



May 23, 2006



Oak Tree Golf Course

Hole #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Out	Total
Yardage	437	387	592	206	590	370	440	165	411	3,598	388	465	471	171	439	434	528	175	433	3,504	7,102
Par	4	4	5	3	5	4	4	3	4	36	4	4	4	3	4	4	5	3	4	35	71

AN INTERVIEW WITH: HALE IRWIN

KELLY ELBIN: We're joined by Hale Irwin, ladies and gentlemen. Four time Senior PGA Champion, second only to Sam Snead, who won this championship six times. Playing in his 11th senior PGA championship. Hale, your thoughts on what you have seen on the golf course so far. It's been 18 years since a Major championship has been here at Oak Tree.

HALE IRWIN: Well, I think that all the players are delighted to see the condition of the golf course. I think we're equally delighted to see that there's going to be a, probably a maximum put on accuracy this week. Certainly distance is of great importance, but I think accuracy off the tee especially is going to pay dividends.

If you don't drive the ball well, then you're certainly going to have a hard time hitting to these smallish targets, and I would think that at the end of the day that the player that emerges or the group of players that emerges towards the last few holes will have played some excellent golf. It's going to require that. And we're going to be competing this with this stuff (the wind) that's trying to get in. Assuming that we don't have gale force winds, I think that's going to make a lot of the holes, particularly those holes back into the wind play very, very difficult.

No. 9, for instance, number 18, very difficult finishing hole. But the course is in wonderful condition, I think that there's -- I have not heard any negative comments from any player and

I think we're all looking forward to playing Oak Tree.

KELLY ELBIN: Questions?

Q. Mike Reid said that this is a course that you use every club in your bag to play. In light of that, do you feel that that's necessarily the case, that you're going to be able to throw something in that you won't necessarily have in another week and how do you sort of see clubs being used this week?

HALE IRWIN: I would echo those sentiments. I think there's going to be a lot of different clubs played, I say different meaning in my own bag, for instance, I think I'll probably be playing a goodly amount of not only just shorter irons but middle irons, long irons and in some cases the fairway woods, perhaps to 18 specifically. Today that would be the case.

Selection off the tee as to what you might want to hit, there's some drivers, perhaps a metal fairway wood occasionally. Metal fairway wood. That doesn't sound right, does it? A metal fairway implement.

(Laughter.) Just can't drop woods. It's always been woods, it will always be woods. But I think there's going to be a lot of pressure on the players to, A, drive the ball, but the second shots are going to be extremely difficult because if you've been out there you know what I'm speaking to when it comes to the conditions we find around the greens with some deep bunkers, certainly some pitching areas that are difficult and a lot of these greens are just not that easy to pitch to. The only forgiving grace I can see right now is that the greens aren't particularly fast. They have a nice speed to them, but they're not fast greens. If they were rolling in that 11 and a half, 12, even 11

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Stimpmeter range then we would have some difficulties. But I guess right now they're -- I don't know what they have them at, but I'm guessing around 10. They may try to get them quicker, but I don't know that. But this wind is going to be probably the biggest factor we have in club selection and how to play it. The Oak trees are unforgiving obstacles. You don't need a lot of rough when you have trees like these.

Q. You kind of slacked off this year as far as wins are concerned.

HALE IRWIN: Not on purpose.
(Laughter.)

Q. Yeah. So what's happened do you think? Is it just a case of --

HALE IRWIN: Poor putting. Just put it in two words. Poor putting. Tee to green I've hit the ball well enough. I made a few mistakes along the way. Like hitting a 7-iron into the water at the last hole. I had an opportunity to win more than just one occasion. So it has not been from a lack of opportunities, it's been a lack of just generally poor putting. There's just no other way to put it. I've gone through, over the last probably five or six events guessing an average of two, 3-putts per round, in one case I had four 3-putt greens. In one case I had one 4-putt green. Which is always really delightful.

So it has not been a case of poor ball striking, poor execution, it's just been very poor putting. This week I'm probably going to be using a different putter, which is yet to be announced to the starting lineup, simply I need something different. And this being a very important week, it's, why not. I can't think of a reason why to stay with what I've been doing. I can think of all sorts of reasons to change. So that's it, just poor putting.

Q. How different if at all different do you prepare for the year's first Major on the Senior Tour as opposed to a different or on the regular a regular *Champions Tour* event?

HALE IRWIN: Well, I don't arrive on Monday to a regular *Champions Tour* event. I will not, at a regular tournament I will have played 18 holes already. Most likely I wouldn't be in the press room on a Tuesday. I would be preparing for a pro-am on Wednesday or perhaps Thursday. A lot of different reasons.

Having played here in '88, and I will say that most of the holes on the front nine I have some vague memory of. Number 8 was the first one that kind of didn't jell. There wasn't one on the back nine, other than 18 that I could remember. So foggy bottom up here, to coin a phrase from another location, just doesn't bring back a lot of memories of oh this ball does this or this putt does that, like you might have on a regular *Champions Tour* event. So we are coming not only to a venue that's unfamiliar to most of us, I think we're all preparing for it a little bit differently. In my case I'm here several days earlier than the normal. And I'm trying to sort of get through a lot of the heavy work the first couple of days and going into tomorrow with a little bit more of a relaxed preparation. And again it's four days of competition rather than three days of competition. You hope it's four days of competition.

So, but as far as am I changing clubs big time? No, not really. Perhaps a new putter. It's actually an old putter that I used before, but really no great changes, other than getting myself here to get acclimated to the wind, getting acclimated to bermudagrass, getting acclimated just to the conditions that we find.

KELLY ELBIN: As a note, Hale finished tied for 38th at the *PGA* championship in 1988.

HALE IRWIN: Thank you for that wonderful, fuzzy memory.

(Laughter.)

KELLY ELBIN: I wanted to make you feel welcome back. Questions.

HALE IRWIN: I had forgotten all about that. Thank you.

(Laughter.).

Q. You won this event a couple years ago and just before your 59th birthday. How much harder does it get the older you get to win not just a Major, but just any event on the *Champions Tour*?

HALE IRWIN: Well, as you're seeing the players of the like of Loren Roberts and *Jay Haas* and Peter Jacobsen those guys that have come out over the last couple of years, they're bringing not only their persona with them, great personalities, but they're bringing a very strong playing credentials. And we're going to see more of those players over the next several years. And I encourage all of them to play. I really hope they do.

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Just like anything else, there's been a semi-evolution, if you wish, in how on the quality of play that it takes to win out here. Each new class seems to produce a player that pushes the envelope. This year it's been Loren and Jay have really kind of gone and taken the lead and here in the past it was, of course there was myself and Gil Morgan and there have always been players that do that. And I think that what we're seeing now is, it's not the fact that I don't feel like I can't compete, it's just that there are more players that are playing at least equally well. And if you want to keep up at that pace, you have to match them shot for shot. And that's, I feel I'm doing that, with the exception of my putting. And that -- I really kind of got into some bad putting the latter part of last year, even though I won a couple tournaments late. I don't feel like I really had the kind of putting here last year that I should have or could have had, let's put it that way. And this year it's just been abysmal. I don't know what the statistics are, I don't even read the statistics, because it might be depressing, it might not be, but just I know the affect of what poor putting has done to my scoring average, as witnessed just by three putts. So if I could eliminate the three putts and just make another putt or two, gosh, that's a change of two or three or four shots a day. And that's not changing things a lot. That's just eliminating some of those errors on the green. So do I still feel capable of winning? Absolutely. But to do that I need to change it just -- I don't need to change the complete direction of my game, I just need to get a few putts in, rather than a few putts hanging. And, my goodness, we can go two shots a day, one shot per nine, at the end of the week that's a huge difference. And that's all I'm looking for.

Q. Oak Tree has some hopes of maybe hosting a Major for the Regular TOUR at some point. I know you only just started to see the course and be around it, but from what you've seen on and off the course, is this a capable place for a PGA championship, or something of that magnitude?

HALE IRWIN: Well, what you're referring to is something of that magnitude is either the U. S. Open or the **PGA**. Basically. I don't think you can have the **British Open** here and I doubt the **Masters** is going to come, so my deductive prowess is tremendous.

Well, there's so much that goes in -- let's go back to '88 when this was, I don't know how long it had been here, five or six years? When was this built?

Q. '76?

HALE IRWIN: '76, so we had 12 years. 12 years. There's been an awful lot of development since then. And you're catching me a little off guard with this, but presumably there's a lot of parking still available. I don't know that. Because if you're to host one of those other events, from the other side, I think there might be a little bit more interest, just a little bit more in crowd control, perhaps there would have to be a few changes made. But I think that this course, yes, could, but again, let's, you have to look at the time of year as well. If the Open is here, it's going to be mid June. It's starting to push the season a little bit in August as, you know, pick a worse month, in terms of grass conditions and weather conditions and all that. We have done it before. Could we do it again? Yeah. But the technology has made such an impact in how players play the game now and courses like Oak Tree, they may withstand the playing pressures of this field, but could they withstand the playing pressures of some of the guy that is really hit the ball a long ways? I just don't know. I just don't know the length.

I know there's some back tee that is we are not using this week, but for the most part, we're playing a lot of the very similarities that they might play and the quality of the course is very high though. There's just so much more that goes into what could happen with sky boxes and all that.

Q. Have you considered a change yet in your putting, long putter, claw grip, anything like that?

HALE IRWIN: No, long putter, geez, I feel like conducting the orchestra with something like that. It's all over the place. No, certainly I have gone out and I have, I don't say practiced, but attempted the claw. I've attempted cross handed. For, if no other reason, than just to try to learn why I do what I do and is there something better. I wouldn't be opposed if I felt like there was a significant improvement. But I think like all parts of my game and all of us do it, there are always you're always tweaking and twiddling and tinkering with things to see if there is not something better. Maybe a new shaft, more loft on the club, maybe

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something, change the look with the putter, but to go to a belly putter, a long putter, no. To change grips? Maybe, but it's more of a passing fantasy than it is a real change. I think I can fix whatever is broken with what I've got.

Q. You mentioned nine and 18 going into the wind as key holes. What other holes do you see as really key for the championship?

HALE IRWIN: That sounds like a question from the press. Well actually, I think that 1 can get your attention immediately. Now you might think, well, gosh, we got like 16 and 17, but I think 1 can set the tone. Because it's a very difficult starting hole. It's a narrow driving hole. You got a relatively short second. But you have to hit the fairway. If you don't you got the pond there in front. So you could start really uncomfortably on this golf course.

I would say the first several holes getting started are very important. But like I say, I'm having a hard time remembering the back nine. So I'm going to use my cliff notes here.

10's not too bad if you can avoid the tree in the middle of the fairway. That seems a little --

11's a pretty good hole. That's, you know, if I remember it's kind of down, it's a longer hole. It doesn't play at 465 or whatever, but I just think there's, the back nine seems to have some tighter tee shots and perhaps a little longer, but if you can get through -- I think if you can get through the middle of the back nine, I think you got a reason and shot to have a decent score.

But 18's going to really press you. I think there could be some disasters at 18. Not necessarily triple bogeys, but in this kind of wind, going back into the breeze, that is a par-5. So a four would be very difficult to make. And if you happen to dump it in that big bunker, there's some problems that await you.

17 is a hole with water, it's a par-3. Both par-3s on the back side are opportunity for a score on the up side. So I don't really know what to tell you what are key holes, but I would say right now all the par-3s on this golf course are difficult. Particularly on the back nine.

The 18th hole, I think that's going to be a make or break shot.

KELLY ELBIN: Hale Irwin, thank you very much.

HALE IRWIN: Thank you, folks.
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