

# U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Wednesday June 27, 2018

## Hale Irwin



THE MODERATOR: We are honored to have five-time USGA champion, World Golf Hall of Famer and Colorado's most recognized golfer, Hale Irwin. He's playing in his 23rd U.S. Senior Open and his 15th consecutive since 2004.

HALE IRWIN: What happened to the other ones?

THE MODERATOR: The other ones?

HALE IRWIN: Yeah, since '95.

THE MODERATOR: Oh, it was consecutive since 2004.

HALE IRWIN: Yeah, but I said what happened to the other ones? I don't know, I'm asking the question.

THE MODERATOR: See I get to ask the questions, don't I?

HALE IRWIN: Yes, you do. Just asking. We'll get back to you on that.

THE MODERATOR: I have further research to do, Mr. Champion. As Colorado's golf's favorite son, how does it feel to play another Senior Open in your home state?

HALE IRWIN: It's been -- thus far, it's been great, it's been very busy, but it's been good. Our son lives up in Denver and he just arrived today with his family, one of my grandsons is caddieing for me, and his mother and his brother are here with her fiance'.

My brother's coming down tomorrow from north of Boulder. So it's a great event, family event. Oh and by the way, we're playing a golf tournament is the way I look at it, and that's the way it will always be in my life.

But having so many formative years here, even though I don't live in the state of Colorado, still feels like home when I come back, a lot of very dear friends. Fraternity brothers from the University of Colorado, guys I went and played on the football team with, just people that I've met through the years and have gotten to know very well. And many of them are here at the Broadmoor. That makes the week for me. That is first prize. And, oh, if you win the tournament that's second prize.

Sorry, but that's just the way it is for me. And at this stage of my career and my life, that has seemingly greater importance, because it is. 73 years old, and what is the realistic goal I could have this week?

Dylan and I talked about making the cut. Well, making the cut is almost -- it's nice. It's great, but it's not what in my heart I want to say. So I don't want to say that. Do I believe it? Absolutely.

Do I think that I could still play to the level of success that I've had in the past? There's some doubt. And when you have doubt, you generally don't have the performance. Simply because I don't play as much as I once did. My body just doesn't want to go to places it used to go.

I have to think about things. And when you start trying to connect the dots in a golf swing, it's not a good formula for success.

But having said that, you never know. This is a crazy game. And you just never know. And we have a very difficult golf course out there. It's not going to be easy for anyone, but those players that hit the ball a long ways, I think, have a distinct advantage here because coming into these greens with less club is going to be far easier to negotiate a good score than kind of playing back where I'm playing. So, having said all that, again, you just don't know.

THE MODERATOR: You shot it last year first round, shot your 72 last year at 72. What keeps the competitive fire going? Is it partly that you're a past champion? Is it partly you're playing at a place that's dear to your heart? What's the answer there?

HALE IRWIN: Well, probably all of the above. It's hard to separate what has been so near and dear to me for so many years. I mean, I've started playing my first professional event in May of '68. So it's 50 years plus now. You just don't turn your back on that. It's hard to walk away from it, particularly as competitive as I am. And I don't -- I'm not ashamed to say that at all. In fact, I'm proud of my competitive spirit. But having said that, it's hard to accept what I've been producing too.

So you kind of find yourself in a fine line of what you can and can't do and what you accept and what you

can't accept, just simply I've lost some distance off the tee.

Someone asked, well, how far do you hit an iron now? I don't know. The distances that I once hit a club, I don't know that. So it's a lot of guessing out there. So there's a lot of questions in my game, but I don't know the answers.

And I think it's evolving. And as it evolves, there will be -- it's not going to be one day that the sun doesn't shine, you know, I know what I'm going to do now. I think it's just coming out and I enjoy being with my grandchildren. That to me and my family is the greatest thing going. And I'm not going to turn away from that.

There's some things that -- people say what's on your bucket list? I don't have a bucket. I have a barrel. And I need to get into that barrel at some time. And part of that is my family. They're a big part of that.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up to questions.

**Q. Well, Colorado being such a big part of your life, we have listened to a string of players come in here and admit they're being confounded by the greens. So I'm wondering if the Colorado guy can explain what's going on with these greens that these guys can't figure out.**

HALE IRWIN: Right up here, I'm not giving the secret away.

(Laughter.)

**Q. Why are they so hard?**

HALE IRWIN: They are confounding, they really are. And I don't play here a lot, but I've played here for a number of times for a lot of years. And this might be the most difficult I've seen these greens. On a pace. Because there are places out there now where I think we're all shaking our heads saying what used to be -- let's call it a hole location in 2008 will not be in 2018 because the ball will just go off the green.

And the greens, they have speed to them. They're uniform. They're in good shape, but they're pretty darn quick. So I think that they're going to have to be very careful where they set some of the hole locations. Even these greens are big greens, they're really small greens, because there's only so many hole locations they can have because there's enough slope, particularly coming off Cheyenne Mountain.

And with the contours that are in the greens, it's confounding. Now you take, okay, how far am I going to hit it at this altitude? Well, for me I can just hit it

normally, don't have to worry about that one, just one less thing to think about.

But it's going to take a lot of imagination, not just putting, but chipping, how are you going to get your self around the greens? It's fairly straightforward tee to green.

I don't think that's the real challenge. But it's going to be how are we going to keep the ball around the green to have any kind of a shot at a decent score.

**Q. Thinking back to your time at Colorado playing football and golf, what went into your decision or what propelled you into golf instead of continuing on with football?**

HALE IRWIN: There was a few health reasons, I guess, like dying. I mean, look at me. Well, I think it's predicated on -- I don't mean for this to be a long story because I got family waiting, so I'm going to try to shorten it.

But I came -- in my eighth game as a sophomore I hurt my shoulder. And we played at the University of Missouri. And I missed the last two games and I got to thinking I'm just getting the you know what kicked out of me every game. It's just -- because I was playing both -- I was quarterback and safety. I was playing a lot of football, and it was -- some strange things happened under those piles.

And so anyway, the spring of '65, I came down here to see Dow Finsterwald. Because Dow's had a reputation, not only as a PGA Champion, but as somebody who might be able to give a person like me some guidance.

And I use this quite often. And I thank Dow many times for what he said. And he came -- I went down to the practice tee and I -- it was an impossible task, because if somebody asked me the same thing to pass judgment on some young person, can they make it, well, how do you know? You don't know.

But he asked me to hit the ball high, low, hook, fade and all that stuff. And said, okay, you can do that. But you really have to look at your self and your heart, what do you want to do? And that's really what happened.

And I think it basically came down to the fact that if I was to leave football, leave a full-ride scholarship and go somewhere else, where it was luke warm at best, maybe not even that, we'll call it cold water reception at any other golf school, I would have to, A, sit out a year of eligibility; and, B, there was no guarantee of any kind of financial assistance.

So it really kind of came down to dollars and cents and

was I going to quit. And I wasn't going to quit. That just wasn't in my blood. So I stayed on and finished out my football career.

But I do remember that instance with Dow. And that's why I bring it up, because I think it was a measurement for me of myself. My golf game got a little bit better. I worked in the summer as a laborer, so I didn't get to play a lot of golf, but when I did play I played with some intensity. I had to get something out of that because I didn't have that many opportunities. I didn't take things for granted.

And I think that in the long run really helped me. I think playing football really helped me. It may have delayed my success, but I think it gave me one up on a number of other players that may have not had that same background.

I don't know if I answered your question. Kind of dancing around, I feel like I'm doing the, you know, da ta da ta da.

**Q. So 45 Senior or Champions Tour wins, do you think Bernhard at 37 can catch you?**

HALE IRWIN: You know, there's not one thing I can do about it. He's playing well, I've made the case many times I think he might be the best senior player that's ever played. He's playing great golf at what, 61 now? Something like that.

THE MODERATOR: 61.

HALE IRWIN: Yeah. He continues to play good golf, whether he'll make it or not, I don't know. We all know that it's increasingly difficult, the players that are coming off the Regular Tour now are formidable players, it's great to see Davis Love in this week, but I think what we see a lot of now is Davis and Vijay and Langer and some of the guys that went back to the Masters are playing, they find when they come over to play in our arena, it's not that easy. I think it's still the gift of talent and can play is still here. Maybe not at 73 years old, but these guys coming out. So I think Bernhard playing the way he has been playing, it's certainly a conceivable thing to do. And I'll be the first to applaud him if he does because I know how much it takes, I just, the intensity in which I've played I think waned a bit because priorities changed. It's simply priorities. And my health was good, my game was good, but my priorities were changing. And when you take away a little bit of from that competitive zeal and put it somewhere else, you lose a little in the transfer.

**Q. A lot of the guys have talked about how they had never been here before and they're taken away by the beauty and the course and whatnot, but they**

**had never been here before. Back when you were on the PGA TOUR in earlier, did you ever try to organize an event or say, hey, guys you should come out and check this place out, you're missing out?**

HALE IRWIN: Well, there was, you try to make a suggestion, but before you can do any of that you got to have somebody that's going to put up the money. Who is going to be the sponsor. And in Colorado Springs, it's a wonderful place, I always loved Colorado Springs and the Broadmoor is a special spot, but who is going to put up the money? NORAD? No. The local college? No. And I don't think they're going to come out of Denver, come to Colorado Springs and put on a tournament. No. So it does come down to the numbers. Who is going to be the financing company behind it. But, yes, I've mentioned it, but where does it go from there?

**Q. I was thinking more on lines of, I don't know, a couple guys and you're out and they're looking for a vacation place and you mentioned --**

HALE IRWIN: Well I'm going to keep that to myself. They can find their own vacation place. I want this place to myself. I speak about the Broadmoor any time I can. If people want to come out and see the beauty of the eastern slope and the Rocky Mountains boy this is a great gateway to do that. There's a lot of things to do around here and you don't have to go very far to get into some pretty fabulous country and the people that are first time here, they are blown away and we have had two or three really beautiful days in which to showcase the Broadmoor and Colorado Springs.

**Q. Putting you on the spot, could this be your last one? Could this be your last U.S. Senior Open and if it is, would that be pretty appropriate, given where it is?**

HALE IRWIN: You're a terrible person, aren't you? After all we have been through you put me on the spot?

(Laughter.)

I don't know, I really don't. Yeah, what I want to say is, no, I'll be back. But I don't know. I really don't. I'm not trying to avoid your question, I just don't know. I don't have a really answer for that. I think how this year, not just this event but this year goes, I'm, when you take the time off the TOUR you're only allowed to play 11 or less tournaments. So just that alone your skills diminish. Not only do you get old but your playing skills, your reaction to circumstances and it just diminishes. So I am not going to go be a token player. This week was special because of all the reasons we talked about. Next year at Notre Dame, not nearly as special. So we'll see how things are developing. I love the USGA events. You know that. So will I be there?

Maybe. If I can bring my cart.

(Laughter.)

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, sir.

HALE IRWIN: My four wheel, you know -- I don't know. I would love to say that this is not my last one, but we'll see.

THE MODERATOR: Yesterday you had a hosted an exhibition. Tell us a little bit about that. Do you have any fun stories about it?

HALE IRWIN: Oh, the kids, I don't know if any of you were there, but I so enjoy being with those kids, they bring out -- if you can get a little interaction from them and their personalities, if they can just relax and that, I get more fun engaging with those kids and not that you're going to teach them a lot about golf, because that's kind of hard to do, but if you could teach them a little bit about life, something to do tomorrow, something that you might suggest, a life lesson, whether it be anything. We speak about the First Tee and the nine core values. Well you can make a case that the AJGA does a really good job -- any of the junior organizations -- these people are engaging these kids, they're terrific. Well I get a real charge out of being with those kids. I love their questions. I love bringing them up to hit balls. Once you kind of break that ice, they are so engaging, it's fun. I had a really good time with it. I don't know how they did, but I had a great time. The adults, they're sitting in the audience, you hope they had a good time too, but -- and you try to answer the questions as you can -- but I try to direct the answers as I can to the children, so they're learning something, hopefully, from what I've been able to see in my life.

THE MODERATOR: That's a good segue to my next question. You are very fortunate to have your grandson be your caddie this week. Which one of you guys is having more fun when you're out there?

HALE IRWIN: I don't know, should we ask him?

THE MODERATOR: Well I'm sure Dylan's a smart guy, man.

HALE IRWIN: He is?

THE MODERATOR: He's your grandson.

HALE IRWIN: Let's say that we're both having a ball. This is, I think, Dylan's third time at a senior event, caddieing for me. He's a great kid, we have a great relationship, and again, for any kid, but particularly my family, I want them to learn something -- hopefully it's

not just me, I want them to learn other things from other people to get different perspectives and measure that against what they truly believe. So it's a learning curve I think that we all have. I'm still trying to learn, at 73 years old, I'm still trying to learn. So taking it in is -- I enjoy watching his younger brother, I enjoy watching my grand daughters, watching them learn gives me great satisfaction and that's part of the going back to, are you going to play again. I don't know. What's important to me? Well it's not hitting a golf ball. It's these kinds of relationships. So I'm having a ball maybe in a little different way than Dylan might have a ball, but at the same time he thinks I'm giving him a hard time all the time, but I'm just trying to get him to think and learn. Any rebuttal on that Dylan? You have rebuttal?

(Laughter.)

THE MODERATOR: Anymore questions for Hale?

HALE IRWIN: Okay, thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, sir. Good luck. Look forward to seeing you.