

A MAN IN FULL

B Y M I K E S T A C H U R A
PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEPHEN SZURLEJ

The Hall of Fame gets a man with
memories of the **good** and the **bad**



The Golf Digest Interview

What a life:
Relaxing aboard
Caddyshack, a
65-foot Hatteras.

Everyone loves Nick Price.

Fans, business associates, tournament directors, shy youngsters afraid to ask for their first autograph, fellow tour pros. And mostly, of course, his devoted wife, Sue, and their three children, whom Price values above all else in his life—including even a major championship. (Because Price wanted to extend a family vacation for an extra week, he opted out of this year's PGA Championship.)

In a large way, Price at 46 is a man who very nearly has it all: three major championships, 41 professional victories on five continents, enough money so that there is no longer any compulsion to sign a head-to-toe equipment-endorsement deal, a luxurious but homey Gulfstream III jet to facilitate the commute to Dallas, South Africa and points beyond (plus a helicopter to accommodate the home games when the tour is in South Florida). And he has a golf swing that still displays the brilliance that made him the best player in the world from 1992-'94.

With a Hall of Fame induction Oct. 20, even life itself seems to



We all know who the lead dog is: It's Ginty, a Jack Russell terrier.

love Nick Price. But for all the public adoration and peer respect, just about no one feels his pain. The pain of majors lost that could have been—maybe *should* have been—won. The pain of the little caddie with the big heart who was lost too soon. The pain of the country of his youth lost beyond all recognition by the destructive hand of a ruthless dictator.

In a quarter-century as a pro, Price has seen all sides of the game—and perhaps even more importantly, all sides of life. He has been the best player in the world and he has been down to his last dollars. He has traveled on his own jet on his way to a million-dollar payday and he has flown on military missions in the midst of a bloody civil war. He has been blessed with a good

wife and healthy children but also seen both his father and right-hand man cut down well short of a life lived full. Price sat down to talk on three separate occasions, reflecting on his career, the game and a life inside and out of golf that has been nothing short of complete.

Golf Digest: Did you ever imagine a Hall of Fame career when you were in your back yard in Rhodesia playing made-up games of golf?

Nick Price: Never. In fact, my mom chased us off the yard for playing golf. The ground is a red clay, like in Texas, and the problem was, we were taking these big divots right after it rained, and the walls of these beautiful houses were getting splattered with big, red welts from the divots.

After your success of the early '90s, was the Hall of Fame something that you let yourself think about?

I thought about it a lot when Greg [Norman] got in, Payne Stewart, Bernhard Langer and Tony Jacklin, because all these guys had similar careers to mine. Payne and I had very similar careers—three major championships; he'd won internationally. When Bernhard Langer got in, he'd won two majors. Greg had won two majors. Tony Jacklin had won two majors. I started thinking, *Maybe I've got a chance here.*

Did you feel left out for a while?

A little bit, particularly when Bernhard

THE PRICE FILE

Born: Jan. 28, 1957; Durban, South Africa.

Residence: Hobe Sound, Fla.

Height/weight: 6-feet-0; 190 pounds.

Family: Wife Sue; Gregory (12), Robyn Frances (10), Kimberly Rae (7).

Turned professional: 1977.

PGA TOUR VICTORIES (18):

1983: World Series of Golf.

1991: GTE Byron Nelson Golf Cl., Canadian Open.

1992: PGA Ch., H.E.B. Texas Open.

1993: Players Ch., Canon Gr. Hartford Open, Sprint Western Open, Federal Express St. Jude Cl.

1994: Honda Cl., Southwestern Bell Colonial, Motorola Western Open, British Open, PGA Ch., Bell Canadian Open.

1997: MCI Cl.

1998: FedEx St. Jude Cl.

2002: MasterCard Colonial.

INTERNATIONAL VICTORIES (23):

1979: Asseng Inv.

1980: Canon European Masters.

1981: San Reno Masters, South African Masters.

1982: Vaals Reef Open.

1985: Trophee Lancome, ICL Intl.

1989: West End South Australian Open.

1992: Air New Zealand/Shell Open.

1993: ICL Intl, Sun City Challenge.

1994: ICL Intl.

1995: Alfred Dunhill Challenge, Hassan II Golf Trophy, Zimbabwe Open.

1997: Dimension Data Pro-Am, Alfred Dunhill South African PGA,

Zimbabwe Open, Million Dollar Challenge.

1998: Dimension Data Pro-Am, Zimbabwe Open, Million Dollar Challenge.

1999: Suntory Open.

NATIONAL TEAMS

Presidents Cup: 1994: 0-2-2; 1996: 2-3-0;

1998: 2-1-2; 2000: 2-3-0; **Totals:** 6-9-4.

Dunhill Cup: 1993: 0-3; 1994: 2-1; 1995: 5-0; 1996: 1-2; 1997: 1-2; 1998: 3-0;

1999: 1-2; 2000: 0-3; **Totals:** 13-13.

Other: 1993 and 1994 PGA Tour leading money-winner; 1993 and 1994 PGA Tour Player of the year; 1997 Vardon Trophy winner; 2003 inductee into World Golf Hall of Fame

and Jacklin got in last year. I felt like that was about the time for me. Payne, I can understand. I'd never, ever have a problem with them putting Payne ahead of me. But you can't take someone who is flamboyant and whatever and put them in ahead of someone who's achieved more, you know what I'm saying? It's like, what's important in golf: Is it a record, or is it what the perception is? A classic example is John Daly. John's won fewer than 10 tournaments worldwide in his entire career. People would think he's a true superstar in the game. Well, his record doesn't say that.

Beyond your golf, you're known for being a nice guy. What helped you develop that reputation?

Honesty—having empathy for other guys.

In what way, empathy?

On the golf course, on the practice tee, where a guy's struggling. If you see him doing something, maybe you can help him a little. You have to go through all those struggles to understand it.

I think it's really hard for a guy like Tiger or Mickelson or any of those great players to relate to some guy who's just got his card and can't make a cut. There are lots of guys out here, sort of my generation, who will help each other.

Does that not happen as much today?

I think it happens in small little cliques.

You helped Hal Sutton this year.

He's a close friend. I'd seen him practicing for four or five weeks, and it just didn't look very good at all. On the practice tee at Hilton Head, I walked past him and said, "Can I tell you something? Would you mind?" He said, "Please, be my guest."

I said, "This is what it looks like to me." And the penny dropped. He hit a couple of balls and said, "Well, it feels kind of weird, but I've got a lot more power." That's what it takes sometimes when you've got a great player—you give him that seed and he can grow it into a tree. Now, if you went head to head with him in a tournament and he beat you by holing a 30-footer on the last hole, you'd feel like an idiot for giving him a lesson. But it's just awful to see someone struggle at this game, like Seve [Ballesteros] and [Ian] Baker-Finch. It gets to the stage where everyone is trying to help them. They're bombarded with information, so you just stay away.

It could happen to us, believe me. It's something that we're all aware of, and we

all have our reasons it hasn't happened to us. But confidence is such a fragile thing.

When was it a struggle for you?

In 1978, my whole year in Europe was a struggle. I remember going to a tournament in Jersey that year. Each week in those days cost about £250 [approximately \$450]. Pay for your caddie, your accommodations and whatever. Well, I had £230 in my pocket, and if I didn't make a decent check, I was done. I ended up making about £800, and then went to the Belgian Open and made another check. Then I was on my way. It was that close. Then when I came over here, in '83, I didn't play very well at all. I think I was 104th on the money list when I won the World Series. I wasn't guaranteed my card at all.

You beat Jack Nicklaus to win that World Series. What did he say to you when you beat him?

On the 18th green he shook my hand and said, "Well played. You played great." I had met him before, and he's always been terrific to me. When friends ask, "What was it like the first time you met Jack Nicklaus?" I say, "Well, if I'd met the Queen of England or the President of the United States,

I wouldn't have been as nervous as I was when I first met Jack." Those people, they're politicians and royalty. Jack was a god to me.

You've been a pro for more than 25 years. Who's the best ball-striker you've ever seen?

Lee Trevino. There are two, actually. Simon Hobday is one of them, definitely.

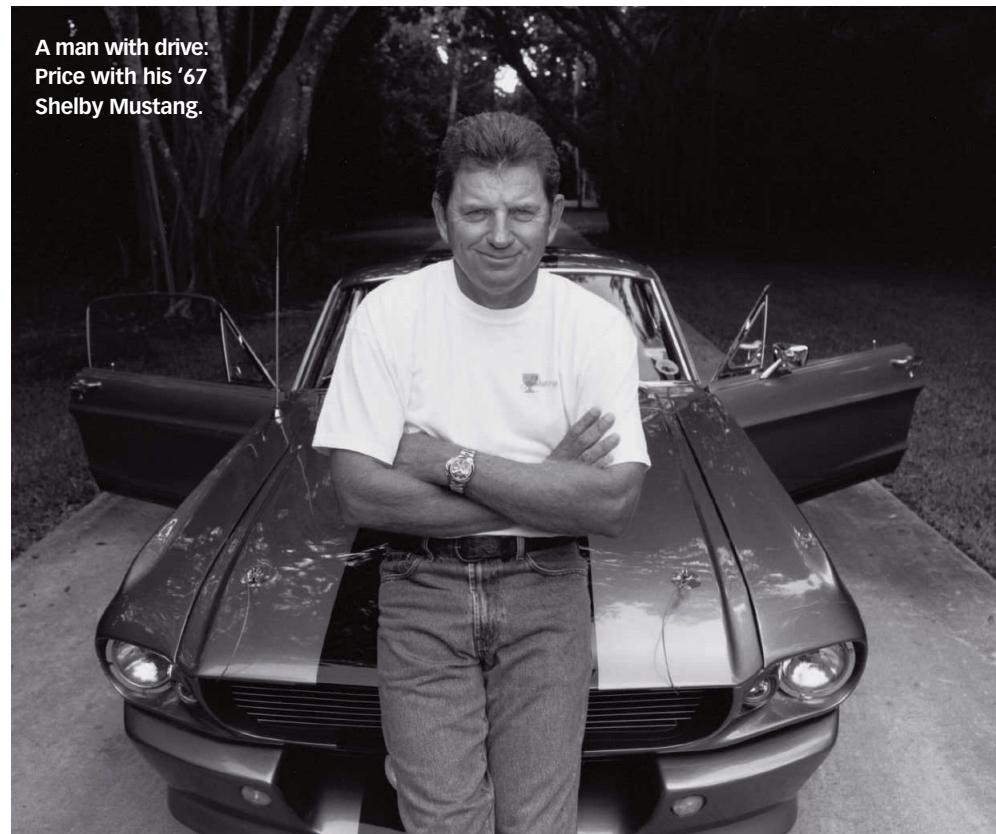
Trevino was mesmerizing on the practice tee. You can always tell a pure ball-striker by the sound the ball makes coming off the club. It's a dull thud, a very solid sound. I always listen to that with good ball-strikers.

Simon would have been a great, great player had his nerves been better. People say he drank a lot. He didn't drink that much. He had trouble sleeping. I know; I roomed with him for a year in Europe. He wasn't the carouser and the party animal that people thought.

What's your best Hobday story?

Simon and Dale Hayes challenged Mark McNulty and me in one of these exhibitions back in the early '80s. McNulty putted phenomenally well, and Mark had used the same putter, a BullsEye with a blue grip, for years. They'd stopped mak-

A man with drive:
Price with his '67
Shelby Mustang.



Interview: Nick Price

ing that model in the late '70s, and there was an old one in the pro shop. So Simon bought it and replaced the putter in McNulty's bag while he wasn't looking. There are like 2,000 people around the first tee. Dale was the emcee, and as he introduced McNulty he said, "Now most of you know Mark for his incredible putting prowess . . ." and with this, Hobday said, "Where is that bloody putter?" He walked over to McNulty's bag, whipped the putter out and broke it right over his knee.

Well, McNulty's eyes almost fell out of his head, and he looked in stunned silence at what Hobday had done to his favorite putter. He was about to start going after Simon. There was a good 30-second period where he was in shock.

Going back to the '70s and '80s, you saw Seve in his prime.

He was the most exciting golfer I ever watched. In his day, he had the ability to do anything, and I mean *anything*. The guy could snap-hook his way around the golf course off the tee and still shoot 65.

I can clearly remember seeing Seve on the practice tee at the Madrid Open in 1978. We were practicing on a polo field. He was hitting 5-irons. I turned to a friend who was caddieing for me and said, "This guy's light-years ahead of me. Light-years. There's no way I can hit a 5-iron that far."

He had the talent and this beautiful, big, strong golf swing. The ground used to shake when he hit a 5-iron, it was so solid. He was hitting a 5-iron 190, 195 yards. We were all hitting our 5-irons 170, 175 yards. I thought, *I can't play against this guy*.

When you start seeing that, you're going to have to do something to compete. So going to see David Leadbetter was a huge thing for me. The first time David showed me my swing on video, I nearly threw up.

What makes Leadbetter such a good teacher?

I've known David since I was 11 years old. Ever since he was a teenager, David had his nose buried in golf books and magazines trying to understand the golf swing. David's not the most gifted of athletes, and I think he tried to make up for it with more knowledge. He has an incredible knack of being able to look at a player, see how he's trying to swing the club and then help him to swing it more efficiently.

Years later, you had become one of the best players in the game, and with it

came the benefits. When did you decide to get a plane?

When I won the PGA in '92, I said to Sue, "This has given us a golden opportunity." After Augusta in '93, I bought the first airplane, and it changed our lives dramatically. It made my life more efficient. Plus, I wanted my kids to be with me. Otherwise I might as well not play. Later that year, I won three more times, and I remember Sue turning to me on the plane coming home and saying, "I think this thing is starting to pay for itself."

You think it was one of the keys to your season in 1994? [Price won six times, including the British Open and the PGA Championship.]

Definitely. It allowed me to play a very aggressive schedule and not be exhausted. When Sue, the kids and I get on our airplane, we're home. And the quality of time that we have in that airplane as a family is irreplaceable. I mean, it really is. There's no phone. There's no one to bug us. We play games, we play cards, we watch movies. It's a really, really golden time.

How did the Payne Stewart crash in 1999 affect you?

I think everyone knows when you fly, it's life-threatening. It doesn't matter whether you go in a 747 or a single-engine plane. But if you've got good crews and the aircraft has been serviced well, you reduce those odds of having an accident by far.

There are certainly times I've been in another plane and thought in the back of my mind, *Well, I hope this doesn't have the same problem as Payne's aircraft did*. We've had a few instances on our airplane—we blew two tires on takeoff with full fuel with all my family on board. That was pretty terrifying, because it wouldn't have taken much to get that fuel heated up and the airplane to explode. So you're always going to have instances.

A couple of years before Payne's accident, you lost your caddie, Jeff (Squeeky) Medlen, to leukemia. How tough was it to lose him?

Anybody who knew Squeek knew the kind of person he was—he was a fighter, he was a battler, he had a great sense of humor. People made so much fun of his voice, but he had more heart than a lot of people who were twice as big.

I guess we just loved each other. When we started playing well together, our

friendship grew stronger and stronger. There was a bond between us that you don't get too often. I think Tom Watson and Bruce Edwards, what they're going through [Edwards' battle with ALS] makes me think about it more.

Squeek died at 43. He'd had a great life, but I still felt he got short-changed a bit, because he'd been a journeyman caddie his whole life, and then he was finally able to buy his house and set up this beautiful media room where he had his all the photos and flags and stuff that we had. . . . Two years later, he's dead. That was hard to take. The Good Lord could have given him a few more years to enjoy it.

You guys had a nice moment when you won the 1994 British Open together at Turnberry.

I love this. I remember Squeek lagging behind as we walked up to the final green. I said, "You—come up here." He came running up. "No, Nick, I want you to go. You go and enjoy it." I said, "Squeek, you and I have done this together. You're walking with me onto that 18th green, right next to me." And that smile on his face, man. He was lit up.

What was it like being No. 1 in the world at that time? Do you think there was a natural comedown after '94?

The biggest problem with '95 was my time constraints. Every tournament I went to, I went to a press conference. I was going through what Tiger is going through now. For someone like myself, who had been a journeyman for so many years, to suddenly go from being Nick Price, no big deal, to suddenly everybody's hanging on every word you're saying and every media guy out there wants your time . . . I didn't say "no" enough at that stage. Boy, that was tough.

OK, tough question . . .

Annika.

Right. You got a lot of attention for your comments about her playing at Colonial, where you were the defending champion, saying something to the effect that it was a publicity stunt. Do you stand by what you said?

I still question what she was trying to prove. I knew that she could make the cut, no problem. She could finish 40th in the tournament. What does that prove? I think that's great, but there are guys out there who finish 40th every week, and

you've never heard of them. She is not proving anything to anybody—not finishing 40th.

The one thing that had me a little upset was the fact that people thought I didn't want Annika to play. There's nothing further from the truth. But if she wants to play on our tour, she has to go and qualify like everybody else did to get on our tour.

Annika is a great player, there's no doubt, and I have nothing but admiration for her. And I'm so amazed at how she handled that week. She showed the true superstar she really is. But if I'd been her manager, I would have said, "Here's a U.S. Open entry form. You go and qualify for the U.S. Open, and let's see." But she's a hero just because someone gave her an invitation to a tournament?

The thing that irked me as well was that for 2½ months, because I was defending champion, every second question I was asked by a media guy had a barb on it. Every second question. There were people who were trying to catch us saying something that they could kill us on.

You didn't catch as much heat as Vijay Singh.

Vijay, the mistake he made is, he said, "If I miss the cut, I hope she misses the cut." You don't ever want to root for anyone to miss the cut. That was the mistake. And I think he would be the first one to tell you.

If we ever did have a female golfer, a pro, who is good enough to play on the PGA Tour, it would be phenomenal for the tour. But she has to go through Q school, she has to get her card, like everyone else.

You've had some pretty strong opinions as well on technology. Given what's happening, which major has the best course setup?

I'm so biased toward the British Open. I just love the British Open. You look at Muirfield, 7,000 yards, and the wind didn't blow for three of the four days and six under par made the playoff.

Just shows you, you don't have to do what Augusta did to a golf course to make it tough. I think the people at Augusta went the wrong way. They've made it a long hitters' course. People say, "Well, Mike Weir's not a long hitter." He's not short, trust me.

But they're trying to keep the challenge the same in the face of technology, aren't they?

Well, I asked Byron Nelson about what they'd done with Augusta. And Byron, in his usual diplomatic way, said that he agreed with some of the things, but on the other points he wasn't too sure. And Phil Mickelson said something along the lines of, "Well, I love the way they set up the majors now. If you look at the major championships, you've got Augusta, where you've got to hit the ball a long way, high, and you have to putt great. In the U.S. Open, you've got to be straight, you don't have to be so long; you've got to keep your ball in the fairway, and you've got to chip and putt well. And the British Open is a shotmaker's paradise. You've got to manipulate the ball, hit it low, high and whatever. And the PGA's kind of a little bit of everything."

So I said to him, "Do you mean to tell me that if you hit the ball 275 yards, now you can't win at Augusta? That's the first time in the history of the game that length has been a determining factor to whether you become a great player. If you brought that into the equation 20, 50 years ago, you wouldn't have had players like Ben Hogan, who wasn't very long. You wouldn't have had players like Nick Faldo, you wouldn't have had players like Olazabal. These guys aren't long-ball hitters. Gary Player wasn't a long hitter of the ball. You take all those guys away from the game and you're talking about five or six superstars in the game, what are you left with?" Do we want to become like tennis?

How about the U.S. Open? Is it fair?

If they keep it like they did this year [less emphasis on distance at Olympia Fields]. People say, "Oh, it was easy Thursday and Friday." It wasn't easy. If it had been a normal week in Chicago weather, even par might have won that tournament. I think they did a great job, and I hope they continue for the good of the game, not for Nick Price, which is what everyone seems to think, that I complain because it's me. There are lots of guys out there now who aren't prodigious hitters of the golf ball but are wonderful shotmakers. Jim Furyk, case in point. If for the next 20 years they'd continued to do what

they had done at Bethpage, I don't think Jim Furyk would ever have won a U.S. Open.

That's my opinion. It would have been extremely unlikely.

The danger is that length becomes over-emphasized.

And Jack Nicklaus said it perfectly in an interview the other day. He said when he was in his prime, length was about 20 percent of the game. Now it's 80 percent. When you've got a great player like Jack Nicklaus, the greatest player of all time, saying that to people, why isn't someone listening?

Now we've got high school kids flying it 320. Are we in danger of young players taking steroids to keep up?

If we put such an emphasis on length in the game, who knows? Every athlete is looking for an edge. If there's a kid, let's say, 5-11, 5-10, great iron player, short on yardage, can't play on the team because there are four kids who hit it 320, how is he going to get on that team? That's when I think we'll be in trouble in a sport that's been basically drug-free.

How much cheating goes on in tournament golf?

I can count on my hand the number of times I've seen guys cheat.

What's the worst that you've seen?

When we used to play in Europe, you'd see guys out there—this is in the old days—carrying their own bags in some tournaments. My first year on tour, I carried my bag 30 to 40 percent of the time. You'd see a guy in the left rough, you're in the right rough and he'd be in there taking 15 practice swings. *What's going on over there?* But there was no one to witness it.

If someone gets a reputation on tour of using the rules to his advantage, people watch those kinds of guys like hawks. But I've seen more honesty on a golf course than dishonesty.

How well have you handled the business side of your career?

Some people feel that we're trying to be businessmen. That's not true. Greg [Norman] is very successful at being a businessman, but I don't want any part of that. My business is golf and golf-related. That's it. I don't want to get into other

Flight commander: At the controls of his Bell 407 helicopter.



things. Because I don't know much about other things.

Are you still pretty close with Greg?

Not as much as we used to be. He's been so busy. I think he's busier now than he's ever been. Greg's on a mission. He wants to be very successful as a businessman, and he's doing a pretty good job of it.

You're into architecture; he's into architecture. Is there a conflict there?

No, I don't think so. I know with our two courses, the Medalist and McArthur [side by side in Hobe Sound, Fla.], we discussed it a little initially with regard to what was going on, and people have speculated that he's really upset that we went and built this golf course right next door. I don't think he's upset at all about that. Sometimes it's pathetic how people will stoop to certain levels to try to create problems for others.

The Presidents Cup is coming to South Africa in November. Are you happy where the competition has reached, or are you concerned that it may not continue?

As long as the rest of the world continues

to produce golfers of top-10 World Ranking standard and guys who continue to win major championships, they will get the interest of the rest of the world. But the relevance of it being at home is the bearing it has on the young kids, having Tiger and Mickelson and all the top U.S. players there. This is going to inspire young kids. There's no doubt I wouldn't be where I am today if Gary Player, Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus hadn't traveled the world and brought great golf to our part of the world.

You used to go back to your home in Africa, in Zimbabwe, at the end of the year and spend three or four weeks.

I haven't been back for three years.

Is that because of the political situation? [Price grew up in Rhodesia and served in the military during the country's civil war that led to the formation of Zimbabwe in 1980. The country has been ruled mainly by President Robert Mugabe, a dictator who has instituted one-party rule and made protest against the government

illegal, punishable by beatings and imprisonment.]

I've never had anything more gut-wrenching to deal with. Because people of all races have been picked on. They've been singled out, they've been intimidated, they've been beaten. One of my lifelong dreams was to go back home and retire. I suppose I'm being a little selfish, because that's not going to happen right now. But the big picture is, what are 12 million people in our country going to do? That's the hardest thing to stomach: One man is going to make 12 million people's lives absolute misery.

Did you still have property there?

I've basically given up on it. More importantly, my wife's family and my brother and a lot of my friends are still there. They're basically going to be refugees soon if things continue the way they're going. My friend went to the bank the other day to get the wages for his employees, and the bank didn't have enough cash. It's so bad.

If you repeated what you just said in Zimbabwe, you could be arrested.

Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I've been very subdued in my criticism over the years, because I have family and friends there, and I know that things could happen.

Your family is obviously very important to you. You like being a dad.

You're given only one opportunity to raise each child. I don't want to look back on my life and look at my kids and say, "Man, I wish I'd done that when he was 10," or whatever. It's gone.

More than anything else, I remember my mum saying to me, "I don't care how successful you are, what you've done in life, how much money you make—it doesn't matter. All I want to see every time I see you is a smile on your face. Then I know I've done well." And it's so

true. That's what I'd like to see from my kids, too.

You took essentially six weeks off this past summer after the U.S. Open, playing only the British and Memphis. And you surprised a lot of people by skipping the PGA Championship. Why?

Nobody wanted to come home from vacation. I figured I've played in enough PGAs, and that time with my family is so important. I said to my wife just before we were going to come back, "How about we stay another week?" And she said that would be great. And then I said, "Do you kids want to stay another week?" And they just went berserk. I said, "Well, that's it, we're staying."

Do you think some of those feelings that you have are related to ...

My father? Oh, yeah, I would say that. [Price's father died in 1967 when Nick was 10] I was really fortunate, because my mother and two brothers certainly filled that hole substantially. We're a very



Price keeps hundreds of clubs at his home in Florida.

close family, and I think people who do lose a parent when they're young and they've got siblings, they do become closer. What happened to my dad, I try not to let that influence too many things with my kids—otherwise I'd never leave home.

I could retire now if I wanted to, but what am I going to do? A man has to have a sense of purpose in life, and that sense of purpose keeps your self-esteem and your pride. I'd dearly like to play the senior tour for three, four years, and then retire. At the age of 54, I'll have been a pro for 35 years. I want to end up doing some fishing and exploring the world and going to the Grand Prix at Monaco, Monte Carlo and going to Wimbledon. I went there a couple of times, but I want to go and witness some of the great sporting events. Go and watch England play Australia or South Africa play Australia in cricket.

I've got to ask you about cigarettes.

My kids are all over me about my smoking.

Who's going to win?

They will. I don't even know what to say. It's the worst habit in the world, there's no doubt about it. I don't know how I'm going to do it. I've resigned myself to the fact that I'm going to have to quit. It has to come from the heart more than anything else. I'm just hoping one of these days I'll wake up and be determined to quit. But I can tell you it's definitely a priority. But I'm really worried as well because I've seen what's happened to players who've quit smoking, and they've lost their golf games. So I don't know. It's kind of a Catch-22. I know what will end up happening, though. The moment I semi-retire from this game, I'll quit smoking. But I don't know when that'll be.

Do you think you've gotten the most out of your career?

I'm going to say one thing. I wish I knew when I was 25 what I know now. About my golf swing. Because had I learned at an early age, even in my 20s about my golf swing, I think I would have won a few more major championships. That was always my desire as a kid and as a young professional, to be a grand-slam player, to win all the majors, because I think that's the ultimate accomplishment.

You think you've still got a chance to win the other two?

I suppose I've still got a slight chance. But I'll take another British Open and retire gracefully. Well, I don't think I'd retire, but I'd sort of just sit back and enjoy the rest of my life. 

This is the 102nd Golf Digest Interview in a series that dates to 1991. For highlights of previous interviews and other stories about Nick Price, visit www.golfdigest.com/features.