

Hale Irwin, 66, has 45 years of S.F. history

Ron Kroichick

Thursday, October 27, 2011

-- Not to suggest **Hale Irwin** is older than his Champions Tour colleagues, but Irwin played in the U.S. Open at the Olympic Club - in 1966. **Tom Lehman** was 7 at the time. **Fred Couples** was 6.

Irwin also brings some deep personal history at Harding Park - he played there in the San Francisco Open Invitational in 1969.

So, yes, Irwin is older than his Champions Tour colleagues.

That's an inescapable, impressive part of his story as he prepares to return to San Francisco for next week's Schwab Cup Championship. Irwin, at 66, is the oldest player ever to qualify for the season-ending tournament, with room to spare (**Gil Morgan** is next, at 63 in 2009).

Irwin earned his trip to Harding by reaching this point in the season at No. 26 on the money list, thanks to seven top-10 finishes. That's not a statistic he will boast about - winning still drives Irwin, as you might expect for a three-time U.S. Open champ who also owns a record 45 victories on the Champions Tour.

He last won in January 2007, as he wages the inevitable duel with Father Time. Irwin rediscovered his game long enough to linger in contention at the Senior PGA Championship in May (he ultimately finished fourth), and he also played well in the U.S. Senior Open in July (tie for fourth).

Father Time still offers formidable opposition, even for a World Golf Hall of Famer and notable multi-sport athlete. Irwin once was an all-conference defensive back at Colorado, long ago.

"It's not as quite as retrievable as it once was, just because I'm older and the body is not quite as willing as it once was," he said Wednesday from his home in Arizona, speaking of his golf game. "You can't keep thinking you're 36 anymore. You have to realize and address some issues."

Irwin hurt his back about 10 years ago, curtailing his practice time. He can't hit balls with the same vigor and durability he previously did, so now he sometimes spends 15 minutes on the range instead of an hour and 15 minutes (or more).

Now he practices in his head, as he put it, giving himself one or two objectives to achieve each day, no matter how long his body lasts.

Even so, Irwin finds the bigger challenge lurking between his ears. That's often overlooked in golf, whether it's 40-something players trying to stay relevant on the PGA Tour or 60-somethings trying to compete on the Champions Tour.

Irwin offered a specific example, from this year's Senior PGA. He took the lead on the fifth hole of the final round, then smacked his drive right down the middle of the fairway on No. 6. Irwin got a little "soft in his thinking," and his carelessness led to double bogey.

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He made bogey on the next hole, a par-5, after again hitting his drive in the fairway. They weren't especially difficult shots and they weren't mistakes a younger Hale Irwin ever made. He reluctantly realized his focus just isn't as sharp anymore.

"I can't keep the mental intensity I once did, to really stay in every shot for 4 1/2 hours," Irwin said. "I occasionally find my mind drifting away, and it might affect that shot. ... What happened at the Senior PGA was frustrating and revealing. I can forgive the body breaking down. It's a little tougher to forgive that mental lapse."

Irwin still will bring good vibes to San Francisco. He remembers Harding's many cypress trees, and the way they swallow wayward shots "like big catcher's gloves." Irwin can live with that, because it means the course rewards accuracy more than length.

Remember, the man won three U.S. Opens.

He still burns to win, which helps explain how he won 20 times on the PGA Tour and those 45 tournaments on the Champions Tour. It has been nearly five years since his last victory, but Irwin doesn't sound entirely convinced that will be his *last* victory.

"I don't feel I've had my last one, though I can't say for sure," he said. "I still have the desire to succeed, and I've always felt success is measured by what you've done in the win column, not top 10s."

"We've romanticized the top 10. (David) Letterman put the top 10 out there, and now that's all we talk about. On the PGA Tour, guys finish in the top 10, make a ton of money and think they're great players. In my era, you had to win. We didn't settle for anything else."

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Irwin not a Top 10 fan

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Don't expect Hale Irwin to read the Top 10 list on "The Late Show with David Letterman" anytime soon.

Some explanation is in order: Irwin, a three-time U.S. Open winner, defied Father Time to qualify for next week's Schwab Cup Championship at Harding Park. He's 66 years old, making him (easily) the oldest player to ever reach the season-ending event for the top 30 players on the Champions Tour money list.

Irwin stands at No. 26, with nearly \$600,000 in earnings, and he got there by posting seven top-10 finishes this season (after collecting only two last year). Just don't expect him to crow about all his top-10s.

The man won 20 times on the PGA Tour and another 45 times on the Champions Tour (the most all-time). So he's not terribly excited by merely playing well, even at his age.

Hence, his disdain for one of Letterman's favorite routines.

"I don't feel I've had my last tournament win, though I can't say for sure," he said in a phone interview earlier today. "I still have the desire to succeed, and I've always felt success is measured by what you've done in the win column, not top 10s."

"We've romanticized the top 10. Letterman put the top 10 out there, and now that's all we talk about. On the PGA Tour, guys finish in the top 10, make a ton of money and think they're great players. In my era, you had to win. We didn't settle for anything else."

Check out my full golf column on Irwin in Thursday's Sporting Green [here](#).



Hale Irwin will play at Harding Park next week, for the first time since 1969.

Posted By: [Ron Kroichick](#) ([Email](#) , [Twitter](#)) | Oct 26 at 4:59 pm

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Post by [Eric Williams](#) on Oct. 25, 2011 at 2:40 pm with [14 Comments »](#)



Russell Okung and Tyler Polumbus watch practice last year. (Joe Barrentine/TNT)

The Seattle Seahawks waived offensive lineman Tyler Polumbus this afternoon, creating an available roster spot to bring back defensive back Roy Lewis or receiver Deon Butler off of the Physically Unable to Perform (PUP) list.

The Seahawks received the University of Colorado product in a trade with Detroit in August 2010 for a seventh round pick in the 2012 draft. Polumbus started five games at left tackle and three games at left guard last season, including two playoff games.

Heading into this season, Polumbus was expected to be the swing tackle behind Russell Okung and James Carpenter, but Breno Giacomini assumed that role once the regular season began.

And with rookie Jarriel King returning from an ankle injury and showing the ability to play both tackle and guard, Polumbus, 26, became expendable.

The Seahawks now have nine offensive linemen on the active roster. Seattle has not announced how they intend to fill the available spot on the active roster.

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They should be thinking about a big back.



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