

# Covina resident tees off on Tour

## *Mind Really Matters*

By Larry Morgan , Staff Writer

**Chris Anderson** had just bogeyed the par-3 17th hole at PGA West's Stadium Course, when he threw his ball into the water that surrounds the island green.

It was the second-to-last hole of the PGA Tour's final stage of qualifying school for Anderson, who was well on his way to earning playing privileges on this year's tour. He turned, let the ball fly and missed a large rock by no more than a couple of inches.

"That could have come back and hit me and knocked me out,' he said with a grin. "That would have been a good story, huh?"

An even better story is about to unfold today in Honolulu, where the Covina resident will play in the PGA Tour's \$4.5 million Sony Open. Anderson will tee off on the first hole of Waialae Country Club at 10:24 a.m. along with fellow "Q" school survivors Joel Kribel and Vance Veazey.

His appearance will mark not only the end of 10 years of frustration and heartache, but the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. No longer will the 32-year-old Anderson have to settle for minitour events and wonder if he could compete with the best players in the world on a regular basis.

Now he has that chance.

"It's not like I want to beat Tiger Woods,' he said. "I just want to see where my game measures up. I'll find that out."

His friends, understandably, are elated over his status as a full-fledged member of the tour.

"The guy has worked hard and really applied himself the last few years,' said Covina's Steve Novarro, a neighbor of Anderson and aspiring touring pro. "You like to see your friends succeed."

"I know he really wants to do well, and I know he will do well."

"It's kind of a thrill of a lifetime,' said Anderson's close friend, Mike Jack, head professional at Vista Valley Country Club. "I'm a golf professional too, and I know a lot about what it's like to go through that grind and work at it for so long."

"The timing is right."

Anderson wishes the break would've come sooner.

"I've never been a bright kid,' he said with a laugh. "It takes me a while to figure some stuff out."

Anderson still isn't sure what prompted this breakthrough. He is no stranger to top-level golf he has played in the U.S. Open and competed on the Nike and Canadian tours but something always held him back from getting the maximum out of his game.

His wife, Jennifer, who turned 29 on the day Chris got his tour card, always wondered, too. So did Chris' mother, Terrie, who even suggested he see a sports psychologist. Chris, though, was not in the mood to see someone his wife joked was "some flowery therapist" and talk about himself.

But something had to be done. It was late in 2001 when Anderson failed to advance through the second stage of qualifying school and quit the game. He went to work at his father's company, which sells fork lifts and industrial equipment. He had no interest in playing again.

His wife, though, had other ideas. She had been through the disappointment of Monday qualifying efforts and the drudgery of one- and two-day Golden State Tour events. It's not that she didn't enjoy having her husband at home, but she admitted she was getting "antsy.'

"We had gotten into some arguments about it,' Jennifer said. "He had paid his dues for so many years, but he wasn't playing at all not even on the weekend with his dad. I was getting frustrated and I thought, 'We have to do something here.'

"I was really afraid of him quitting. I thought he was really, really done, but I wasn't ready to throw in the towel.'

She started researching sports psychologists on the Internet and came across Dr. Patrick Cohn of Orlando, Fla. Cohn had done post-graduate studies at Cal State Fullerton and had worked with a number of professional athletes, including Brad Elder and Brian Gay, who had developed into two of the PGA Tour's more consistent performers.

Jennifer went so far as to book a plane ticket to Orlando without telling her husband, pack his suitcase and tell him what was going on. Chris, naturally, was skeptical of the idea.

"It was like, 'Yeah, we're going to talk for five hours," he said. "I would say, 'Talk for five hours? I don't talk to anybody for five hours.' After I did see him, we got to maybe a third of what we wanted to do in that time.

"I always thought I could do it myself. Then you see all of your friends get on tour and have success and you're thinking, 'I kicked that guy's (butt). I'm way better than that guy.' But the fact was, they were out there and I was playing a minitour event. I always thought I needed one kind of an adjustment ... I was always looking for one thing to bump me up to the next level.

"Hopefully, I found it.'

What Anderson discovered, with Cohn's help, was that he was a perfectionist. That helps explain why, during his younger days of BMX bicycle racing, he once refused to accept a second-place trophy.

"I was striving for perfection instead of excellence, which is a huge deal,' Anderson said. "And you're never going to be perfect playing this game. I had always wanted it to look good, feel good and sound good. Everything had to be right.

"I remember in one tournament I hit a wedge to a couple of feet, and I was (angry) that I didn't hit it real solid. But the shot turned out great.

"Good players seem to get it around no matter how bad or good they hit it. They get the most out of their game, and I wasn't. I'd hit it well and shoot 71. I'd hit it bad and shoot 76. I could never turn those 76s into 72s, or those 71s into 67s.'

His swing had become more efficient with the help of South Hills Country Club head pro Wade Berzas. Anderson had eliminated his tendency to lift his club on the takeaway, which often resulted in a troublesome tilt on the downswing, but he was particularly anxious to test his new mental approach.

He finally did in last September's State Farm Open at Empire Lakes Golf Course, where he tied for 16th. But it wasn't until the next week's Buy.com Tour event in Monterey that he noticed a telling difference in his game.

"I couldn't have hit it worse for two days,' he said. "I missed the cut, but only by a shot. I knew if I could play that badly and still just miss the cut, I'd be OK.'

He got through the first stage of "Q' school in Pensacola, Fla. and then the second stage at Oak Valley Golf Club, despite a bad back. From there, it was on to the grueling final stage at PGA West but Anderson was ready.

He later admitted all he wanted that week was to stand on the tee of the final two holes on the last day with plenty of cushion to get his tour card. He did bogey the par-3 17th, but he ripped one of his best drives of the tournament on the par-4, 460-yard 18th hole and got an easy par.

He wound up getting his card by an impressive seven shots.

His wife admitted she "lost it" as family members, including their 3-year-old daughter Madeline, and friends watched him walk up the final fairway.

"It was six days, three practice days and 10 years of going through this process," she said. "When you've been doing it for as long as we have, and taken such a different road than some of the other younger guys ... maybe it means a little more. Maybe the emotional stakes are a little higher.

"I couldn't have asked for a better day."

Anderson tied for second and won \$35,000, but the spoils of victory are much more rewarding than collecting a nice check.

"The best thing about the last year or two is, he's starting to trust what he's doing," Berzas, said. "To stand on the tee of the 108th hole at 'Q' school, with water all down the left side, and hit one of the best drives of the week ... it's amazing what these players go through, how they have to peak their game three times in two months, basically.

"What a thrill this is for him."

But the thrill is just beginning.

Anderson said he is exempt for pretty much all of the tour's West Coast swing, with the exception of Phoenix (which has a reduced field), and he still finds his new status a little hard to believe.

"Before it was, 'What tour are you playing on again?'" he joked. "That's the way it should be. This is the elite of the elite and it's special for a reason. It's hard to get there and hard to stay there.

"I would have given my right arm to play in a tour event last year. Now, I have to pick and choose what \$4 million event I don't want to play in."

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