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THE ACE GROUP



CLASSIC

HOSTED BY

Peter Jacobson

An Interview With:

LANNY WADKINS

PHIL STAMBAUGH: Obviously you're feeling a lot better than you have the last two years only playing in five Tournaments. But a couple of weeks ago you had a fusion on your back and you're in good shape. Naples is a special place for you as won your first Champions Tour event in your first start on Tour here. Please talk about coming back and the state of your game.

LANNY WADKINS: Well it's nice to be back! The state of my game is... I don't know. I haven't played in a Tournament since last April when I play Legends with my brother and at that point of time I probably shouldn't have been playing golf... I couldn't walk or play. I tried to play a couple of rounds with my boys but never finished the rounds... it just got worse and worse. On August 20th I had a double fusion where they put rods and screws in my back... actually went in through the front and put the apparatus in decompressing more nerves. I had a neuron surgeon Rob Dickerman of Dallas and orthopedic Scott Blumenthal of Dallas did the procedure. I was on the operating table for 6 ½ hours for this thing... it was quite an ordeal. I had a fatty cyst on the back of my neck... usually they are encapsulated and they split it and it comes out like a hardboiled egg and no big deal. Well they went to take it out during the surgery. It ended up taking him an hour and a half to get that out of there. It had wrapped around my trapezius muscle. I hadn't been able to turn my head to left in the last 15 years and now I can go all the way around which I haven't done in

20 something years. It came out the size of a softball. The toughest thing I had to heal up was the hole in the top of my back. Mindboggling! I don't wake up in the morning with headaches... getting old sucks. Getting old is not for sissies.

Q. John Cook was in talking about Tiger and his being golf ready. Are you golf ready? Ready to play three or four or five days in a row?

LANNY WADKINS: Yeah... I'll have some fun doing it. My attitude is better than it normally is because I'm excited to be out of the house and out here playing golf. I've been laughing at bad shots which I've never done. It's a little different for me. Am I golf ready to win? No... I don't even know what my expectations are. I'm hitting some good shots but it's just been too long. You have to understand I didn't start hitting full shots until January 1st. Then I was stuck in Dallas with a design project in southwest Texas. Then you get catch up in bad days in Dallas you don't hit balls for three or four days. It's not like I've been in Florida where I could do it every day at my leisure. I came down ten days ago and stayed down here for a while and was thinking I would play last week but didn't get in. I went back and did a voice over for a Nike commercial that they are doing on Tiger's return to the Tour.

Q. What were your lines?

LANNY WADKINS: It was varied... I'm not sure which one they are using. It is a cute one! It will be cute... about a 60 second spot.

Q. Where did you play ten days ago?

LANNY WADKINS: I came down to visit a friend a buddy of mine that lives in Boca and we played Pine Tree a lot, played Seminole and the Floridian in east coast Florida. Tuesday I dropped my stuff



of at a friend's house before tapping the Tiger commercial and came back Friday night... have been here the past few days. Played Mediterra and here twice already.

Q. I remember a couple of years ago, when you won the Tournament here, you stayed with friends at Pelican Bay?

LANNY WADKINS: Yeah... Buddy Wilt lived over on the beach just south of the Ritz Carlton in a high rise. I'm staying with some other friends this year that live over at Mediterra.

Q. After the first couple of failed back surgeries where you coming to terms that you may not be playing golf competitively again?

LANNY WADKINS: I didn't know... I kept thinking I was going to but things didn't get well. My wife would wake up in the middle of the night looking for me and would find me using the living room and sleeping on the floor with my legs propped up on the sofa. The leg pain was excruciating... the only relief I got was sitting down. Which now is the opposite... sitting down bothers me more than it did before. Now I feel better standing, walking, moving. I haven't walked around with golf in three years. I did walk Seminole last week. I am excited about walking.

Q. How did you find the people that did your back surgery? How did you arrive at getting them to do all this?

LANNY WADKINS: I had been seeing a chiropractor in Dallas. I've always had adjustments my whole life growing up. I'm one of those people that believe in chiropractor care and he recommended the neuro surgeon that I went to see. Once I got with Doctor Dickerman he enlisted Doctor Blumenthal who is the orthopedic and they did the surgery together on August 20th.

Q. I was talking with Trevino yesterday and he said he had talked to you about what he had done?

LANNY WADKINS: When Dickerman did the first surgery he wanted to do the procedure but there wasn't enough bone there from my previous procedure to do what Lee had done. Had he been able to do that it would have prevented the final surgery done recently. Doctor Blumenthal is with

the same group in Dallas, Texas Back Institute that Lee had worked with. We communicated a lot. He was gimping around and he said you look better than I do... I've lost some weight and eaten crappy food.

Q. Are you going to try and play a full schedule if you stay healthy?

LANNY WADKINS: Yeah... I'd like to play, that's what I have planned. I've entered here, L.A., Capa Canna. My exempt status is in question because I haven't played enough on TV and not having played out here a couple of years. I actually have a sponsor exemption to play this week which is amazing that I'm exempt from the regular Tour but not out here but that's the way it is looking... so, we'll see what happens. I hope to play in L.A., Cap Canna and Legends with Bobby. I'm not going to play Outback in Tampa because my oldest boy plays for Wake Forest and they have the ACC Championship that week and I want to see him play. I don't know Tucker's schedule... my 16 year old is a big time player too. Travis is going to summer school so that frees me up a bit. I know I'm going to play Senior PGA and I'd love to play Senior British Open at Sunnydale. I plan on playing as much as I can.

Q. Your doctor said you were surprised at how quickly you healed. What is he telling you on the chances of you getting through the year?

LANNY WADKINS: He said its fine... once it is solid it shouldn't cause any problems. He said keep your weight down and do exercises which I do every morning on the floor half an hour stretching and exercising and strengthening my core. Right now I feel fine. It looks fine. I've been playing every day... I played 27 holes the other day at the Floridian.

Q. Will you be walking or using a cart at all this week?

LANNY WADKINS: Since I don't know what's going on I'm going to have my caddie take a cart so I have an option to sit down when I want or use it to stretch. It's not the back but the support muscles around it that aren't where they need to be because I haven't been playing golf. I've done



a lot of rehab but it's hard to replicate the golf swing.

Q. I think you won your first Champions Tour event here but haven't won since. Are you surprised how tough it is to win out here?

LANNY WADKINS: Yeah... these guys are competitive. I look at the difference after doing TV... this whole Tour plays to win. They are not out here to win checks but win Tournaments and with three round Tournaments they approach it with a sprint with no hold back. You don't have room for a round that is not solid. I've won on the regular Tour shooting 75 in the first round and won by three shots one year. I've shot 76 in the third round in the Players and won by five. You can do stuff like that in four rounds and get away with it but you just can't do that here. I've seen guys like Larry Nelson and Jim Thorpe use drivers on holes you shouldn't taking the approach if it's my week I'm going to drive it in the fairway or there's always next week. It's kind of cool... everybody plays this thing to win from the get go. The first day if you don't shoot 68 you feel like you're in a hole.

