



An All-Big Eight football performer and NCAA Individual Medalist for CU, Hale Irwin tops the Champions Tour In Career Earnings.
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Brooks: Irwin Turns His Golden Years A Nice Shade Of Green

BOULDER - Hale Irwin is closing fast on 65 - that's years, not a well-crafted 18-hole golf score. He's not fighting it, although in some respects he's feeling it.

A decade ago, he had this to say about the aging process as it related to his profession: "I just never subscribed to the theory that at age 55, you fall off the face of the earth on the Tour. I always felt that was too young of an age for that."

For Irwin, those were words to live (and play) by. The birdies and eagles aren't flocking to his scorecard as effortlessly as they once did, but he's not doing *that* bad. Almost 10 years after uttering those "forever young" words (he celebrates birthday No. 65 on June 3), the former University of Colorado football/golf star continues to be a force on the Champions Tour. When the time comes to settle into a publinx player role, he'll know it - but for the record, he's not there yet.

CHAMPIONS TOUR CAREER EARNINGS TOP 10		
(Through May 2, 2010/Mississippi Gulf Resort Classic)		
Pos.	Player	Earnings
1.	Hale Irwin	\$25,415,757
2.	Gil Morgan	\$19,671,828
3.	Dana Quigley	\$14,656,281
4.	Bruce Fleisher	\$14,485,967
5.	Tom Kite	\$14,015,166
6.	Larry Nelson	\$13,724,465
7.	Jim Thorpe	\$13,423,156
8.	Allen Doyle	\$13,247,304
9.	Tom Jenkins	\$12,916,807
10.	Tom Watson	\$12,290,382
Source: PGA Champions Tour		

Now living in the Phoenix area (Paradise Valley), Irwin has done more than eke out a living since qualifying in 1995 for

what was formerly the Senior PGA Tour. He's won 45 times and is a runaway leader over runner-up Lee Trevino (29) in total wins. He's also the PGA's all-time earnings leader, having won nearly \$32 million - the bulk of that won since 1995.

His last No. 1 finish came in 2007, but before you develop a heavy heart for Hale, consider: In 15 years on the Champions Tour, he's won almost \$26 million, topping the tour's earnings list - all in all, a pretty nice pathway for a "mature" golfer to follow into his, ah, golden years.

Fellow seniors have noticed, but then how could they not? Colleague Peter Jacobsen called Irwin "unbelievable . . . he's an ATM machine. What he's done is incredible."

Irwin finished tied for 63rd in last week's Mississippi Gulf Resort Classic in the Biloxi, Miss., area. He managed a 224, while winner David Eger shot a 205 and won \$240,000. Irwin's 2010 earnings are \$197,931, ranking him 22nd on this season's Champions Tour earnings list. With a pair of top 10 finishes in 2010, he's also No. 22 on the Champions Tour Charles Schwab Cup Points list, trailing leader Fred Couples by 872 points.

Colorado golf fans will get a chance to see Irwin compete later this month at the 71st Senior PGA Championship, to be played at the Colorado Golf Club (*more information at end of story*). Irwin hasn't played the course, but said he hopes to sample it the week before the event with son Steve, who lives in the Denver area.

Earlier this week, I asked Irwin a question that might lead off any cold-call conversation with a golfer who picked up his first clubs at 4 and was playing nine-hole courses by the time he was 7: "How's your game?"

(Ask that of a guy who played 659 PGA Tour events, won three U.S. Opens and has been a multi-time Ryder Cup participant . . . then hold on.)

Irwin chuckled and answered, "I'm hitting enough good shots to create optimism, but enough bad shots to tear it down . . . I'm more frustrated now, and that leads to inconsistency."

That's unfamiliar, uncharacteristic and unwanted territory for Irwin, of whom Jack Nicklaus once said, "Hale is not exceptional in any part of the game, but very good in all parts."

Irwin continued: "I haven't been putting well, my short game is questionable. The thing that's been consistent for me through the years is my iron game, but it's been as bad over the last couple weeks as it's ever been.

"I've been driving well - not poorly. Some of the things I've done well through the years I'm not doing now. It's kind of baffling; I've not gone through this. But a lot of what I'm doing wrong is between the ears. I don't think I have that commitment to playing a good game, to making a good shot that I once did. What I have to do is put one shot in front of a good one, then another, then another. I've played some hard holes well, some that aren't so hard not so well.

"If I had to rank anything over the years, I've been a very good iron player . . . I wouldn't trade my iron game through the years with anyone else's. I've driven the ball average, but I've been accurate. My short game, when it's on, it's on very nicely. I've been consistent with my driving and irons and not had to rely heavily on the short game."

Then, Irwin chuckled again before adding: "It doesn't take much for the worm to turn - and now it seems like the worm got me in mid-stride."

Worms and such aside, the good news here is that Irwin is a competitor - a very smart and still-very tough competitor. If pulling out of what likely is a temporary swoon is his goal, he's strong-willed enough to pull it off.

Still, I asked him how much longer he hopes to play on the Champions Tour. His answer was fairly predictable: "I still have the desire to do some of it. Two things, though - if I'm ineffective, I will cut back. But I still enjoy promoting golf and competing. I enjoy seeing friends. This might sound trite, but I like to give back to communities that have helped me out for 42 years . . . give back some of those charitable dollars. If you can influence kids, young people, get them turned on to golf, that's also a goal."

Irwin, who maintains a course design company (Hale Irwin Golf Design), enjoyed a wildly fulfilling 27-year career on the

PGA Tour, playing in 659 events and winning 20. His trio of U.S. Open wins came in 1974, 1979 and 1990. If he can cure what's ailing his game before he tees it up in this month's Senior PGA Championship and win, it would be his third title in that event (he previously won it in 1998 and 2000).

Asked if his time on the Champions Tour had been as fulfilling as his years on the PGA Tour, Irwin said, "In many respects, yes, in some respects, no. The 45 wins on the Champions Tour is very fulfilling. But it's sort of like comparing children. You know, 'Who's your favorite?'

"I had a great regular Tour highlighted by the three Open wins . . . it's hard to say anything on the Championship Tour has equaled that. But I have different priorities now. Things change. Back in the day, I was touring and trying to raise my kids. Now, it's touring and seeing the grandkids (he has three) when I can. I wouldn't say that the Champions Tour hasn't been awesome; it has been, but for a different set of reasons."

An all-Big Eight free safety in his junior and senior years at CU (1965-66), Irwin still manages to follow Buffs athletics when possible. He gets to Colorado more often than he did on the PGA Tour, but concedes, "I don't travel that much when I'm not going to tournaments. You kind of like to park your body in the easy chair and rest a little bit."

The Buffs' lack of recent football success has left him "disenchanted, like many of the alums," he said. "I'm not pointing a finger at (football coach Dan) Hawkins or anybody else. But what's perplexing to me is how it got on that downward spiral so quickly.

"Other schools hit rough patches, but they seem to pull out of it. I'm all for student-athletes and I hope CU turns out great students and citizens for our next generations. But one of the ways you promote that is through your athletic programs."

Irwin recently has spent time in Tampa, Fla., and Biloxi, Miss., with a tour stop looming in Birmingham, Ala. All are in a rabid football region that he says is "jumping with alumni trying to throw money at their schools . . . it seems like there's nothing to get our teeth into (at CU)."

He keeps tabs on CU golf mainly through e-mails sent by Athletic Media Relations Director Dave Plati and golf coach Roy Edwards. Irwin won the 1967 NCAA Division I individual championship, which might factor into his scoffing at golf as a team sport.

"I have to laugh at the concept . . . I don't think it works as a team sport," he said. "You talk about five guys in golf playing as a team, but I don't know how that can be equated with 11 guys playing football. It's just not like 11 guys running one play. I don't know about taking one for the team in golf.

"I guess you can mold people into thinking that (golf) is a team sport, but at the same time, I wonder if they shouldn't just say it's an individual sport. I see it all across the land with college coaches and in high schools. But let's face it, a lot of golfers simply do it on their own . . . I just don't see it, but that's me."

Irwin has been dubbed "Mr. Longevity" by some pundits. When he teed it up on April 24 in the Liberty Mutual Legends of Golf event in Savannah, Ga., it marked his 1,001st PGA start and added his name to a list that features but a dozen members.

Fellow golfer Jay Haas told the *Savannah Morning News*, "I've played over 900 (906 at the time) and I feel like I've played a lot of tournaments. He's not just played 1,000, he's played 1,000 good tournaments."

Actually, he's played more than that. Counting events abroad, World Cups, Ryder Cups, etc., Irwin figures his tourney total "is closer to 1,100 - but who's counting?"

Kind of like his birthdays . . . although there are times now when he does keep track of those.

(Senior PGA Championship information: The tournament will be played at the Colorado Golf Club in Parker, May 25-30. Ticket prices begin at \$20, with persons 17 years of age or younger admitted free with a paying adult. Go to SENIOR PGA 2010 for additional information.)

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Andre Gurode carries on friendship with Flozell Adams, high on Doug Free



Posted at 1:30 PM on Wed., May. 5, 2010 | Permalink | Yahoo! Buzz
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Imagine you went to work every day for eight or nine years and sat next to the same guy, got to know him pretty well, knew his family and friends and then all of a sudden one day the guy is gone. The widget company you work for just decided to fire him in a cost-cutting move.

In the real world, it happens way too often. In pro sports, it's an accepted part of life, too.

Since 2002, Andre Gurode and Flozell Adams were teammates. Then the Cowboys cut Adams this off-season, leaving Gurode as the longest-tenured Cowboy.

"You realize it's the business," Gurode said, "but the other thing is just because the guy is not here doesn't mean you don't carry that friendship on. Calls may drop off but you still reach out and ask how he's doing and make sure he's doing well. I've been in contact with Flo a couple of times. It's definitely different, but you know the friendship you built with this person will be there."

When asked about Adams' replacement, Doug Free, Gurode echoed the thoughts that just about everybody at Valley Ranch has had, too.

"I think Doug will do just fine," Gurode said. "I've been around Doug his whole career and when he first came in he was a high-motor guy, real nervous, but you could see so much potential. To see him go on the field last year and do some of the things he did, it didn't shock me. Before he got on the field to play, the guys told him, 'It's going to be like this. Calm done, you've done this before. Relax and you'll be fine.' He went out there and did his thing. He just waited for his opportunity and he did the best with it when it came."

Comments

Posted by vix @ 12:59 PM Thu, May 06, 2010

Really? All the guys told him to calm done? Interesting. DMN Sports is staffed with a bunch of hacks.
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