

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Pinehurst, North Carolina)

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF AN ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT THE OPENING OF
THE WORLD GOLF HALL OF FAME
PINEHURST, NORTH CAROLINA

I've really enjoyed listening to our eight honorees describe their greatest moments in golf. And if I may, I'd like to tell you the most memorable golfing experience I ever had. I was at the Burning Tree course just outside of Washington when Ben Hogan, Patty Berg and Byron Nelson came up to me and said they were looking for another great golfer to join them... I said, "Well, here I am!"... And they said, "Good. You can help us look!"

I didn't mind that so much. But what really hurt was when Arnold Palmer asked me to wear his slacks under an assumed name.

I do appreciate the great honor of your invitation -- but as I stand up here before all of you golfing immortals, one thought keeps running through my mind: I have an 18 handicap... You need me like Sam Snead needs another tomato can!

They say you can always tell how good a player is by the number of people in the gallery. You've heard of Arnie's Army? My group is called Ford's Few.

I've figured it out. My problem is, I have a very wild swing. I'll tell you how wild my swing is. Back on my home course, they don't yell "Fore!" They yell, "Ford!"

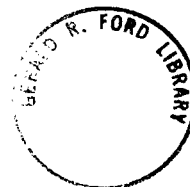
You know all those Secret Service men you've seen around me? When I play golf, they get combat pay!

But I try to keep my hand in whenever I can. Personally, I like to play golf with Henry Kissinger. Henry Kissinger is undoubtedly one of the greatest diplomats the world has ever known. I'll tell you why I say that. Last week I was in a sand trap. There was a water hazard beyond that and then 95 feet to the first hole. And Henry conceded the putt!

But this afternoon, I had one of the greatest thrills of my life. The chance to play a few holes with the super stars of world golfing. I can't tell you how I felt out there surrounded by these legendary names -- Berg, Hogan, Nelson, Nicklaus, Palmer, Player, Sarazen, Snead! It was almost like being in Golfer's Heaven!

But as the cliché goes, tonight I have good news and bad news. The good news is that four of our honorees -- Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Gary Player and Sam Snead -- will be competing in the World Open beginning tomorrow. The bad news is, today they shared the course with me... I'll tell you what I mean:

(MORE)



In 1972, I played with Sam Snead in the Pro-Am before the Kemper Open. He didn't go on to win the tournament .

In 1973, I played with Miller Barber before the Kemper Open. And he didn't go on to win the tournament.

This year I played with Tom Weiskopf before the Kemper Open -- and Dave Stockton before the Pleasant Valley Open. And neither of them went on to win the tournaments.

In Washington, I'm known as the President of the United States. In golf, I'm known as the Jinx of the Links!

I figured it out that Snead, Barber, Weiskopf and Stockton blew \$165,000 in prize money. If you think they're unhappy, you should see the Internal Revenue Service.

As you might have gathered by now, I enjoy golf. I enjoy the exercise it provides. I enjoy the competitive challenge. And I enjoy the good fellowship before, during and after each game.

But if I had to single out one attribute of golf above all others, it would be found in this simple statement from the ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA. It reads: "Golf is played on the honor system. A player is expected to count his own strokes even though he may miss the ball completely; to acknowledge the fact promptly if he violates a rule and incurs a penalty, and to avoid interfering in any way with his opponent's or fellow competitor's play."

Golf is one of the few games where honor is more important than rules. Without good sportsmanship, golf could not exist. Without trust, another name for good sportsmanship, governments cannot exist either.

But there is still one more lesson to be learned from golf. I have never seen a tournament -- regardless of how much money or fame or prestige or emotion was involved -- that didn't end with the victor extending his hand to the vanquished.

The pat on the back -- the arm around the shoulder -- the praise for what was done right and the sympathetic nod for what wasn't -- are as much a part of golf as life itself. I would hope that understanding and reconciliation are not limited to the 19th hole alone.

Before I leave, I'd like to thank you for asking me to be here today. It was just great! This afternoon for a few hours, I tried to make a hole in one. Tomorrow morning I'll be back in Washington trying to get out of one. Thank you most sincerely for this welcome mini-vacation.

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