

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: HALE IRWIN
Wednesday, June 10, 2015



DAVE SENKO: We would like to welcome Hale Irwin to the Constellation Energy SENIOR PLAYERS Championship, or the Constellation SENIOR PLAYERS Championship.

HALE IRWIN: Is this a multiple choice?

DAVE SENKO: No. Hale, you've won twice here in Boston and this is also the 25th anniversary of your U.S. Open victory. Just talk about playing here in Boston. You've had some success here, played here several times, but just what it's like to be back here in New England again.

HALE IRWIN: Well, I've said many times that Boston's probably the No. 1 city in the country for sports and the energy that people put into the Pats and the Sox and the Bruins, I think it's -- the Celtics, it's the greatest town in America as far as sports go. So golf fits into there quite nicely with the people that at least came out to Nashawtuc and came out to The Country Club and other venues where we've been able to play. It's fun to play in front of a crowd and the energy that's there. They know sports, they know golf. It's not something new, and I think the players respond to that, they appreciate that.

For me, Nashawtuc brought to me a lot of great memories, it still does. And there were a few times out there on this course, while it's not Nashawtuc, it's sort of a snapshot of holes over there. I don't know how far away we are, but there are a couple places you just got that feeling that this looks like a hole that's from Nashawtuc, so I feel quite comfortable on the golf course. I don't find it to be overly bearing in one direction or another. Having been up here for so many years, or Worcester in the old Pleasant Valley days and over here for this event, with my grandson having played for the Pats for four years, so it's kind of a little natural tie-in, I suppose, with being here and feeling comfortable.

Q. Do you generally appreciate these Donald Ross courses that are built on the topography and what kind of challenges do they present?

HALE IRWIN: Oh, yeah. The old architects went out and found the land that would be a golf club. It wasn't a country club, it didn't have housing. They chose the sites. That luxury is not afforded to too many design groups now. If there's any to be built, it's like okay, we have 500 homes we have to put in here and roads and all the services, but back then they chose the site because it would make a great golf club. It didn't matter if it was a hard one or not, or an easy one. We were talking about some of the holes out here. If you had to play uphill like you do to two or three of the greens, on a new golf course there would be so much screaming and yelling going on. But now this Ross or MacKenzie or Tillinghast or a Raynor, suddenly it's okay, so I don't quite understand the logic. But anyway, I really enjoy the old courses. I enjoy the architects and what they did or maybe what they couldn't do. They didn't have the heavy machinery that today's design groups have. I mean, I know

when we go in there, we can rock and roll and do whatever needs to be done. Well, not then. They had to be a little more selective. So I really enjoy it. I like the nuances they provide.

Q. Hale, you talked about how some of the holes are reminiscent of the layout at Nashawtuc. I'm thinking of the maybe the ninth hole there where you have some elevation.

HALE IRWIN: A little bit. I think as we got over to -- I have to think, this is the first time I've really played the course -- 16? A par 3 and then there's a par 4. I think it's 16 here. That second shot in there reminded me of the 10th hole the way that hole kind of goes, you have the trees on the left and kind of swings to the right and that green sets down, it reminded me some of that 10th hole at Nashawtuc. But there are a couple other places reminded me of the same thing. Some of those uphill holes, if you said what's 7 like, I don't know, I would have to go back and find 7. But there were a couple times where sort of reminiscent, oh, yeah, I've been here before, it's Groundhog Day all over again. A little bit, yes. That's why I think there's some courses you get on that you just don't feel right or feel comfortable, but I felt very comfortable out there. I was here yesterday, played five holes, so 13 of them I had never seen before today but I felt at home, felt good.

Q. Felt familiar instead of foreign?

HALE IRWIN: Yeah, yeah, exactly. What felt foreign was a place like French Lick. That was out there. It was just out there. But I don't mind the defining trees and the hills and dales. That to me is what I'm more in tune with for my game and what my eye prefers to see.

Q. Talking about your game, how is it? What are your thoughts looking ahead?

HALE IRWIN: Looking ahead? Boy, there's not a lot of years. There's a lot of years back there. That rearview mirror is this big. (Laughing.)

Well, my game. My game is frustrating right now. I think some of it is due in large part to age. I'm 70 years old now and the focus is just not what it once was, and maybe it shouldn't be. I don't question evolution and what happens with your game. It doesn't mean I have to like it, but I think over the last several years I haven't played to the level that I think I can still play. But then again I don't prepare and I don't stay on task the way I used to, either. There are other things more important in my life than just playing golf.

Long way, long-winded story perhaps, but I have a couple of physical things that maybe older age brings along. I've got a hamstring thing up in my butt that's -- they call it something special in the trailer, I don't know what it is, that gives me a little issue if I really try to fire my hips. It's that movement.

Then I've got a little left side neck here which makes it a little harder. So between not being

able to get back here and not being able to get through it, even if it's just that much, adds that little bit to your game that you don't need. It takes away from your game that you're kind of counting on. So there's some frustration in that that they're not getting well as quickly as they may have a couple years ago. As we all know, it just happens. We get out of bed, what did I do in bed last night that I don't know anything about or something. So that part of my game is not sharp.

So I'm often asked, are you still having fun? Well, it's not fun to go out and shoot some of the scores that I've been shooting. I can point to French Lick. The first nine holes I played I shot 42 and then I came back and shot 33. Really? How do you do that? Nine shots in nine holes?

Q. You can do that in that course.

HALE IRWIN: Really? That's not who I am. That's not the way -- my career has been defined by kind of being steady and not a nine-shot differential in nine holes. So that's kind of the way it is. I'm still capable of doing the good stuff, but I'm very capable of doing the other stuff now, too. So I've just got to find a way over the next, let's just say this week, to kind of keep it simple, stupid, try to stay on task. And I say that meaning prepare myself to play a little bit better by just staying focused. I can't hit the ball quite as far as I used to, and that also has added some discomfort because what was a 6-iron now is, maybe it's a 5-iron. So I'm not really sure how far I hit the ball, and that's kind of been a relatively new phenomenal because I used to be right on. I could tell you how far I'm going to hit that ball within a yard or two every time. Now it's give or take five or 10.

Q. Let's look back then. Does it seem like 25 years, 1990, the victory, or does it seem like it was just a lot more recent?

HALE IRWIN: We can go back even to '74. That just seems like a couple months ago. Honestly, I heard the description of life is a little bit like toilet paper, you run out faster at the end. You know, just the roll goes and all of a sudden that's kind of what it seems like. The years are rolling by so fast now. My wife and I, didn't we just go to bed? I mean, we're going to bed again? We just got up. The days are just so quick.

But you're right. I think 25 years ago, really? It just doesn't seem possible because there are things I remember about that week -- not everything, but a couple things that are so clearly imprinted in my mind, it seems like yesterday but it wasn't. Twenty-five years.

Q. Hale, I guess with the level of physical discomfort you're having to deal with or manage out on the golf course and some of the frustrations you're dealing with in terms of the game, it begs the question how much longer would you like to continue to do this past this age?

HALE IRWIN: Good question. I have no answer, because I ask that of myself all the time. You know, others have asked that question. I think as long as I -- as long as I feel like I can

contribute to the game, and that's as important to me now maybe as playing well. If I can give back to the game and to the people that have given me so much, then I will play or stay involved in some capacity. It may not necessarily be playing 26 events or 22 events. It may next year probably be a lesser number than this year. But at some point in time I'm going to step off the merry-go-round and if my wife and I want to take a trip, it's without golf clubs. I'm tired of lugging those things around. They're heavy.

But I don't know. I think this year I'll play as much as I can. Next year I think I'm going to reel it in, and whether it's 11 or whatever the retirement number is. I don't know, I haven't even checked into all that, but I was reminded that in December this year I've got to start taking my retirement, you're mandated, you have to take your 70-and-a-half. I'm not that old. Well, I am, I guess I am. So they're telling you to get out, it's time. So I don't know. This is all kind of new. This is new territory we're in.

Q. Still look good, though.

HALE IRWIN: Oh, thank you. That mirror tells me something different. I hate mirrors.

Q. When you say contributions, what do you mean? What sort of things would you like to give back and what shape would those take?

HALE IRWIN: Well, probably in dealing with today's youth. I think the kids of today can learn a lot about themselves through golf. That's why I love the junior golf programs, I love the First Tee, I love the AJGAs, I love any of the junior golf programs where the kids can get out and learn about themselves through golf and associate with others through golf. It's a high-class sport. We're not gouging each other under the piles, we're not elbowing each other, we're not undercutting somebody and putting them on the hardwoods, we're not driving them into the boards. We're pretty civil about it.

But I think as much as anything else they can learn about themselves because they have to do it, they're accountable to themselves. That's important. And if I can pass on some of the lessons that I've learned, particularly to the children, to our youth to help them become better citizens, I don't know there's anything better that I can do than that. I'm involved with some of the kids down in Phoenix in the First Tee program and I love it. Those are great kids. Not just saying First Tee, but it's important. Any of those kids, they just -- AJGA out in Denver just had a tournament in my name last week and I was there with the kids. It's great because they listen, they're willing participants, and it's great to be able to talk to them and be able to impart some of the wisdom that I might have in a free and casual environment. I think it's great. So that would be the primary way I would like to do it.

Q. You're articulate, you're so good in these situations. Are you going to miss any of this at all?

HALE IRWIN: Of right now?

Q. Yes, just imparting that wisdom that you're talking about, whether it's telling stories or whatever.

HALE IRWIN: No. I think if we took this situation and you went out there and helped kids with the story, then I would miss that. But if we don't reach those kids, and I'm not talking about adults. I know that's who our readers are, and viewers, I'm not immune to reality. But if I can get to those kids in some way, shape or form, that's what I think because those kids are going to be adults very soon and they're going to be the next politicians, they're going to be the next people that run companies that I'm going to have to -- the pharmaceutical drugs, I hope they run good companies so I want them to be smart and with it. They're going to have to be taking care of me. I think everybody here would like to help out somebody else, particularly the kids. I've got three grandchildren that I just adore and one on the way. If I can help them in any way, shape or form become better citizens, and I say citizens, in the greater sense of the word that's what I mean. It's not just individual. I think you have to be part of a society to contribute to it. What you take, you have to give back.