

BEST SEAT IN
THE HOUSE

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18 GOLDEN LESSONS FROM
A FATHER TO HIS SON

JACK NICKLAUS II
AND DON YAEGER



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For my wife, Alli, with love



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FOREWORD

I can think of no nicer compliment than to be asked by your son to write the foreword to a book that he has written. When Jackie asked me to consider this—to honor my legacy—I was blown away. It brought back special memories of Jackie's birth, his growing-up years, adulthood, and marriage, and now, with children of his own—how fast time flies!

Barbara and I were just twenty-one when Jackie (our first child) was born—and he did not come with an instruction book! We both grew up with loving and caring parents who taught us right from wrong. So we relied mainly on what we learned and retained from the lessons our parents shared with us.

We tried to be the best possible parents, but I think we learned more from Jackie than we ever taught him. We wanted everything to be perfect, but—as in most child-rearing situations—there were always challenges. Along the way we learned ways to inspire, discipline, share experiences, and value something as simple as time together.

When Jackie shared the manuscript with me, I enjoyed reading his words and, frankly, did not realize what the impact of


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some of our experiences together had meant to him. I will treasure these words forever! How blessed Barbara and I were, and are, to have raised and been a part of the life of such a special son. He may think he has had the *best seat in the house*, but my seat has been very special too.

I hope you enjoy reading *Best Seat in the House* as Jackie shares his insight into what I feel is a treasured father-son relationship.

—JACK NICKLAUS

JANUARY 2021



INTRODUCTION

Learning from the Golden Bear

I arrived in this world on September 23, 1961, in Columbus, Ohio, as the 7-pound, 8.5-ounce firstborn and bundle of joy of married twenty-one-year-olds Jack and Barbara Nicklaus.

Dad wasn't a household name yet by any means, even if he enjoyed a successful career in amateur and college golf at The Ohio State University. Dad won two U.S. Amateur titles in 1959 and 1961 and gained a modicum of national attention in 1960 when he finished second in the U.S. Open behind Arnold Palmer, by two strokes. He came close to winning, but Arnold rallied from a seven-stroke deficit on the final day to overtake Dad.

As a young father holding my little self, Dad had no idea what the future held, nor, frankly, could he have predicted what would come over the next few decades. However, he realized the best competition was in the professional ranks, and so he turned pro just two months after my birth. Since professional golf was not the lucrative career it is today, Dad juggled other jobs. He successfully sold insurance for Ohio State Life and Parker and Company, a brokerage firm out of New York. He also did promotional work

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for Hercules Slack Company, a pants manufacturer based out of his hometown, Columbus, Ohio.

Dad's first professional tournament was far from a financial windfall. He finished tied for fiftieth—last place—in the Los Angeles Open on January 8, 1962, twenty-one strokes behind the winner. Dad had to split \$100 with two other players who tied for that spot in infamy, pocketing just \$33.33. (That extra penny went to one of the other guys!) Even as an infant, I traveled with Mom and Dad to tournaments. The car had clothes and golf clubs in the trunk and a Port-A-Crib and diaper pail in the back seat. Boy, I can't imagine the smell! Night visits to a laundromat were as routine for them as practice rounds in preparation for the next tournament were for him.

Nine months after I was born, Dad, a rookie on the PGA Tour, beat Arnold Palmer in a playoff to win the 1962 U.S. Open for his first professional win, which began to fuel the legendary rivalry with "The King." After that loss to Dad, Arnold said of him, "Now that the big guy's out of the cage, everybody better run for cover."¹ The win also ignited Dad's amazing run in major championships that will likely never be matched. The name Jack Nicklaus had become a big deal.

Being named after my father was more of a warm, wonderful tribute than anything else, but following in his footsteps wasn't always easy. Dad recently admitted that if he'd had a crystal ball to allow him to see into the future, he wouldn't have anointed me his namesake. Dad thought it was unfair to knowingly place that pressure on his son. He said his choice for my name had not entered his mind until maybe five or six years after I was born. At that point, Dad had won two Masters (1963 and 1965), claimed the PGA Championship in 1963, and raised his first claret jug at

the Open Championship in 1966 to complete the career Grand Slam at the age of twenty-six.

But as big as the Nicklaus name would become on the golf course, he always put his greatest effort into being just Dad. I've been asked many times throughout my life, "What is it like to be Jack Nicklaus's son?" My quick response has always been, "He's just my dad." When I was six years old, somebody asked me what he did for a living. I shrugged and answered, "Nothing. He just plays golf."

While in college at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I often simply introduced myself as "Jack." I intentionally didn't mention my last name because—even though they'd eventually figure it out—I wanted people to get to know me for who I was instead of treating me as "Jack's son." Thankfully, and more importantly, as Dad's namesake and firstborn, I have learned so much about Dad and myself over time. And by watching the way he's lived his life, I've spent years in the greatest leadership-parenting-marriage classroom one could imagine.

The greatest golfer of his generation, if not all time, known to his fans globally as the Golden Bear, has always made family his number-one priority. Dad says his life's work—117 championships, including a record eighteen major championships; a successful golf-course design business; an unwavering commitment to his wife (and my mom), Barbara; and raising funds for pediatric care for children—was to make his family proud.

"I hope I have delivered on that," Dad said one day when the subject of priorities came up.

And speaking for the rest of my family, let me respond: Dad, we are proud beyond words.

Dad and Mom both turned eighty-one in early 2021, as we

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were finishing this book—Dad on January 21, and Mom, the First Lady of Golf, on February 28. They celebrate their sixty-first wedding anniversary on July 23, 2021. I am the oldest of five children, followed by Steve, Nan, Gary, and Michael. My parents' lives revolve around us and their twenty-two grandchildren. In nearly everything Dad does now, he always considers how it will affect his family when he's gone. And both he and Mom strive to exhibit an enduring love, grace, and humility no matter where they go and what they do.

In the spring of 2020, for instance, Dad and Mom tested positive for COVID-19 at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. It could have been a bad experience at their high-risk age, but, thankfully, they recovered quickly. Mom didn't exhibit any symptoms; Dad had a sore throat and slight cough. They quarantined in their home in North Palm Beach, Florida, for five weeks so as not to put their family and friends at risk.

Dad tested positive on March 13, 2020, the same day the PGA Tour postponed the season due to the spread of the coronavirus. During his time in quarantine, Dad, always concerned and determined to help others, established a charitable campaign aimed at providing personal protective equipment for frontline health care workers.

Through all of Dad's amazing achievements that made him one of the world's most recognized athletes, he made being a parent one of the most important parts of his life. I know we're all accustomed to hearing people say those kinds of words (usually at retirement parties, lifetime achievement ceremonies, or funerals), but I had the best seat in the house to watch this man live out extraordinary lessons.

While I share these lessons with you, I promise you right

now that my parents never once stopped me and said, “Hey, Jackie, file what I’m telling you right now under ‘lessons.’” Dad shaped everything about me, and for the first time in his life (and mine!), it’s time to share those lessons he passed down to me as his oldest child.

I want to share stories about Dad in these pages and explain how these stories led to lessons about fatherhood. Along with each story and the lesson learned from it, I’ll also include some discussion about how I, as a father, carried that lesson forward to my children. These are the takeaways I used to raise my children—and the way I hope they will raise their children. I hope you find value and fun in all of it.

I have so many experiences and memories of our incredible journey—at home, on the golf course, and in business as vice chairman of the Nicklaus Companies, Dad’s course design company based in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. I have watched the decisions Dad has made throughout his life, and I have been impacted greatly by his pledges to and passion for his family, career, gifting, and mentoring. He has always rightly credited Mom with holding down the fort with the family, but in this tribute, I’ll share private family stories that show how Dad set a bar for fatherhood that we all can learn from—wisdom that continues to teach and guide me every day.

The influence of fathers on their children should never be underestimated. Dad’s father, Charlie, taught him the lessons he continues to live out. To this day, Dad still wants to make his late father proud with the decisions he makes daily. Charlie,

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who died from pancreatic cancer at the young age of fifty-six, was a pharmacist who owned several pharmacies in Columbus. A stellar athlete himself, Charlie introduced Dad to athletics and golf. Far more important, Grandpa also taught Dad how to live life the right way, how to be a good sport, and that your word is your bond. Dad studied pre-pharmacy at Ohio State before he decided to pursue a professional golf career.

Dad built on those lessons and passed the mantle to me. Even as I turn sixty years old in 2021, I still live for Dad's approval. That's how much I respect him. I think every son, no matter his age, wants to catch his dad's eye and make him proud, or live a life that honors his memory if he's passed on. I wish knowing I have my dad's approval could be enough, but I need to hear it all the time. I want my life—and the Nicklaus name that stretched across my back when I caddied for him—to mean something. I value that reinforcement from Dad. And I believe my five kids value that reinforcement from me.

Because of his career and life, Dad is the first sportsman, and only the fourth person in history, to be awarded the three most significant honors an American civilian can receive: the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2005), the Congressional Gold Medal (2015), and the Lincoln Medal (2018). He is the first living person outside of the royal family to appear on a British banknote. Dad was voted *Golf Magazine's* 2014 Architect of the Year, received the 2017 World Golf Award for Golf Course Designer of the Year, and his company, Nicklaus Design, is responsible for nearly 450 courses open for play worldwide. The Jack Nicklaus Museum is housed on the campus of his alma mater, The Ohio State University, in his hometown of Columbus. There are multiple awards named after Dad as well.

The Jack Nicklaus National Player of the Year Award is presented annually to the top male players in the country from five different collegiate divisions. The Jack Nicklaus Award is presented to the first-year PGA Tour player with the best scoring average, and the Jack Nicklaus Medal is presented to the U.S. Open winner.

Those are just a few of the ways Dad's accomplishments have been recognized, but they all pale in comparison to Mom and Dad's commitment to making a difference in the world. In 2004, they cofounded the Nicklaus Children's Health Care Foundation, which has raised more than \$100 million in less than fifteen years, and its impact has led to the rebranding of renowned Miami Children's Hospital and Miami Children's Health System to Nicklaus Children's Hospital. The hospital has cared for families and children from 119 countries and all fifty states. The Nicklaus Children's Health System includes seventeen outpatient and urgent care centers, with plans to grow. Dad credits Mom for her vision and work in this area—Mom was the recipient of the 2019 PGA Distinguished Service Award and the 2015 Bob Jones Award, the U.S. Golf Association's highest honor, which is bestowed on those who show "spirit, personal character, and respect for the game."² And this journey has become more personal for Dad over the years as he has grown close to some of the families and children that he and Mom have helped, and these people tug on his heartstrings.

Dad has repeatedly said golf is just a game. Though it turned out to be an important component in his life, he says the miracles he has witnessed in hospitals are far more important than any four-foot putt he ever made.

In 1972, at the age of thirty-two, Dad won the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach Golf Links in Pebble Beach, California. I was ten years old, barely tall enough to see over the gallery rope lines. I sat on the ground near the 17th green, out of the way and behind the cheering spectators, shifting and looking between people's knees and legs to watch my dad (*Golf Digest* captured and published a picture of me in that moment). At the par-3 17th, he hit what would be described as one of the most famous shots in his career. Pulling a 1-iron out of his bag, Dad used it to make a tee shot that hit the green, bounced once, and struck the flagstick. The ball landed inches away from the hole, and Dad tapped in for a birdie. Dad bogeyed the 18th, but it didn't matter. He beat Bruce Crampton by two strokes for his second consecutive major that year.

Though my vantage point was obstructed by all those legs, I had the *best seat in the house* that day for Dad's eleventh career major championship. A few minutes after that victory, I was sitting on Dad's lap when he received a congratulatory telephone call from President Richard Nixon. How many ten-year-olds get to listen in as their fathers talk to the president of the United States?

Although now I'm much taller and older, my view of my dad hasn't changed.

So back to the question, "What is it like to be Jack Nicklaus's son?" I had never pulled back the curtain and given an in-depth answer until I spoke at the Congressional Gold Medal presentation for my dad in 2015. During my speech, I discussed in detail the 1986 Masters, where I served as Dad's caddie. Not many

had given Dad a chance at victory because they thought he was past his prime at the age of forty-six, but he proved everyone wrong. He shot a final round of 65, seven shots under par, with a 30 on the back nine, for a total score of 279 to win his record sixth Masters. He became the oldest winner of the Masters and second-oldest winner of any major championship, behind Julius Boros, who at forty-eight won the 1968 PGA Championship.

But that's not the memory etched into my heart. I described it this way after Dad's final putt dropped on the 18th green. (I share more of my speech later in this book.)

And there I was, completing the mundane task of placing the flag back into the cup. For me, time was standing still as the cheers continued. I was thinking, *Wow, Dad really played great today.* Yet it was more, so much more. This man, this wonderful man, had accomplished so much. He is Jack Nicklaus; he is arguably the greatest golfer in the history of golf. The Golden Bear had just won his sixth green jacket in incredible fashion. His fans adored him. It was his moment in time. A moment so earned and a moment so deserved. . . .

So there I was, turning from the flag, and all I saw was my dad. In the midst of this moment—that was all about Jack Nicklaus—there Dad stood, waiting for me with the most wonderful smile. His arms were outstretched to embrace me. Dad had made me a part of it. I knew I had Dad's full focus. I felt like I mattered. And I felt loved. That is what it's like to be his son.³

Whether you are a serious golf fan, a casual golfer, or someone who has never picked up a club before in your life, you will

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be able to learn lessons from my father. You might recognize some of these lessons from things you've discovered in your own life. Other lessons might be new to you, even if you apply them far away from the golf course.

Now, let's get ready to tee off for eighteen golden lessons.



CHAPTER 1

Listen to Your Children



As parents, we are often living lives filled with distractions, emotional challenges, and professional and personal disruptions. No matter what you face, take every opportunity you are given to listen to your children. My dad did that so well—even when his career was at its peak and he was traveling so much—and his actions toward me taught me to listen to my own children.

On Father's Day in 1980, Jack Nicklaus was doing what he loved most—being a dad.

And I—eighteen years old at the time—was being selfish. I had just completed my second round in a Palm Beach County Junior Golf Association tournament at the Osprey Point Golf Course, located in Boca Raton, Florida, a few miles from our home in North Palm Beach. I was at the scorers' table that late



Sunday afternoon signing my scorecard when somebody yelled over to me that my dad was on the telephone.

I was a little frustrated about the timing of the call because the tourney was still being played. At that moment for me, this junior golf tournament was the most important thing going on in the world. I had just graduated from high school and signed a golf scholarship to play at the University of North Carolina.

I picked up the telephone receiver. Dad asked me how I played.

Well, I hadn't scored very well, but I proceeded to describe my entire round, hole by hole, shot by shot, whether I lifted my head during a swing, misread a putt—whether it went left instead of straight—or if the ball slowed against the grain.

Literally, I went on and on for twenty straight minutes.

Dad listened, patiently and intently. He responded with questions about why I thought I might have made certain mistakes as I rehashed my eighteen holes. When I told him I was having problems with my chipping, he promised we'd work on it when we both got home. He was so interested, generous, and genuinely wanted to hear about it. All of it. As I finally finished, there was a short silence. I was about to thank Dad for calling me and say goodbye.

Then Dad said, "Jackie, would you like to know how your dad did today?"

A little embarrassed, I quickly said, "Well, yes, how did you do today?"

"Well, I just won the U.S. Open."

That was Dad.

The Golden Bear had just set a new tournament scoring record to win his fourth U.S. Open title at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, New Jersey. And he was on the telephone, some

twelve hundred miles away, asking *me* how my round went at a junior golf tournament.

I didn't realize it at the time, but Dad taught me a valuable lesson that Father's Day. It's a lesson that I have grown to understand and tried to incorporate into my daily life as a husband and father to five children.

That junior golf tournament has no meaning for me to this day. But Dad's telephone call still resonates deeply.

A good parent always makes time to listen to his or her children.

It's not as easy as it sounds.

Dad could have quickly changed the direction of our conversation that Sunday afternoon forty years ago. That was a big, big day for him, having not won a tournament in 1979, the first year in seventeen he had gone winless as a professional. The experts and pundits believed, at age forty, he was past his prime. But minutes after making history, with a new scoring record, he telephoned me to see how I had played.

That is just one of many examples throughout my life when Dad made me his top priority. He always made a point to arrange his schedule to meet mine. Just as important, Dad was always there to listen. It was only four years later—a few weeks after I graduated from the University of North Carolina—when again I failed to think about Dad and what he might have had going on in his busy life.

I entered the 1985 North and South Men's Amateur Championship. It's an annual invitational tourney that has been held since 1901 at the Pinehurst Resort in North Carolina. It's also a tournament that Dad won in 1959, at age nineteen, while attending Ohio State.

I wasn't a star player by any means during my golf career at North Carolina. Five to eight players compete in college tournaments, and I was usually positioned anywhere from seventh to third in the rotation. I won two college tournaments and wasn't a high-confidence player on the course. Some of my teammates included all-Americans like John Inman, Davis Love, Kurt Beck, Brian Sullivan, and Greg Parker. It was a very competitive team, and I always did my best just to squeeze into the lineup.

I played well that spring and felt good about the North and South tournament. Prior to the event, I traveled to Puerto Rico and stayed ten days with Chi-Chi Rodríguez, who won eight PGA Tour events during his career and, in 1992, was the first Puerto Rican to be inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame. My short game has always been the weakest component of my game, and Chi-Chi took me under his wing and shared lessons on chipping that hit home with me and helped me improve.

At Pinehurst, the tourney's format is pretty straightforward. The 120-player field competes over two days on both the Pinehurst No. 2 and Pinehurst No. 4 courses. The field is then cut to a 32-player match play bracket, and I played well enough to advance. All match play rounds are contested on Pinehurst No. 2, which stands as one of my favorite courses to this day.

On his way from Florida to Ohio for the upcoming Memorial Tournament, Dad decided to make a pit stop in North Carolina to watch me play. I assumed Dad figured he'd watch me get beat, and then we'd drive together to Dublin, Ohio, for the Memorial Tournament. It was an event Dad founded in 1976, and one he hosts every year on a course he designed at Muirfield Village Golf Club. Dad was also the defending champion that year, and I caddied for him during his 1984 win there.

Well, after Dad arrived in Pinehurst, my good luck continued. I won my next two matches. I overheard Dad's conversation with Mom that evening when he said, "Hey, Barbara, your son won again today. So we're staying over for another night."

I continued to win. Each day after the match, Dad and I hit balls at the range, where he helped me with my swing and fundamentals. After dinner we talked as we walked one or two miles around the grounds at Pinehurst, which was so peaceful, but we didn't say as much about golf as we did about staying focused on a routine. We said our good nights and headed to our quaint bed-and-breakfast-style rooms.

At this point, there were only four players left in the tournament. I was scheduled to play Peter Persons in the semifinals. On paper, I was the underdog. Peter was a premier player at the University of Georgia. He won medalist honors at the Southeastern Conference (SEC) Championship that spring as a senior, was a former Georgia Amateur and Georgia Junior Championship winner, and would later turn professional.

The evening before our match, Dad, Peter, and I enjoyed dinner at the Pine Crest Inn, where we were staying. We had a nice time. However, during our conversation Peter, unprovoked and as if I were not even present, looked at my dad and casually said, "I called my mom tonight. And I let her know that I only brought enough clothes for tomorrow [the semifinals]. I told her she needed to bring me another set of clothes for the finals."

Obviously, if Peter believed he needed another set of clothes for the finals, he was expecting to beat me. I'm sure it was a bit of a mind game, but it was also a funny moment because neither Dad nor I knew how to respond. Dad, not to belittle Peter at all, looked at me innocently and just smiled. No words, just a smile.

During that awkward moment of silence after Peter's subtle prediction, the waitress asked all three of us if we wanted Peach Melba (peaches simmered in a sugar syrup mixture) for dessert. Her question broke the silence, and we all laughed, even Peter.

The next day Peter got off to a nice start in our match, draining a fifteen-foot birdie putt on the 1st hole. As I walked to the 2nd tee, one stroke down, I looked at Peter and told him, "Nice start. That was really a nice birdie." I also caught Dad's eye at the same time; he heard me congratulate Peter. Dad smiled and gave me a thumbs-up as if to say that was the right thing to do as a competitor.

The match went back and forth, but I finished strong and beat Peter four-and-three to advance into the thirty-six-hole finals the following day against Tom McKnight. (I was sure glad I brought an extra set of clothes.) I played well against Tom, birdied two of the last three holes, and beat him to win the tournament, matching Dad's accomplishment twenty-six years earlier. We had a great celebration that night with Dad and Mickey Neal, who was my golf, football, and basketball coach in high school.

I know Dad never expected to be in Pinehurst for as long as he was. While Dad and I never talked about Peter's prediction and his telephone call to his mother to bring additional clothes, I *know* Dad didn't bring enough clothes for his stay. However, not once did he mention the preparation and great responsibilities he had for the next week's Memorial Tournament.

Dad was proud of me and made me believe the North and South Men's Amateur Championship was the most important event in my life—and his. He encouraged me, supported me, and always listened. What's so cool about that victory is that the winner receives Pinehurst's iconic bronze Putter Boy trophy.

What was also great was that Dad and I were featured on the cover of *Golf World* magazine after my victory, with the caption “A trophy of his own.”

That is a moment in time I will always treasure.

Of course, there are other moments when Dad was equally giving of his time with me, but I just ignored many of those opportunities, which are lost forever. Parents can relate, but most teenagers can't see past their own noses. Trust me. I was one of those teenagers.

When I was fourteen, my buddy Gene Sowerwine and I were supposed to play eighteen holes with our fathers. Gene and I arrived at the course before Dad and Mr. Sowerwine. I don't recall, but I suspect both were still at work. Anyway, Gene and I tossed our golf bags on our shoulders and started our round as a twosome without them.

We were on the 2nd green when we noticed that Dad and Mr. Sowerwine had teed off and were a hole behind us. To this day, I don't know what goes through a young kid's mind. Gene and I thought if they really wanted to play the round with us, they'd speed up and catch us. We continued our round, even playing faster. While they also picked up their pace, we stayed a hole to a hole and a half in front of them, until the 11th tee box.

I greeted Dad with a big smile and said hello. Gene and I figured they'd be happy to join us. Think again.

Dad and Mr. Sowerwine barely acknowledged us. Dad looked at me and said, “The two of you are obviously enjoying yourselves as a twosome, so we will just play through and not interrupt your day.” They teed off and played through in front of us.

Gene and I looked at each other. I am not sure I realized it immediately, but, boy, our decision not to wait for our dads

was a bratty thing to do. I then realized the only reason Dad rushed from the office to get to the golf course was to spend time with me. And I know Mr. Sowerwine wanted to spend time with Gene too.

It is both amazing and appalling how I treated my dad that day, not only disregarding the time and effort he took to be with me but disrespecting him as well. Kids! Yes, I was a typical kid who thought only of himself and gave no thought to another person's interests, and, in my case, I intentionally and blatantly ignored Dad. That never happened again.

As each of my children hit the stage when he or she might have acted as I did on that course, I made sure to casually tell them that story, hoping they would listen and learn.

My five children—Jack III, Christina, Charlie, Casey, and Will—are each in different chapters of their lives. I have always tried to take the time to offer advice when asked or when I felt it was appropriate. I have also learned from them and love each one dearly.

The best way to describe the interaction I share with my children is *active*. Introduce each child to just about everything possible. Let them find their interests or passions, and support and encourage them to follow their dreams. I remember many times we spoke about the direction of their lives. I explained that if they were able to find something they loved to do in the classroom, on the athletic field, and in life, they would be amazed how good they would be at it. I can tell you that Dad found his passion in golf, and he felt as though he never worked a day in his

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life (at least on the golf course). A follow-up message I preach to my children is mostly about their effort. They know that whatever direction they choose in life, they need to give it their all.

Like you might imagine with five kids, I had to learn to listen to each one differently. As I've said, I wanted to take every opportunity to listen to them.

And, like Dad, I always learned from listening to my children.

CHAPTER 2

Attend Your Children's Games and Activities

Regardless of distance and destination, traveling for a career resonates with millions of dads and kids who might be separated almost every week. Dad traveled for a living too. He tried his best to be home as much as possible, and he also had a deal with Mom that he'd never be away from home for more than two weeks, which is longer than most families are separated by work travel.

My siblings—Michael, Nan, Steve, and Gary—and I were raised on sports, including golf, tennis, basketball, volleyball, football, and baseball. Nan went to Georgia on a volleyball scholarship. Steve attended Florida State on a football scholarship. Michael went to Georgia Tech on a golf scholarship. Gary, who dealt with the pressure of being “the Next Nicklaus” (as you will see in chapter three), went to Ohio State on a golf scholarship and later worked in the family business. (Gary rediscovered his love for the game and is now on the senior tour.) I was on a golf scholarship at North Carolina.

From Little League to college, Mom and Dad always made every effort to attend our games. Dad arranged his schedule to align with ours, sacrificing his time to be there for us.

At our home high school football games at the Benjamin School, Mom often worked the scoreboard, while Dad—though not technically a coach on the staff—slipped on a headset and helped coach our team from the roof of the nearby gymnasium. It was amazing when you think about it. Mom directed the household, and Dad focused on his profession. Yet here was Dad, one of the most famous athletes in the world, who did everything in his power to attend our games.

I can't imagine parents not wanting to cheer on and support their children. There were many times when Dad literally traveled across the country to attend our games. What I realized later—and appreciated even more—was that even though Dad had the means to be able to attend our games, he had to actively choose to be there. He could have easily just telephoned any of us kids from the road and asked about our games. Even now Dad (Peepaw) and Mom (Mimi) display that same commitment to their grandchildren. They always try to attend every event without fail, even if they must divide and conquer.

Dad made family his priority, and he has passed this trait on to us. I am so grateful. Dad missed only two games in the five years that Steve and I (we're only a year apart) played football in high school.

There are a few Friday nights I will never forget. One was when we played our football rival Glades Day School, near Lake Okeechobee in Central Florida. Dad was playing in the World Series of Golf in Akron, Ohio, but only agreed to compete if officials guaranteed him an early tee time Friday so he could

make our game. As soon as he walked off the last green, he flew to Florida, and we awarded him a great game.

We won, and both Steve and I played well. Still dressed in the golf clothes he played in that day, Dad was so excited when he met us on the field. He hugged us, voiced his pride, slapped us on our butts, and then headed back to the airport for a return flight to Ohio. And it wasn't like the airport was around the block! The nearest airport was forty miles away, in our hometown of West Palm Beach.

In 1978 we played Florida A&M University Developmental Research School in the Class 1A state title game at Bragg Memorial Stadium in Tallahassee. Dad was playing in the Mexican Open in Mexico City, but he still made our game (we lost), gave us a hug when it was over, and jumped back on his plane to Mexico for the tournament. At least this time, the local airport was only a few minutes away from the stadium.

Another memorable Friday night was in my junior season (Steve was a sophomore) in a game against Frostproof, located in Polk County, Florida, in the state playoffs. I played tight end, and Steve started at wide receiver and safety. I had separated my shoulder in a game the previous week, so my playing time was limited. Steve, on defense, covered a deep pass and looked back over his shoulder. He never saw the base of the goal post and ran full speed into it. He immediately was knocked out cold, crumpled to the ground, and lay there motionless. The crowd went silent.

Dad and Mom were in the stands, and Dad had never come out on the field during a game. But this time, as the coaches ran to Steve, Dad was right on their heels. It looked bad, and everyone was concerned. Our offensive coordinator, Tom Mullins, was

kneeling over Steve when Dad arrived, but thankfully Steve was okay. He eventually sat up, a little groggy and clearly seeing stars, and it was obvious he was going to be fine after a few minutes. Dad, the ultracompetitor and always dialed in, saw his opening to offer advice to the coaches after he made sure Steve was in one piece.

Dad grabbed Tom's elbow and said, "Frostproof's secondary is hanging way back on defense, and the middle of the field is wide open. It's been open all night." On our next offensive series, a recovered Steve caught a pass across the middle and scored a touchdown for our first lead of the game. Dad's smile stretched the width of the field. We won 7-6.

We've all heard the horror stories of overbearing parents or grandparents who scream at officials and embarrass their children and grandchildren. Dad was never that parent—and isn't that grandparent. I have never heard Dad, the fan, shout at an official in an angry or negative manner. Sportsmanship with Dad was always paramount. It's like that famous quote, "It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game." The actual quote came from Grantland Rice's poem "Alumnus Football," in which he wrote, "For when the One Great Scorer comes to mark against your name, He writes—not that you won or lost—but how you played the Game."¹ Rice's words go well beyond sports. They touch on how we live our lives and the importance of putting things in perspective. Nobody was more competitive than Dad was on the golf course, but he also knew that decency, sportsmanship, integrity, and kindness mattered far more.

Some things are simply more important than the final score. Nobody knows that better than Dad. For every winner, there's a second-place finisher. Dad leads the PGA Tour with eighteen

major wins. He also leads the PGA Tour with the most second-place finishes in majors with nineteen, seven of which came at the Open Championship. It was always important to Dad to be gracious in victory or defeat. But don't misunderstand me. Nobody wants to win more than my dad—other than maybe my mom!

Dad is all about winning, from his preparation to his drive to his goals. If it's not a competition, Dad loses interest very quickly. When Mom and Dad play backgammon or any board game, step back, because it's a competition. (I will speak more to their competitiveness later.) When we were younger, Dad, Steve, and I played golf, and the winner won a milkshake. If Dad won, we'd make him a milkshake at the house. If Steve or I won, Dad drove us to Dairy Queen for a milkshake. Even now, if we fish on a lazy Sunday afternoon, it immediately turns competitive. Who can catch the most fish? Who can catch the biggest fish?

Dad's number-one goal, though, is to support his children and grandchildren. Dad and Mom have traveled the country to watch grandson Nick O'Leary (Bill and Nan's son, and my nephew) play football. Nick played at Florida State, was drafted by the Buffalo Bills, and has been in the NFL since 2015. And no matter where the grandchildren are playing, Dad and Mom are almost always in the stands.

Of course, Dad's usually the most recognizable face in the stands when he attends games, and there's always a murmur when he arrives. It is also neat to see how Dad interacts with fans at games involving family members. He's laser focused on the game, but he's also always polite and friendly to everyone. I remember one of my son Charlie's high school lacrosse games, when the Benjamin School played Cooper City High School in

Fort Lauderdale during the state playoffs. Fans lined up four hundred deep to get Dad's autograph, and he signed every request after the game.

I am very quiet in the stands when I watch my children, even though my emotions are blowhorn-loud on the inside. I developed my approach with my kids from a lacrosse survey that I once read, which focused on what words were most appropriate to say to a child after a game. The survey noted you might say "Great play," which wouldn't register because the child might think otherwise. The survey also asked players what they thought was the most powerful comment they heard from their parents. The top answer was "I loved watching you play today." That was it. That really hit me, so much so that I changed the words I said to my children. I think all my kids have heard me say that after every game they played since. "I loved watching you play today." But I added an important caveat: "Did you have fun?"

I know from experience how difficult it is for a father to teach his children. After their games, they weren't ready to hear my critique on how well they played or didn't play. Win or lose, there is still too much adrenaline and emotions—or whatever it might be immediately after a game. My approach has been more quiet and humble. But make no mistake. I enjoy winning as much as anyone, including my father. I remain a fierce competitor. It is simply not something I wear on my sleeve.

I also don't think there was a standard message passed down from my father to me. Dad was a little more hands-on with me than I was with my children. I played catch with my kids, shot free throws, worked on whatever. When I say hands-on, I mean that Dad was more technical with me when I was young. For

instance, after one of my basketball games, Dad might immediately have taken me to the free throw line to work on my form; after a golf event, he might work with me on my chipping.

I see Dad today, as a grandfather in his eighties, as an authority for me. Outside of God, he is the final word. I may analyze what he says, but what he says is close to the gospel because I have so much respect for his knowledge and his methods.

That wasn't always the case even though he was a great teacher. When I was younger, I had difficulty hearing instruction from Dad. I often put up a barrier when Dad tried to teach me how to do or not do something. Sometimes the timing of his instruction may have kept me from receiving it well. When he approached me at the right time, I was usually more receptive to his instruction.

I think I am more cognizant of that with my kids—again, maybe it goes back to Dad being more competitive than I am. Maybe my approach was different with my children because early on I realized I wasn't going to win eighty-two tournaments. I wasn't going to achieve the things Dad achieved. I wanted to make this about enjoying the journey. And that's what I chose to teach. Please don't get me wrong. I am not a fan of participation awards. In sports there are winners and losers, but winning in life is so much more important.

Dad has instilled in his children and grandchildren the drive to compete, improve, and strive to win in whatever we do, but he also believes that we often learn more from our defeats than our victories because those losses provide opportunities to improve and teach resilience and courage. A defeat simply highlights a need to work harder to prepare for the next battle.

Dad always stayed in the present too. And that was a

teaching lesson I tried to share with my kids—even under difficult circumstances.

Some of the greatest times I enjoyed as a parent were the times I watched them compete on the athletic fields. Of all the events we attended, my favorite is girls' high school volleyball. Cheering for Christie and Casey as they got competitive was the best. Watching my Jack, Charlie, and Will compete on the football and lacrosse fields is really special, as well. If I could have a simple message to share with any parent, it would be to embrace every moment. Your kids really do grow up so fast.

As you might expect, my children pursued very different things. Jack graduated from Florida State University and went to work for a developer in New York City. Christie also graduated from FSU and works for a real estate developer based in Palm Beach. Charlie, who graduated from Rutgers University and played lacrosse for RU, is a boat broker. Casey is my third graduate from FSU. She works for a sports marketing and entertainment group based in New York. Will is attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, my alma mater. He plays on the lacrosse team and was recently accepted into the Kenan-Flagler Business School.

When Will's lacrosse team was in the state semifinals his junior season at the Benjamin School, I sent him my customary pregame text: "Look forward to watching you play today, have fun." I also added, "I'll see you after the game." Will admitted he thought the second sentence was strange.

Dad attended that game, and as he always did, he waited for Will as he walked off the field. When Will saw Dad, he asked where I was. Dad explained that earlier in the day I had an unexpected but successful heart procedure (I had 85 percent blockage

in one artery that required a stent) and that I hadn't wanted to interrupt his preparation and focus. I had wanted him to play to the best of his abilities without any distractions. That heart procedure also cost me the opportunity to attend Charlie's Senior Day at Rutgers. For me, it was everything to be present and support my kids. It killed me not to be there. In retrospect and with better perspective, it might have killed me to have been in attendance. On those two occasions, Mom and Dad were there in my place.

Dad won his last major in 1986 when, at age forty-six, he became the oldest winner in Masters history. By that time Dad had played in one hundred major championships, finishing in the top three nearly fifty times. My oldest son, Jack III, was born in 1990, so my kids didn't grow up watching Dad play professional golf. They knew him as Peepaw, their grandfather. Sure, they watched replays of Dad over the years, so they have had an opportunity to share in those moments that way—but only from watching old videos. Dad has also had his grandchildren caddie for him at the Wednesday par-3 tournament during Masters week.

One of Dad's most emotional moments happened in 2018, when his grandson GT (Gary's son) made a hole in one on the par-3 9th hole. Deservedly, GT's hole in one made ESPN's top-ten moments at the number-one spot. GT's playing group included Gary Player, Tom Watson, and Dad. It was the first time GT, at age fifteen, had caddied for his granddad at the Masters. What you need to know is that there is a tradition in the par-3 tournament during Masters week to let the caddies take the shot at the

9th hole. GT made the most of it since this was the first hole in one he ever made. After GT's shot, Curtis Strange turned and shouted to Dad, "Where does this rank on your Masters list?"

Without saying a word, my emotional dad pointed up one finger. It was number one on his list. It was a day scripted so well. Dad finished third that day, and GT, in his white caddie uniform, hits one shot—and it's a hole in one. Incredible!

Like Dad, I always made every effort to attend every single sports game, every art show, every awards ceremony, and every school performance of my children. I wanted them to see my face in the stands supporting them. I always tried to put my family first no matter how hectic my work schedule was at the time. I wanted to make sure I was the first person to give them a hug.

We all represent ourselves, but we also represent our last name, Nicklaus. We have our own responsibilities to carry on the Nicklaus legacy in the correct manner. A lot of people may think, *Oh, it's great having the last name of Nicklaus.* But with that last name comes a great responsibility. Yes, we all stub our toes from time to time. But I am very proud of my kids because I believe they walk through life understanding their actions will reflect not only on their father but also—the way I see it, and more importantly—on their grandfather. That is a big responsibility to have. I have carried it my entire life, and I am proud of my kids because they keep that in mind when they make decisions in life.

Their actions are a reflection on their Peepaw and Mimi.

Even though my dad traveled a great deal during his career, he always put his family first. While he faced a lot of pressures when he was traveling, Dad came home as much as possible to attend our games and events. We can all learn from that, especially those of us who travel for our jobs. Children, especially

ATTEND YOUR CHILDREN'S GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

young ones, might not fully understand why parents have to be on the road for their work. They can feel ignored, slighted, even not cared for. Attending your children's events—baseball games, dance recitals, musical performances, or golf tournaments—serves as a reminder to your kids that nothing is more important to you than they are.

CHAPTER 3

Raise Each Child Differently

It's not unusual for a child at some stage of life to aspire to be in the same profession as his or her father, whether he be a carpenter, firefighter, business executive—or even a professional golfer. Though Dad never pushed me or any of my siblings into golf, we all migrated to it. Again, with the best seat in the house and the opportunity to learn from the best golfer of all time, it would seem to make great sense.

But it was accompanied by challenges.

When I played golf professionally for nearly four years in the late 1980s, I can't tell you how many times I heard people say under their breath, "He will never be as good as his dad. He will never win as many tournaments as his dad."

Really?

News alert, people.

I never said this but wanted to: "I am trying to win my *first* professional golf tournament, not my eightieth!"

Being Jack Nicklaus II was probably toughest for me as a teenager. Like most teenagers, I couldn't see past my nose. When

BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE

I went to the University of North Carolina to play golf in the early 1980s, I continued to learn about myself. I was always proud to be Dad's son, but I also wanted to be recognized for what I accomplished. It was a daily process and a continual challenge.

When I was at UNC, I rarely said my last name when I met people for the first time. I often said, "Hi, I'm Jack," as opposed to, "Hi, I'm Jack Nicklaus." I didn't want people to immediately go, "Oh, there's Jack Nicklaus's son." My good friend Scott Stankavage, who was a quarterback on the Tar Heels football team, picked up on what I was doing and asked why I didn't reveal my last name. I wanted people to see who I was before they identified me as Jack Nicklaus's son. I wanted them to talk to me as a normal person before they figured it out.

Because invariably, people have always treated me differently as Jack Nicklaus II.

I will say this though: Not everyone has recognized Dad! I was with him in Asia when a woman on the elevator asked Dad, "Do you know who you are? Do you know who you are?" Dad smiled and said, "I think so." The woman was adamant. "Do you know who you are? You are Arnold Palmer!"

Dad laughed and said, "No, I'm Jack Nicklaus."

She shook her head back and forth, walked from the elevator, and said, "No, you are Arnold Palmer."

When I was playing in high school, Dad told me he was more interested in me liking the game of golf than having great golf fundamentals.

I asked him why, and Dad explained: “I know it will be tough on you at times, but I would rather you enjoy the game than somehow think you should match my records.” As a result, Dad didn’t push me on fundamentals. He just wanted me to have fun.

And that worked for me.

Kids don’t come with an instruction manual. Parents learn as they go. Dad took a much different approach with my younger brother Gary, ordained “the Next Nicklaus” on the cover of the March 11, 1985, issue of *Sports Illustrated*. He was sixteen years old.

Dad was harder on Gary when it came to golf fundamentals. As a result, Gary is great fundamentally and is now playing on the PGA Champions Tour. Gary is a good player, a far better player than I am. His short game was always so good. I always loved his confidence too.

I have never forgotten this moment, and it still makes me laugh. It was Christmas 1980, and I was a freshman at North Carolina. South Florida is a great place in the winter to work on your golf game, so I returned home to North Palm Beach for the Christmas break. Two of my UNC teammates visited, and one afternoon we played golf at Frenchman’s Creek in Palm Beach Gardens. We had a fivesome—Dad, my two college teammates, eleven-year-old Gary, and me.

We were on the 9th hole, which had water in front of the green, and Gary hit his approach shot over the green and into the bunker. His ball was on a slight downward slope in the sand. There was about eight feet of Bermuda grass rough between the bunker and the green, which sloped away from Gary. The pin was tucked in the back of the green, so Gary had very little green to work with from the bunker. There was also a lake staring at Gary, should he overhit his bunker shot. It was a very difficult shot for a golfer of any age, let alone one who was eleven.

Gary stepped into the bunker with a confident, cute smile. Actually, it was an annoying little smile to his older brother but, nonetheless, a priceless little smile. Gary settled his feet in the sand, and just before he began his back swing, he paused, looked up, and made sure he had everyone's attention. Gary confidently announced, "Just so you all know, they call *me* the king from here." My teammates and I cracked up with laughter. Dad laughed too, and asked, "What did you say?" I think Dad just wanted to hear Gary say it again.

Gary said with a big smile, "Yes. They call me the king."

Gary settled into his stance and took a slow, beautifully rhythmic swing back and through the ball. Unfortunately Gary peeked a little too early and lifted his head. His club hit the ball before the sand. We all heard that awful sound of the leading edge of the clubface slapping the center of the golf ball. The ball rose as it sailed past the flag stick, over the green, and into the middle of the lake. God love Gary, it was so funny. Everyone howled. That Christmas break Gary earned the nickname "the king."

When *Sports Illustrated* named Gary the "Heir to the Bear,"

the magazine touted that “At 16, Gary Nicklaus is a golfer of immense promise, with a style uncannily like that of his proud and watchful papa, the great Jack.” The magazine’s cover featured Gary, in white shorts and a light garnet shirt, following through his swing, an iron in his grip and a pile of white golf balls waiting at his feet behind him. A small photograph of Dad, from the chest up in his follow through, was inserted on the cover with the caption “Here’s Jack’s son Gary. He’s only 16, but already he can beat the old man (sometimes).”¹

The *SI* reporter Barry McDermott wrote, “Maybe it’s true what people are saying: The kid can inherit the old man’s business.” He noted in the article, “In some ways Gary faces a tougher course than do other boys with similar ability. Golfing talent doesn’t seem to travel well from generation to generation.”²

Gary was that good. He had all the potential to be a world beater. At age eleven, he broke 80. At thirteen, as the youngest player ever in a Palm Beach County men’s tournament, he tied for the title in the first flight—and beat me by more than twenty strokes even though I was already at UNC. He beat Dad for the first time when he was fifteen.

Some might enjoy being on the cover of a national magazine so much that they’d immediately have it framed. Not so for Gary, who ran from golf for the next two years after that cover. Dad wasn’t happy with *Sports Illustrated* for their decision to write the story, mostly because of the way it impacted Gary. There again is the pressure of the Nicklaus name.

Gary disliked golf because of the limelight that was focused on him, mainly from that article. He went through a time when he did not like golf. Yes, he still played and competed in golf events and performed well enough to earn that scholarship at

Ohio State. But Gary did not have a love for the game until later in college as an all-American for the Buckeyes.

Gary turned professional in 1991, but he failed to earn his PGA card. He mainly played overseas and on mini-tours. Gary eventually recommitted himself to golf and was one shot away from being a mainstay on the PGA Tour, which I'll explain.

Gary went through qualifying school and made the PGA Tour in 2000. He survived what many longtime golf professionals will tell you is the most difficult test in golf. Gary worked out, ate correctly, and was dialed in.

In April of that same year, Gary finished second to Phil Mickelson in the BellSouth Classic in Atlanta. Gary and Phil were tied for the fifty-four-hole lead, but heavy rains on the final day left some of the greens unplayable for the final eighteen holes. Tour officials canceled the final round and called for a sudden-death playoff to determine a champion. On the first playoff hole, a par-3, Gary's tee shot landed in the bunker while Phil's hit the green, where he sank his birdie putt to win the tourney.

Phil did what any golfer should do—he earned the win. We can look back and wonder, *What if?* That win would have been a difference-maker for Gary. I am not talking about the winner's check. I am talking about the two-year exemption to play on the PGA Tour that accompanies a tour win. It also would have improved his confidence. There will always be pressure on golfers to perform and win again. It is a different program because winning breeds winning. We all have our doubts. But a win would have legitimized Gary. He would have belonged. He would not have been riding on Dad's coattails.

Had Gary gotten a win under his belt in Atlanta, he would have been a regular on the PGA Tour. The Champions tour is for

those golfers fifty years and older who had previous PGA Tour membership. Gary just needs that one break to prove in his own mind that he belongs. I hope it happens soon, as the Champions tour is a narrow window.

Obviously Dad's investment in Gary's fundamentals worked—just as much as his choice to make sure I enjoyed the game worked too. That was the only way I could grind out what would become my four-year professional golf career.

I remember when I played in the Southern Open, which was a golf tournament on the PGA Tour from 1970 to 2002. It was a Friday evening, and I had missed the cut (again). I was in the locker room, and most everyone had left the property. I had just tipped the locker room attendant and thanked him for looking after me during my week in Columbus, Georgia. And it was a full week. You went at it all day—warmups, competition, post-round practice, press interviews, interacting with the gallery, and sponsor commitments.

As usual, I had the weekend off. If I remember correctly, the Southern Open was my tenth consecutive week on the road. I was married, and being on the road that long was a challenge. I was about to leave the locker room when I noticed a huge Rubbermaid cooler in the middle of the room filled with ice and beer. I am not a big beer drinker. Honestly, I don't think I had a beer or any alcohol during that ten-week stretch. I was a nerd when it came to drinking alcohol while I was trying to get better on the golf course. I wanted to do everything I could to have a chance at success.

I remember being exhausted, mentally and physically. The locker room attendant looked at me and said, “Go ahead, have a beer. They’re ice cold.” They looked good, so I said, “What the heck?” I dug in the cooler, pulled out a Bud Light, and popped the top. As I walked from the locker room, two fans, probably in their forties or fifties, strolled by me. They didn’t break stride as they looked at me and then to each other. “Unbelievable,” one of them said. “You would never see his father have a beer.”

I already knew I had a spotlight on me. That comment was confirmation that people were going to judge me regardless. But there came a point when I finally figured out I wasn’t going to play the game at the elite level needed to make a living.

After I graduated from UNC in 1985, I bounced around the world for those four seasons competing in professional tours in Canada, Australia, Asia, and Europe. It was so difficult financially—I barely made any money—that I watched where every penny and dime went. One year I entered the Palm Coast Tournament in Australia, where, on the 18th hole on a Friday night, I had about a foot-and-a-half putt that I thought was going to allow me to make the cut by one shot . . . and make a little money. I remember shaking like a leaf as I stood over that putt, trying to control my nerves and my emotions. I don’t know how I made the putt, but it went in. Sadly, I still missed the cut because I had miscalculated the cut line—and made no money.

Later that night I thought to myself, *What am I doing? I am out here just trying to make a cut?* Whether for me or for Dad or for the people who expected me to play well, I put so much pressure on myself to perform. I didn’t play much longer after that tournament. Lingering ill health from a tick bite and from a rib injury made the decision easier.

It was time to chase other goals, specifically in Dad's golf design company.

I have tried to raise my five children in the same manner that my parents raised me and Gary—differently. I have had to call audibles as I have raised them, and that's okay. Like any parent, I've taken cues from understanding how each child is wired. You can't use a cookie-cutter approach because it will drive you crazy. When my son Jack first started to play football at age eight, he couldn't run or catch the ball. I was like, "Come on, Jack, let's go. Catch the ball."

Fast-forward a couple of years. I sat in the same stands watching him run and catch the football on the field where I had played. He looked great. I overheard a few parents shouting some of the same things at their boys that I had shouted at Jack a few years earlier. I asked, "Is that your firstborn son?" They said, "Yes, how did you know?" I laughed and said, "Let me tell you a story."

I told them their son would be okay; they just needed to give him time. But not to necessarily apply that lesson to the next child because each child is an entirely different person.