

World Golf Hall Of Fame Induction Ceremony

Monday, June 10 2019

Retief Goosen

Induction Speech

GARY PLAYER: It's always a special occasion for me when a South African is inducted to the World Golf Hall of Fame. We are a relatively small country, but have produced many talented golfers who became major winners and Hall of Famers. I'm honored to introduce Retief as a member of the World Golf Hall of Fame's Class of 2019.

As Bobby Locke, that wonderful golfer, took a keen interest in my career, the same can be said for my attention to Retief's when he started to make a name for himself.

After winning the South African Amateur Championship, Retief was ready to take his game global. Much to my delight he won in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Asia. That is the mark of a champion.

Retief's accomplishments quite honestly have flown under the radar, so to speak. Maybe it's his cool and calm demeanor, the respect he shows for players, fans and the media. He is a true gentleman of the game, a gentleman.

His worldwide wins include two U.S. Open Championships in 2001 and 2004. He led the European Tour Order of Merit in 2001 and 2002. He also played in six executive Presidents Cups from 2000 to 2011 as part of the International Team.

And so to think, Retief, you became a Hall of Famer even after a near-death experience getting struck by lightning on a golf course in Pretoria in your teens. One would have said I have had enough. Instead you put together a Hall of Fame career with the drive and determination of a champion, which you are.

Retief, do what Trevino said: Carry a 1-iron when the weather is bad, and keep it above your head, because Trevino said: Not even God can hit a 1-iron.

What a pleasure it is to induct you into the World Golf Hall of Fame, as my countryman and my dear friend. Vivienne, myself, and the entire Player family send our love to you on this special occasion and this special night. Many, many congratulations, my friend. You are a Hall of Famer. God bless.



(Applause.)

GARY PLAYER: Retief Goosen is a great competitor and at the same time a great champion. And it is my great pleasure to present him to you for induction into the World Golf Hall of Fame, which we all cherish so much.

Ladies and gentlemen, my friend and countryman, Retief Goosen.

(Applause.)

RETIEF GOOSEN: Gary, what a great honor for Gary Player to introduce me here tonight. I've known Gary for a long time, and he's a great friend and a great man on and off the golf course. He's done incredible things for this game and for charity.

So, Gary, thank you very much for your time being here tonight and doing this for me. It's a great honor. I hope I don't have too many three-putts here tonight (laughter).

I really just want to start off with really the Hall of Famers here tonight. I mean, there's so many of you here tonight, and what an honor to be standing here in front of you and be part of this great Hall of Fame. It's hard to believe that where I've come from that I'll be standing here one day, but it's been amazing. And thank you, everybody, for being here tonight.

And the selection committee. I know it's been a tough decision. I was up against some tough players. And for you guys to have chosen me, it makes me really proud to be a part of this great team of players. Thank you very much.

To my fellow inductees, Jan, Peggy, Billy, and Dennis, Dennis, you're amazing. I'm really honored to be part of this great team this year and induction team, should I say. Dennis, it really makes you just want to cry. What you've done for this game, amazing. And giving me a little bit of inspiration to carry on and just keep going. Congrats.

Let me talk a little bit where it all start for me. I grew up in a small town called Pietersburg, now called Polokwane. It was a very small town, only one golf

course. Even today there's only one golf course. If you had rain, you played on grass; and if you didn't have rain, you played on sand.

You could cycle from one side of town to the other side of town in about 30 minutes. It was very much a farming community. My dad was a property developer as well as a part-time cattle farmer. And he was also a very good golfer. He was South African Senior Amateur Champion at one stage. He could play the game. And my two older brothers, they were pretty good players, themselves. And that's really why I learned the game.

I played a lot of other sports in my young days. I played rugby, cricket, tennis, swimming, athletics. I did a lot of other things, and then really golf started for me when I started caddying, especially my brother, Francois, and I caddied for him many times. And now he says he'd like to caddie for me. And that's how I learned the game. Going around the course and caddying for them.

And really from the age of outside 12 golf really bit me. And I started reading golf books. And my dad was a very big fan of Ben Hogan, and I was a big fan of Jack Nicklaus' Golf My Way. And that's where it started for me. Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Gary Player golf books were lying in the house, and I started copying what was in those books. I didn't have any video cameras or anything like that.

My dad had a practice net on the back garden. And my mom always screamed at us for hitting out of grass. My dad had a big mirror there, and I stood in front of the mirror and looked in the book, that's how Jack holds it, so I'm going to hold it like that. And that's how I really grooved my game, got into that of just copying and swing and go with feel.

It was an exciting junior time. We cycled everywhere, as I said. I didn't actually wear shoes to school until I was about 11. It was about that kind of place. Everything was barefoot going everywhere. We lived less than a half mile from the golf course. It was easy for me in the afternoons, grab my clubs, put it on my back, and my little bag of golf balls, and cycle down to the club and get a quick nine holes in and practice and then cycle back. So it was a very exciting time.

There's probably a rough area of around ten juniors around my golf club. Six of them were English (indiscernible), and we always had a little sort of mini Ryder Cups against each other, the English against the Afrikaans boys. And after a while they didn't really want to with me anyway, because I just started beating them. So I ended up playing a lot of rounds on my own (laughter).

But probably my biggest buddy at the time was my cousin Henry. He was a pretty good player. We played a lot of golf together. And one afternoon on the 30th of January 1995 me and him decided, it's a Wednesday afternoon, let's cycle down to the course, let's play a quick nine holes behind the men's game.

We got there, and there was a little bit of weather around, and it started raining. About on the fifth hole we stopped and we hang around in the rain shelter a little bit. And then it cleared up and off we went. And we got on No. 7, a long par 4, and we both hit bad drives down the right. And we just started wandering off in that direction. He was luckily walking sort of 20 yards in front of me, and the next moment I get knocked over. And what's going on? And he said -- and when I spoke to him, he said he turned around and there I was lying, smoking away, no clothes, blood coming out everywhere, burned black head to tail. Not knowing what to do. He just ran off to the hole next door, and there was a group of four guys playing, and to my luck one of them was a doctor. The guy was literally there in a few minutes and brought me back to life. I was basically dead there. When I woke up, I was in the hospital covered with bandages from head to tail, looking like a mummy.

But it was really a lucky escape, should I say. You don't know where you're going to wake up when something like that happened. I didn't see any lights. I didn't see anything else. Lucky for me when I woke up I was in the hospital, and literally three weeks later, when I get my shoes back on, I was back on the golf course, and here we are today. Still going, luckily.

But I think the lightning sparked something in me. After that I really started playing some good golf (laughter). I did okay. The battery is still charged. I'm still going.

I started winning quite a lot of tournaments, amateur tournaments, South African Amateur. I even won one professional tournament as an amateur. So my game really took off from there, and that's when I knew golf was going to be my thing.

And when I finished school in 1987, it was military time. It was compulsory in those days, still. Me and Ernie were in at the same time. We both played together for the Defense Force team. We had some exciting times, I would say, at a few events we went to because I was not a drinker at the time, should I say. And so I was the designated bus driver for all the trips that we did. The rest of the team was unable to drive, let me put it that way (laughter). So that was a lot of fun hanging around with Ernie and those guys.

I turned pro straight after that. I won Rookie of the

Year that year. And from there things took me to Europe. I started on the European Tour. I joined IMG in 1990 and things from there, went to Europe. I got my card in Europe and really started building my game.

Came to America for the first time in 1995 for the World Cup at Lake Nona with Ernie. That was the first time I came to America, and it was exciting. Ernie played great that week, and I played like a dog. I got into Bay Hill, Arnie's event, which was great to play there.

Then I went into the European Tour and things really turned for me right here at Pebble Beach in 2000. I managed to get in here. Well, we knew who the winner was by 15 shots, but I happened to make the cut on the mark. And I was the first group out the third round, and I played a reasonable round and the weather picked up that afternoon. I went from last to about 20th. And in the final round, I finished birdie, eagle, on 17 and 18, to finish 11th, which got me into the U.S. Open the following year in Tulsa.

I got to Tulsa. I had a great practice round with Pricey, who won there. And I had a nice round with him there to see what he was doing around the course and things turned out great for me that week. Although it took me five rounds to finally lift the trophy, but it was great to win the U.S. Open at Tulsa.

And also playing again with Ernie at Shinnecock in the final round. That was mentally tough. Besides the greens. I found the greens perfect. I don't know what they were complaining about (laughter).

There was more to the mental side. Playing in front of the New York crowd was not easy. There was a lot of chitty-chatty coming out of the crowds trying to put me off. But I managed to block all that out and pull it off. It was a great time that period. The big five sort of was developed -- Tiger, Ernie, Phil, Vijay and myself -- and it was a lot of great competition. Exciting stuff.

Then slowly my back, unfortunately, started backing up, and back issues held me back for quite a number of years, but I've had now back surgery six years ago, and the back is absolutely perfect. And now I'm starting a career on the Senior Tour. I'll be carrying the Hall of Fame badge with pride on the Seniors Tour. Really a great honor to be part of this great team.

Thank yous. I probably have to thank IMG. IMG has played a big role in my career, all the way from Mark McCormack, (indiscernible), Angela Jones, Sherry Way, Phillip Barker (phonetics). They've been there since really I got on to the -- onto Tour and guided me through playing around the world everywhere, up to 38 tournaments a year around the world. It was a busy time.

My sponsors, past sponsors, a lot of them are here tonight, and present sponsors, thank you. Without you guys, nothing would be possible. Coaches and caddies, some of them are here. Thank you for getting the swing in groove a little bit.

And then all my friends from all over the place, South Africa, England, even my friend Michael Campbell came all the way down from New Zealand, thank you very much.

And then finally my family, Tracy and my two wonderful kids, thank you for your support through all the thick and thin what this game brings, and love you all. Thank you.

(Applause.)