

The Chevron Championship

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Rancho Mirage, California, USA

Mission Hills Country Club

Shirley Spork

Press Conference



Q. So couple days ago you found out that up inducted into the LPGA Hall of Fame.

SHIRLEY SPORK: Oh, my, what a tremendous surprise, and so, so welcomed for all our members of the Founders to be able to be honored and be inducted into the tour's Hall of Fame, LPGA Hall of Fame.

I would say that I am happy for all of the Founders and representing all of our Founders; honoring especially Louise and Marilynn who passed away, and Helen Detweiler. Helen Detweiler was working for Wilson Sporting Goods way before Patty Berg.

She taught Patty Berg how to give a golf clinic. This is one of our Founders, Helen Detweiler, who built the second golf course ever in the Coachella Valley, a nine-hole golf course Indio where Jackie Cochran, who was in charge of the lost, sort of the voluntary women who flew the airplanes in World War II from the factory to the east coast, so the military picked them up and went into the war and bombing and so forth.

Helen was also the very first fall pro at the Thunderbird Country Club, which was the very first 18-hole golf course. So a lot of our 11 members were instrumental in building the game of golf here in our desert.

We have over 120 golf facilities now, private clubs and public golf facilities, and we have all different kinds of leagues, and especially the USGA-LPGA program, which is super great because it has 500+ sites and it's developed into -- you would know the answer to this probably -- what is it? How many have been through the system?

Q. Almost 500,000. Almost half a million.

SHIRLEY SPORK: Yeah, unbelievable. So we're leaving all this good stuff to grow. It's like a plant and we were the seeds, and we had a little pot and we put the seeds in the pot and put some water on it and got some support systems, and this plant grew to a big huge plant.

That's where we are today, because when we started playing on the tour in the '50s, how did we gain members? How did we get members? Well, when we finally got a tournament director, Fred Corcoran, his job was to go out and find sponsors. And so once we got a few sponsors, other people began to support us and wanted to come and see us play.

In the beginning prize money was \$3,000 divided amongst the 11 of us the first couple of years. We only had a meeting once a year, and being a graduate with a physical education degree, PS degree and beginning to teach college golf at Bowling Green State University, I only played the tour a little bit on and off.

But the very first LPGA-sanctioned tournament on the west coast in the desert, April 1953, was at Tamarisk Country Club. Playing in the event I thought, you know, I could teach here in the winter and play the tour in the summer.

So I presented that at the executive meeting and it was turned down in 1955, '56; two years it was turned down; third year it passed, 1959, by one vote to start the teaching division.

So how are we going to grow numbers? I was appointed chairman of a school called the LPGA National Golf School for Teachers, and at that school we got a nucleus of the area, find people that would like to come to a free golf clinic.

We had five people that talked for five days, and then if any of those people wanted to -- and they received a certificate. If they wanted to be tested, it's to their teaching ability.

So we had three of our staff watch them teach a junior and a senior and a regular man, woman, child. If they pass they had to teach three separate lessons. If they passed we gave them a certificate saying they attended a school and they're certified to become a member.

So that's how we started to get teaching members. To this day I am so proud of the fact that we have over 1700 teachers. It grew from that six years of a structured golf school to gain membership, and on the tour to gain



members, each town that we traveled to we invited the 10 or less handicapped women in the area to play with us to have some bulk.

Then we would try to convince them to become a member. We didn't have a player's school. We just would take anybody that would come along and wanted to be part of us. So now, gosh, last year there were 360 college graduates come here to Mission Hills in August when it was 118 degrees to try to qualify to become a member of the tour.

In our education department it is now -- the fact that Chapman is it, the name of the college? They study printed material. They send a video of them teaching, and that's how they pass to become an applicant and apprentice in our organization.

I'm just absolutely thrilled to say that I convinced them knocking on the door for three years to start a teaching division, so that's important history that we need. Here at Mission Hills, this tournament becoming a master tournament on our tour was because of someone who believed in us, David Foster, who was head of Colgate Palmolive at the time, so they helped build this golf course. They helped build the clubhouse. They bought a TV station, a news sport network so it could be on television.

So all the things he did that got us publicity, and the visual with the television. We are in 100 and some in Europe. We are on 180 -- on the TV in 180 different countries or something. Is it 180?

Q. I'm not sure the exact number, but it is a lot. We're all in and around the world, international stations.

SHIRLEY SPORK: They get more information in Europe than we get here, but hopefully in the near future we'll be getting more television, especially with our new sponsor, Chevron demanding that it gets on television or we won't have it.

Q. What's it like being here with a sponsor like Chevron, having the The Chevron Championship and just seeing the incredible builds, the special things that all the players get, and just this wonderful major championship atmosphere?

SHIRLEY SPORK: Well, it's tremendous that Chevron -- I think Amy Alcott had a lot to do with it. She used to play with the executive of Chevron who has a home in Pebble Beach. Amy spends her summers up in in the Monterrey Peninsula and plays golf with him.

So I think she really pushed and shoved and help convince

him that they should be a sponsor. We didn't know what sponsor, but it happened to be for the Dinah Shore, or Chevron event, and it's going to carry forward in Houston, their headquarters, for another six or seven years.

So we are building tremendous income from our sponsors. To think that our first thing, first tournament was \$3,000 divided among 11 of us. But we were able to represent our -- we were all on advisory boards. Wilson had Patty and Babe and MacGregor had Louise Suggs, and Spalding had Marilynn Smith.

Then I joined and was committed to the advisory board of Golf Craft, which is now Titleist. We would go and service their accounts and give clinics, and we would show how to slice it and hook it and top it, and then we would show how to correct their errors, and then we would play an exhibition with the pro and the man and ladies champion at their club.

That's how they could promote selling of equipment. We got seven cents for each golf club the company sold as a royalty payment. So every month we would get a little check as to how many clubs they had sold with our name on it.

So there are still quite a few Shirley Spork autographed clubs made by Golf Craft. We made the glass shaft. Owens Corning fiberglass was rolled off of a roll and heated onto a steel rod, and that was lighter than a steel golf club.

So that was the start of making clubs lighter because of the shaft weight, and now everything is done on a computer. We were the advisory staff. You made a golf club. I looked at it and said, I don't like how it looks; I don't like the color; it doesn't hit the ball high enough, da, da, da, da, da.

So that's all done on computers now. It's different. So Wilson had Sam Snead and we had -- trying to think of his name; he'd represent us.

The glass shaft club was lighter, and then came along graphite, and now we are using titanium and graphite. So the lighter the club would still have swing weight, can hit the ball farther because you can make it go faster.

It's like taking a string and tying a weight on the expend swinging it. It's going to bring more power into the club. But in the methodology of the game, the swing pattern changed about every ten years. When I came into the game in high school we still rolled our hands, opened it and closed it and called supinate, pronate, supinate, pronate.

And then the next thing that came along was Byron Nelson had a real straight left arm and pulled and went against his

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

left thigh. That was the next ten years. Then we go to playing -- we used to play around ourself and now we play with everything in front of us. So we don't want to be back here anymore. We want to be out there.

So all these developments come about because of our LPGA teaching division and the PGA of America upgrading the methodology and seminars. Today anybody that picks up the game could get on television and there will be somebody showing you a method. There is all kinds of different ways to get the ball going down the fairway.

Someone asked what I teach. In three words, it took me 71 years, and there is three things you have to do. You have to set up to it. That's set.

Then somehow you have to turn out of the way so the club can come back and meet the ball.

Set, turn.

And how do you release energy? Well, you get out of the way so the club can go down the entire line.

So my three words are set, turn, release. There is a chapter of each thing that you have to understand.

It's different for each person as to their body build, their streak factor, their age. I don't think I've ever taught two people alike the same thing, except they have to have the correct setup, get out of the way, then they release the force.

You know, most teachers have diarrhea of the mouth. They talk too much. The person that talked very little was Harvey Penick. He didn't say too much. I used to sit and watch him teach. What he did is build mental compliments in the person. Kathy Whitworth was a disciple of his and Betsy Rawls and Ben Crenshaw. What were the other ones? Tom Kite?

So his method was basically giving compliments. You have to have someone on your support team. If someone tells you you can do it, that helps you understand and agree that you're doing the right thing.

Well, I never had a mentor until I was, oh, giving a golf clinic for Golf Craft and in Pasatiempo, which is a very famous course in Santa Cruz, California, and he said, you know, you're not making much money out there on the tour. Why don't you become a golf pro, a golf director or manager or whatever up the highway where the pro just passed away. Go give a clinic and apply for the job, which did I.

It was a municipal golf course. It was nine holes; it's 18 now. I raised the revenue 700% in the first year. They took my money and put it in the recreation department to build a baseball stadium.

When I wanted fertilizer there was no money for me, so I thought, well, I've done everything I can do here. I'm going down the road.

So I applied and became the coach at Stanford, which would've started in the fall of 1953. They objected to my receiving royalties on golf equipment. I hadn't started yet, and I came down here and we played our first tournament at Tamarisk and I thought, I'm gone go and see if they need a golf pro here in the winter and I'll play the summer and teach all winter.

So luckily that day I asked, who do I apply to? The secretary said, well, they're having a board meeting by happenstance. I went in and introduced myself and told them I had teaching credentials and I wanted to teach here in the winter. They would, Well, what would you have to have? Well, I got to eat just like you do. If the wind blows or it rains I would have to have a guarantee.

So I gave them the amount of money I wanted and they stood up, shook my hand, and said, We'll see you November 1st. That's how I got the job. So I started here in the desert teaching and called Stanford and said, I've decided I'm not going to go to Stanford.

Other than that, recently I was given an honorary full-time membership at Tamarisk, along with Amy. Amy being Jewish, it was a Jewish club. They honored her. So they were the two women that are honorary members of Tamarisk. I'm honorary member in Indian Wells. Honorary member in Michigan at a course, at Meadow Brook, which I represented when I played amateur golf. I was allowed to play there during the week; I was never allowed to play there on a weekend. I was in college then, so that was okay.

So I feel that if someone believes in you, you can be successful. But if you don't have that backing behind you it's doubtful in your mind all the time.

Whereas our tour players today, the membership being a lot of Asians who are brought up with that mindset, they play better. They are all good. Everybody is a good player or they wouldn't be here.

But the ones that do the best have that confidence when they tee it up on the first hole. People have told them they're good and they won some tournaments, so that is why they can contend.

Whereas when I started we were the pigeons and the Top 3 were up here. They'd won all that. I hadn't won anything except a state championship in the Detroit district and an international and a collegiate.

So when -- finally my mentor was Joey Ray at Pasatiempo. He said, You have the education background. You should be very proud of trying to build this up.

Whereas I asked a Founder who had been on the executive board why they turned it down. Her answer was, Because it's going to be a bunch of old gym teachers. That's what they thought of us as physical education teachers.

So I was glad -- oh, and it would take members away from the tour. They were trying to get bodies on the tour, so that was a problem.

But now it's, you know, sort of on easy street. Not really, but it's functional, and with our new commissioner being interested in all fields, both players and the teachers, it's a good mix.

I'm happy to be able to see where it went, where it is, where it's going. I feel that we're in a sound base with our support group of sponsors. We have nowhere to go but to grow, grow, grow.

So that little plant we planted the seeds, it's growing, getting bigger. Got to get a bigger pot to put it in, okay?

Q. Well, we couldn't be where we are without you, Shirley, and all the other Founders, so thank you and congratulations --

SHIRLEY SPORK: Well, thank you.

Q. -- on finally being inducted into the LPGA Hall of Fame.

SHIRLEY SPORK: Well, it's an honor for all of us. I'm representing all 11 of us Founders here today. I'm sure that Marilyn is tremendously happy, a very good friend of mine and we traveled together on the tour. Marilyn has had her Founders tournament and made a lot of money to give scholarships through the years, and now there is the Marilyn Smith Legacy Foundation.

They're going to have a tournament the first part of May, which I can't attend because a week after that is the Founders. At 94 and three quarters, I can't do that much.

Q. Founders and your birthday I heard.

SHIRLEY SPORK: At the Founders is Mollie's birthday and Shirley's birthday and the Founders tournament, so we'll be celebrating big time. Lots of milkshakes. Ha, ha.

Q. I would gladly share one of those with you, don't you worry. All right. I think we're good.

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