



Lewis Chitengwa conducting a "Champions for Kids" clinic in 1994

Remembering Lewis

By Mike Moraghan

Lewis Chitengwa would have turned 50 on January 25. I can't picture him as a 50 year-old. In my mind he'll forever be a humble and kind young man, and an incredibly talented golfer, one of a handful of extraordinary players who emerged in the early 1990s. I knew Lewis for a little more than eight years, and they were really good years, until the summer of 2001 when at age 26 he died during the Edmonton Open.

In 1992, I was coaching the golf team at the University of Virginia, and doing my best to bring the world's greatest players to Charlottesville. Like every other coach in the country, I'd been pursuing Tiger Woods, the best junior golfer in history. It was widely known that he was a good student who announced in eighth grade that he would go to Stanford. But man, he was so good I had to at least try to get him interested in Virginia.

I watched Tiger play eight full rounds of golf in the summer of 1992, and began writing to him on September 1, the date the NCAA designated as the first day a coach could correspond with a high school junior.

The kid was phenomenal. Of the eight rounds I witnessed, he had no bogeys in four of them, including a 66 in the second round of the U.S. Amateur at Muirfield Village that was a masterpiece of four birdies, one eagle and thirteen tap-in pars. At Pinehurst I saw him win the 72-hole Insurance Youth Classic by 17 shots. There the final round was brutal with constant rain and wind that pushed the average score to around 77, but Tiger, in an amazing display of focus and concentration, was in the middle of every fairway, hit every green in regulation, and shot 69 with 15 pars and 3 birdies.

That summer he also won four AJGA titles and the U.S. Junior for the second year in a row, so when it came time for the Orange Bowl Junior at the end of December, it was a forgone conclusion as to who would win. The only real question was who would finish second.

But on December 30, the day Tiger turned 17 years old it was Lewis Chitengwa blowing out the candles on the 1992 season.

WOODS UPSET IN FINAL OF ORANGE BOWL JUNIORS

By Harvey Fialkov, Special to the SunSentinal
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CORAL GABLES -- Unheralded Lewis Chitengwa of Zimbabwe upstaged Tiger Woods, America's top junior golfer, on his birthday by winning the Orange Bowl Junior Championship Wednesday at the Biltmore Golf Course.

Chitengwa, Woods and Gilberto Morales of Venezuela entered the final round tied at 211. But only Chitengwa was able to shoot par (71) to finish at 2-under 282, three strokes better than Woods (74-285), who edged Spain's Oscar Sanchez (70-285) in a playoff for second place. Morales dropped to fourth (75-286).



Lewis Chitengwa wins the 1992 Orange Bowl Junior by 3 shots over Tiger Woods

Everyone had heard of Morales and Sanchez, but who was this “unheralded Lewis Chitengwa” from Zimbabwe? With a little research, coaches soon discovered that Lewis’ Orange Bowl victory was no fluke. He’d already won the Zimbabwe Men’s Amateur, and was being highly recommended by renowned instructors Wally Armstrong and David Leadbetter.

It wasn’t easy to track Lewis down. No one had cell phones or email back then, and the Chitengwas didn’t have a landline at their home in Zimbabwe. It took more than a month before we were able to establish regular contact, a weekly phone call to a family friend’s office in Harare, the nation’s capitol, every Thursday at 11:00am “Zim time” (4:00am in Virginia!).

We'd established a good rapport by March of 1993 when in one of our calls Lewis informed me he'd just won the Zimbabwe Amateur for the second year in a row, this time by 7 shots. After a good bit of time talking about his latest victory, I asked, *"So what's next on the schedule? You got anything coming up in the next couple of weeks?"*

The excited banter with which Lewis had been describing his second Zim Amateur win turned serious. His tone changed, as if he was sharing an important secret, and there was determination in his voice.

He said, *"I am going to South Africa."*

I knew enough about South Africa to know that it was still an apartheid country, not just unfriendly to black people but downright oppressive. The country reeked of institutional racism, resettlement camps with miserable conditions that millions of blacks were forced into, and treated like cattle. South Africa was a pariah shunned and boycotted by democratic nations, and it was only slowly, grudgingly beginning to change. The world's most inspiring political prisoner, Nelson Mandela had finally been released from prison after 27 years confined to a cell, but real change in the racist apartheid system of government, including free elections had yet to occur.

My words came slowly as thoughts turned from golf to basic safety, *"Lewis? Why are you going to South Africa?"*

"I am going to play in their national championship."

Another pause. Back to golf.

"Lewis? What do you think the South Africans will say, when a skinny black kid from Zimbabwe comes in and wins their national championship?"

He actually laughed before replying with his customary humility.

"Oh, Coach Moraghan, you know this is a very difficult tournament. 72 holes of stroke play just to make match play. 32 will qualify and then it's two matches each day with a 36-hole final. And many good players. A very, very strong field. I will do well just to make match play."

It was about two years after that conversation, as a college freshman taking English 101, that Lewis and his classmates were given an assignment: Write an essay about the greatest day in your life.

There was the necessary preamble, the events leading up, before Lewis could get to his "greatest day." He described his arrival at the East London Golf Club, being told by a guard that he couldn't enter the clubhouse. The guard, assuming the black kid couldn't possibly be a tournament player, telling him, *"Caddies can't come in here, you go around back."*

He described the 45 mph wind gusts that plagued the third and fourth rounds of stroke play, and how he'd battled to earn a spot in match play. He described each of his first four matches, including a 5&3 drubbing of Rory Sabbatini in the semis. Lewis wrote, *"Rory had done extremely well to reach the semifinals. He had a steady round and finished 3 under par, but it wasn't enough to beat my eight birdies in 15 holes. I had reached the finals!"*

And then, writing about what would become the greatest day in his life, Lewis described the scene at the start of the 36-hole championship match.

“Approximately four-hundred people packed the first tee box. Among the large gallery were a group of black maids who had left their dirty laundry and dishes to watch me in the finals. This was a rare sight for black women in South Africa.”

Over the course of that week, Lewis had become an inspiration, a hero to every black caddie and domestic worker and to thousands beyond the club as word spread of this extraordinary young man doing the unthinkable. When he closed out his opponent on the 34th hole they were all there, rushing the green in celebration. The black caddies. The black maids. Shouting, singing, dancing, crying, they quite literally carried him off the golf course.

Lewis wrote, *“Lifting me up on their shoulders, and chanting in their native language!”*

He concluded his essay writing,

“The president of the South African Golf Federation announced Lewis Chitengwa as the South African Amateur Champion and his wife presented me the trophy. This was an emotional moment. Lifting that trophy was such a great feeling of accomplishment and personal satisfaction. Becoming the first black to ever win this significant national championship was the greatest day of my life and a dream come true.”



Lewis Chitengwa - 1993 South Africa Amateur Champion

In the eight years that followed Lewis's historic victory in South Africa he continued to enjoy great success. He won the Zimbabwe Amateur a third time, was named ACC Freshman of the Year, and became a two-time All-American at Virginia where he won two college tournaments, tied for first in another, and finished 7th in the NCAA Championship, what was then the best finish by a Cavalier in over 50 years.

We had some extraordinary adventures on and off the golf course. In Puerto Rico where Lewis made six birdies in a row in one of the rounds, and where all of us, Lewis and his teammates hiked through El Yunque rainforest and swam under a waterfall. In Tallahassee, Florida where Lewis beat N.C. State superstar Tim Clark in a playoff for the individual title. In the Philippines during the World Amateur when Lewis and I spent four hours in the US Embassy because of a screw up by UVA's International Office. The time we nearly froze to death at Royal Portrush in Northern Ireland. A trip to a hospital in Knoxville, Tennessee, a couple of visits to UVA's Student Health Office, and a lot of great golf including nine team titles.

There always seemed to be some mad scramble involving passports, textbooks or Titleists, and whether he was winning a long drive contest or battling through final exams with little sleep, Lewis always seemed to be smiling. Well, at least that's how I remember it now.



Teammate James Driscoll congratulating Lewis after his playoff victory over Tim Clark

After his graduation in 1998 Lewis turned pro and was frequently in contention on the Sunshine Tour in Africa, on the Buy.Com Tour (what is now Korn Ferry), and on the Canadian Tour. Lewis also received a couple of exemptions into PGA Tour events, and it appeared to be only a matter of time before he would be out there as a full and regular member.

On a number of occasions over those years I would run into Earl Woods, Tiger's father who held Lewis in high regard. In one of our conversations Earl indicated that it had been *"a good lesson for Tiger"* when Lewis won the Orange Bowl Junior and Tiger finished second. And Earl would always mention the South African Amateur, typically raising a finger for emphasis and saying with what sounded like real authority and pride, *"What he did down there, what he did in South Africa, he will always, always be the first."*

And then suddenly, it all came to a terrible end. In June, 2001 after back to back top-10 finishes in British Columbia, Lewis was again in the hunt at the Edmonton Open. He followed up an opening round 70 with 67 on Friday before falling ill on Friday evening. Saturday he was rushed to an emergency room where he died that afternoon. Meningococcal meningitis, a deadly bacterial disease that had been lingering in the Edmonton area for close to a year, had killed 26 year-old Lewis Chitengwa.

It was a devastating loss for thousands of people who knew and loved Lewis, and a tragedy for golf. Having at one time or another beaten every great player of his generation, the arc of Lewis' career had him destined for the PGA Tour. Fellow Zimbabwean Nick Price, and South African Gary Player would insist many times in the years that followed that "*Lewis would have won majors!*"

Perhaps he would have. But what he did accomplish in his short life was truly amazing. I still believe that what Lewis did in winning the national championship of apartheid South Africa was, for that part of the world, the equivalent of Jesse Owens winning gold medals in front of Adolf Hitler in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the equivalent of Joe Louis knocking out Hitler's heavyweight, Max Schmeling, and for sub-Saharan Africa, the equivalent of Jackie Robinson integrating baseball in America.

Yes, I loved Lewis as if he was my own son. For years I struggled to watch the PGA Tour knowing that Lewis would have been, should have been out there. And I imagine those same thoughts will creep in now when the Champions Tour is on, with Lewis' contemporaries, those 50 year-old rookies making their debut. Of course I wish we'd had more time, wish Lewis had been given more time for more amazing accomplishments, more history making. But that's when I remind myself to treasure every moment we had, and to remember him forever.



Mike Moraghan with Lewis Chitengwa in the mid-1990s

About the author: Mike Moraghan was the men's golf coach at the University of Virginia from 1989-2004. He has been Executive Director of the Connecticut State Golf Association since December 2011.