

POWER POP

For tips on how to rip it like Rocket Man Cam Champ, turn to our Best Lessons 2020 blowout on p. 75.



The Giving Tee

It's Payback Time

Lessons were learned early and often, from his mother and father and "Pops," about how to play—and how to make a difference. Now, there's no separating Cameron Champ the golfer and the giver.

By Ryan Asselta

IT WAS 1:30 A.M. and Cameron Champ paused outside the door of his grandfather's bedroom, holding a wine barrel in his arms.

Eight hours earlier he'd pulled off the improbable, winning last September's Safeway Open in Napa, Calif., just 65 miles from where his grandfather Mack was in hospice care, nearing the final stages of his battle with stomach cancer. Knowing "Pops" was likely in his last days, it was a tournament Cam had no plans of competing in. It wasn't until Wednesday of tournament week, after some convincing from his wheelchair-bound grandfather, that he decided to tee it up.

"Leading up to the tournament, I'd hit one ball in four days," says Cam, who put together rounds of 67 and 69 on the weekend to win by one stroke. Now here he stood cradling Safeway's wine-barrel-style trophy, ready to share the win with the man who helped shape him.

"We showed up, and Pops was laying on the ground, which was a little more comfortable for him than his bed," Cam recalls. "He was wide awake. Somehow, he had stayed up the whole day with my grand uncle Glidel and watched the entire tournament. I'm like, 'Pops, we did it! Here's the trophy!' And he says, 'Well, that's what you should be doing!'"

Replaying the night, Cam laughs. "Such an awesome, awesome response."

Mack Champ passed away at age 78,



At the '19 Cameron Champ Foundation Classic in Sacramento, Pops was enveloped by family and friends. A week later, Cam won the Safeway Open. A month later, Pops had passed.

less than a month after his grandson's win—the second Tour victory of his young career. But he has always been, and continues to be, Cam's greatest influence. It wasn't only a love of golf that Pops—and Cam's parents Jeff and Lisa—instilled in the kid. It was a charitable heart.

As a junior golfer, Cam's name and game were well known in the Sacramento area, where the family had its roots. This was especially true at Foothill Golf Course, the track where Cam learned to play. "My mom and dad would literally just drop me off," he remembers. "They'd give me a little pushcart, and I'd play 18, then go into the pro shop and use the phone to call them to come get me."

Locals had heard about the monster drives this 10-year-old could unleash—so much so that he'd be invited to fundraising tournaments, where golfers would donate money for every tee shot Cam smashed for their team.

In 2019, Cam and his family took over management of Foothill as a way to give back to Sacramento. And through his eponymous foundation, launched in 2018, he's started an after-school program for kids at the course.

"Our main focus is mentorship and schooling," says Cam, who's helped design a program where kids can earn time on the golf course through academic achievement and community service. "We give them somewhere to go to have fun with other kids, to get help with

homework and to play. Golf and other sports are part of it, but not all of it."

More recently, Cam decided to use his own "big break" moment to fuel his next charitable venture. As a teen, he stayed close to home when competing in junior tournaments. "I played up in age groups until I was 12," he says. "As I got older, my family and I would drive maximum an hour to play in a tournament, maybe stay one night. But we couldn't afford to play at the elite national level." That changed in 2011, when Cam was 15.

Jeff Champ grew up playing Little League with PGA Tour caddie John Wood, who, in 2011, was looping for Hunter Mahan. Mahan, a six-time Tour winner, annually hosts some of the country's top young talent at an American Junior Golf Association tournament in Plano, Texas. Familiar with Cam's game and his family's financial challenges, Wood convinced Mahan to give the free-swinging kid an

exemption. Cam finished in a three-way tie atop the leaderboard, ultimately earning a T-2 after a two-hole playoff.

“I always look back on that: John asking Hunter for that invite,” he says. “If I don’t get that, who knows what would have happened?”

His showing in Texas (along with an AJGA Ace Grant) gave Cam access to junior golf’s national stage. It also caught the eye of swing coach Sean Foley. “I’d never seen anyone at 15 hit the ball that far,” Foley recalls. With Foley’s guidance, Cam blossomed into a two-time high school All American before earning a scholarship to play at Texas A&M—despite never having won a national junior tournament. Now 25 and in his second season on Tour, Cam holds close the lessons he learned as a kid—and an especially hard one he took away from his grandfather’s passing. “I’ve figured out perspective,” he says. “There’s a lot more to life than just golf.”

With the same exhilarating speed that powers his swing, Cam has turned that insight into action. This year, he’s launching the inaugural Mack Champ Invitational, which will offer junior golfers from diverse backgrounds a chance to play in a premier tournament. The event, a tribute to his grandfather’s legacy, was set to be played in March in Cam’s adopted hometown of Houston, but it’s now tentatively scheduled for fall. Do the seismic cultural shifts sparked by George Floyd’s death give new meaning to the event?

“No,” Cam says. “It’s a real problem, and a difficult one for a lot of people to talk about. I’m glad people *are* discussing it and improving their understanding of the issues and what needs to change. The tournament itself has the same meaning for us—it’s always been about the importance of creating equality of opportunity and inclusion in our game. The goal is to help all kids in need, no matter what color their skin is.”

He adds, “I just want to give them the same help I’ve received over the years.”

Somewhere, Mack Champ is saying “Well done.” Or, Pops being Pops, “That’s what you should be doing!”



All Talk

Retief Goosen

THE MAGNIFICENTLY CHILL SOUTH AFRICAN AND TWO-TIME U.S. OPEN WINNER RIFFS ON HIS TOP TWOSOMES

GOLF: What are your two favorite U.S. Open venues? Are you partial to Southern Hills and Shinnecock, where you won in '01 and '04?

Retief Goosen: Southern Hills and Shinnecock have changed dramatically since my wins, so it’s difficult to comment on their current designs. Pinehurst No. 2, a semi-links, is a truly unique course—very natural looking with its waste areas and, obviously, especially challenging around the greens.

G: Two favorite courses in South Africa?

RG: The Gary Player Country Club at Sun City is a great course at a great resort. Polokwane Golf Club was my home course growing up and where it all started. My family are still members and I enjoy going back there when I’m visiting.

G: Two favorite pieces of golf gear?

RG: I like how my Callaway Chrome Soft X golf ball performs. It’s very good off the driver, and I can control it into the green—it does what I want it to do. And the ball speed on my Callaway Mavrik 3-wood is outstanding, plus it’s a versatile club. I can rely on it off the tee and for a lot of different shots.

G: Two favorite pre-round warm-up drills?

RG: I focus on flexibility in my hamstrings and glutes, always stretching those, and walking on a treadmill for a few minutes before starting my range warm-up. I also use a few light weights to activate my arm muscles prior to making any swings.

G: Two tips for staying calm and collected under pressure?

RG: I always try to stay focused on what’s ahead of me on the course and on the shot itself rather than on the situation. Another key is to make sure I stay hydrated and snack on the course. I’ve always believed having food in your system helps with concentration.

G: Two favorite swing thoughts?

RG: I really only have one thought, which is to focus on swinging smoothly, because, generally, your swing speeds up under pressure. —*Josh Sens*