

# A walk with Nicklaus



James Yee / For The Star

**Tee it up:** Jack Nicklaus tries out his new golf course, the Sagamore Club in Noblesville.

## Amateur resume

- Won U.S. Amateur in 1959 and '61
- Runner-up in 1960 U.S. Open

## Major championships

- 6 Masters
- 5 PGA Championships
- 4 U.S. Opens
- 3 British Opens

## As a designer

He has designed more than 200 courses worldwide, including the following within driving distance of Central Indiana:

- Indiana**
- Sycamore Hills Golf Club, Fort Wayne
- Ohio**
- Aston Oaks Golf Club, North Bend
  - Barrington Golf Club, Aurora
  - Country Club at Muirfield, Dublin
  - Country Club of the North, Beavercreek
  - Glenmoore Country Club, Canton
  - Golf Center at Kings Island (2 courses), Mason
  - Muirfield Village Golf Club, Dublin
  - New Albany Country Club, New Albany
  - The Medallion Club, Westerville
- Kentucky**
- Valhalla Golf Club, Louisville
- Michigan**
- Grand Traverse Resort, Acme
  - TPC of Michigan, Dearborn
  - Wabek Country Club, Bloomfield Hills
- Illinois**
- Coyote Creek, Peoria
  - Stonewolf Golf Club, Fairview Heights
  - Wynstone Golf Club, North Barrington
- Source: Nicklaus.com



Rob Goebel / The Star

**Tote that bag:** Sagamore Club designer Jack Nicklaus receives a club on the sixth hole from his trusty caddie and Indianapolis Star reporter, Phil Richards. Nicklaus christened the course in Noblesville, which carries a \$45,000 initiation fee.

## Golfing great plays 1st round on local course he designed

By Phil Richards

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**N**OBLESVILLE, Ind. — Jack Nicklaus played a game with which many of us are familiar Tuesday at Sagamore Club.

After running his 18-foot birdie putt 5 feet past the cup on the first hole, he picked up. Gimme. When his tee shot on the 538-yard second strayed into an awkward lie alongside a bunker, he moved his ball. Let's put it where we can hit a shot.

So it went. By proclamation of Gov. Frank O'Bannon, Nicklaus was declared an "Honorary Hoosier" during a brief ceremony before his "dedication" round. He spent the rest of his day acting like one.

He was informal and informative. He was fun and engaging. He mugged for photos, shook hands, patted backs and exchanged pleasantries.

"When's the last time you did this?" he asked his caddie, your intrepid reporter, as we ap-

proached the first green.

"Never," I replied. "Never caddied for a guy who's won 18 major championships."

Nicklaus grinned.

"Neither have I," he said. "We've got that in common."

Nicklaus designed Sagamore, a handsome, just-opened private golf club that levies a \$45,000 initiation fee, and Tuesday he played it, all 7,173 yards. It was a stiff dose of his own medicine. Very informal scoring of a very informal round credited him with a 4-over-par 76.

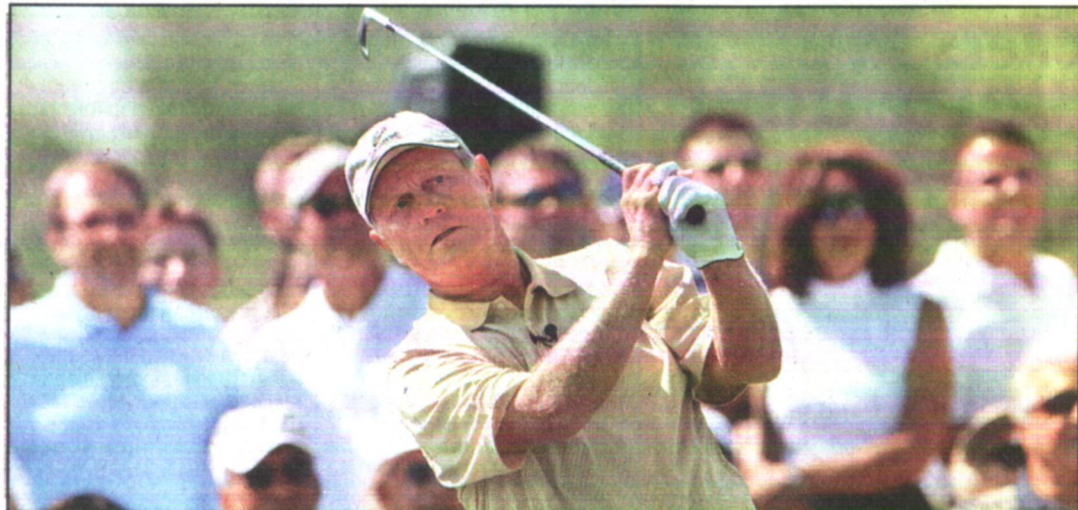
Sure the man has 18 majors. He also has 14 grandchildren. He's 63. Tuesday was an exhibition, not a competition. He frequently was speaking when he drew his club back, and he did not arrive in Indiana on a roll.

"I haven't made a birdie in August," he laughed. "That's how bad I'm playing."

"A Walk With Nicklaus," as the outing was

"I know a lot of courses that would die for greens like these. I don't know of any that wouldn't."

Jack Nicklaus, about Sagamore Club in Noblesville, which he designed



Rob Goebel / The Star

**It's like this:** Jack Nicklaus practices and offers tips on the driving range at Noblesville's Sagamore Club before playing the inaugural round on the private course he designed.

## Nicklaus

■ He noticed a few flaws that require attention soon.

### From D1

tabbed, was for the members, and some 500 members and guests trailed "the great man" around the course. There were no gallery ropes. It was up close, and personal.

On each hole, Nicklaus identified the feature that defined its shape and strategy. Then he described the options afforded a player and which he intended to employ. Those options did not include unsolicited advice, intended or otherwise.

After playing his second shot into a collection area alongside the par-5 seventh hole, Nicklaus was faced with a ticklish shot: a tight lie, the green above him and sloping sharply away.

He approached the bag. I offered his sand wedge. He reached past it for his putter.

"You play sand wedge," he said. "Why would you do that? You don't want to score?"

Caddies, first and foremost, are supposed to keep up and shut up. Especially if they're working for Jack Nicklaus. Especially if they're me. I have one green jacket. Nicklaus has six, and his have that familiar Augusta National patch. I got out of his way.

Nicklaus hit some rockets. There was a 316-yarder at No.

10, after which he turned to me and said, "I'm not that good."

He also hit a lot of soft, pretty shots: 8-iron from 145 yards, 9-iron from 123 and 129 yards, pitching wedge from 100, all of which afforded good birdie opportunities.

Mostly, he missed putts, but he never blamed the greens, about which he raved, from the first hole through the last. He was genuinely impressed.

"I know a lot of courses that would die for greens like these," he said. "I don't know of any that wouldn't."

He was less taken with a few other features, and said so. A bunker face on No. 5, pocked by holes with ankle-snapping potential, evoked a no-nonsense response. Fix it. Now.

Through it all, he bantered.

"Can you imagine hitting a golf ball that far off line," Nicklaus asked after slinging a 3-wood tee shot sharply left, into the rough, on the 371-yard 12th.

The gallery responded immediately, unanimously:

"Yes."

His first birdie since a tie for 14th at the Senior British Open the last week of July came at No. 14, a graceful 578-yard par-5 that arcs right, like a green river, flowing between bunkers. Nicklaus' 3-wood second from 270 yards ran through the green, into a bunker. He played a deft sand shot that trickled down the slope and almost went into the hole for an eagle. His ball stopped inches from the cup.

Nicklaus stood in the bunker, arms upraised. His wife of 42 years, Barbara, told him not to come home without a birdie.

At one point, while discussing tee-shot strategy, Nicklaus suggested, "It's best not to play from a wet lie."

That was a bit of his own advice he chose to ignore.

No. 17 is a menacing par-3 that played 240 yards Tuesday, nearly all of it a forced carry over water. Nicklaus hit 4-wood. He hit it perfectly, a laser that covered the flagstick all the way.

Wrong club.

His ball hit on the bank, just below the hazard line. It rolled back into the water, half submerged, half above the surface.

"We'll play it like a tournament," he said, unzipping a side pocket on his bag and reaching for his rain pants.

Nicklaus waded into ankle-deep water. He swung. Out splashed mud, water and golf ball. The latter stopping in the fringe. Nicklaus walked up the bank, squish, squish, squish, shoes awash, pants and shirt muddy. He chipped on and tapped in for bogey.

"Haven't practiced that shot in awhile," Nicklaus said as he sat alongside the 18th tee, pouring out his shoes and ringing out his socks. "I thought I could make 3 or I wouldn't have gone in there."

Tough hole. Tough shot. Blame the architect.

■ Call Star reporter Phil Richards at 1-317-444-6408.