Zhang Xinjun’s 68

[2019](https://www.hsbcgolf.com/latest-news/tag/2019/), [China Golf](https://www.hsbcgolf.com/latest-news/tag/china-golf/), [Li Haotong](https://www.hsbcgolf.com/latest-news/tag/li-haotong/), [World Golf Championships](https://www.hsbcgolf.com/latest-news/tag/world-golf-championships/), [Zhang Xinjun](https://www.hsbcgolf.com/latest-news/tag/zhang-xinjun/)

Back in 2005, in the first year of the WGC-HSBC Champions at Sheshan, the crowds asked for the Chinese players’ autographs simply because they were in the field and playing alongside the greats of the game.

On the first morning of this year’s installment of the championship, things were a little different. The new breed of Chinese golfing connoisseurs were looking for their compatriots’ autographs because some among them were close to the top of the leaderboard.

When Zhang Xinjun, who was in the first group, arrived back at base with a 68, it was a score which would have caught the eye of compatriot Li Haotong who, after fourteen holes, was sharing first place with Victor Perez on seven under par to Zhang’s four under.

Zhang, in describing his 68 to the Chinese media, was making them laugh as much as he was himself. When he had arrived at the 14th, he had whacked his drive into the woods and, unable to do much more than chip out of the forest, he had expected a bogey or a double. Instead, he chipped in for the most unlikely of pars to remain at three under par until he notched what was his fifth birdie of the day at the 16th.

When he first started out in America, the now 32-year-old Zhang felt nervous and well out of his comfort-zone. This year, though, has been a much happier experience in that he has notched three top twenty finishes. The first was a tie for fourth in Houston, the second a tie for seventh in the Safeway Open, and the third, a share of 16th place in the Shriners Hospital event. This week, it can only help that he has a younger brother on the bag and the two of them are able to chat away to each other in Chinese.

Zhang has every shot in the bag but does not mind saying that his English has not developed to quite the same extent during his time in the States. Yet he was happily prepared to pass on his piece de resistance, an English word which worked well in an American arena in which so many players are so successful.

The word in question is “Congratulations!” and, as he said it, his manager stood by to explain that he only uses it when praise is due as opposed to congratulating all and sundry.

Only Phil Mickelson can ever have signed more autographs than Zhang was signing after he had handed in his card and spoken to assorted television crews. Most of the locals wanted their HSBC hats autographed but there were others who came armed with books and another with a sheet of music.

If the player’s signature played havoc with three different lines or whatever tune it was, the owner of the music was not about to complain. In her eyes, no musical score could compare with Zhang’s 68.