

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT: HALE IRWIN**  
**Thursday, August 15, 2013**



**PHIL STAMBAUGH:** Hale Irwin joining us in the media room this afternoon. Hale, obviously a special week on the Champions Tour when we're going to crown our 1,000th winner in our history and I thought it only appropriate to have you in as our all-time winner with 45 titles and No. 500 at the '97 Burnet Senior Classic. Just some thoughts about the longevity of the Champions Tour, now almost 35 years, and we're going to have our 1,000th winner this week.

**HALE IRWIN:** I think the Champions Tour now, what was the Senior Tour once upon a time, the players that all went before us set such a precedent of caliber of play and maybe more importantly caliber of integrity and being a gentleman on the golf course. I just think of the players that really kind of started this whole thing as more of almost like an exhibition tour. They came out and they played, they showed that the still level that they once had was still pretty darn good and they had fun doing it and they set the model for what we see today. I think it's certainly revised itself, it's refined itself, it's a very competitive tour, but at the same time our players get it and I think we almost seem to admonish people at times. Don't mean to do that, but the players out here now are, while they're still competitive, they understand that the game is bigger than any one player, any given set of players. Hence, while we do well in the pro-ams, while we have two pro-ams or three pro-ams a week, we enjoy that, we enjoy the participation of the amateurs and how they relate to the professionals, and just a moment ago I'm sitting with my pro-am team and we're talking about the old days and recognition and it's fun to hear that and see that they've enjoyed themselves.

**PHIL STAMBAUGH:** Talk about your game. We're coming to a place very familiar to everyone. Might we see the 1,000th winner be the same guy that won the 500th?

**HALE IRWIN:** Perhaps. You never know in this game. It never fails to amaze me how this game sort of ebbs and flows and changes and yet at the same time it's still the same. It's a wonderful game that we never seem to be on top of, yet at the same time we always come back for more, get beat up and come back for more. There's so many good players now and this field is very strong. I think one of the reasons or maybe the big reason a lot of the players come back here is that we remember when the tournaments weren't just -- I know Dick's Sporting Goods is the title sponsor but it used to be we used to have the GHO, the Greater Hartford Open or the Greater Jacksonville Open and the Greater Milwaukee Open. We had the "greater's" of whatever community and that's what this is. It's a community endeavor. It's not just Dick's Sporting Goods, but it's a community endeavor and I think that's what we all harken back to, is that there's so many things about this event that remind us of where we came from so many years ago, that it was a civic event and we enjoy that.

The golf course is a great little golf course to play, not terribly long, although it played fairly long this morning. It's a challenging golf course. So put the ingredients together and you have great championship. And my goodness, look at the field, I think it's a wonderful field.

**Q. To have the chance to play for 1,000 after winning 500, to know that you're still going at it all these years later, what does that mean for you?**

**HALE IRWIN:** That's a lot of numbers, maybe it's beyond what I can think, but at the age of 68 I don't feel like I'm over the hill, although it's a pretty big hill in front of me and kind of a small hill back there. I understand that most of my career's in my rearview mirror, there's no doubt about that, but there's still things I think I still want to do. I still have goals and achievements that I want to have. Whether I make them or not I don't know, but that's the way I've kind of driven myself. If that next victory were to be this week, there would be no one happier than me, believe me. There is a story to be told on the Champions Tour about this being the 1,000th and the 500th. We can get into all the numbers, but it really comes down to Sunday evening, who shot the best number.

**Q. This might a silly question to ask someone who has 20 TOUR wins and three U.S. Open Championships, but with everything you've done on the Champions Tour, do you feel like your success out here has enhanced your stature in the game? Do you ever think about that?**

**HALE IRWIN:** If I do, I quickly slap myself because again I'm going to go back to what I just said, that the game is bigger than any one person. If I can leave this game better than what I found it, then I think I've done my job. If that's because I've won tournaments or because I've added one more person to the game that enjoys it, if it means that I've enhanced an amateur's fun time at the golf course, then I think those are all small steps which really lead to a big step. So hopefully that's the case. Every player that comes out here wants to do the same thing. Some of us are more able to do it than others, some of us achieve it a little bit more than others, but I think we all try to keep that in perspective, and when you don't is when you get slapped upside the head. So perhaps it's something that someone else could answer better than I.

**Q. Maybe to follow up to a certain extent, your almost 20 years out here on the Champions Tour and you prepared yourself to get to this point, but are you at all surprised at how much you've been able to achieve out here?**

**HALE IRWIN:** Well, there's nothing that -- I knew I would be successful. As to what degree, I don't know. I think you have to have that inner confidence. I'm not trying to say that being braggadocious at all, just you have to enter the fray, if you wish, with some confidence and I feel like I had the game and the confidence to be successful. Now, to what degree? I don't know. An injury could have reared up its ugly head,

maybe disenchantment, maybe some other things, family issues, health, who knows what could have happened. Am I lucky? Absolutely. I'm very fortunate to have the success I've had. Like I said earlier, my goals are lofty, they always have been, and to reach those goals I've got to work hard at it, and I'm going to have to bring that goal level down just a little bit now because I understand that my skill sets aren't quite what they used to be, I can't stay in there mentally quite as long as I used to. That was something that was sort of second nature. Now I find myself sort of wobbling off onto some tangent and usually it has something to do with family, the grandchildren and things I still want to do with them. So there are challenges, absolutely, but hopefully the game has been enhanced by my participation in it. If not, then I'm sorry, I've tried.

**Q. Do you know how many times you've shot your age in competition?**

**HALE IRWIN:** No. Hopefully, this week. I've had the opportunity several times this year very recently but what I've been doing is going out and I'll give you three instances. I was at The Tradition this year, I went out and played my first nine in 4-under par, I came back in the next nine at 3 over par. I went to the PLAYERS Championship at Fox Chapel, I was 5-under after 11, bogeyed four holes coming in. I was in Minneapolis several weeks ago, I was 4-under, came back in 3 over. So I'm still capable of doing the good things but I'm also showing that terrible ability to do the other when in years past that would have -- 4-under would have become 5, would have become 6. What I think's happening is I'm pressing it and trying to shoot that age. As I'm 4-under par playing the last TPC Twin Cities, par 5, 205 yards over the water to the flag. Well, you can get there with a 3-iron or something or I can lay up. No, I want to go for 5-under, c'mon. Knocked it in the water and I made an 8. So would I have done that a number of years ago? Most likely not, but I did. So I can do it, it's increasingly difficult to do.

**Q. You talked about how the Champions Tour has grown over the years. Just talk about the competition level. You've got a guy like Kenny Perry who's been out here two or three years leading everything.**

**HALE IRWIN:** Yeah, he needs to go home.

**Q. Just talk a little bit about how it's progressed competition wise.**

**HALE IRWIN:** Well, many of the players in years past may or may not have played right up to the time they were 50 and then came right on. They may have taken off a year or two or three or maybe took it easy health wise or whatever reason. What we're seeing now are players coming right from the regular TOUR right onto the Champions Tour, so their skill sets are still very sharp, they still have the competitive instinct. And Kenny to single out one guy and Bernhard Langer to single out another, just any number of guys, Corey Pavin, Tom Lehman, Bernhard Langer, these guys all set a new standard for all of us to try to reach that level of achievement. The fact that

they're still doing it, they're in good shape, their competitive instincts are still there, they still are relaxed, they still are the champions that they've always been, they keep themselves in good shape. Kenny Perry has just kind of thrown the gauntlet down and said okay, guys, catch me. He's played spectacular golf this year. You look at the year that Bernhard Langer's having, you would think that's a pretty darn good year, too, not that it pales, but...