

U.S. Senior Open

Flash Interview

Thursday June 29, 2017

Hale Irwin



Q. I have a feeling you knew what that last putt was for?

HALE IRWIN: Well, it was to break the age, but I shot my age, so you know.

Q. Oh, good.

HALE IRWIN: Oh, yeah, that's my only goal anymore is can I do it.

Q. So you did it?

HALE IRWIN: Yeah. Is that what we're talking about, my age?

Q. That's what we're talking about.

HALE IRWIN: My age is real old.

Q. But not 81.

HALE IRWIN: I'm not playing enough now to really get any consistency in my play. My skill sets are not what they used to be for a number of reasons. A, you're getting older. B, not playing enough.

I can go practice, and I can hit the shots, but it's not playing. It's not playing against the Paul Goydoses and people like that that are out here on a week-to-week basis and really playing well. So having been there, I kind of know what that's about, and I'm far, far from that.

But when you take retirement, and just that "R" word, when it hits your -- you take -- you don't take a step back. You kind of take three or four steps back. It's -- oddly enough, I was talking to Larry Fitzgerald, the great receiver for the Cardinals, and he's contemplating. I said, Larry, when you start talking and thinking about retirement, that half a step you just lost becomes a step and a half.

I think that's -- for me, you're allowed 11 or less tournaments. Here I've played seven last year, and if I get to eight this year, it will be a lot. So when you're playing infrequently -- I'm not going to play again until maybe Pebble Beach, you know, The First Tee.

Simply because now I take those weeks that I had tournaments, now I insert them with other things -- family, primarily. Going to see the girls out in -- girls. The grandchildren out in Colorado, spending some time with the boys. Sally and I have a couple different trips, doing an outing that you would turn down

because it's during a tournament before, but now you take it.

I'm into revenue production rather than winnings, and so it changes. And suddenly, your focus and your mindset becomes something else.

Q. How did you play so well today?

HALE IRWIN: I didn't -- I really didn't play -- I putted okay. I managed my short game okay. But I really didn't hit the ball well at all. Very short off the tee. Hit some -- I hit all the fairways, which is the good part.

Bad part is I missed a lot of the greens so I wasn't really putting for that many birdies. But a lot of it's management. I still know how to do that. It's just do I have the skill sets to do it with consistency?

And having Dylan, grandson, with me is great fun, but it's different.

Q. How do you balance the competitive fire, which was your hallmark, with the fact that we're talking about these things where the golf is limited, the skill set isn't where you want it, the length isn't where you want it? How do you do that?

HALE IRWIN: Well, I'm not sure that I'm doing it that well, honestly. There's a whole lot of things that you take for granted when you're playing on a regular basis and you're playing -- just playing regularly gives you a different frame of reference, different focus, different perspective.

When you step back, that changes, and you just don't step right into that -- you don't go through that curtain real easily. It's more of a door than it is a curtain. That's what I've found is that it's hard to go home and do your thing.

Even though I hit balls when I'm home and I hit them great -- last week, when Dylan was down in Arizona, the way I was hitting it then, the way I hit it today, totally different.

So there's just a different perspective, a different look. Not that I want to accept 72 as my best score. I didn't play that well. I didn't hit a lot of good shots. But I managed, and that just kind of comes from all the years of knowing what you can and can't do. But I'm

just hitting some shots that are ugly, just no way around it. It's ugly.

Q. Do you take some positives out of that because you know you can play better?

HALE IRWIN: I know I can hit the ball better. Whether I play better is another thing. That's always the case. Sometimes you play lousy and score great. Sometimes you score great and play lousy. You just don't know.

But from my perspective, I'm just trying to kind of put one foot in front of the other, not with a whole lot of expectations, but I expect more from my ball striking than what I got today.

I don't expect to drive the ball out with Roger Chapman. I don't expect that. Far from it. But I expect more from myself than what I hit today.

Q. If you didn't hit it well, you certainly did some things well. What would be the highlights of your day today?

HALE IRWIN: Like I said, it was just kind of ugly from the start and ugly at the end, and made a couple of birdies in there, but I made a couple of bogies. I missed two putts, although they were the kind that were this long, but they probably break a foot, that kind of stuff.

How do you make those every time? You don't. But if I get one of those in, now we're 71. If I get both of them in, now we're 70. If I make a better shot at the last hole -- you know, there's always those little things. It's the little things that escape you.

Can I still read the greens? Yeah. Can I still tell what the distances are? Right now, rather than being 150, they're 180-plus. And rather than being a 7 iron, now it's a friggin' 5 iron. Oops, maybe it's a 4 iron. I mean, Dylan's handing me 3 irons and hybrids all day long today.

It's just hard -- you can't score from where I was when you're that short off the tee, when you're mis-hitting that many shots, given these guys.

That's what I think -- you guys know it, but the outside world doesn't realize how good a play this is. That's a helluva score that Paul posted. 64, was it? I don't care who you are. You could be Rory McIlroy, I don't care. Jordan Spieth. That's a heck of a score.

But from my perspective, can I go shoot under par? Yeah, I can. Can I shoot worse than I did today? Oh, yeah, because today was one of those days I could have but didn't because I kind of kept it together. You know, made several of these, and those aren't easy.

Several of those. But I only made one putt of any length at all because you're not going to make lengthy putts on these greens. They're just too much.

Q. Congratulations.

HALE IRWIN: Anyway, here we go. Go have lunch and celebrate with a ham sandwich.