

*The travel is endless, the pressure is fierce, but the money is great.*

# The 3 big ones talk about golf



JACK NICKLAUS, ARNOLD PALMER, GARY PLAYER: "SOME SPECTATORS ARE THOUGHTLESS AND SOME GREENS ARE LIKE PEANUT BRITTLE."

Fifteen years ago I decided to play golf on the professional-tournament circuit. I don't think I believed that I could actually win a tournament. My real reason—I think now—was to see just how much I would choke.

In that respect the experiment was a success. When I joined the circuit I had a long, lazy backswing. Six months later I found it difficult to raise the club past the level of my hips, and my once-effortless follow-through had begun to resemble, as one pro put it, "an old lady beating off a purse snatcher with an umbrella."

Every so often since then I have gone back to the circuit just to see how things are getting along. I now confine myself to the gallery, where I belong, or to the clubhouse, where I shoot dialectics with one or another of the pros while he is changing his shoes or grabbing a sandwich or having a beer. Not long ago, tape recorder in hand, I cornered the three currently ranking pros: Arnold Palmer, the game's acknowledged master; Gary Player, the

small, sensational South African, and young Jack Nicklaus, whom many acclaim as golf's next superstar. They had been playing at the Olympic Club in San Francisco, and this is the way the conversation went:

PRICE: When I used to travel on the circuit, a pro thought he was really moving around if he went 20,000 miles a year.

PLAYER: I travel more than that a month. I finished a tournament near here last Sunday, then flew to my club in the Bahamas and back by Wednesday. That's 6,000 miles right there.

NICKLAUS: I fly about 100,000 miles a year, and both Arnie and Gary fly more.

PALMER: We don't think in terms of just miles any more. I mean, how can you? Last year I flew from my home near Pittsburgh to New York, then to Miami, back to New York, on to Paris, Johannesburg, all over South Africa and Southern and Northern Rhodesia, then Athens, Rome, Milan, back to New York

and finally home. Do you know how long I was gone? Two weeks.

PRICE: This much traveling has got to make for a hectic life. Got any regrets?

PALMER: I love to fly. But it can get to be a pain. Like when you sit up all night at an airport waiting for the fog to lift or something, and then you got to play the next day.

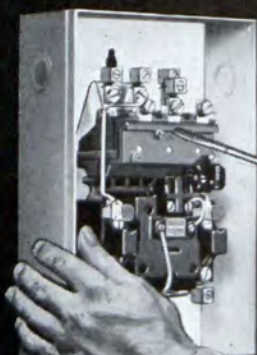
PRICE: Of course the life has its compensations.

NICKLAUS: Everybody says we make a lot of money. Well, we do. But we have to spend so darn much. Traveling with your kids you have to spend, oh, \$35 a night for two rooms if you're lucky. Now you multiply that —

PLAYER: Last year I had my wife and three children, my mother-in-law and also a nurse, all traveling together. That made seven of us. We had 20 pieces of baggage. Every time I arrived at or left an airport it cost me six dollars to tip the porters.

PRICE: In all this traveling what impresses you most about the game?

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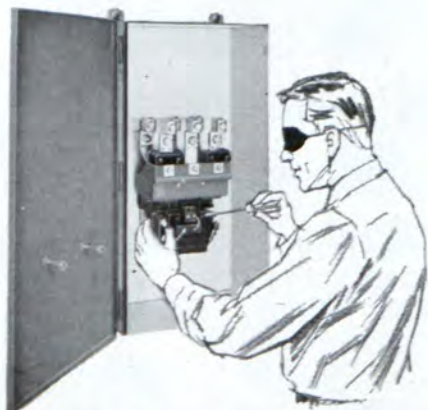
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### **GOLF ROUND TABLE**

**PLAYER:** Without a doubt golf will be the national game of the world in another ten years.

**PRICE:** Would you say the appeal of the game is due to the fact that golf is so—well, civilized?

**NICKLAUS:** Yes. Golf is still the gentleman's game.

**PALMER:** Pros are conscientious enough about the sportsmanship angle that they don't need somebody standing over them saying they should be penalized for this or for that. If the ball moves accidentally, for instance, they're gentlemen enough to say the ball moved and that they should be penalized a stroke. That's the great, great thing about golf. You don't have to have a referee standing over you and saying you were roughing the opposition or that you slid into the bag too late. You do it yourself. You don't like to but you do it, without hard feelings.

**PRICE:** Is there anything in golf you do have hard feelings about?

**PALMER:** Unruly galleries. Not spectators individually, but galleries collectively when they aren't controlled properly. I enjoy large galleries. They can get you charged up, and they can make a good target out of a green when they're standing around the edge of it. But I don't enjoy large galleries when the marshals are just a bunch of nice guys in red coats who are out to enjoy the tournament. Some of them don't even care if the galleries walk on the greens.

**PLAYER:** I was standing on the fairway of the second hole at a tournament recently, looking the shot over and trying to decide what to hit, and—pow!—some guy walks right into me and almost knocks me down. On the 15th tee I'm getting ready to hit my drive when I spot some guy right here with a bloody movie camera. Right here above me in a tree, not ten feet away. "Please," I said, "give me a chance, will you?" Well, I finally get the ball on the edge of the green somehow, and I'm getting ready to putt, and some old lady trips over my putter in the middle of my backswing!

**PRICE:** Those are things you can't appreciate if all you know about the circuit is what you read in the morning papers. Another thing people can't appreciate is the often poor conditions of the fairways and the greens.

**NICKLAUS:** Sometimes you can't appreciate how bad they are until you play them. The other day I was paired with Dave Ragan and Al Balding. All three of

us putted to within two feet of the hole, and then all three of us missed the cup with our next putts. As I walked off the green some guy comes up to me and says, "Boy, you sure make me feel good missing those short putts. Are the greens really that bumpy?" This guy was on the course, and he couldn't tell how bumpy they were. Why, it was like trying to putt on peanut brittle.

**PRICE:** In an ordinary round of golf most people concede themselves that six-incher. That's one of the differences between tournament golf and everyday golf. What are some more?

**PLAYER:** In tournament golf you get charged up.

**PRICE:** Yes, but why is it some people can play when they are charged up while others cannot?

**PALMER:** I think we apply ourselves a little more in tournaments. The difference is as simple as that. But that doesn't mean we don't play hard all the time. Our scores are often a little higher during practice because we experiment or work on weak shots. We'll try these shots on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but on Thursday we go to the shots we know. This experimenting is true for any part of the game, even putting. I'm sure we all use shots early in the week that we would never even try when the tournament starts. But once we get to know these shots well enough to attempt them in a tournament, we do.

**PRICE:** In Florida a few weeks ago Sam Snead was telling me that he used to play 10 or a dozen shots in a round of tournament golf that were extraordinarily good. Ten or 20 years ago, he said, he could count on these shots' making a round of golf successful. Today, he says, he can't bring off more than one or two shots exactly as he planned them.

**PALMER:** Exactly the way he planned them? That's a lot of shots, two in 18 holes, I think, to come off exactly as you plan them.

**NICKLAUS:** I don't hit two a year. That is, two that go in the hole.

**PALMER:** I don't believe Sam meant that he could knock it stiff into the cup 11 or 12 times in a round. If you hit two shots a round that come off the way you planned them exactly, that's exceptional. Playing today I hit 18 tee shots that were on the fairway or on the green, but I didn't hit any of them exactly the way I planned. In fact, I didn't plan any of them very precisely, and I never do unless the fairway's very, very narrow. I just try to drive it on the fairway in a position that I like in order to get to the green. Then I think



PLAYER AND NICKLAUS CHAT ABOUT GOLF WITH A NOTED AMATEUR.

about getting the ball close to the hole. I think I'm fortunate if I can get two of these shots where I can make the putt with no problems. In other words, the putt will be almost a "gimme."

PLAYER: I think another reason why we sometimes play better in a tournament than we do in practice is the fact that we're conscious of the tournament a long time before we start. A practice round we don't give any preliminary thought to. We just play it. But a tournament is something exceptional. We make an effort. And we have four goes at it: four days when the excitement's big.

PALMER: Basically a golfer's life is lived four days a week, Thursday through Sunday [tournament days]. The rest of the time he's just working on his game.

NICKLAUS: Existing. Just existing.

PRICE: Dutch Harrison, one of the most perceptive golfers on the circuit, recently said that he thought you, Jack, were going to be unquestionably the next big player in the game—meaning, I suppose, in the image of Snead or Hogan. Then he added, "But I hope he doesn't think himself out of his game."

NICKLAUS: I hadn't heard that, but Dutch probably means that the more and more a fellow plays, the smarter he thinks he gets. I have to take a lot of time now, which I do. But —

PALMER: Not only playing golf, either. PLAYER: Jack needs three alarm clocks to get himself out of bed in the morning.

NICKLAUS: Quit interrupting. As you find more and more things to think about, and more and more things to do, pretty soon, as Dutch says, you're going to out-think yourself. I'm aware of that.

PRICE: Dick Groat, a former All-American basketball player and a star major-league shortstop, is also a four-handicap golfer. In other words, he's a pretty good club player. Anyway, he's said that there is nothing in sports to compare to the continuous pressure of tournament golf.

PALMER: I played with Groat in a tournament. Actually he was pretty good under pressure, and, frankly, I don't know why he let the tournament bother him so much. But he did. He didn't sleep any night he was there. He was in bed early, but he wasn't sleeping. He let the tournament keep him awake. Bud Wilkinson of Oklahoma says the same thing. He's played football and coached football, but he thinks golf is much tougher on you. In football, he says, a man can get nervous and excited before a game, but then he can relieve all that tension by going out on the field and busting somebody's head. But in golf what are you going to do? It's

an internal thing, something that you can't explain. You just can't put it here on the table and analyze it. I try to find a solution to it within myself, and then I go try and play. If somebody else can tell you how you can conquer this thing, I'd love to hear the solution. Whatever the solution is, I'll practice it.

PLAYER: Also, in golf the ball is absolutely stationary. It kind of hypnotizes you as you stand over it, and you're conscious of it being stationary and —

PALMER: Don't bring up any theories I haven't heard of!

PLAYER: You know what I mean.

NICKLAUS: I don't. My ball's always moving. I can't even catch the thing sometimes.

PRICE: Groat complained that it was the loneliness of tournament golf that bothered him.

### Easy shots look hard

PALMER: If a golfer is truly concentrating he doesn't feel the loneliness. He's there, and he's got a job to do.

PRICE: But the effects of blowing a short putt —

PLAYER: That's what makes golf tough. The strain is on the simple shots even more than on the difficult ones. If you're playing in front of 10,000 people, and you have a three-foot putt, let's say—in everybody's mind they're expecting you to make it. And you know that you *should* make it. If you miss it you're going to feel foolish. The prospect magnifies the three-foot putt out of all proportion to what the shot actually is.

PALMER: In golf there is no way to release your energy except through your golf shots. And if you release it through your shots you run the risk of releasing the ball right out of bounds. In golf you've just got to stay within yourself and think your shots through. You've got to think. When you stop thinking on the golf course, that's when the wheels usually come off your game.

PRICE: Toney Penna, a good judge of golf flesh, once said that every golfer in the world has two swings: the one he uses during the last three holes of a tournament he's winning and the one he uses the rest of the time.

PALMER: I disagree.

NICKLAUS: I agree with him, sort of. In other words, when you're leading a tournament and —

PALMER: May I interrupt? I think I know what you're going to say. You agree with Penna only because you feel that you swing a little freer the last three holes where you're leading a tournament.

NICKLAUS: Sure.

PALMER: Well, I don't. I feel like I swing pretty much the same all the time.

PLAYER: How can you change your swing? Why would you if you could?

PRICE: We mean that a man's true swing—a swing stripped of frills and any sort of fanciness he might use otherwise—will come out when he plays the last three holes of a tournament he happens to be leading. In other words, when the pressure is greatest. That's the swing, Penna implies, that a man is going to be stuck with for the rest of his playing life.

PALMER: Oh, I see. Yes, I agree absolutely.

PRICE: Later on he might add something here or subtract something there, but his basic swing will be revealed holding onto the lead during the seventieth, seventy-first and seventy-second holes.

PRICE: That's his real swing.

PLAYER: That's my *best* swing.

NICKLAUS: I don't know. I try to use the same swing all the time, but I'm a lot more careful with it during the last three holes of a tournament I'm leading.

PRICE: What do you think is the one absolute essential to this swing?

PLAYER: Nobody can say what it is. You've got to use what suits you. A man like Arnie might think of his hands. I might think of keeping my head steady. Another guy might think of turning his hips. No two people swing a golf club alike. That's why a man's style to me is never impressive. If the man is great at impact, that's all that really counts. Under pressure, that's the big thing.

NICKLAUS: We're all different. Gary's head goes down at impact. He gets behind the ball that way. Arnie takes his hands through differently. It almost looks as though he doesn't even break his wrists going through the ball. He does, but it almost looks as though he doesn't. I might look like—I don't know what I look like.

PRICE: Where do you get all your power from, Jack? For a big man you have awfully small hands.

NICKLAUS: I think everybody gets his power from different places. I think Gary gets his power because he's got his hands —

PALMER: He's flat.

NICKLAUS: He's flat, and he's got such good hand action, so much whip at the ball. Arnold gets his power through his shoulders. I think where I get most of my power is from my legs.

PALMER: Take Jackie Burke. Here's a guy who isn't particularly powerful anywhere, and this guy can hit a ball pretty well. He's very well coordinated. He has everything working for him, everything. His toenails are working for him.

NICKLAUS: His swing's as good as Snead's, I think.

PALMER: I think so, too, frankly.

NICKLAUS: Can you imagine a man the size of George Bayer [six feet five, 250 pounds] swinging like Jack Burke does? PALMER: You'd never find the ball. He'd drive over every green.

PLAYER: It's a pity that a man has got the strength of Bayer, really, and doesn't release on the ball the way he should. Here he's got this power, and he's cutting every shot, throwing away the power.

NICKLAUS: Jack Burke made a pretty good point the other day about power. He said that every time we start out in a tournament together I automatically start out about 12 shots ahead of him. I can reach all the par-fives in two shots, and he can only reach two of them maybe. Every time I'm hitting an eight-iron he's

hitting a five-iron. It all adds up to about 12 strokes' difference in a tournament. This is amazing. I play an eight-iron or nine-iron on every hole, and this man plays a five-iron or six-iron. I guarantee I'm going to get inside him on the green more times than he's going to get inside me. This is one hell of an advantage.

PLAYER: When it comes to the difference between a seven-iron and a bloody four-iron, then you're talking about a big advantage. But I think that if you're playing well you invariably feel that you can get the ball as close with, say, a five-iron as you can with a seven.

PALMER: I hate five-irons.

PLAYER: You do?

PALMER: I'd rather hit a four-iron or a six-iron any time.

NICKLAUS: Isn't that funny? I'd rather hit the five than the four or the six.

PRICE: What do you think will be the next big advance in the overall standards of tournament golf?

NICKLAUS: The present way of playing was pioneered by Ben Hogan, I think. Hogan perfected every shot except the putter, but somebody's going to perfect the putter too. Ben perfected the drive, the fairways woods, the irons, the pitch, the chip—everything.

PALMER: That's right. You have to perfect every shot in the bag. You just start playing a lot of bad shots with any one club in your bag today, and you don't win tournaments.

PLAYER: The standards of play today are too good. At the St. Petersburg Open two years ago, 276 wasn't even in the money. That's an average of four 69's.

PALMER: There's about 10 million people in the United States who play golf. Out of 10 million just think how small 200 golfers—the number of touring pros—are.

PRICE: Most of these 200 players are going to be at the Masters Tournament. Who's going to win it?

NICKLAUS: Well, Gary says he is, and Arnold says he is, and I say I am.

PALMER: No, I didn't say I would. I never will be quoted as saying I'm going to win a tournament.

PLAYER: But you're going there to win, aren't you?

PALMER: But I would never say it, think it or anything.

PLAYER: Now wait a minute, Arnie.

PALMER: But I wouldn't play if I didn't think I *could* win.

NICKLAUS: And if you don't win you'll chew the grips off your clubs.

PLAYER: Nobody goes into a tournament knowing that they're going to win it. You got to go there *hoping* you're going to win it.

NICKLAUS: Naw, Palmer doesn't have a chance anymore.

PLAYER: I'll say this about the Masters: There has never been a golf course in the history of the game that suited a man more than Augusta National suits Arnie. Never! He's got a four-stroke bloody advantage before we tee off. Almost every hole is dogleg left.

PALMER: You don't like Augusta National—is that right?

PLAYER: No, that's my favorite golf course in the world.

NICKLAUS: It's my favorite golf course too. But I don't like dogleg lefts.

PLAYER: It's a hooker's course.

PALMER: I've practiced for years to be able to fade the ball toward the left during the Masters.

PLAYER: Fade! I'll tell you one thing—that fade is for the birds. Fade the ball out on this circuit, and you'll fade right out of the picture.

THE END