

USGA Media Conference

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

USA

Tiger Woods

2024 Bob Jones Award Recipient
Award Presentation Ceremony



MIKE TIRICO: This award has been given with great honor to a who's-who champions of men's and women's golf, individuals who Tiger I know you idolized like Arnold and Jack and Lee Elder; Stanford products like you like Tom Watson; fellow Career Grand Slam winners, as well, Sarazen, Player; even individuals who covered you, Judy Rankin, and last year's honoree, Johnny Miller. No matter how you slice it, the list is phenomenal and we're adding a great person to that list, as well.

I just want to take one brief second before we talk golf to acknowledge a little bit of the citizenship part of Tiger's career, the charitable work through your TGR Foundation that started way back when you got started. You truly helped change the trajectory of students and their lives through access to college and STEM-based learning experiences, and if you don't know that or you're not familiar with it, because Tiger doesn't take a lot of time to publicize what he's done for others, take a moment to check out the website and see a quarter century of impacting and changing lives and sending young women and men to college with your foundation. Congratulations for all the work you did for that.

[Applause.]

Usually someone comes up and speaks on behalf of the honoree, and everybody in the Tiger team took a pass because nobody wanted to be one-upped because if you were at the World Golf Hall of Fame, Tiger's amazing daughter Sam kicked butt with one of the greatest introductions of an induction ever.

Everybody else around the table said, "I'm good." Sam set the bar.

My dear friend and the guy long, long, long who's been a part of everything Tiger has done, Mark Steinberg, tapped me on the shoulder. I wish I had time to say what I want to say, but there are too many people I respect in the room. Thank you, Mark.

Here's the deal. Tiger won 82 TOUR events, and most of them were broadcast by three of us: Our friend Dan Hicks

from NBC, Jim Nantz from CBS, and myself. As I was trying to figure out one of the thousand things I could say about Tiger, I reached out to my friends, and I'm going to share with you what they shared with me.

This is from Dan Hicks: "We get into this business because we love the unpredictable magic of sports. I honestly cannot think of any single athlete who created more of those moments for the length of time that he did than Tiger Woods. All I can say is thank you, Tiger, for playing such a huge role in making my broadcast dreams live up to everything and more I could have ever hoped for."

These are the words of Jim Nantz: "57 times we had the honor of walking Tiger up the 72nd hole as the champion." That was Jim's humble brag to say he did more than Dan and I did. "Each time marveling at the sheer greatness we just witnessed. I've been fortunate to document several legendary careers across many sports, but there was never anyone who was more brilliant, more dominant than Tiger. What a worthy recipient, and what an honor to have had a front row seat for that."

From Jim and Dan, on behalf of the guys in the booth, thank you for those memories.

In '96, I have not started calling golf yet. Tiger debuts with "hello, world" in Milwaukee; Curtis Strange, my parter at the very start, interviews you, and you tell him that you think you can win every time out. He's like, you'll learn, you'll learn. Well, it's his ass that learned, right?

If Curtis was here, I'd say the same damn thing so don't worry about it. You can all text him and tell him.

The very first tournament I got to call on the PGA TOUR I got to call Mercedes Championships at La Costa in 1997, rained out on Sunday, so Tiger and Tom Lehman, the reigning Player of the Year from the year before, playoff, Lehman hits it on this par-3 downhill, the 7th I think it was,

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in the water, and Tiger hits it to about yag far, and there it was, the start of one of the remarkable seasons.

First time I was at the Masters was '97. I think we know what happened there.

The tournament after that was to me one of the memorable ones for Tiger. His next start was at the Byron Nelson in Dallas, and that was the height of Tiger mania because everybody waited a month to see, okay, is this real, and before we had Instagram-created fake energy around things and people, we had Tiger walking through the hotel in Dallas and the golf course and the range and everybody stopped. Fans, caddies, players, and all eyes turned to him. Every time you went out there and all eyes were on you, you thrived.

That's the one thing that I think separates great athletes from everyone else. You left a legacy in the game, a legacy that I think a lot of us thought was going to bring a lot of minorities to the game, and it has, as Fred alluded to earlier.

But your legacy was to me, you made golf cool. Like there used to be a lot of 5'9" guys other than Andy North winning major championships. Now you'll go out there -- it's like watching power forwards and tight ends play basketball. They didn't look like that before, from health, fitness, power, strength. Your impact is everywhere, and every golfer we see out there.

The perfect mix that you had of that intimidating walk prowling a putt around the green, and 30 seconds later that 10,000-watt mega smile when it went in and the joy of celebrating those moments. You turned on a dime like nobody else.

I personally cherished the chance that I had to call you completing the Career Grand Slam at St Andrews. Your '06 win at Lytham is one of the few things that make me tear up every time I see it because that one was for Pops, right after your dad passed, and that was great.

In 2019 I got asked to do the Masters on radio, and I said, why do I want to broadcast a golf tournament on the radio, and it was just one of those if you want to be associated with the great things in this sport, if you're asked to do something at Augusta, you do it, and I got to be there to write about you, to watch you have your Jack-in-'86 moment. So we got a chance to see all of that.

I cherish all of that, but I cherish more the texts, the conversations, the phone calls about your girl and boy and me sharing about my young man and young woman in my life, my kids. A lot of us enjoyed watching you, and

millions, and I mean millions, around the world who never knew you, cared about you, rooted for you, rode the roller coaster with you and wanted to get off that roller coaster at the end and wanted to give you a high five.

For all of them and myself, I want to say thank you for bringing us joy. Thank you for letting us see what greatness looks like, and thank you for holding the bar up of hard work, dedication that shows people that with hard work and dedication, you can be great, even when everybody tells you you're done.

I admire all that you've accomplished, but I think the accomplishments of Sam and Charlie speak more to your legacy than the 82 wins, the nine national championships that you won. You brought out the best in them, and you have given us so many thrills that on behalf of all of those who had a chance to call those moments and watch those moments, thank you for the pleasure of watching one of the great careers in all of sports. Thank you.

That is the last nice thing I will ever say about you.

The governing body of golf in the United States is the USGA and it is under extraordinary leadership. It's been built by a lot of folks who have come before, but what Mike Whan has done and on July 1 we'll be celebrating the third anniversary of Mike as the CEO of the USGA, look around Pinehurst, look around what's happening around this championship and this site, and you know that the USGA is thriving and succeeding, and it's a lot of folks on the executive committee and the people who work day in, day out, but it is all due to the leadership of the CEO of the United States Golf Association. Please welcome, Mr. Mike Whan.

MIKE WHAN: Thank you, Mike. I'm just calming down. It's been a tough dinner.

I've got to tell you a quick story. We're all kind of filing in here, and I see Steinberg from across the room, and he's got a serious look on his face, and he kind of gives me one of those, and I've been on the other side of those looks before, and he comes walking over, and he says, "Dude, you're going to kill me. Tiger has got nasty food poisoning. There's no way he's coming tonight. He's borderline for Thursday."

I actually turned and start looking for my team because we're in crisis mode, and he's running behind me going, "I've known you for 40 years; I'm kidding!" But heart palpitations.

Please be careful with the seafood.

Well, welcome to my favorite night. I got the joy of coming to Bob Jones Award dinner when I was the LPGA commissioner, and I never could have possibly dreamed that I'd be standing here in this position.

At every table, because I've roamed it, at every table there's some of the greatest leaders and difference makers in the game, so I just want to say thank you for making this night special.

If you know the USGA, and now I do, there's no way they'd let me come up here without a pre-typed speech, and it would be well-prepared, it would be professional, and usually the last quote you get on the way up there is "stick to the script." You can see how well that's going. (Laughter).

I just can't do it tonight. I can't give you the speech that was written for me. I've got to talk to you as a father. I've got to talk to you as a golf nut. I've got to talk to you as a leader.

As a father, I raised three kids, and as Mike said, you took their dad's passion, which they weren't too sure about, and you made it cool. You made me cooler because you were cool. I'm not sure that you really want to take credit for that.

But my kids would walk in - they're now 30, 28 and 26 - but when they would walk in at 10, 12 and 14, it was three words when I was watching TV. It was, "Is Tiger playing?" If the answer was yes, they sat down. If the answer was no, they kept walking. I don't know how many events I told them you were playing and you were not in the field, but I wanted my kids to sit down, so yeah, he was always playing.

I don't know if I should tell you this story, but my kid is now a 30-year-old lawyer in New York. It was about three years ago, I had moved to the USGA. You and I were talking distance stuff and we were having calls back and forth, and I'm driving him, he's riding with me somewhere, and I've got the Apple Play up, and a call comes in and it just says Tiger. It just says ringing, Tiger. I look over at my son because what I really want to say is don't say a word. Like I'm going to answer this, but don't say a word. He looks at me before I answer, and he goes, "I've never loved you more than I love you right now." I didn't know he loved me, so it was a pretty big moment.

I'm not sure he'd agree with that story, but that's exactly what he said.

As a golf fan, 42 and 3. I just wrote on my card. I only have one card here. I just wrote "WTF." 42 and 3. That's

Tiger's match play record as an amateur in USGA championships. My record against my kids in Nerf basketball when they were in junior high was not 42 and 3. It was close. But that's what he did to the best competition in the world. 42 and 3 is silly.

But in the process of doing that, he made the game bigger. He made the game better. He made a two-word title that's going to last in every golf administrator's world the rest of your life: The Tiger effect. As we talk about what's happened since COVID, we all say, how does it compare to the Tiger effect. Hey, what's happening with rounds being played this summer? How does that compare with the Tiger effect?

I don't know, Charlie and Sam, if you have heard the term "Tiger effect," but for the rest of us, the Tiger effect is a natural term because it's the last time the game exploded. The only other time we've seen the game explode like this, the world had to go into a pandemic, so hopefully we won't have to do that again.

But it's pretty cool what's happened.

As a leader, I would just say that I'm impressed by anybody that does more with their action than their words. Most people that know me, it's just the opposite. But I would say that what's impressive to me is what you say with so few words turns into incredible action. Your impact, what you've done outside the golf course, is going to last for decades, and that's impressive.

I think most importantly, no matter what room you walk in, whether you're playing golf or not playing golf, you're a difference maker.

As Mike said and rattled off a few names, and I'm going to give you a few more, too, this is the highest honor we have at the USGA, and I just want you to know that we don't take this award lightly. It is for distinguished sportsmanship, and so this is not just about how many times you raised the trophy, but how you raised the trophy, how you handled your peers, the media, and all of us.

Francis Ouimet lifted that trophy, Babe Zaharias, Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Lorena Ochoa, Mickey Wright, Gene Sarazen, Nancy Lopez, and in the room tonight, who lifted that trophy, Dennis Walters, you're here, right? Lifted that trophy. Bob Ford, you're in the room, right? Lifted that trophy. Payne Stewart's family is here, and Payne Stewart definitely lifted that trophy. Thank you for being here.

Millions of people have played this game, and millions more will play it in the future. This is weird to say to somebody, but you're the only one. I mean, you're the



original. There's never going to be another Tiger Woods. You're the standard, as they would say in TV, you're the needle, you're the original, and for so many of us in the room, whether they're aged 16 or 60, you're one of the main reasons we love the game.

Nine wins at USGA have only been matched by one human being, Bob Jones. Before I give you that trophy, I want to show you something we're going to mail to you. If you win a championship as some in the room have like Fred Ridley, if you win a championship, you get posted in the Hall of Champions at the USGA Museum, and I watch every day at my headquarters champion golfers walk in and they spend 45, 50 minutes searching the hall to find their name. There I am, 1967. There I am, 2004.

You wouldn't spend much time because you'd go, oh, there I am, there I am, there I am. You're on so many plates at the Hall, we didn't want to send you the plates because you'd need another room in the house, but we decided for the only person in history that's achieved that, we made our own plate for you, and this plate shows all the championships. It's made out of the same material that's in the Hall. This is a replica but we'll send one to your house, and the font there is too small so I had somebody type it for me. I'm just going to read what's on it.

It says Tiger Woods and the USGA, nine USGA titles matched only by Bobby Jones for the most in history. The only player to win three U.S. Junior Amateurs, the only player to win three consecutive U.S. Amateurs, and we've got some U.S. Amateur winners in the -- can you imagine winning three consecutive U.S. Amateurs? 42 and 3 match play, which is the record in USGA amateur history, a 15-stroke victory in the 2000 U.S. Open, the largest margin in USGA history.

Hopefully, Sam, Charlie, you'll allow him to have some room in the house for that, but that deserves to hang on some wall, and you need to walk by that every day.

On behalf of us that love this game, and a lot of people in the room that actually live this game, we just want to say thank you for being you. We're so proud to be able to honor you, and there was a lot more people that wanted a chance to tell you how they felt, so if you don't mind, let's listen to a few of them.

(Video shown.)

I know it's a workweek. I know tomorrow is a school night. But really appreciate you taking the time to allow us the opportunity to celebrate you. So on behalf of -- I think you think you've changed the lives of a lot of young people throughout the world, but on behalf of about 400 less

young people who represent about 400 million like us, you changed our life, too. If you could all join me, and Fred, if you could do the honors in saying thank you to the 2024 Bob Jones Award winner, Tiger Woods.

TIGER WOODS: Well, I guess I'll start my speech by saying that Charlie just said, don't let my head get too big. (Laughter.)

Well, here we go. Thank you, everyone. Thank you to the USGA, Pinehurst here, for hosting this event, this night. It is a very humbling and special night, one that I don't take lightly just because of the former recipients of this award. These are people that I had idolized either through literature or in person or in books or in video or even got a chance to play with and compete against.

This award, as its name says, it's Bobby Jones. Bobby Jones is the greatest amateur that's ever lived, and what he meant to the game and what he had designed the game to be and how he designed it to be represented, how he created the Masters, a major championship, all the attributes that we all try to aspire to in this great game of golf, try and be a part of, this is what Bobby Jones alluded.

I just am so honored and so tickled to be here.

I'll take you back to 1990. It was my first USGA event. I had qualified for the U.S. Junior at Lake Merced. I ended up getting to the semifinals that year, which got me an exemption into the following year.

I remember going into the following year, it was at Bay Hill, and Arnold Palmer was speaking, and I'm like, man, this is really incredible.

Well, everyone who was there who got a chance to play in three straight U.S. Juniors got a chance to take a picture and shake hands with Arnold Palmer, and this is only my second one. So I told Arnold, dammit, I wanted to be up there with you, dude. But it just didn't happen. He says, "Just win this week." I said, okay. I won, and after I told him the story, he still didn't shake my hand. He just looked at me. It should have been last year, right?

But this is what the great game of golf allows us to have, these memories, these moments in time, and the USGA provided those opportunities and those moments for me.

I got a chance to play in four U.S. Juniors, five U.S. Amateurs, and ended up losing a couple of them but ended up winning six in a row, too, so that's not too bad. That's one of the words that I'm very proud of, to win 36 straight matches. That's not too bad.



[Applause.]

I look back on those times, those memories, Mom knows this as well as anyone, that I built my whole calendar year around one golf tournament, right, around winning the U.S. Junior. Once I had moved past the U.S. Junior days, it was the U.S. Amateur. All I wanted to do was win that one big event. I would experiment, try different things throughout the year, and Mom knew when I was hitting wiffle balls and rolled-up toilet paper against the mirror and chipping golf balls over furniture, then she always threatened to break something more than the furniture.

These are things that I had aspired to be. I had aspired to be a USGA champion because of what that meant, and through the years I've been able to win a few more U.S. Opens and to be able to tie the great Bobby Jones in that number, being nine.

But I look back at the stopwatch that started back in 1990, and especially in '96, because there's no other time that I had ever felt so much pressure to win one event as the last U.S. Amateur that I was ever going to play in, and the reason is mom never came to any of my Juniors. Mom never came to one of my Amateurs. She was wearing her Stanford shirt there at Pumpkin Ridge, and she was there for the first time.

Now imagine if I had lost the damn thing, right?

But when I made that winning putt, who was the first person that I hugged. Right, Mommy? It was you. My mom doesn't get enough credit. Everyone thought that it was my dad when I went on the road, which it was, but Mom was at home. If you don't know, Mom has been there my entire life. She's always been there through thick and thin. This award, I accept it in humbleness and just unbelievable regard for the past recipients, but I also accept it for my mommy, too. She allowed me to get here. She allowed me to do these things, chase my dreams, and the support and love -- I didn't do this alone. I had the greatest rock that any child could possibly have: My mom. Thank you, Mommy.

MIKE TIRICO: An honor for all of us to be here tonight. Great to see you, Mom. Thank you, as well.

I know you've got a tournament to try to go win because that's what you do, right? Charlie told me around the greens you look great right now. What did you tell me, he's just got to keep it in the fairway? Right? Was that the deal? I got it right from the guy who knows your game the best.

Honor to be here with all of you tonight. Tiger, thank you

and congratulations. Enjoy the rest of the week, everyone, and we look forward to seeing you not only the rest of this week but at the award next year when another great champion of the game joins this pantheon that's gotten even brighter and more broad because Tiger Woods is the latest winner of the Bob Jones Award. Thank you, and good night, everyone.

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