

April 10, 2014



An Interview With:

**JACK NICKLAUS
ARNOLD PALMER
GARY PLAYER**

MODERATOR: Well, good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to another memorable morning at Augusta National Golf Club. It is my true honor and privilege to introduce to you three gentlemen who have been so vital to the growth of the game as we know it today and whose iconic legacies will ever forever in all of our hearts and minds especially those who were fortunate enough to witness their remarkable play throughout their careers. We at Augusta National are forever grateful for the indelible mark these three greats have made on the Masters Tournament.

This trio has combined to win 13 green jackets in the tournament's 80-year history, including seven consecutive from 1960 to 1966. In an astounding 147 Masters appearances, they either won or finished second an impressive 21 times and compiled 32 Top 5s and 49 Top 10s.

These men are truly golf's greatest ambassadors and have always displayed the highest levels of integrity, character and dedication to the game we love so much.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Arnold Palmer, Mr. Jack Nicklaus and Mr. Gary Player. We'll now open it for questions.

Q. Without ShotLink it's kind of hard to tell, but by the eyeballs test it looked like you were neck and neck up the fairway. Do you have any opinion as to who might have gotten the longest drive?

GARY PLAYER: I think Jack outdrove me by a yard or two, but it's not bad when you think he used to outdrive me by 50. But he did hitch on a sprinkler, you didn't see that.

JACK NICKLAUS: Actually Gary and I have argued about it every year because one of us hit it this way, one of us hit it this way and this year we hit it both together. They were pretty close.

Q. I heard you say something like, I wish I could do this again; when you get up on

that tee, does it remind you of when you first started 50 years ago when you first got on that tee?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I should say half it, because that's all I could hit it is about half as far.

No, what I meant by that is obviously, it was such a great thrill every time we teed it up to actually play for real, and I think we'd all love to wind the clock back a few years and play, because it's such a great tournament, a great thrill to stand on the first tee, have the butterflies and get that first tee shot over with and get going.

Today, no butterflies. Just happy to hit the first tee shot over.

Q. You said that you would love to do it for real. I know for years you probably didn't envision yourself doing this. When was the time where you said, you know what, this would be great for me to go out there and join Arnold and Gary?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I think that I said that originally because I really had no desire to do that because I felt like Arnold needed to have his due, and he did that. And then Billy asked me if I would do it and I said sure. And then Gary was asked to join Arnold and me.

We have played a lot of golf together, the three of us. We have all enjoyed it. We have all competed hard against each other. I mean, it's amazing, even a tee shot like this, the question was asked who hit it further, who did this, still competing. It's kind of fun.

Q. I remember Byron Nelson once said the hardest thing he did all year was trying to get ready for that one shot. Do you guys practice and prepare, and is it as nervous as anything else you do all year?

JACK NICKLAUS: No (laughter).

Q. Arnold is shaking his head.

ARNOLD PALMER: Took me about ten minutes (laughter).

JACK NICKLAUS: I don't think any of us look at it the same way as we used to look at it.

Q. When Jack mentioned butterflies a minute ago, back when you were playing, curious for all three of you, how is the feeling

different on the first tee of a championship here compared with the other three, I guess coming back to the same place every time?

JACK NICKLAUS: I'll let somebody else answer something.

He wants to know whether the feeling is any different in this tournament teeing off on the first tee than any other tournament.

ARNOLD PALMER: Well, there's a difference.

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, that's what the question was (laughter).

ARNOLD PALMER: You feel a little different. It's preparation just for the Masters Tournament. To be here is always a great pleasure.

GARY PLAYER: I think that this tournament has just grown in stature. It has a tremendous amount of tradition and when you think of it, a great man like President Eisenhower being attached to this tournament, and Bobby Jones, who was a great gentleman of golf who raised the bar across the world; and to see such great appreciation, I think the word that comes to mind for me is gratitude that we at our age can tee up and so many people are there and so many of you are here this morning to hear what we've got to say.

It's been a wonderful journey with these two gentlemen here. We went across the world. We went down gold mines together. We visited my ranch. We've slept at each other's homes and our wives have known each other, and we have had a great friendship.

We've always wanted to beat each other; we've never hidden that. But when we did win, we congratulated the other. When we lost, we congratulated the other. It's been a special journey, and I don't think there's ever been, if I may be so forward, not boastful, but factual, that three athletes have ever in the history of any sports travelled together, been together so much across the world, not just in the United States, but across the world and had an association like we've had. It just doesn't exist anymore and it never has, and I don't think it ever will again. It's a unique time in history, really, as far as we're concerned.

JACK NICKLAUS: What was your question again (laughter)?

GARY PLAYER: You've got to repeat it for him.

JACK NICKLAUS: I don't care what tournament it is, on the first tee, I always had butterflies until the first shot was over.

Q. Curious, watching the first three days, the mentoring that goes on here at Augusta National for the Masters, the young players playing with the veteran players, just wondering for the three of you, how much mentoring did you do when you were competing here with young players who were coming here for the first time and seeing the course for the first time, because it's kind of extraordinary, you don't see that in many other places.

JACK NICKLAUS: (Looking at Arnold) somebody else answer.

I get an occasional young man that comes to me and asks me a little bit about the golf course, through the last half a dozen years or so that have come and said, you know, would you talk to me a little bit about how you prepare and what you do for Augusta. I've sat down and talked with them a little bit and given my thoughts of what I think you need to do at Augusta and what you have to do here to play well in this golf tournament and what you have to learn as a first-timer, particularly.

I know that Arnold and Gary are no different than I am and certainly would pass on whatever wisdom they had as it relates to what they have learned through the years. I think we all feel like it's nice to see the young players come along, and be able to help them grow and be helped as we were when we grew up and we played. I know that all of us looked at the fellas that were older than we were and how they played the golf course and what they think. Not that we asked that many questions, but I think if you're a youngster, I think you learn by watching and imitating and seeing what other people do.

GARY PLAYER: I think that as far as I'm concerned, I always asked a lot of questions when I was coming up and I still ask a lot of questions today because it's a great way to learn in a very quick fashion.

But I remember playing with Sam Snead, who was a lot different in those days. I played with Sam Snead at Greenbrier, the last 36 holes of the tournament, the last 36. As we tied, we went into a Sunday playoff and we went seven extra holes, and I eventually lost to him.

I said, "Mr. Snead, is there anything that you can see in my swing that you can help me with?"

He said, "Son, I ain't seen you swing yet." (Laughter)

"Thank you, sir." (Indicating tipping cap)

JACK NICKLAUS: Thank you, Sam.

Q. Gentlemen, can you put your architects hats on and perhaps share a few thoughts on what you would do with the 17th hole now that Ike's tree is gone? Do you have any strong opinions about how to handle that?

ARNOLD PALMER: Well, I think I would probably put a tree right back where the tree was and try to get it about as similar as it was when it was taken out.

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I look at the area, it does look a little naked. It's not only Ike's tree, but Little Ike and a couple other trees were gone. But they really had no effect on the play of the golf tournament as it relates to the tournament. I think the statistics show that I think there's been an average of maybe five or six balls that have hit the tree a year by bad shots, and it affected the membership far more.

Could you put a tree back? Sure you could put a tree back. But I personally think that the hole needs definition a little further up, not back. There's many things they can do and I'm sure that there will be many opinions from many different players about what they can do, and I'm sure that they will come up with a solution that they think is best for the golf course. I think it's best to probably just keep my nose out of it, until I'm asked.

GARY PLAYER: You are being asked.

JACK NICKLAUS: I wasn't being asked by who really wants to ask me (laughter).

GARY PLAYER: No, I think there's never been a tree that's been so significant in golf. Personally, I am anti-trees in the middle of fairways or on fairways, same as I'm against bunkers in the middle of fairways. There's enough trouble, golf is a very tough game, particularly for members who don't hit many fairways. I think the tree, as much respect as I had for the name attached to the tree, I think it's best that the tree does not get put back.

I know that Bobby Jones is -- when they designed it, they wanted the golf course not to be like other golf courses. They wanted wider fairways with no rough and the pressure being put on the second shots and the greens itself, which are very severe.

The 17th green was never designed originally for the type of shot that's being played in there right now.

JACK NICKLAUS: Do you know what the 17th was originally?

GARY PLAYER: I don't know what it was, but --

JACK NICKLAUS: It was a par 5.

GARY PLAYER: Yeah. I don't know it was a par 5, but it's the kind of green that was never designed for much longer a shot than maybe a

7-iron. So I think it's a very good idea that the tree is -- that they don't put it back.

Q. This is a question for each of you. Adam Scott carried his green jacket just about everywhere he went during his year reign. Did you wear your jacket much in public?

JACK NICKLAUS: Never took it home. No, he's the only one that took it home (pointing to Gary) and Cliff Roberts called him and said, "Gary, you know the jacket is not supposed to leave the Club." He said, "Do you have your jacket at home?"

He said, "Yes, I do, Mr. Roberts."

He said, "Well, it's not supposed to be there."

He said, "Well, you can come and get it any time you want." (Laughter)

GARY PLAYER: The bad thing is he called me and reversed charges (laughter). No, he didn't do that.

JACK NICKLAUS: The Masters Champion is supposed to wear his green jacket during the year he is the champion at official events, at least that's what I've always been told. I've never worn it off of the Club grounds, but I've never taken it off the Club grounds.

ARNOLD PALMER: The same.

GARY PLAYER: Yeah, I think it was the same --

JACK NICKLAUS: Gary is the only one that smuggled it out of here (laughter).

GARY PLAYER: But he said to me -- he said what he said to me, and I said -- well, you know, I thought he would appreciate it. I said, "Well, you can come and fetch it."

He laughed about it, and he just said, "No, in all seriousness, please don't ever wear it in public."

I hung it up with my honors blazer from other sports at school in a plastic bag. It was part of the deal, you didn't do it in those days. Whereas now I think it's nice. But you have a man like Billy Payne, who like some of his predecessors, who were reluctant to change, as we know, with women, and many other things.

And I'm proud that in the time they asked me, I stood up and I said, they should have women, because this is a tournament that has 500,000 women around the world watching this tournament, and I think you owe it to them to have respect for them.

And I think that Billy Payne has been a man that's not been reluctant to change. To see what he did in China, when he had this junior

tournament; I was part of the deal. I had to take my jacket and go into China and they chose a young man to play in the tournament, and I think one of the most significant things we've ever seen is a 14-year-old boy making the cut here; and then going the next week and beating another 80 of the best players in the world. I don't think you'll ever see anything like that again.

When I saw it was a 14-year-old boy, I said to my wife, "If it was my son, I would have him withdraw from the tournament. He can't break 90." This is a monster out here; this is tough. What he did with an unjustified penalty of one shot, to still make the cut was something that I'll never forget in my life.

So Billy Payne brings juniors here this year, he makes the changes that are necessary to make and keep up with the rest of the world and I admire Billy Payne very much indeed.

Q. Gary mentioned that this tournament has grown in stature, and I think it can be said that it's largely because of you three. I just wonder, do you take personal pride in what this tournament has become?

GARY PLAYER: Yes, we do. It means an awful lot in our lives, this tournament. To win this championship is something very special in your life and the way the tournament is organized. I mean, it's the best-organized tournament in the world. There's no tournament that is organized -- of course, they have a great advantage in playing at the same place every year, but it is something special and it's nice to be a part of it. If we can contribute to it, it's something that is important in our lives.

Q. Do you take pride?

JACK NICKLAUS: Of course we do. We wouldn't be sitting here and you guys wouldn't be sitting there if you didn't think we contributed something towards this golf tournament. But I think all of us feel that it's been a big part of our lives and that we have -- not only been a big part of our lives, but Augusta National thinks we have been a big part of the Masters Tournament. We are very proud of that. I think we have all enjoyed our time here.

There were a lot of people that blazed a trail ahead of us to get here. If you look at the early years of the Augusta National Invitational and given the name the Masters and so forth, as time went on, it's an evolution, and we're just part of that evolution.

GARY PLAYER: Let Arnold say something about that because he was --

JACK NICKLAUS: You were here a long time before we were.

ARNOLD PALMER: Yes, and I hope I'm here a long time after you (laughter).

GARY PLAYER: I will tell you one thing that's quite interesting with the tournament. We only got television in South Africa in 1974, and South Africa is a significant golf country, as you know, won more Majors than any country in the world other than the United States, post-war.

But when we first played this tournament, we used to make a film of this tournament. They had this big film that they gave the players and I hired a man in South Africa to go around South Africa to all the golf clubs and show what was happening here at the Masters because they couldn't see it in South Africa in those days.

Q. Wasn't there a story about it took you a long time to get your own green jacket?

JACK NICKLAUS: You want me to go through the story again?

Q. I don't remember the details, unless you have a plane to catch.

JACK NICKLAUS: No, I have plenty of time. I just didn't want to bore you with it.

In '63, when I won the Masters for the first time, they don't know who is going to win the golf tournament so they put a 46 long on me. I'm a 43 regular. It looked like an overcoat.

When I came back the next year, there was no mention about getting a green jacket. So there was a jacket that was put in my locker, it was Tom Dewey's jacket, former governor of New York. So I put that on, and I won a few more Masters and no mention has ever been mentioned of a green jacket. I kept putting Tom Dewey's on.

Finally Tom Dewey's jacket was getting a little thread-bare, so I went and -- I didn't want to ask anybody, so I went to Hart Schaffner Marx which I was working with at the time. I said, "Could you make me a green jacket, please? I'm afraid to ask Augusta because they don't want to give me one, I guess."

They made one and it wasn't quite the right material and color. It was close. I wore it for about a year, and I said, "Give me Tom Dewey's jacket back." So I wore Tom Dewey's jacket until 1998.

In 1998, I was down here the week before the tournament with Jack Stevens and I told him the story that I had won six Masters and never been given a green jacket. He said, "You what?"

Anyway, I came back the next week, there

was a note in my locker that said, "You will go to the pro shop and you will be fitted for your green jacket." I didn't even have to pay for it (laughter), I don't think. I never did know whether I got the bill or not. But anyway, this is the jacket.

Q. What size is that?

JACK NICKLAUS: 43 regular.

GARY PLAYER: Nothing's changed. He doesn't pay for anything today. Deep pockets and short arms.

JACK NICKLAUS: That's a true story (laughter).

Q. Amen Corner is the most famous stretch of holes here; do you think that that's the stretch of three holes that warrants that notoriety, and if so, why? And if not, is there another stretch of holes that you think should have gained that notoriety?

JACK NICKLAUS: I think yes. I think yes is the answer to all that. The three holes here, I think Herb Wind is the one that named them Amen Corner.

When you go to Amen Corner, you take a big breath when you go in there, and when you leave you go (exhaling), if you can get through it in decent form.

If you look back through the years, those who have played that stretch well who have been in contention obviously usually end up winning the golf tournament. Those who have gotten that stretch and ended up putting it in the water at 11, putting it in the water at 12 or unsuccessful birdieing on 13 or eagling 13, not taking it beyond that point; it's very rare that anybody who has screwed up that area has done well. I think it's an appropriate name and I don't think there's another stretch in golf that I know, in championship golf, that would warrant anything like that.

Q. I spoke to Mr. Player a couple months ago, and asked him about how much longer he might consider doing this Honorary Starter thing and he said probably not more than 20 more years. Have you all ever put much consideration in how much longer? Is it just as long as you're able?

JACK NICKLAUS: I'll let Arnold answer that question.

ARNOLD PALMER: I suppose as long as they ask me to do it.

JACK NICKLAUS: There's your answer.

Q. Since we seem to be talking about green jackets a lot, at some point, you won't be

wearing that green jacket, so what would you like to see happen with that green jacket?

JACK NICKLAUS: (Shrugging shoulders).

Q. We have a museum.

JACK NICKLAUS: I have a green jacket in the museum. I think we've asked the Club if I can have one for that. They've given me permission to do so. I imagine Gary has one at home and I'm sure Arnold has one where he wants it.

Alex, it's not supposed to be a specific green jacket. It's a green jacket. Whenever Tom Dewey's gets too old to wear (chuckling), I'll get another one.

Q. We talked a lot about how great the golf course is, and I'm just interested in your opinions about what you think makes Augusta great. Is it the course or is it the history of the event, traditions, the players?

GARY PLAYER: I think that what makes Augusta great is the fact that it's, first of all, it's the best-run golf tournament in the world and it's the first major championship of the year, and it's always so beautiful and the condition of the golf course is so good, and the tournament is always so dramatic, you always have such fantastic finishes.

People often say when these great shots are played in the last few holes how lucky they are, but luck is the residue of desire. You see phenomenal shots being played, and you've got such a great TV audience. You guys, the media, help to make this such an event, and it just gets better and better. You know the names that have been attached to this tournament and you go to the Champions Dinner and you see all these champions in the room.

I mean, as a young man, going into the room and seeing Ben Hogan, who was the best striker of a ball I ever saw in my life; I never saw a man have control of a ball that he had, and then you see Sam Snead and Byron Nelson and Jimmy Demaret, you're just in awe all the time how this tournament just gets better and better.

You hear all these wonderful screams and excitement and you can hear it echoing through the trees. It's just like a dream. It's so exciting and the excitement, and just driving through Magnolia Drive, you drive through there and the first thing that comes to mind is the great sense of gratitude that you've been part of this tournament.

MODERATOR: Well, ladies and gentlemen, thank you so very much for attending. Gentlemen, thank you for giving the golfing world

another thrill on the first tee and beginning the 2014 Masters as only y'all could do it. Thank you all very much.