

## FEATURED INTERVIEW

### Dual Triumphs of Jack Nicklaus: Winning Majors and Marrying Marvelously

*Drawing from her heartland America blessings, Barbara Nicklaus's life has been a tribute to the joy of family and friends.*

BY MARK PAZDUR, PUBLISHER

NORTH PALM BEACH, FLORIDA: Something about 1962 seems to stoke memories for anyone old enough to appreciate an important and eventful year. On a serious global front, it was the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis (study up if you haven't committed these chilling details to memory) and of John Glenn's orbit of earth, the first by an American astronaut. It was a big year in golf, as well. Arnold Palmer won the 1962 Masters, his third green jacket. It was also the year that a man named Jack Nicklaus spent his first full season on the PGA Tour after turning professional the previous autumn.



BARBARA AND JACK NICKLAUS.

Which brings us to Barbara Nicklaus, who was 20 months into a marriage with Jack, her former classmate at The Ohio State University, when they arrived at Doral Golf Resort and Spa in Miami for the 1962 Doral Open. Jack and Barbara were by then parents to Jack II, who was all of 4 months old as their rental car cruised from the airport toward Doral. In an era before Pampers it was necessary to bring cloth diapers along with all the other essentials a newborn would need. "I was a typical over-protective mom," Barbara says, remembering the details with a smile and a shake of her



PUBLISHER MARK PAZDUR TALKS WITH BARBARA NICKLAUS.

head. "I brought those cloth diapers, a crib, sheets, and enough supplies for a small army. The airline charged us \$80 in excess baggage fees. Remember, this was 1962. Eighty dollars was a lot back then. Jack was furious. I think he wanted to send me back to Ohio. I quickly learned to pack smarter."

The moment is worth a grin almost 50 years later. And if you are Barbara Nicklaus, the smiles are frequent because there is so much to appreciate. Her vantage point within the world of sports and history has been particularly intimate. She and Jack, above all, have one of those genuine and enduring marriages that is not terribly commonplace in the celebrity world. They will be married 49 years in July. They have five children and 21 grandchildren.

Barbara, though, has always been Barbara. Effortlessly, her civility, her patience, her unpretentiousness and her depth have been the traits of a woman whose substance has been obvious. After all, she has a degree from The Ohio State University (bachelor of science in education, 1961). She could have known the fulfillment that can be part of a career as vocational as education. But if you're talking fulfillment with Barbara Nicklaus, you are invariably discussing those four sons and a daughter who turned out so nicely.

## A FATHER FIRST, A GOLFER SECOND

“Jack sums it up best,” Barbara was saying, sitting in the gorgeous home in which she and Jack have occupied since 1970 on Florida’s eastern coastline, with Cali, their 10-year-old golden retriever. “He always said that, no question about it, our five children are the five biggest trophies we’ve ever brought home.”

In the same trophy case now reside 21 grandchildren. It is a new era for Barbara and for Jack, that blissful time when 60-something adults again experience the joy of children—and know those same children are headed home that night with their own mom and dad. On second thought, Barbara could handle having the grandkids around



(TOP) JACK AND BARBARA NICKLAUS WITH THEIR FOUR SONS (FROM LEFT) JACK II, MICHAEL, STEVE, AND GARY, AND THEIR DAUGHTER NANCY. (ABOVE) THE NICKLAUSES WITH THREE OF THEIR 21 GRANDCHILDREN.

24/7, which is fairly close to the way it works now. On the kitchen’s refrigerator door, smothered in the grandkids’ school art, is a calendar color-coded to delineate what everyone is doing on a particular day. “I have grandchildren playing on five different football teams,” said Barbara, speaking of a third generation that spans ages 19 to 1. “The school year can get to be a little crazy around here.”

Not so frenzied, however, that life ever seems out of order. Barbara Nicklaus knows a thing or two about that lovely word “grounded.” She is a woman whose personal story speaks to the blessings and foundation embodied by family life in Ohio’s heartland culture. She had strong parents—a homemaking mother, and a father who was a math teacher whose annual salary never exceeded \$6,200. “I don’t know how they did it,” Barbara remembers of her parents and “the greatest childhood a kid could have,” when she was growing up alongside one brother in a humble neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio. “Mom and Dad made incredible sacrifices for my brother and me. They never gave each other Christmas presents. The money was spent on us.”

## A DAD AND MOM ADORED BY A DAUGHTER

Barbara recalls as a young girl when her father would spend an evening or a Saturday delivering dry-cleaning orders. She assumed it was Dad being Dad, another instance where he was simply helping a friend. Later in life she realized it had been her father’s second job as

he collected a bit of extra cash for a family that was fighting along with everyone after World War II to make the American Dream a reality. “They were marvelous parents,” she said as Cali power-napped a few feet away on the kitchen floor. “They taught me integrity, honesty, love, and respect. I learned by their actions, not words.”

Barbara and Jack had grown up in different parts of Columbus (Jack was from Upper Arlington; Barbara attended North High School) and never met until later on. But anyone who would have known them as teenagers would have seen instantly the similarities. Barbara played all sports, as did Jack, who was your basic all-around athlete destined for a college scholarship. Barbara was in Campfire Girls and had a natural appreciation for people that, as Jack’s profile rose, would make her a favorite in the exceedingly social world of golf. Two teens who had never met one another during their high school years finally came together in the fall of 1957. They were freshmen at The Ohio State University. “I was all of 17,” Barbara recalls. “I stopped to say hello to a girlfriend of mine, and she introduced me to her boyfriend, Jack.” .... Uh, make that former boyfriend.

“That day,” Barbara remembers, “Jack walked me to my job on campus. We dated for a couple of months and then didn’t see each other after the holidays. I figured our relationship was over. He went back to his previous girlfriend and I got another boyfriend. Then, out of the blue, I get a birthday card from him in February as well as one from his parents and his sister. I thought, ‘Hmm, how interesting.’ We’ve been together ever since.”

## SHARED VALUES SPARKED A ROMANCE

Their backgrounds, of course, were crafted for compatibility. Barbara was raised by the essence of earnest, loving parents. Jack had his own moorings there, epitomized by his dad, Charlie, a pharmacist and athlete who, during his high school years, had won 11 varsity letters.

Barbara had an early interest in nursing before concentrating on education. She also won a \$500 girls state scholarship, which, by living at home and working at a campus job, she was able to stretch across her freshman, sophomore, and junior years.



As for Jack, he had a steady relationship with golf. He had been a stand-out in all sports in high school, but he knew even before he got to Ohio State that golf would be his focus. With golf, he had the freedom to determine his own results. He was in control. Legend has it that famed Ohio State football coach Woody Hayes, who would have had interest in Jack's quarterback skills, told his father, "Charlie, Jack has a special talent in golf. Keep him as far away from football as you can."



It has always made for amusing lore in Columbus, but it wasn't quite that way. Jack had broken 70 when he was 13 and had won five consecutive Ohio State Junior titles from the time he was 12 until he was 16, which was the same year he beat all of the state's professionals to win the Ohio Open. He simply had extraordinary power and skills suited to a game for which he was being recognized beyond Ohio.

Football could have been an option. But it was not a serious one, not for a young man whose life was going to be golf. There was only one problem as Jack showed up at OSU in the fall of 1957. Ohio State did not offer golf scholarships. Jack was instead given a basketball scholarship.



It was a way to help two parties, the Buckeyes and Jack, the latter of which was moving closer to becoming a national golf force. Nicklaus won the U.S. Amateur in 1959 and again in 1961, the year after he nearly beat Arnold Palmer to win the U.S. Open at Cherry Hills.

## JACK'S CHERRY HILLS PREVIEW

At a time when the U.S. Open finished with 36 holes on Saturday, Palmer had found himself all but out of the championship after Saturday's morning round. But over the final 18 holes of golf, which seemed more like something from a Hollywood script than from a golf tournament, Palmer scorched Cherry Hills with a final-round 65 in the afternoon to win. It was a story so improbable that it necessarily involved other characters: 47-year-old Ben Hogan and Nicklaus, the 20-year-old amateur. Hogan was set to win and steal Palmer's show until a wedge shot at No. 17 missed

by a foot of being perfect and instead plopped into the pond. Ben Hogan's miscue helped Nicklaus finish in second place, two strokes behind Palmer (Jack's 282 remains the lowest-ever U.S. Open round by an amateur).

It was not his runner-up spot but Hogan's words afterward that remain part of the transcript from one of the most hallowed days in American golf history. "I guess they'll say I lost it," Hogan mused afterward. "Well, one more foot and the wedge on 17 would have been perfect. But I'll tell you something, I played 36 holes today with a kid who should have won this Open by 10 shots." The kid was named Jack Nicklaus.

Five weeks later “the kid” was on his way to a triumph quite separate from anything he would ever gain on a golf course. He was headed for the altar to marry Barbara. They became engaged, the previous Christmas Eve, in Jack’s home with his parents on hand. “We were in their living room and he gave me a ring,” Barbara recalls of a moment that featured none of the down-on-one’s-knee dramatics usually reserved for proposals. “I guess he just assumed I would say yes.”

He assumed correctly, which shows that it hasn’t only been on a golf course where Jack Nicklaus has displayed supreme confidence. The wedding plans got a boost from whom else? Barbara’s dad.

#### WEDDING BELLS—AND BILLS

“He had put \$1 a week in a special kitty for my wedding,” Barbara recalls, still blown away by a father’s love and discipline. “Over two decades, he saved up \$2,000. He was a very special dad.”

He also had an important errand to run ahead of the wedding day. So did Barbara’s mother and Jack’s parents. “They had to go to the courthouse to help us get a marriage license,” Barbara remembers. “We were just 20 and in Ohio you had to be 21 to get a license.”

For anyone who thinks a teenage daughter was a bit young to have flashed all of her folks’ considerable smarts, consider what Ms. Shrewdie had up her sleeve. “We got married on July 23, 1960,” Barbara says, and here comes the grin. “Why that date? I knew Jack would be free. It was the week of the PGA Championship and amateurs couldn’t compete.”

Everything began to happen so quickly after the wedding. The children began to arrive. So, too, was Jack heating up on Tour en route to becoming the greatest golfer of his time. Not that anyone was necessarily banking—literally—on such glory in 1960. It was a different era. Tour golfers were not cashing checks for millions of dollars. Travel was often by car. Perks? They were something CEOs might get, but not Tour golfers.

Jack won his second U.S. Amateur in 1961 but had no particular plans to turn professional. He was selling life insurance and intended to remain an amateur as he and Barbara raised the kids. But how could he say no to a competitive world in which he clearly could make not only a living, but perhaps a difference?

#### A DEFINING DISCUSSION WITH JOE DEY

Jack decided to have a conversation with his “second father,” Joe Dey, the revered executive director of the United States Golf Association. If Dey believed Jack had the game and the stuff to win on Tour and to still be a husband and a father, who would be good enough for Jack. Dey told him to go for it. “Jack does things 100 percent,”

Barbara said as Cali snored away on the kitchen floor. “He’s always trying to get better. Turning pro allowed him to focus all his energy on golf.”



WINNIE PALMER WAS A DEAR FRIEND OF BARBARA’S FOR MANY YEARS.

He turned professional that November. Four months later came the trip to Doral. Three months after Doral another adventure awaited the Nicklaus. It was that year again, 1962, when so much was happening. It was Father’s Day weekend in western Pennsylvania when Jack was about to win another championship—at the same time Barbara won an eternal friend.

She and Winnie Palmer had met that week at Oakmont Country Club, just outside of Pittsburgh. Never mind that their husbands would duel in an 18-hole playoff on Sunday to decide the 1962 U.S. Open champion (Jack shot 71 to beat Arnie’s 74). Forget for a moment that the Nicklaus-Palmer rivalry became one of golf’s most important eras. Two women that weekend bonded—forever.

## NEVER ANYONE LIKE WINNIE

“Winnie Palmer was my mentor and best friend,” Barbara says in a voice both happy and melancholy. “We did a lot together after that ‘62 Open and became very close. Sometimes we wouldn’t see one another for an extended period of time, but we would quickly pick up where we left off. She was a great lady. The last time I saw her was at the ‘99 Masters,” and here the tears begin to collect. “She was on chemo [Winnie was battling cancer] and we spent the day together. Late that summer, we had a hurricane blow through Florida. She called to make sure we were OK. She had trouble talking and,” a long pause and more tears, “that was the last time I talked with her,” recalled Barbara. “I miss her deeply.”

One man who understood the bond uniquely was Winnie’s husband. “Winnie and Barbara were buddies,” said Arnold Palmer, reflecting on a relationship that had meant everything to his late wife, who died in 1999. “Winnie thought Barbara was one of the greatest persons she had ever met. They were very close friends for all those years.”



BARBARA GIVES MUCH OF HER ATTENTION TO THE CHILD LIFE INSTITUTE THAT SUPPORTS PEDIATRIC ONCOLOGY.

In the years since, Jack and Barbara have been at least as busy as when they were living their Tour lives. Jack melded his golf game with golf architecture to become one of the most prolific designers of new courses (and re-designers of older facilities) in the world.

## MORE AND MORE, A FAMILY BUSINESS

Barbara will tell you that she loves the decorative side to Jack’s business. “Nan and I really enjoy interior design,” Barbara says. “We just finished six villas at Muirfield Village [site of the Memorial Tournament]. A couple of times a year we go to North Carolina to source fabrics and furniture. Furnitureland South [High Point, North Carolina, one million square feet of showroom space] is an amazing place. I feel like a kid in a candy store.”

Barbara probably deserves a treat or two, at least in the view of all those kids and grandkids who seem to get their fair share of time from Mom and Mimi, the affectionate nickname given their grandmother. And it’s not only her family that gets her attention.

She has been working with the Nicklaus Children’s Health Care Foundation which funds the Child Life Institute, providing programs for children in a five-county area of South Florida; the Pediatric Oncology Support Team (POST); the Sickle Cell Intervention Program (SCIP); the Bringing Education, Art and Recreation (BEAR) program for hospital patients; and supports, as well, other programs aimed at pediatric illnesses including cystic fibrosis.

## MAN’S—AND WOMAN’S—BEST FRIEND

Cali manages her moments with Barbara, as well. Cali is the Nicklaus family’s fourth golden retriever, the first having been a puppy awarded to them in 1976 by none other than President Gerald R. Ford. Jack had been bugging Barbara for a while to get a “big dog.” Barbara thought five kids was burden enough. But when President Ford introduced them to his golden retriever, Liberty, and asked Barbara if she might like one of the puppies from Liberty’s litter, Barbara decided to put good manners and citizenship ahead of her true emotions: “We would love to have a puppy,” she said, all but gulping.

Two weeks later, the President called. On the way to Florida was a puppy that became the first in a line of four golden retrievers at the Nicklaus homestead. The kicker, of course, is that Barbara understands it isn’t only a husband, five kids and 21 grandkids who she helps oversee. Cali, snoring at Barbara’s feet, has gotten in on the act, as well. Love, it seems, knows no boundaries.



BARBARA NICKLAUS WITH “BEST FRIEND” CALI.

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