

A Change in Style

an interview with Nick Faldo



By Leonard Finkel

The Masters has just been completed and the golf season has officially begun.. Three-time winner Nick Faldo is one of only two players to win back-to-back championships. Through a series of coincidences I bumped into an associate of Faldo's. With a "what the heck" attitude, I asked if it was possible to meet and interview Nick. To my surprise, the answer was yes and this interview was set up to coincide with a group of junior golfers that Nick was bringing to America to escape the British winter. I'd heard about a change in Nick's personality, a more relaxed attitude as time has passed. Nick was pleasant, open and honest with me and at times downright hilarious. He is a very likable chap and I think you'll like what he has to say.

Pub●Links: The 1996 Masters was one of the most incredible events I've ever witnessed. You were playing with and against Greg Norman; at that point it was almost match play. Did what was happening with Greg affect what you were doing on the golf course or were you so into your own game that you were oblivious to what was going on with him?

Faldo: Exactly, we all knew was going on, I mean when you're playing a guy and I was getting more and more of a chance to get in there. I really just played every shot one at a time and I was able to focus a little bit more on every one. We started the back nine and it was a case of commitment to your own discipline. I was just trying to push myself each time, I was saying to myself you've gotta do it, just go through your routine. Make your shot; make your decisions and act on it. It was as simple as that.

Pub●Links: Early in your career the brutal British press dubbed you Nicky Foldo. How did that sit with you and did it help drive you to achieve your spectacular later success?

Faldo: Sometimes you feel when people are talking negative about you; you say I'll show them. But generally most of the time I'm self-driven. I went through an era with the British media, which was a tough era. But I look back on it and that was just that time. It's very much the editors and what they wanted and how they wanted to

write the story. I accept that. Now I'm perfectly happy with it. I think I'm happy with myself, I'm happy with what I'm doing. That's all you can do. If the media doesn't agree with it, well that's just one person's opinion.

Pub●Links: When you decided to rebuild your swing you were already quite an accomplished player. What went into making that decision and what was going through the changes like? I think many of our readers can sympathize.

Faldo: It was just like I said to myself I haven't got it. I haven't got what I want to get me to the next level. I competed in a couple of the majors and I got close, the 83 British Open being one of them. I thought I needed a little bit more, to understand more. I started to rebuild and I call it my dark days. It was pretty low. In hindsight what you learned from trying to rebuild a swing during a season, especially if you're a name already, it's just short of suicidal. You get hammered media-wise. I lost sponsors because of it and everybody sort of thinks well that's it. He's gone. And you cannot state your case because are not great, and yet you're working



like a madman. Like I said they were dark days, it was very tough for me.

PubLinks: Whether it occurred in tournament play or just a recreational day on the course what are the best and worst rounds you've ever played and I don't necessarily mean your lowest score or worst score?



Faldo: The best rounds in the world? Wow, fortunately I've had lots of good rounds. The bad ones I don't remember. You delete those and put them in the waste bin and forget about them. A great one was the 67 at the British, the 64 I shot at the second round at Muirfield in the British Open in 92. Obviously, the 65 in the third Masters that I won. Gosh there have been lots. Some can be rewarding even now. I mean the 66 I shot at Bethpage in the U.S. Open was the lowest round of the week. I even shot 65 in Thailand two weeks ago. I was trying something new, a whole different sort of mental approach. Any given day like that and you think wow. Any time you try to achieve something and you hit a goal that you're trying to reach, it feels good.

PubLinks: So there wasn't one particular day that stands out?

Faldo: No there really isn't one over my whole career.

PubLinks: The public never truly knows what their heroes are like away from the cameras. To be the best in the world at anything is an amazing accomplishment and requires a tremendous sacrifice. It appears that you've transformed from an intensely focused and private personality to an outgoing, friendly and humorous chap. Do you think that you could have accomplished all that you did being the new Nick Faldo?



Faldo: I'm a different age now. I was a competitor before, from 25, 35, 40, when you are in your highly competitive years. I lived in that era and there was so much media going on that I didn't need to invite them into the house as well. And it was too dangerous. The most frustrating thing I think is sitting down and doing a one-hour interview with a newspaper and you say something for 30 seconds, like I don't like so and so or I don't like this, and that becomes the whole story. The other fifty-nine minutes are gone, like they're not even talked about. And that happened to me enough times. I just thought well why, why do you want to invite them to the house? You're talking, and all they're doing is waiting for you to slip up. Now the media's better trained, they're a different breed. It's a different media era where the public really wants to get close. You have the entertainment shows and the public really feels that it's they're right to be right there, even lounge with them, to know what it's



really like. It's a tough thing to have your PR and get it just right. Either way you can lose, either too much or too little. The bottom line is you have to do what makes you happy. Like I said it's a different era for me, and you have to do what you're comfortable doing. Obviously I'm not as intense on the golf course. Today there's just more things in my life. Before, being a competitor was number



one, which is fine. It's probably what's needed. Now I have great other things off the golf course. I have my family, business ideas and building golf courses and other things. So sure it'll change you.

PubLinks: As you transition from a focus on tournament golf, numerous other ventures are popping up. We're sitting here at the Nick Faldo Golf Institute. You currently have four schools. How did that venture come about and where do take it from here?



Faldo: It started quite simply. I was introduced to Steve Bradley and Pete Watzka in Orlando. Pete's in charge of marketing and all customer communications for the Marriott Vacation Clubs. Steve Bradley has lots of titles like the Senior Vice President of Marriott Golf I think. So I played golf with them and it's quite funny, Steve was playing to an 18 handicap. So I said Steve you create an institute and I'll get you to be single-digit. It was kind of like a joke but we created the institute in Orlando, and I got Steve down to single figures. And it's been a success. Ed (Utz) can you give numbers on how many students come through, but I think in all, we taught over 10,000 students in our programs at our four locations in 2003.

PubLinks: As far as your current teaching methods at the Faldo Golf Institute, how much of that is derived from your early teachers versus what you learned from Tour instructors?



Faldo: Oh, everything. It's 100% me. This is the beauty about golf; you can rewrite your book every day because you learn something more in this game, which is the beauty of it. I guess it's what keeps us out there. You never know what you're going to learn tomorrow. It has a bit of everything. It has history to it and it has modern-day. There are great swings from way back, McDonald Smith back into early 1900s had a fabulous golf swing. Then you have to take onboard your knowledge of biomechanics. So you try to do a bit of everything.

PubLinks: You've also ventured into golf course design? Can you tell us a bit about some of the projects you have going now?



Faldo: Currently it's worldwide. I was just in Australia opening a golf course down in Melbourne. Right now I have about 20 projects going on in some stage. There's usually a couple under construction, a couple on the drawing board, you know sort of getting a production line going. I'm in some funny



places. I'm in Moscow, Greece, we're trying in Hungary, we just finished one in China, in Beijing. I have another one in Ku Ming that's under construction in China. It's basically in all four corners of the world. I enjoy the business, and the goal for me is to create tournament golf courses. That's my dream, that they start playing regularly on Faldo golf courses for tournaments.

PubLinks: When they heard I was to interview you, several people told me to ask you about a golf course you're designing on an island off the coast of Ireland. Can you give me some details?



Faldo: That's my little baby. I pursued a piece of land and it took me six and a half years to buy it, which I've finally done. The next goal is, I have to come up with a vision. We have to do environmental impact studies, which is very important. Obviously we are going to have to do everything correctly and do it properly. It's an amazing piece of land. The golf course will literally have to be hand built. It's on pure sand dunes so it's lovely to own it, design it, and build it literally with my bare hands.

PubLinks: So like with Tom Weiskopf, this is your Loch Lomond?



Faldo: Exactly! You get an opportunity to do something, do it step-by-step and put a lot of time into it. It's a beautiful, beautiful spot. If you can imagine, it's an island in a

bay so the views are fantastic. These beautiful sand dunes, the sun rising east and west runs down the golf course and this beautiful beach. That'll be a fun project to sort of campout with the guys, the construction crew and build it.

PubLinks: Will it be open to the public?
Faldo: Oh yeah. I'm sure this will be a bit of everything.

PubLinks: The reason you're here now has something to do with your junior golf program. My understanding is your goal





with junior golf in the UK is to help develop the next generation of champions. I'm sure our readers will like to hear more.



Faldo: About seven years ago the media questioned where the next great champion's of English or British golfers were coming from. The only way to do that is to start a program. The Swedish program started back in 1984 and now on the European Tour, about 30% of the players are Swedish. The Scandinavian program is very strong. So I thought let's get things started. So we came up with the idea for this series to divide Great Britain into six areas and have three tournaments in each region. We run 18 events that they come to the finals. The next goal was to reward the winners and have them spend some time with me away from the British winter. We started in Florida at the Faldo Golf Institute by Marriott and now we're out here at Marriott's Shadow Ridge in Palm Desert where we have courses up and running. They get a good week out in some decent weather, great coaching and I'm involved with hands-on coaching of these players. I bring in my friends too. I've got Craig Farnsworth here this week, who is a putting coach. So they get some good insight from top instructors in a lot of different areas. For the junior series we actually have a Faldo team. We've selected half a dozen and we really try to bombard them with the good stuff. They meet every month and they go through the physical stuff, they're diet treated, technical coaching, mental coaching. They get some really good insights into playing the game.

PubLinksLF: And they get to spend time with their hometown hero?
Faldo: I hope it is. I hope they're inspired to do great things.

PubLinksLF: You seem heavily connected with the Marriott Corp. How is the relationship working out?



Faldo: As I said, I met Steve and Pete, played with them and thought right, here's an idea I have about creating an institute. They studied and rewrote my books and videos to become an instructional manual that is PGA certified now.

PubLinks: You design courses for them now too, right?



Faldo: Yeah, yeah. I obviously designed this one. I was a player consultant on a project they've done in Orlando, which is now Grand Pines. I also have the Firefly in Phoenix. They're a good bunch. They're true golfers, which is great. We all understand golf, which obviously helps.

PubLinks: You've won more Ryder Cup points than anyone in history. What does the Ryder Cup mean to you? how does it feel to be the record holder?

Faldo: I knew when I beat Arnold Palmer, Lee Westwood, my partner, holed a putt at Valderama, I said thank you very much, you put me in the record books.

Yeah, anytime you're the top of the list it feels great. The Ryder Cup has always been a major part of my career. I always used call the odd years Ryder Cup years. It's always been a big thrill to be there, to be part of the team. In the early days, it was just getting your head beaten in, the Americans were so strong. But now Europe's come on and it's been great to be a part of that transformation.

PubLinks: When people look back, how would you like them to remember Nick Faldo?



Faldo: Famous American question (laughing). You guys love to finish with this one. I don't know. That should be my answer; you Americans always want to know that.

PubLinks: I'll buy that. Now for my real last question, if you can give our readers just one piece of advice what would that be?



Faldo: Take up tennis. (laughing even harder). The number one thing for amateur golfers is their alignment. For 99% of them, their alignment is horrendous. In all the Pro-Am's I play, they hit the ball straight right or left and I say great shot. They look at me and say he's charming, most charming. And I say that's where you're aiming? So alignment would really be number one. The best piece of advice I can give is when they practice, put a club on the ground. Put a club down, point it at your pin, where you want it to go. And guess what? It will feel uncomfortable, because you're not use the standing in the right place. It's as simple as that. ■

