

The 150th Open

Press Conference

Monday, 11 July 2022

Jack Nicklaus



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. As you can see, we're joined by one of golf's great champions, 18-time major champion, three-time champion Golfer of the Year, Jack Nicklaus.

Jack, thank you for joining us today. It's great to see you back in St Andrews. We've all got so many memories of so many of your achievements here. But can you sum up how you're feeling to be back here to celebrate The 150th Open and to see the Celebration of Champions this afternoon.

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, as many of you might know, I declined to come back the last couple of times to St Andrews, I played at St Andrews, because it made my farewell in 2005, and I didn't want to come back and dilute that for what it was. It was fantastic then.

But when I got the invitation this time to be an honorary citizen of St Andrews and to follow Bobby Jones and Benjamin Franklin, I've got to come back. So to be back is fantastic. We brought the weather with us, in case you didn't notice that. But this is about the same weather we had in 2005 when we played. It was beautiful.

Anyway, it's great to be back. We're back actually at the same hotel room I was in, Barbara and I stayed in every time we've been at St Andrews. And we're looking forward to a great couple days.

Q. It's terrific to see you here. You've given us all so many wonderful memories over the years. For that, we're all in this room eternally grateful for you. But what makes, to you, what makes St Andrews so special? What's so magical about the place?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, that's part of my speech tomorrow. But when I came here in 1964, I couldn't believe that St Andrews was a golf course that would still test golfers of that time. Now, that's, what, 60 years ago? Close. Anyway, I didn't think -- it still tests the golfers at this time. It's a magical golf course.

The conditions, the weather, where you actually choose to put the pins, whether the golf course gets dry, whether the golf course gets wet, all those things that make St Andrews a

magical place.

And to believe the game of golf essentially started here, and it just absolutely is mind-boggling to me that it still stands up to the golfers of today. I tell you if you get a little bit of weather, anytime you get it, it will tell you real fast how fast it makes you stand up to it.

Q. Do you still get goosebumps when you come into here?

JACK NICKLAUS: I'm warm today. I'm kidding. I'm thrilled and so forth about coming. I drove into town, first time I've driven into town in about 17, 18 years, and it was interesting. Coming into town, I said we used to go that way. No, no, we go this way. Okay. But it was kind of fun just to come back to see where we were, see the gates, come into the little curves that we came into.

I always said St Andrews looked like an old grey town until the Open came around. All of a sudden it just lit up like a light, and it was beautiful.

And St Andrews always the week of the Open Championship is always beautiful. I imagine actually probably from anybody who makes a pilgrimage here to play this golf course feels that way.

Q. You talk about standing up, the course standing up to the players. I'm wondering, it's supposed to be potentially pretty calm this week, and with the added length that these guys now have, do you wonder how low guys can go on this golf course?

JACK NICKLAUS: Might shoot low. So what? That's sort of the way I look at it. They're shooting low now compared to what they shot 100 years ago. But times change and golfers get better, equipment gets better, conditions get better. Shoot low scores.

But I don't think it really makes a whole lot of difference, frankly. It's St Andrews and it is what it is, and it will produce a good champion. It always has. That's the way I look at it.

Q. Do you remember when you first came here, how much you knew about St Andrews and then how quickly did your affinity develop for the town and the golf course?



JACK NICKLAUS: The only thing I knew about St Andrews before I got here was my father came over with a couple of friends in 1959 when I was at Muirfield.

And they came over. And of course they were saying how much trouble they had, and I couldn't understand what was your trouble? But one of them had three-putted 13 times, the other one 14, the other one 15. Now I understood why they had trouble.

But then I came back in '64, and that's all I really knew about it other than it was the home. Arnold came here in '60, lost by a shot to Kel Nagle. That's what I knew about St Andrews. I knew St Andrews obviously from previous years, but that's really what my knowledge was.

When I stepped on it in '64, all of a sudden to step out of the clubhouse, step here, look at the first tee, look at the 1st tee, look at what was there, see the town, see everything, I fell in love with it immediately. And I've had a love affair with it ever since.

Q. You've obviously had huge success here over the years, but what does it mean to you to be made an honorary citizen of the town?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I think that's pretty special. That's why I'm back, obviously. There's a lot of reasons to be back, 150th anniversary and a lot of other reasons in the tournament, the whole thing. But this is why I'm back because of that. I wouldn't be back for any other reason.

But that's pretty special. There's only two Americans that have ever been honoured. I think I'd have to think that's something pretty special, very flattered by that. I thought that was very -- I'm sure it will be a humbling experience tomorrow.

Q. The fact that we can measure who are the best golfers in this golf world in St Andrews, still in the same scenario than 50 years ago, over the time, and maybe the materials, the distance and other things have changed, but you can still compare the magic of somebody playing here 50 years ago with the magic of somebody playing here now, or the touch, or the grit, all these things.

JACK NICKLAUS: The magic of golf played here 60 years ago?

Q. Some 60 years ago you can compare the touch of somebody to the touch now.

JACK NICKLAUS: The game has changed quite a bit but St Andrews hasn't. And, sure, St Andrews has a little bit of length added to it, The Old Course has. But the length has been added to try to sort of compromise the golf ball of today. But you've

still got to play golf.

You still have those pesky little bunkers out there that grab your ball every time you hit an errant shot. You hit one out there, you play it out sideways, you say why did I hit it here? Somebody hit it here 60 years ago or 100 years ago and they had the same problem. They hit it right here sideways. And they haven't really -- I don't know whether they changed locations. I think they changed a few locations but not a dramatic number.

But I think the Beardies were changed a little bit back about midway when I was playing, but you've still got to play golf. If you really play well, play smart at St Andrews, you're playing like most of the seaside golf course, you're playing by where the bunkers are.

If you play smart, really play smart, you're probably going to take a couple of chances during the week, but most of the time you don't. In other words, like when I won at Muirfield, I planned myself out. I hit four drivers a day. And the last day I had a little wind in my face at 14, and I elected instead of hitting 3-wood, I hit driver and I knocked it right in the frickin' bunker, and it almost cost me the tournament. Discipline is such an important part of playing over here. You get frustrated.

Once you get frustrated, then say bye-bye, we'll see you next time, because that's what happens. You've got to be patient and you've got the ability to just sort of play to what the golf course gives you. You can't try to take anymore.

Q. You have a philosophy how to play Augusta National when guys come to you, you can explain what you would do necessarily. What's your philosophy out here?

JACK NICKLAUS: Just been through it a little bit. Basically it's by where the bunkers are. 1st hole I just made sure that I take a club and I can't reach the burn on the left as it comes back. You can drive it down there, but you've got plenty of room to drive it down there. Why hit it there, you're only going to play a wedge from just short of that.

And the 2nd hole, you're really dealing with -- I can't remember the name of the bunker that sits out on the turns on No. 2, but you're playing by that. And of course on the right.

You're playing always, trying to play in between what your hazards are. St Andrews -- what is it, I think it's only about 94 acres?

THE MODERATOR: Yeah, it's pretty small. It's not a big piece of land.

JACK NICKLAUS: Very small piece of property. It goes out and comes back. Your width is what you have between two

holes, every hole adds up to 18, every green does. So you try to keep it in between that.

St Andrews is played to the left. And if you're going to miss it, you miss it left. And most of the time -- occasionally there's a bad problem left, but not too often. Most of your problems are right. Your out of bounds, bad bunkers, and so forth are on the right.

And so the philosophy is to keep the ball favouring the centre of the golf course, play a club that you need to play off the tee that doesn't get you in a bunker. As it relates to the greens, you're going to get the ball on the greens. It's whether you can putt or not.

First time I played here in '64, let's see, I think I was 149, I think the first two rounds, and I had 41 putts. That's what you have in the wind and the bad weather. And I shot 66, 68, the last two rounds. The wind dropped out, and I made some putts.

But putting is really difficult in the wind, and particularly on this golf course because the wind just sort of pushes it across the green. You've got to figure out -- you try not to leave a ball in a place where you leave yourself with an impossible putt.

Like No. 2, you've got the Himalayas. I don't think you want to leave the ball and be putting out of there. You want to try to keep the ball to the right of it so you're putting back up into the hill. The same type of thing pretty much through the golf course. 3rd hole, I guess, has that little bunker on the left. You've got to hit the ball, you just don't ever want to be in that bunker, short-side yourself, you want to be right of that little bunker so you're not playing off of the slope.

And all through the golf course it's the same thing.

Q. Following up on Memorial, have you made a birdie this year?

JACK NICKLAUS: I made a birdie last weekend. I lipped out for a hole-in-one, and I left it that far away and I fortunately got it in. Playing with Gary, Gary said I'm not going to make you putt that. He said, that's good. But I did make a birdie. I played nine holes, since the Memorial.

Q. I wanted to ask you, as many memories as you have here, what would be your one single probably strongest memory of St Andrews? And if you could remember, what would be the one shot you'd love to have back?

JACK NICKLAUS: The one shot I would love to have back? I don't think I have any here. I wasn't going to win in '64. I think Sanders would like to have his putt back in '70. I don't want to give that back to him.

I felt bad for him. But it's golf. Gotta finish the last hole. And '78, I didn't really have -- I won by a couple of shots. Stayed in front of the field. I don't think I was ever in contention again.

I don't really have anything I'd like to have back. I suppose I do. I try to avoid hell whenever I can. I think I took about four shots to get out of that one in '95.

Q. I guess you've had the two wins here and that incredibly warm reception when you finished here in '05. Do any of those three years or moments stand out over the others?

JACK NICKLAUS: Probably '78, I suppose. '70 came back because I won at St Andrews, and Jones always said that a golfer's resumé is not complete unless he's won at St Andrews.

So that was '70. But '78, the people were just unbelievable. They were hanging off rooftops, out the windows. Walking up the 18th fairway, the last hole was dangerous. People were running all over you. I don't know how many security guys I had tried to keep the people off of us.

And of course me, it's my typical, I'm sitting there, had tears rolling down my eyes as I'm walking up because I get pretty sentimental about that kind of stuff. I remember my caddie Jimmy hit me on the back, and he said, we've got another hole to finish. Get with it.

Q. Greg Norman is going to be a pretty notable absentee from past championship events here this week. What do you make much of that situation? Does it suck?

JACK NICKLAUS: I don't know much about it, to be honest with you.

Q. The R&A did not invite him to the past champion dinner or past --

JACK NICKLAUS: I really don't know anything about what they did. I know that they did that, but I don't know any more about that.

Q. Do you think Greg's reputation has been harmed or affected by his involvement with the LIV golf?

JACK NICKLAUS: Let me just sum this up with a couple of words. First of all, Greg Norman is an icon in the game of golf. He's a great player. We've been friends for a long time, and regardless of what happens, he's going to remain a friend. Unfortunately, he and I just don't see eye to eye in what's going on. I'll basically leave it at that.

Q. Back in the day after '70 and '78, did you put anything in the Claret Jug for a special drink?

JACK NICKLAUS: I have never put anything in the Claret Jug. I know it's the Claret Jug, but I always thought it was disrespectful to be drinking out of it.

I've seen guys that have done it in the future, in the past, but I always respected it. They cleaned it out before I got there, and I didn't want to dirty it up.

Q. Did your kids have any moments with it? What was your kids' reaction to the Claret Jug?

JACK NICKLAUS: My kids' reaction? They just looked to see if there was any wine in it. If there wasn't any wine in it, they didn't care about it. Is that about right?

No, I never used the Claret Jug for anything other than what it symbolised. Champion golfer of the year and delighted to have been able to retain that twice, here. Three times with Muirfield.

Q. Given the historic significance of what's going to happen tomorrow, I wonder if you could talk about your relationship, your memories of Bob Jones?

JACK NICKLAUS: I could go for hours on Bob Jones. I go back to 1955 when I first met Mr. Jones. I was playing at the U.S. Amateur. I was 15 years old at the country club of Virginia, James River course. And it was sort of a windy last practise round. And it's a long par-4. I hit a 3-wood into the green. Got it on the green.

And there was this gentleman in the cart. And I didn't know what Bob Jones looked like at the time. And he was there, and I finished the round. They said, Jack, Mr. Jones would like to say hello to you.

Okay. So I went over to the cart. He said, Jack, I'm Bob Jones. He said, I'd been here for a little over an hour. He said you're the only person that's reached this green in two today. Congratulations. I said, thank you, sir. I left. That was about it. We went to dinner that night. He was a speaker at the dinner. After the dinner, we were walking out and he caught up with me.

My father was with me. He got up with me and he said, Jack, I think I'm going to come out and watch you play a few holes tomorrow.

Okay. Bob Jones is going to come out and watch me, 15-year-old, Jack Nicklaus, play some holes of golf. I kept looking over my shoulder.

And I had Bob Gardner was a Walker Cup and World Cup player, who I played with later, and I had him one down after 10. I was doing pretty well.

On the tenth fairway, here comes this cart, it's Bob Jones. I got through. He watched me play, 11, 12, and 13. I went bogey, bogey, double bogey. And he looked at my dad and he said, Charlie, I don't think I'm doing Jack much good here. He excused himself. I actually got back to even, and I lost the last hole. That was my first experience with Jones.

My second experience was 1957, and he came to the U.S. JC Juniors at Ohio State when I was 17. And he presented the trophy and we had nice conversation and so forth there.

And then I qualified for the Masters. There was a note in my locker, Jack, I'd like to have you and your father come down, see me at my cabin during the tournament. Very nice gesture.

So we went down. That gesture was there every year. And so I really got to know quite a bit about him. He talked about his stories. Talked about stories. Talked about how he had won at Scioto in 1926 where I grew up.

And it was just conversation of how to play golf and do things. And I gleaned a lot from that.

And so I became a very big fan of Bob Jones. I was always a big fan. But my dad's idol was Bob Jones. My dad would -- we played the Ryder Cup matches in Scioto in 1931. My dad used to look a lot like Jones. Parted his hair in the middle. He was an 18-year-old kid at the time. He comes walking by the clubhouse, hey, Mr. Jones, come in here.

So my dad, he never passed up anything like that. He went off into the clubhouse as Bob Jones sat down, ordered him a drink. Finally figured out who he was. Out of here, kid.

But anyway, my dad was a big fan. And when I won The Open in '62, I got a note from Jones right after The Open.

He said that four-foot putt you holed at 17, when you holed that thing going down, I came right out of my chair. Obviously he couldn't. That was his expression.

We had a very nice relationship. And I remember the last thing that I had with Jones was when I turned pro. It wasn't the last thing. But I never forget the letter, I've still got it in the museum, about how he hoped I would remain an amateur and how nobody had been in the amateur ranks since he was, and he thought I could really help the game of golf and so forth and on.

He says, however, I understand what pulls at you to play professional golf and so forth and so on. He finished the letter, he said, I've had an awfully nice relationship with Spalding through all these years. I think you maybe ought talk with Spalding, which was kind of funny because I got a big kick out

of that. But he was a good friend. Never saw a better shot.

Q. I can see you have a number of family members in the room here today. How important is it for you for them to be part of what's happening here in St Andrews for you?

JACK NICKLAUS: I think it's very special that they wanted to come. They were here when I finished in 2005.

And they're here again today. And that's very special to me. And to think that they want to come watch the old man say a few words, I think, is very nice. Very honoured by that.

Q. When do you think golf was at its most watchable? Was it when you were in your heyday? There were so many different types of golfers. Or do you think it's now?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I think golf has gone through a variety of periods. I think Arnold -- golf is golf, prior to Palmer. And you knew a little bit about Hogan and Snead. But you never really watched it. Then Arnold came along, and they had television. Arnold sort of popularised the game from a television standpoint.

But more media and more awareness of the game, I think. I think that the era that we played in was a good era.

We had a lot of very good players. I think then came along Tiger's era. And Tiger had it pretty much by himself for a while. When Tiger got hurt, the other guys actually got a chance to win a golf tournament.

And they learned how to win. So when Tiger came back he had some competition. Those guys had learned how to play during that period of time, I think have become a great number of players.

There are more good players in the game today than we've ever had. I think the game, from a television standpoint, good gracious. Popularity standpoint. COVID has really, people flocked to the game of golf with COVID.

But we've also seen the game grow and television -- you can watch any golf tournament in the world almost today on television. And you turn it on and you say I'm going to watch something in Africa or want to watch something in Europe, want to watch something in Asia. No matter where you are, you're going to be able to watch it.

And it will continue to popularise the game of golf. And so I think golf probably in as good a state as it's ever been as far as the growth of the game and seeing the number of good players that there are today, I think it's really fantastic.

Q. Could you take your mind back to '70, on the 18th hole. In

regulation, as well as in the playoff, because in regulation you hit it right up on the green or close to it and 3-putted...

JACK NICKLAUS: I did? Did I 3-putt?

Q. You were off the green and 3-putted, read it in your book and you were pretty upset. But then Doug missed his...

JACK NICKLAUS: I didn't remember that 3-putt. I think maybe off the green, maybe missed the putt for birdie.

Q. Anyway, I was curious, in the playoff, when you took your sweater off you had that one-stroke lead and yet went right at the green.

JACK NICKLAUS: I was hot.

Q. If you could just talk about that. How good a shot was that, in your memory, as far as how it ranks with the great shots you hit?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, in 1964, I drove it on the green all four days. The first round with a driver, last three rounds with a 3-wood. So it wasn't a big feat to get the ball to the green.

And '70, I got to the 18th hole, and we were dead downwind, and we were playing from a shorter tee. So it wasn't a matter of getting the ball to the green. I just wanted to be free enough to swing. That's why I took the sweater off.

And I hit it. And of course, it went right on through the green. If it hadn't had the rough behind the green I think it would have been out of bounds. And I hit a decent chip down to about five feet. Then I made the putt. That was what I did. And I'm sure I circumvented your question. What was it?

Q. Seemed like a bold move. You had a one-stroke lead and you hit a very bold shot.

JACK NICKLAUS: What do you want me to do, lay it up back of the fairway and play -- you know, that day, we turned the loop, they clocked the wind at 56 miles an hour.

So it was really windy. So I had a lot of wind behind me. I didn't think I would want to be pitching into that green. So I wanted to hit the ball into the green, onto the green, somewhere so I wasn't going downwind. And that was sort of my thought process.

I didn't really dream I'd knock it through the green, but I hit it pretty good. That was still small ball, in '70.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for taking the time to join us today and best of luck this afternoon and with the ceremony tomorrow.

