

Outside the Box

The game of golf has been labeled many things since its inception in the 15th century. It has been known as a game for the wealthy, the proper folk, the businessman, and of course, had a stigma for being a predominantly Caucasian sport. Then, in 1960, a Mexican American named Lee Trevino turned professional and dismantled everyone's thoughts on the game in about ten seconds flat.

In our current era of "me" athletes, millions of corporate dollars, and "I'm just here, so I won't get fined." it's important to remember the individuals who broke down those walls between athletes and fans. The professionals who allowed themselves to be vulnerable and interact with you and me after we've paid hard-earned money to be entertained by them. Lee Trevino did more for the game than he will ever be credited for. Nobody (still to this day) has the ability to chat up a gallery like Trevino. But his quick wit and infectious joy weren't the only things that allowed Trevino to sustain a career that spanned forty-plus years; he was a pretty good player too.

Lee Trevino Changed the Game

By Todd Mrowice

89 professional wins between the PGA Tour, Champions Tour, and international play places Trevino among the greatest to ever step foot on a golf course. A good chunk of those victories came on the biggest of stages, major championships. Trevino won the U.S. Open in 1968 and

'71, The Open Championship in 1971 and '72, and the PGA Championship in 1974 and '84. Of his six majors, Jack Nicklaus was the runner-up in four.

Trevino also made noise as a six-time member of the U.S. Ryder Cup squad with team victories in 1971, '73, '75, '79, and '81. He

also captained the 1985 team. Certainly one of the hot button topics in the game today, Trevino doesn't mince words when talking about the recent history surrounding the U.S. teams.

"You can't win a Ryder Cup if your top guys don't have a good record at that competition," said



Trevino. "You should always have three or four good 'guns' on every team, your top guys. So that tells you that who you think your top guys are... I don't need to tell you who those guys are, you know. The other thing I have a problem with is guys who don't want to play with other guys. You're a

team! You stand on the same side and you go get it done."

Don't confuse Trevino's opinions as being an "old timer" though. At 75-years-young he shows that he is still very much tuned into the game, its players, and all that surrounds golf. Trevino surely would be a

corporate goldmine if he were a rising star today, but he is happy for today's touring pros.

"Old school was that you played golf to make enough money to pay the taxes from what you made off of the course. We didn't make a lot of money on the course, we made money coming to events like [the Chicago] golf show or playing in a par 3 with twenty foursomes at a golf outing," said Trevino. "The top pros today will never know what that's like, but that's not their fault. They don't need to make that extra money because there's so much of it available to them on the course. I've always felt that golfers deserve the opportunity to make as much as top athletes from other sports, and now they can."

Running parallel with recent struggles for Tiger Woods have been questions of the state of golf. A decline in revenue surrounding professional tours, in addition to equipment sales, and course closings have many wondering how the game will fair without Tiger hunting victories on Sundays.

"No one individual is bigger than the game," said Trevino. "Everyone thought when Jack Nicklaus retired that the tour was dead. And then comes along Tom Watson, Lanny Wadkins, and Tom Kite. The needle didn't move the same way, but it didn't die. There are too many young people playing this game to not have someone up next."

So if not Tiger, who is the person that can carry the tour today?

"I love Bubba Watson. I think he's great. The only question I have though is if he really wants it? He's oozing with talent and can do anything in the world with a golf ball," said



Trevino. "Rory McIlroy we don't know that well. He has a business approach to the game and you can tell he wants it. He's the No. 1 golfer in the world, but I hope he remembers someone is always practicing while you're sleeping."

While in town for the Chicago Golf Show, Lee Trevino recalled how Chicago provided him with one of the scariest and most memorable moments in his life. In 1975 the U.S. Open and Western Open were hosted in back-to-back weeks between

Medinah and Butler National. At Medinah, it began to rain during one of the rounds of the U.S. Open and tournament officials encouraged Trevino to get off of the course due to the threat of lightning. In typical Lee Trevino fashion, he told the officials that

if the 12,000 people in the gallery couldn't go inside, neither would he. Trevino went on to joke that if there was lightning, then he would hold up a 1-iron, "Because God couldn't even hit a 1-iron."

The following week at the



Western Open it began to rain again. Trevino found himself sitting on his golf bag at the 13th hole when a bolt of lightning hit right beside him, throwing him a few feet away.

"If I wasn't a believer in fate before then, I sure was from then

on," said Trevino.

While it might not be commonplace to find a professional golfer as entertaining as Lee Trevino, his stamp on the PGA Tour and the game overall is indelible. His talent alone was enough to bring in droves of fans to watch

him, but they wouldn't have had nearly as much fun just watching him hit his sweet power fade for 18 holes. Here's to hoping that the next generations of professional golfers study Trevino and how he has balanced his physical and "vocal" talents.



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