

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT: DON JANUARY**  
**Sunday, August 18, 2013**



**PHIL STAMBAUGH:** Don, thanks for joining us this morning. Well, I guess it's noon now. I just thought I'd have the first winner of a Champions Tour event in 1980 at the Atlantic City Seniors International, it was the first of your 22 titles on the Champions Tour and you had 10 PGA TOUR victories, including the '67 PGA Championship. We're going to crown No. 1,000 today. I just thought I'd have you in to get your early thoughts about did you ever think you'd live to see that happen, and then talk about winning the first one in 1980 in Atlantic City, what you remember.

**DON JANUARY:** Oh, God. No, we never even dreamed that there would be a 1,000th tournament. We were just interested in getting enough that we could make a living. There were a bunch of us guys that were in our late 40s and early 50s that were still trying to play the TOUR and weren't being very successful at it, yet we still felt like we could play a little, and I'm talking guys like Snead and Boris and van Slykes and Bob Goalby and Gene Littler and Billy Casper, Arnold Palmer, so that was quite a group of us. We got the idea through Fred Raphael and Jimmy Demaret started the Legends Golf in '78 and it was such a success that we thought, well, there might be a market out there for us old guys, and so we stuck our toes in the water and it turned out to be what it is today.

The first year we played two tournaments for \$125,000 each, and I have a friend at home that he reads The Wall Street Journal all the time and he sent me an article that was on the front page about the PGA TOUR and its financing and it stated in the article that this year on the -- I keep wanting to say Seniors Tour but it's the Champions Tour, are playing for \$50 million this year. Golly, 33 years from \$250,000 to \$50 million, that's quite a story.

**PHIL STAMBAUGH:** A few details on that. You won \$20,000 out of the \$125,000 and it says you hit every green in the final round of the tournament and you had your two sons there and one caddied for you, right?

**DON JANUARY:** Yes, my youngest son caddied for me, he was like a senior in high school, and my other son, who's six, seven years older than him, was trying to actually get -- trying to think about getting on TOUR. He was a pretty good player and he had some putting problems and I had brought him with me to see George Low. I don't know if you remember George Low, an old golf pro that he could kick it on the putting green better than most people could putt it, and George had given some tips to Arnold and also to Jack about putting. So I knew George for years and I said, Would you mind, you know, taking a shot at my son? He said, Well, what do you want me to teach him? I said, Hell, how about putting? I tried to help him, I couldn't help him. So George helped him.

But then I was happy to have them both there. We stayed in one of the hotels in Atlantic City. I think at the time there was only two hotels, there must be, what, 25 or 30 now? So it was the first time they had opened up gambling. I don't know, I don't think it was the first year but it was within probably the first three or four. And who was the guy that used to be the president of the PGA, Leo something?

**PHIL STAMBAUGH:** Fraser.

**DON JANUARY:** Leo Fraser. They owned that golf course. Yeah, I couldn't think of it. You know when you get old, golly.

**Q. Excluding the money, how have things changed from when you first started playing to the point that you started on the Senior Tour, what has now become --**

**DON JANUARY:** Well, yeah, that goes back to I got out of college in '53 and it was during Korea, so I went in the service for two years. I was an ROTC 2nd lieutenant in the Air Force. I spent two years in Lackland Air Force base down in San Antonio and then I came on TOUR.

Arnold was doing the same thing, he went in from Wake Forest, he joined the Coast Guard and spent a couple years in the Coast Guard, and then came back and got on TOUR. Littler and Billy Casper were in the Navy in San Diego go and then they came out on TOUR. I was still in the service when they came through San Antonio and they had a rule then that you couldn't accept money for the first six months that you were a pro. That was aimed at going into a new town and some good old or young amateur that could play that one course pretty good taking away some of the money, so they said you had to wait six months to accept money.

Well, I didn't have any to start with, so I turned pro while I was still in the service, but if I did win something I needed the check, I couldn't go without it. Littler and Holscher and Casper, they had sponsors. They played and didn't receive the money but they were getting money from the sponsors. So yeah, it's changed. We had like 30 money spots and 21 through 30 was \$100. A one year, I think it was Tucson, I played and there must have been 10 or 12 of us tied for last place and I got a check for \$7.85 and I cashed the damn thing. I should have kept it and put it up on my wall. I regret that I didn't do that, but I needed the \$7.85. So yeah, it's kind of come a ways.

**Q. It's amazing we're talking about truly the legends of the game and yourself and the others, the Caspers, the Demarets. Would you compare it to baseball, talking about the Williams and DiMaggios?**

**DON JANUARY:** Yeah.

**Q. Can you relate any stories about yourself and those other greats?**

**DON JANUARY:** Oh, golly, it's hard to put me in there with them. I wasn't a bad player but I wasn't a world beater. I played the TOUR for a living and I needed the money. I've always hated to be away from my family as much as I had to be so I set a goal, years ago it used to be \$65,000. If I could get to \$65,000, I went home. Sometimes I was home in June, most of the time it was November and I was still trying to get to the 65,000. The first year I played, 1956, I won a tournament in Dallas, I tied for the Western Open out at Presidio in San Francisco, got beat in a playoff, was in the Top 5 at least three other times. I won \$16,000, \$16,000. When I got through paying all my expenses, I had \$1,100. Now, I played 21 years, I'm not really hollering or bitching or anything, I think it's great that they're able to make what they're making now, it's a tremendous amount of money. But I played 21 years on the regular TOUR, and like I said, I was a pretty good player, I won a PGA and I won 10 other times, two Ryder Cups, the Vardon Trophy, a few things. I made a million three. Now a guy wins one tournament and makes a million four. He makes more in one week than I made in 21 years. But then I could buy a pack of cigarettes for a dime and now they're six dollars or something because that's the worst thing I ever did. I haven't smoked in 25 years but I smoked for 45 and it's the worst mistake I ever made in my life. I got emphysema in both lungs and I have a hard time breathing and it's just my damn fault, nobody held a gun to my head. When I grew up, to be a cool cat, smoke a cigarette and drink a beer, you were doing pretty good doing that.

So it's come a long way and the road, as Phil knows, being here week to week all the time, it wasn't a smooth path all the time. We had some ups and downs. 1968 the media just crucified the players because we separated from the PGA of America, but we needed to be, we had to be. We were the cash cow for the PGA of America. We needed to run our own business. Look at the difference when we took it over, it's in black and white. I mean, we both loved the game of golf. Without the game of golf, my daddy was a roofing contractor. I'm going to tell you there's no shade up on that damn roof, and hot in Dallas, Texas. I didn't want any part of that. So I'm just, you know, happy -- every time I hit it out in the woods, I didn't care because at least it got in the shade for a while.

**Q. From all the people you played with and against, the modern era as well, if you had to pick somebody to win a tournament, who would get your pick?**

**DON JANUARY:** Oh, God, there were so many good players through the years, varied ways to play golf. The golf that's being shot nowadays and played nowadays is a game I'm really not familiar with. The people are bigger, they're stronger, they train so much better than we did. They have those trucks going around that's got all the workout stuff and the PTs in there, I think it's wonderful. I know somebody said, Well, when you played did you have a psychologist and a sociologist and a PT? I says, Yeah, I called him Bartender. I mean, you know, Ben Hogan liked that clear, too, I think. That was just part of the deal back then.

There wasn't a lot of places to stay, so you were housed in the same hotels and motels because there wasn't -- instead of 200 to pick from, you had three, so there's a lot more camaraderie. And we had two or three in a car because you couldn't afford -- hell, I used to put a hundred thousand miles on a car every year just driving on TOUR.

One thing I hated about the driving part was it wasn't on these freeways, it was two-lane roads then and I would get to play in Connecticut. Hell, it takes me five days to get home. To get a week off I had to take three. Well, I couldn't afford three weeks off, so you just stay out there. Your family life sucks. Thank God I married a strong woman. We were married 56 years and she raised our three kids because, hell, I never was there and that's the only thing I ever regretted about playing was that I was not around my family as I probably should have been. Back then, if you were going to do it, that's the way you did it. It's come -- you know, we didn't have private jets and all the other. I think the kids nowadays are missing some of those things. I don't believe they're as close knit as we were, but the product creates all that. If you put up that much money, you get very individual about it. Before, I mean, nobody had any money and so we were all in the same group and it was a different attitude. The equipment is so much better than it was then. Golly, if they can shoot a guy up on the moon, they can make a golf ball go anywhere. It's just technology took over and it's the same old -- the dog's tail -- who's wagging the tail. They don't let the manufacturers do it, it's kind of like the USGA, well, if they don't like the rules as people do it, somebody's got to do it. Nowadays I think we have a pretty good correlation of everybody getting on the same page and doing what's I think the most important part is the game of golf. Golly, what a great game, and to be privileged enough to go out and make a living at it is just unreal, it really is unreal.

**Q. You talk about the comparisons. Can you compare the persimmon woods to today's metal drivers, and again extending that, the banning of the belly putters?**

**DON JANUARY:** Yeah. Well, about the equipment, wood against metal, I don't know if y'all are old enough, but you know everybody but the USA used to play what they call the little ball. Now, that was a smaller ball in circumference, so consequently it reacted differently than what we called the big ball that we played with. That's the reason in Ryder Cup we just drowned them all the time because they played the little ball. England and over in that area, the weather's so bad, it required the little ball because the wind was blowing so hard and the rain and all the other stuff that you had to put up with. And when those good players would come over here, they weren't good players. They only knew half the game. The little ball, you couldn't hook it. Why? Because you got off the clubhead so fast and that's how you control the ball is keeping it on the clubhead long enough to make it do something. They got off so fast that all they did in playing over there was aim left and swing hard because it wasn't going left, it was always going to come back. Well, now you put the big ball and you

aim left and swing hard, it goes left, hell, it's in the next century over there, you can't find it. So they weren't very smart, for years they wouldn't do it, and then they switched and went to the big ball and now look at the Ryder Cup. It's a little different. Of course not only just England they're picking from, they're picking from Spain and France and all the Netherlands and Germany and everywhere else. That's okay, but when I played them it was just Wales and Ireland, Scotland and England. That was the Ryder Cup and they played the little ball. Every chance I got to play it I played it because it's easier to play, you could do more with it. Very difficult to chip because again it got off the club so fast you couldn't spin it enough to control chipping around the green.

The belly putter, I'm of the opinion that it ought to be outlawed. My answer to people that are using it, well, how can it help? I say your nerves are part of the game of golf and anytime you brace something against your body, you take away your nerves. If you get nervous and choke and whatever and make that terrible putt and it's not only the breakdown of the left wrist this way and when you're jerking, jerking and if you don't have to do that, if you can put that up against your body -- I said rather than disbar it, if a guy's going to putt that way, just make him drive that way, we'll stop that shit. So it's a crutch. Competitive golf is not a game of crutches.

**Q. What would you like people to say about Don January the man, Don January the golfer?**

**DON JANUARY:** Oh, golly, what would I say?

**Q. What would you like people to say about you?**

**DON JANUARY:** Just take me with a grain of salt. My vocabulary's awful. I'm a true Texan, you know. You know what you have left when you take all the bullshit out of a Texan? Just hat and boots, that's all you've got left.

On, I've had a wonderful life, I'm so blessed, so fortunate, so lucky, a little bit of talent. I'm not an egotist, but then yeah, I was a pretty good player, I enjoyed it. I went home very seldom after I got my PGA card when I had to play 25 years to get the card for five years, I never played more than 15. First of all, I wasn't big enough or strong enough. I know, I laugh now, I've got six grandchildren and they're 21 to 28 and they're old enough now that they'll sit and really talk to me. Before it was parents and grandparents, you would just get yes, sir, no, sir, some of the others. Now they come up to me and say, Why do we call you Slim? I say, Well, when my kids started having kids, they said, what do you want to be called, Dad? I said Granddad, Granddad's fine with me. But pop pop and some of the those other pet names, I said I'm not one of those, so why don't you just have them call me Slim because when I was growing up that was my nickname. I was 5-11 and 150, they used to say I could turn sideways in the wind and I'd hung, but then now I'm 5-9 and 215. But I quit smoking 25 years ago and I gained 50 pounds within two months and I've never gotten it off. I finally could

taste food and I loved it.

**Q. Can you talk about Tiger Woods and his impact on the game and TOUR?**

**DON JANUARY:** Been tremendous. I think he's been a wonderful asset. Yeah, he's had his problems. That's his life. You know, his problem has always been prevalent out there, just whether you wanted to participate or not. It is in all life, a bar or a business or wherever, it's there if you want to participate. Unfortunately, he did. That's his business. I didn't like the reflection it put on the TOUR, but then that's life, that's human life.

Golf wise, good gosh, gosh, talented, oh, just tremendous. I saw him when -- first time I saw him he was at Stanford and he came up to Napa and he and Arnold were having dinner in there at the hotel. I asked Arnold the next day -- I'm kind of nosy, I want to know everything -- I said, Hey, I saw you having dinner with Tiger in there and he's a freshman down at Stanford, what were y'all talking about?

Arnold was very truthful. He said, Well, he came up and wanted to know how I handle all the notoriety, how I handle the press. There's a guy that's a freshman in college that hadn't beat anybody yet. He won an amateur. Who in the hell? It's not a big feat to win the damn amateur, it's match play. The best player doesn't always win. In fact, he very seldom does.

But boy, look at his record and look where he came. Man, he's killed them. In three years I saw him on TV not really knowing him or meeting him, I saw his upper body gain at least 25 or 30 pounds and his golf game got better, not worse. Golf's always been your muscles need to be long and smooth and not knotted and hard because it shortens your swing, you know. They say he put all that weight on, he just got better. I think he's done a tremendous job.

How would you feel if you were put in his shoes, all that notoriety, or Arnold's or Jack's? They can't go out to a restaurant because everybody's on them all the time wanting this, wanting that, sign this, sign that. They don't have a life, they have to make one separate from that. I'm glad I wasn't that good. I enjoy people, I enjoy being around people. I think they do, too, but they get forced into this and it's just something that, you know, Bing Crosby, anybody that's a celebrity and they live a different life and it's partly caused by the paparazzi and notoriety. It's nice even at my age now, somebody says, hey, that's Don January. That makes my shoulders straighten up a little bit, that's nice, that's good. I think he's been great for it.

**Q. Don, being here 33 years after winning the first and to present the trophy for the 1,000th winner, what does that feel like for you?**

**DON JANUARY:** I felt very fortunate that they called, very glad to have helped in any way. Truthfully, when we first started we had no idea how long it was going to last or

whether it would even be successful or not. We thought we had a pretty good product but then we weren't sure of anything. We never thought, at least I never thought in that realm of 1,000 tournaments. My God, that's forever. That's 33 years ago. I was 50 33 years ago.

So golly, I don't know. We never dreamed that it would be what it is. I think what it is is good, it's come a long way. Hopefully we'll get better and keep people like Phil and others around to help us. Phil and I go way back to the regular TOUR. And we've had good leadership. Bruno, Henning, Butch upstairs, we've had great people. Our product has grown, it's getting better. I'm not around it anymore, but from what I can see from the outside looking in again, it looks like it's in good hands and it's going to be here a while.

**Q. Any prediction for today?**

**DON JANUARY:** For today? The best man will win.

**Q. Over your years, who did you love playing with when you were on the TOUR?**

**DON JANUARY:** Oh, golly, there was always groups of people. A good friend of mine, we just lost him this year, was Miller Barber from Texarkana, Texas. Miller and I used to ride in the same car together for 20 years and stayed in the same places and played practice rounds together. He was probably one of my best friends out there. You get any group of people together, you kind of get cliquish; a certain four or six or eight or 10 kind of think the same things, kind of do the same things, some people like to drink and other people don't. They all get in our little niches and I was in a niche, especially back then, yeah, we did a lot of drinking. It was just part of the deal.

It's like Hogan, like I said, he drinks sic clear (ph) or did. Wonderful man, helped me tremendously with my golf game. If anybody said he didn't help you, that's BS, he did. He had to like you. It came so hard for him, it was very difficult for him to be outward.

I'll tell you a story about him most people don't even know. I was married to my wife for 56 years and I lost her about four years ago and when I had been married to her for 32 years we were talking one day, lived in a little town out in Eastland, Texas, and her husband -- my father-in-law was a car dealer in a little town and it was not only if you were the car dealer, you were the mayor or you ran the drug store or whatever. Back in the little town of Dublin, Texas, they had an oil play in the late '20s and Ben Hogan's daddy was a roughneck and his mother worked for my mother-in-law in the telephone exchange. It was back when you plugged in and you rang it. That goes a long way. Like I said, she finally mentioned about, she said I used to babysit Ben Hogan and Royal, his brother. I says -- her name was Arita. I said, says, Arita, my

God, I've been married to your baby daughter for 32 years and you never said diddly squat about Ben Hogan. Man, he's my man. Well, so I got to asking her a question. I said, Well, that's a shame about I heard that his daddy -- he saved his money, took his shot and he dry holed it and he couldn't handle it, I guess, and he killed himself. My mother-in-law said, No, no, he didn't do that, put it right there, pulled the trigger.

Ben Hogan was in the room, he was eight years old. I don't know about you and your kids and if you had any boys or not, but a little boy of eight loves their daddies, I mean really love their daddies, and to see his daddy take his own life just very traumatic, I just came -- and hard, he learned the hard way, Ben did.

I saw him play in '45 and he hit a duck hook all the time. Saw him again in '49 and he had it up in the air and it was just as long and it fluttered down to the right and that's when he killed everybody, and it was the fall that there was a gambling game going on, I was in Texas, in Denton, and I heard that Pollard Simons, a guy there in Dallas that had some money was the first one that put up the money for the Ben Hogan Company, was playing Harry Todd, a pro there at Lakewood Country Club who was a good player, and Dizzy Dean, the old baseball player. Dizzy carried a 12 and played to a 6. Back then, this is in the '40s, they played a \$500 Nassau. Hey, try on that. Oh, I said I've got to see that, so I hitchhiked from Denton down to Lakewood, it was on a Thursday or Friday and I got there and they were on 5 and I saw Ben, he shot like 64 or something and just tremendous. That was like in October, and in February was when he was coming back through Van Horn and the bus bus hit him. I didn't realize this until I got to playing more but he won the majority of his major tournaments after the wreck. They didn't ever think he'd walk again much less play. Gardner always depicting himself as Ben and worked for him at Tamarisk in Palm Springs. I always called Gardner Flip and I said, Flip, what did Ben do when you worked for him? He said he would open the shop and Ben would come in about 9:00, have breakfast and then go to the practice tee and hit balls until about 12:30 and then he'd have lunch and then he'd go back out on the practice tee at 1:30 and hit balls until about 5:00. Try that on for size for about five years. That's how he changed his swing and his game. He learned through hook and crook and hard work. Hard, hard work to get rid of that duck hook. You couldn't find it half the time. He worked hard to make himself as good a mechanic as I've ever seen. He was not the most natural player I ever saw. The most natural player I ever saw was Sam Snead. That West Virginia hillbilly could handle his business. He loved it. Everybody loved to gamble back then. It was a different era. Now it's sophistication and private jets. Back then it was a stiff drink and let's go again tomorrow.



