

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
July 29, 2020



JACK NICKLAUS

STEWART MOORE: I'd like to welcome 18-time major champion, World Golf Hall of Fame member, a man who needs no introduction, Jack Nicklaus, back here at the Ally Challenge presented by McLaren. Mr. Nicklaus, obviously out here for a couple days getting the chance to watch your son Gary.

Before we talk about your trip back here to Grand Blanc, looking back over these last three or four months, America's really been starved for sports. I think we saw with your tournament, The Memorial Tournament presented by Nationwide, ratings through the roof over the weekend.

How much has sports and golf in general allowed some sense of normalcy to kind of come back to our routine?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, golf is outdoors. There's really -- the guys aren't really on top of each other. It's not a contact sport. Tell us all when we finish it's not a contact sport, because our bodies think it's a contact sport. But I think golf is -- it lends itself to being able to be played.

The way they've done it without the fans, I think the people -- the players all like the fans out there, I think the tournaments like the fans out there, but it's about playing the game. Having live television, having live sports, having -- if you look at the golf on television, it's really not a whole lot different. You don't hear the reaction from the fans. I mean, I see the guys hole putts, they still tip their hats, right? Who's applauding? They're just used to tipping their hat when they make a putt.

But I think golf's been good. Of course, this is the first PGA TOUR Champions event. Jeff Brown asked me to come up and be part of it, which I'm happy to do. Gary's playing, so I came up and watched Gary hit a few shots. Not much, a couple holes today and I think I saw him play one or two holes yesterday.

But we're doing this and then we're heading -- I'm going to Muirfield this afternoon and fix a few more greens.

STEWART MOORE: Real quick before we turn it over to the media. You mentioned Muirfield. Obviously tremendous support, your tournament, from Nationwide. Up here, Ally and McLaren as well. Talking about the fabric of sports, bringing some sense of normalcy back, none of that's really possible without their support.

JACK NICKLAUS: For sponsors to stay with what's going on with the Tour is amazing. You

know, in Columbus, Nationwide stayed with us. They brought in Workday for the first event, which was a new sponsor. The only reason we had two tournaments at Muirfield was because they had one canceled and they were looking for a place to play for the guys and they asked us if we would do that. I can't imagine anybody in their normal mind would say yes, but we did. So we had two weeks in a row.

Dan Sullivan, who runs this tournament and ran Muirfield and the Workday tournament, his whole team did a great job. And, of course, when you have Ally and McLaren here -- Ally's been a great supporter of the game, great supporter of charities and things. I've gotten to know JB for the last year and a half or so. He's really committed to doing the right thing.

So it's nice to have them here. They've stayed by you on the Senior Tour.

Q. As a South Florida guy, I'm sure you're aware what the Marlins are going through right now. Do you have any thoughts on that? And can you talk about your own experience with the coronavirus and how difficult it was going through the recovery process?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I don't really know what the Marlins are doing. I know they had, what, 16 guys test positive? Is that what it was?

Q. A bunch, yeah.

JACK NICKLAUS: Yeah, a bunch. It's a pretty contagious disease. I would imagine that all 16 of them are probably over it by now. For most people -- I happen to be in the vulnerable age, you might say. We got through it. I had a little sore throat for about four, five days, a cough that lasted about three weeks. Barbara had absolutely nothing. I'm actually still left with no taste. I can't smell or taste very much. She's not bad, but she had it for a long time, too. I mean, I've been out of it for three months, still can't taste.

Q. Was it scary when you found out you had it?

JACK NICKLAUS: Not really. I mean, I called my doctor and he says, oh, you've got a cold, forget it. I said, what if I take a Z-Pak? He said, well, it might help you, it might not, don't worry about it. I said, I would like to get tested because with what's going on today. That was in March.

So he said, okay, I'll test you. So we tested, both of us tested. I said, why is Barbara testing? Well, she's been with me. Both came back positive nine days later.

Anyway, we tested for each of the next couple weeks and we were positive both the next two weeks. And then the third week we did that and tested for the antibodies. So both doctors said, we wish we were in your position. You can't give it and you can't get it. Whether that's truth or not, we don't know. I guess some people have had repeat cases of it.

It wasn't a big deal for us. I'm sure it's, obviously, a big deal for about 150,000 other people in the United States. That's not good. You don't want to be losing any lives over that. But you're talking about baseball and you're talking about golf, you're talking about mostly people that are really in good condition and good shape. They seem to handle it pretty well. It's people that have underlying conditions, I suppose you say, and have other troubles that get it.

I have some breathing problems, but it didn't seem to get to me on that. I guess I'm one of the fortunate ones. They said there's about 150,000 who haven't been so fortunate in the United States.

Hopefully, this thing will pass. I think they've got to get -- you've got to get back into life. Just protect your senior citizens and protect those who are vulnerable. And the ones who aren't vulnerable probably get through it pretty easily.

Q. How about your wife, though? She gets it. Weren't you a little bit concerned about her?

JACK NICKLAUS: Her? She took care of me the whole time. Don't worry about Barbara. Barbara's like a rock. She was totally asymptomatic, she had nothing. The only reason she got tested is because I did. She says, really, I've got this? Yeah, she had zero.

Q. Your response to COVID reminds me of a question that I've asked a couple other people, including Muhammad Ali and a few others, and the question of what your mental approach is to have such extended sustained excellence. Is there any principles that you just feel are endemic to who you are, you try to live by, that allow you to have this resilience both professionally and personally?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I've always tried to -- I'm not a drinker, I'm not a -- I was a smoker when I was a kid, but I'm not a smoker, I'm not a drinker, I've never been into drugs, I get a good night's sleep. I take care of myself. I'm a little overweight. That's mostly because of my back and not being able to walk. I can't walk from here to, well, the clubhouse, my back's hurting me. Sooner or later, I guess one of these days I'll go get that taken care of. I'm not doing very well with it right now.

But my whole attitude has always been, you know, positive, optimistic about what's going on. I feel like if you have a negative attitude, you're going to have a negative result. So I try to keep it that way.

Q. How often are you playing golf right now?

JACK NICKLAUS: I think I played about three nine holes this year. Not much. I played two nine holes -- I probably played -- I've actually probably played a couple 18s, too. I played two nine holes Saturday and Sunday before we went to Muirfield a couple weeks ago, and I paid for it ever since.

Q. What's it like when you watch Gary play in something like this?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, Gary hasn't played, either. Nobody's played. He plays because he likes to play. Is he playing well? I don't know whether he's playing well or not.

But to watch him play? I honestly enjoy watching my kids play anything. And we're not going to stay for the tournament because we're not allowed to be spectators.

You know, I loved watching Nick play football and I loved watching a couple of my kids play college lacrosse. Of course, we had all the high school sports they all played in. We love doing that. Sort of getting slow right now. But five years ago, Barbara and I would be hitting eight or nine athletic events a week at home in the high schools. We just try not to miss them. We like them.

Q. You don't think they would make an exception for you if you wanted to watch?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I wouldn't want them to. I suppose I could watch in one of two ways. One is be his caddie, or coaches are allowed on the side, is that right?

STEWART MOORE: Correct.

JACK NICKLAUS: Which I could be coach, which I basically am his coach, but I don't think that -- that's taking advantage of what it is. I don't believe that's right. We'll play by the same rules that everybody else plays by. I think that's the right way to do it.

Q. You talked about that shot last year in the charity event that you were walking off. I mean, now that you look back at it, what are your thoughts on that whole moment?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I hadn't chipped a ball in for about five years and I haven't chipped one in since. We had the chip-off and Kid Rock was my partner and I chipped it in. And he said, well, I can get out of here now, I can get out of the concert.

It was kind of fun. I'm competitive, you know. I can't hit the ball anymore. My clubhead speed's so slow, it sounds like I've got the clubhead cover on it, and it goes like it, too. I can still hit a decent bunker shot or a decent chip or putt.

Q. How strange is it for you to be at tournaments and not see fans here?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I'm used to it now. At Muirfield, I kind of liked Muirfield without the fans. I got to drive around and be somewhere and say hello to somebody without everybody tugging at me. So that was kind of fun. I don't think I would want that as a steady diet. I think the fans really want to be out there.

Q. Do you think it affects the players' performance when there aren't any spectators?

JACK NICKLAUS: I don't think it affects them at all. Some people -- some guys feed off the gallery a little bit when they get going, but not really. These guys have all -- when they're home, they're not playing with galleries. They're shooting, 63, 4, 5 at home, and it's just getting their game in shape to play, concentrate on what they're able to do. Sometimes you get a guy who hasn't been maybe the best player out there and he gets the people on his side when he's playing, they do feed off of that.

But I think I fed off the gallery in the '86 Masters. The gallery was fantastic. I enjoyed that a lot. For the most part, I think most of the guys really are working on trying to just play golf.

STEWART MOORE: Jack, you mentioned the '86 Masters. Four years later you turned 50, transitioned back out to PGA TOUR Champions. This week, Jim Furyk, KJ Choi, Mike Weir, all making their debuts. Can you talk a little bit about that mindset of moving from the PGA TOUR to PGA TOUR Champions and maybe some of the obstacles it creates?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, when I turned, I didn't -- I turned 50 in January and I didn't play until April. I made The Tradition my first tournament at Desert Mountain, and I was playing terrible. I was just awful.

I went out to the tournament and played a practice round the day before the tournament, and Jim Flick walked with me. And Jim has known me for -- known each other for, I don't know, since I was a 19-year-old kid, but he never had been my teacher or anything else, but he watched Jack Grout teach me for a lot of years. So he walked around the round and we just talked. Didn't think anything about it. We got on the 18th hole and I turned to him and I said, Jim, I said, you've seen Jack Grout teach me a lot. I said, what do you see? He said, well, I don't see Jack Nicklaus.

I says, well, what do you mean? He says, let's go to the practice range, I'll take five minutes and show you what I see. So he showed me what he saw, what I needed to do, and I won the tournament. My debut was fun and successful.

Now, KJ. KJ played the Memorial tournament, KJ played decently. Jim Furyk's been playing very well. And who --

STEWART MOORE: Mike Weir.

JACK NICKLAUS: Mike's been in and out a little bit.

But all three are good players. I would expect -- this week I would expect Furyk to be right there. I don't know how KJ -- KJ can still play well. Mike is, as I say, hasn't been playing that much.

When the guys come out and all of a sudden they have a new lease on life, they've gotten off a tour where they really haven't been as successful as they would like to be. I don't

necessarily think that's in Jim's case, because Jim's still very competitive right now. I'm sure he'll play a lot more on the regular tour. It's a new ballgame.

When I played, I was still playing -- I played -- when I turned 50, I never played more than six tournaments in any one year on the Senior Tour, and usually five: the four majors, and I picked usually one or two other tournaments. I still played as many tournaments on the regular tour. You know, it's just what you like to do and how you feel. I think Furyk will do a little bit what I did.

Q. Jack, how much has the Tour changed and developed and grown since you played in the '90s?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, you want to talk about financially or -- it's the same number of players, 144 a tournament, but when I was winning in the '90s -- well, let's just put it this way: The biggest purse I ever won on the regular tour was the '86 Masters, which was \$144,000. The biggest purse I won in a regular tournament on the Senior Tour was the last one I won, which was The Tradition in '96. I never won a tournament after I was 56. I won skins games and little events and things like that, but I never won any more tournaments.

The game financially has changed dramatically, and the guys can now go out and play -- when we played, we played golf to win tournaments to make a name so we could go make a living using our name that we made on the Tour. Today, the guys can make a living on the Tour and a lot of them can make a living on the Tour, and they don't necessarily have to win to be able to make a living, which I think is sort of a drawback a little bit.

I think a lot of guys, they look -- they're out there, they don't win a tournament and they win \$3 million or \$4 million in a year. And a lot of them say, I don't want to work as hard as Tiger Woods worked. They say, I know I can't compete with them anyway, I'm quite happy where I am.

I don't think it should be that way, I think everybody should try to -- everybody's different, but I think they should try to be the best. That's what I always tried to be. It didn't make a difference what we were playing for when I played, I could care less about prize money. It was I wanted to win and I wanted to be the best, and that was my -- that was my -- I think a lot of money disincentivizes that a little bit, whatever the right word is. But I think it's great for a lot of these guys. They can not only play golf on the Tour, make a heck of a living, but they can also spend time at home and have a family.

We didn't have -- thank goodness for my wife, Barbara, I'd have never known my kids. The guys today, they can get home.

Q. On this course, what do you feel like is the key to success for the guys that are playing this week?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, obviously the golf course has changed. I told the guys out there

when I was doing the pro-am, when I was out here before, there wasn't a tree out here. I first played here in 1959. We got to the 13th hole, 13th hole, and I said, now, that tree down there is the only tree out here that's older than I am. It's one big white oak tree that sits about 250 off the tee, and I think it's probably the only tree. This was just a big open field when we played the first tournament here. They changed the greens, they changed the bunkering, they changed the whole golf course. The golf course has matured tremendously over the time. It's matured long before this time.

The golf course has changed -- I can't remember what the question you asked me first.

Q. The key to success on the course.

JACK NICKLAUS: The golf course here, you know, it's now gotten to where -- it used to be where you could drive it anywhere because there wasn't any trees. Now you've got to drive the ball pretty straight. It depends -- we're on Wednesday. Wednesday, these greens are pretty quick already. That was surprising to me, I saw how quick the greens were out there today.

They have a pretty good challenge on their hands. When they first started playing the Senior Tour, we were playing 6,500 yards. The guys are playing 7,100 yards now, aren't they? What are they playing this course at?

STEWART MOORE: About 71.

JACK NICKLAUS: About 71? That's a long golf course.

Some of these guys, they're getting like I am, getting a little long in the tooth, and they just -- they don't hit it out there as far as they used to. It's tough.

Q. Jack, you already beat COVID-19 and you're out here again, you're at different events. What's your motivation to keep coming to these events even after getting coronavirus?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, I don't think corona has anything to do with it. My motivation in coming is I love the game of golf. I love to promote it and grow it wherever we go. I've got sponsors who love to have me come to their tournaments and be part of what they're doing because it's good for their clients and it's good for -- it's good -- well, we're sitting right here. I hope this is not bad for the event. We're talking about it and having publicity. Hopefully, that's a plus.

You know, I don't play golf anymore, so that's the kind of stuff I do now. Still go to golf courses.

This afternoon I'm going to Muirfield and make several visits prior to the tournament and the one the day after the tournament. Then I'll do one this week, do another one next week, and

then in a couple weeks I'll get the golf course pretty well done. I enjoy that. That to me, again, is growing the game. You're keeping up with -- keeping up with the Joneses, you're bringing your golf course up to date in the current status of what the world is today, so that's what I'm trying to do.

Q. How proud that the PGA, whatever tour it happens to be, is doing their best not just to put a product out there but to raise the money for the local charities that depend on them each and every year, especially in a year like this?

JACK NICKLAUS: Well, this has been a really, really difficult year for the PGA TOUR. They have really stepped up. The PGA TOUR, for the large part, has financed most of what's going on. I think it's mostly through television packages and money they've had in their coffers. They can't keep this up, no chance at all.

Thanks to sponsors like Ally and McLaren and our Nationwide that we had, tournaments like that, some of the sponsors, they're not getting their full money. They're not getting their full worth, I should say. So the PGA TOUR's had to step up and supplement a lot of what's going on, and I give them a lot of kudos for doing that. I think they knew the game had to come back, that golf is a safe game for most people to be out there. They haven't felt as safe for spectators yet, but they're bringing live television to the public and that's been fantastic. But they're the ones that have had to finance it. And really, the players -- the PGA TOUR is really owned by the players, so the players are really financing their own golf tournaments. You know, they have sponsors, but the sponsors -- without gallery, they need a supplement and the Tour's been there to do it and I think it's fantastic.

STEWART MOORE: Jack, thank you so much for spending some time with us today. Appreciate it.