in the bad side, it's going to be tough. And when the tide changes, that's when the wind changes. So it's it's all to do with that as well. And I briefly looked at the forecast, glanced at it, didn't really look at the winds, but I think it's going to be temperatures are going to be nice in the mid 70s had the high 70s. So it's going to be a nice week. But a golf course like a links when it does get dry and firm and (INAUDIBLE WORDS) makes it even harder to hit the fairways. And the fairways are narrow from what I've been told. So it's going to be a lot of, let's say, irons off the tees positional play to try and keep it on the fairway and go from there.

OC > And lastly, can you share with us a story from any Open experience off the course that took place?

OC > 2011 was a pretty drunken evening after I managed to win. That's pretty well documented, but the rest of the week was as well, so I tended to have a I tend to enjoy myself that week.

OC > Well, they say if you can remember it, it wasn't that good a party right.

OC > Well, I can only remember vague parts of it, but it was good.

VO > Best of luck to Clarky and all the competitors at Gleneagles. But this is a time to congratulate our major winner in Akron. With that, we bid farewell from the Buckeye State. I'm Vince Giuliani. Thank you for watching. And soon it's major mode again in Scotland.