



the Price of success

2011 Old Tom Morris Award winner Nick Price has left behind his days of high-level championship golf for something more rewarding: family and friends.

Seth Jones



"He's the best," Wayne Branthwaite says of his boss, Nick Price. "His disposition is unbelievable. He supports you in everything you do and lets you do what you need to do. He's a friend." **Photo by Arthur Cicconi, Golf Shots Inc.**

Jorge has been holding out.

Nick Price has been on the ground for only a few minutes, his private jet having just arrived in Cancun. And he wants answers. Jorge Huerta, the project manager for Price's newest course, Grand Coral, drives his rugged Jeep toward the course.

"What is this that Wayne has been telling me, Jorge?" Price asks. "Are you holding out on us here?"

Huerta turns and looks to the back seat, over the tops of his Oakley sunglasses, giving Price a serious look.

"You've got a new fish taco place but you haven't taken us there yet?" Price demands.

Huerta laughs, putting his eyes back on the road. He tells Price that this new place is his wife's favorite place to get fish tacos.

"OK, then, that settles it," Price says. "Once we're done at the golf course, you're taking us."

The quest for the best fish taco in Mexico is one of Nick Price's few concerns. There's real, multimillion dollar business to tend to, but Price doesn't consider it a concern so much as he considers it a privilege. His relaxed demeanor relaxes those around him. Once he gets to the course he's all business, but even then, he's more a people person than a businessman.



"I hate using the term 'risk/reward.' It's more of a challenge. You dangle a carrot in front of the golfer — you tempt him, lure him, to have a go at a par 5." Price's home course, McArthur GC in Hobe Sound, Fla., was co-designed in 2000 by Price and fellow Old Tom Morris Award winner Tom Fazio.

Photo by Arthur Cicconi, Golf Shots Inc.

"The intensity that I played at, the level that I played at, for a five-, six-, maybe seven-year period, was very difficult," Price says. "(Golf course design) is less intense to me, in that you have time. It's not a do-or-die situation. It's much easier to have fun."

It's much easier to think about tacos.

Well-seasoned choice

Nick Price, a member of the 2003 class of the World Golf Hall of Fame, is one of the most decorated golfers of this era. From 1992 to 1994, when at his peak, there was no argument that he was the greatest golfer in the world. He won 16 of the 54 tournaments he entered, including three majors — the 1992 PGA Championship, the 1994 British Open Championship and the 1994 PGA Championship.

Price now adds to his trophy case the 2011 Old Tom Morris Award, given annually by GCSAA to an individual who "through a continuing lifetime commitment to the game of golf has helped to mold the welfare of the game in a manner and style exemplified by Old Tom Morris."

"There's not a nicer guy in the world. He's also one of the soundest ball-strikers I've ever known," says fellow World Golf Hall of Fame member (2002) and Old Tom Morris Award winner (1997) Ben Crenshaw. "(The GCSAA) know what he's about and what kind of person he is. This is a wonderful, well-seasoned choice. And he's really going to appreciate this award, too."

GCSAA's president, James R. Fitzroy, CGCS, says he could hear the sincerity in Price's voice when he was informed of winning the 2011 award.

"He was extremely appreciative — it was like I was talking to an old friend," says Fitzroy, who had never previously spoken with Price. "He told me how appreciative he was of our members, how they make the game better. I honestly think he was a bit humbled."

"I think (Price) has the qualities that exemplify what we look for in an Old Tom Morris Award winner," Fitzroy continues. "He has a dedication to the game of golf; an appreciation of the history and the traditions of the game; and he's always done exceptional charity work to benefit society."

Or, as Chris Deariso, the Class A superintendent at Price's home course, McArthur Golf Club in Hobe Sound, Fla., succinctly puts it, "Whenever people ask about

Nick, I tell them: He's just as good of a guy as you've heard."

A lot of growing up

Price was born in Durban, South Africa, in 1953, but was raised in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). He got his start in golf at an early age, playing an unorthodox self-made golf course that relied on a neighbor's flower beds for greens and buried steel cans for golf cups.

He moved up to a real course, Warren Hills, which was known locally as a blue-collar course for artisans and working folks. A year-long membership for junior players was 50 cents, while green fees were 5 cents for nine holes, 10 cents for 18.

Junior golfers weren't exactly welcomed at Warren Hills. They were only allowed to play on weekday mornings and holidays — no kids allowed on weekends. Early on, the pro, who was also the superintendent, would follow Price and his group of friends on the course to make sure they weren't damaging the course.

"If anything went wrong, we weren't allowed to play the next day," Price recalls. "So if you passed a bunker, and you saw one of the older members hadn't raked it, you'd go in and rake it because you'd get blamed for it. It was a great lesson."

This practice grew into habit, and the pro's perception of Price and his friends changed.

"We'd take these ball mark repair tools, and we'd fix 10 ball marks," Price says. "After a while the pro figured out we were actually helping (take care of the course), then we were welcomed on the golf course."

Though Price's golf game was quickly on the rise — he won the Junior World Championship at Torrey Pines at age 17 — he couldn't think about turning pro right away. There was a civil war being fought in Rhodesia, and all men were required to serve a year after high school.

"It was pretty scary at times. I got shot at a few times, but I never got into the heated action. A lot of my friends did, and a few of them were killed," Price says. "When I got in, I realized it wasn't going to be any kind of easy time. As it turns out, it was probably one of the greatest experiences of my life, because I made so many good friends. It was a difficult time, but I did a lot of growing up."



Above: Price and Branthwaite are selective about what projects they take on in a year, not wanting their work to suffer from being overloaded. "We have fun doing this. After having played professional golf for 30-odd years, the last thing I want to do is have the intensity and pressure that I had for those 30 years," Price says. "To do two or three courses a year is very comfortable for us — that's all we want to do."

Above right: Dean Bedwell, Nick Price, Wayne Branthwaite and Jorge Huerta review the plans for Grand Coral as they review the course in the shaping stage. "I've tried to do the contrasts of the water, sand, grass and the landscaping to bring out the natural beauty of the place," Price says. Photos by Seth Jones

A dog's life

Price turned professional in 1977, notching his first win outside of Africa when he won the 1980 Swiss Open. Price burst onto the international scene when he finished the 1982 Open Championship at 1 over par (285), one shot behind winner Tom Watson. It was only Price's third Open Championship.

The next year, Price went 10 under to win the World Series of Golf, a wire-to-wire win against the likes of Jack Nicklaus and Hale Irwin. Price didn't win on the PGA Tour again for eight years, but when he did break through, he went on the aforemen-



tioned run of 16 wins in 54 tournaments, all in a three-year span.

Price is now a popular figure on the Champions Tour. He played in 17 tournaments this season, winning two and collecting \$1.4 million in prize money. His playing schedule is dictated by his children's schedule, not wanting to be away from home when they're on summer or spring break. "Those six weeks are golden," he says. Price and his wife, Sue, have three children, Gregory (a freshman at the University of Miami), Robyn and Kimberly (both in high school).

Price has seen and played golf courses all over the world, making it a natural for him to throw his hat into the golf course

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— James R. Fitzroy, CGCS

Left: "I've learned more on this project than any other project I've ever worked on," Dean Bedwell, shaper, says of working with Price at Grand Coral. "(Price) has a way of talking about golf, about how to play golf . . . he just has a way of explaining it so it makes sense."

Right: Price asked Bedwell to add elevation to this par 3's tee box to afford the golfer a better view of the green and surrounding bunkers.



"A lot of guys may think they're agronomists, a lot of pros who get into design — Nick does not," Chris Deariso, superintendent at McArthur GC in Hobe Sound Fla., says. "Nick will come in and say, 'I don't know how to do this, this is your deal, you have to deal with this.'" Photo by Arthur Cicconi, Golf Shots Inc.

design business.

He's now designed golf courses all over the world, including courses in Zimbabwe and South Africa, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Europe and in the United States.

The manager of Nick Price Golf Course Design is Wayne Branthwaite, a South African who was a superintendent early in his career. In fact, Branthwaite was at one time a Certified Golf Course Superintendent. After building a few courses in Asia, Branthwaite joined Gary Player's design firm for a few years before being hired by Price full-time.

Together the duo forms the core of Nick Price Golf Course Design, and if you hire them for a job, expect to see both.

"Every golf course I'm going to do, I'm going to be involved in a big way," Price says. "Only time will tell how good I am, but I'd rather build 60 or 70 courses throughout my life and they all be good ones, all be courses I've been involved with, as opposed to building 300 courses where I couldn't tell you what the seventh hole is on a particular course."

And bring your hiking boots because the two like to get up close and personal

with each property they take on. Price and Branthwaite like to walk the holes as they're in the process of being shaped. It allows them to get a better look at what is going on with the property, Price says. And, he says as he smiles, it also helps them leave the onlookers behind so they can focus on the task at hand.

"(Price) is one of the few designers who still will walk the entire review, giving you so much insight from a player's perspective," says Huerta, who has been on the Price design team since 2008.

"This is priceless for us who stay behind to build his course. In the golf course construction industry there is an understanding that golf course design plans are only conceptual and not literal. When the designer gives you the tools to understand his concept early in the process, this becomes a win-win for everyone involved — designer, construction team and owners. The designer gets his desired course, the construction team has a clear understanding of what they are to do and the owners get lots of savings in their reduced cost of reshaping and moving dirt twice."

Price is especially proud of his team at

Grand Coral and the results they're seeing, saying he'd "do another project with them in a heartbeat." He's getting the best out of everyone, it seems, because the crew has such a strong desire to impress Price, who takes so much care to describe his vision to them and make them feel like an asset to the team.

Take the time Price described in great detail why he wasn't satisfied with the slope of the No. 8 green. Shaper Dean Bedwell listened intently to Price as he talked about angles, and the game of the average golfer, and how what he was seeing wasn't what he wanted to see.

Bedwell told Price he could fix it right then and there if he gave him an hour to work on it. Price told him that wasn't necessary, but Bedwell, wanting to impress Price on one of his first visits to the course, insisted.

"Shapers are a unique lot — most of them are prima donnas," Bedwell admits. "They all strive for praise, and they solely want to satisfy the architect. They don't care about superintendents and they don't care about budgets."

Bedwell chuckles as he reflects on it now, but it wasn't long into that hour that he started second-guessing his ability to deliver on his promise. Price, Huerta and Branthwaite came back after an hour to look at the green.

"Nick looks at the green, and then he looks at me. He says, 'Were you not listening to me? Do you have any idea what I want?'" Bedwell says. After a panicked second, Bedwell looked over and saw Huerta and Branthwaite covering their faces to hide their laughter. "Then Nick throws his hands in the air and says, 'I'm kidding, it's perfect!' I finally started breathing again."

"You want to keep your shapers and your construction guys excited about a project," Price says. "It's very hard to go along and say, 'Listen, what you've done is very good, but it's not exactly what I had in mind.' There is a certain amount of flair involved with a shaper, and you have to give him that little bit of encouragement to get that flair and that passion into it. You want him to be creative."

"It also has to be harnessed in a little bit, you can't let them do their own thing," Price continues. "So having people skills is an important part of (design), and that's



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Practicality over beauty

Price says that his design style, first and foremost, is that of a traditionalist.

"I hope when people play my golf courses, they will see that a lot of thought has gone into it, and also a lot of passion," he says as he walks the course.

Price likes to think from the perspective of the casual golfer, and how he or she would play a course. It's not hard for him to switch his brain from his game to that of the 18-handicapper, he says.

"I play with amateurs in pro-ams every week. I get to see more amateur golf than a lot of the other designers," he says.

Because of this, holes like the famed 17th at TPC Sawgrass, for example, leave him scratching his head.

"There's no strategy involved in that hole — you either hit that shot or you reload," Price explains. "You know what the worst thing you can do to an amateur is? Not let him get off the tee. He wants to play; he doesn't want to keep dropping balls all over the place."

Price has kept the course at Grand Coral relatively flat. It wouldn't be believable, he says, if he added a lot of undula-

tions to the fairways because the surrounding land is clearly flat. The real difficulty in this course is going to be when the wind blows in off the nearby Caribbean.

"As a player before an architect, I look at the practicality of a golf course before the beauty, whereas an architect will always go with beauty over practicality," Price says. "Some architects will say, 'Oh, this looks great, let's put the tee over here.' Well, guess what? You can't play that shot."

"I've always believed if you just hit the ball straight, even if you hit it along the ground, it's better than hitting it hard with a big slice," Price says. "To me, that's what golf is all about. It's why the links courses are so great."

He likes to have subtle slopes in his greens, a point he's stressed to Bedwell.

"I've always said the hardest putt in the world is from 6 feet, and you don't know if it's right lip or left lip. And whatever you decide, the ball breaks outside the hole," Price says. "When you've got a sharp slope, it's a lot easier to see which way the ball is going to break. All you've got to do is get the right speed."

For all his golf design philosophies, there seems to be one recurrent theme: Price wants golfers to have fun.

"This course is going to be fun to

play. That's what I want more than anything," Price says. "A guy finishes playing at 5 o'clock, he's got an hour and a half of sunlight left, and he says to his wife or his buddy, 'Let's go play another nine holes.' That's the biggest compliment anyone can pay me when they play one of my courses."

Just being a human being

If Price is known for one thing on Tour, it's for his good nature.

In 2002, Price won the first-ever ASAP Sports/Jim Murray Award from the Golf Writers Association of America. The award is given every year to a player for "consistent and thoughtful cooperation and accommodation to the media." In other words, it disregards scoring average and focuses on smiling average. Later that year the PGA Tour honored Price with the Payne Stewart Award for his "respect for the game, his professional conduct and his commitment to charities."

"He has this very infectious personality — people are just drawn to him," Crenshaw says. "He always has a big smile on his face, and he's a great storyteller. It's just been a pleasure to know him and be around him."

"He's the nicest guy, and he's as good of an ambassador of the game as you could have," Deariso says. "Me having been able to work with him from the golf course maintenance side, it's just made me think that way even more strongly."

Deariso sees Price at least weekly because Price is a part owner of McArthur Golf Club, and hence, Deariso's boss. But it's not just lip service from the 13-year GCSAA member. Price has a loyalty to the superintendent.

"The only time you're really able to tell how a guy is going to adapt to your club is to give him time," Price says. "Let a superintendent do his own thing without micromanaging. There's no way that any member — unless he's with a turf nursery or is an agronomist or is a Ph.D. — is going to tell our superintendent what to do with the greens. That's his expertise. If I had to do another club and I found out it had a greens committee, it would be my No. 1 priority to disband it."

Letting Deariso use his expertise freely has worked well at McArthur. Many Tour pros use the course as a practice facility based on the ferocious green speeds on the



"He knows he's going to be dealing with golf courses for the rest of his life. He's knowledgeable and wants to keep learning," Ben Crenshaw says of Price. "I think he wants to spread that knowledge." Photo courtesy of Nick Price

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course. It's a popular spot prior to the Masters. Deariso takes satisfaction in the fact that if someone entered "fast green speeds" into the search engine on YouTube, his video, "Fast Greens at McArthur," would pop up. In the video, his crew measures a green running at 17.5.

"The professional golfer, we are a lot closer to the superintendents and the guts of the workings of a golf course than most members," Price says. "As a professional golfer, you get to see how well the course is being taken care of — it sort of slaps you in the face."

One time course conditions slapped him in the face was immediately following the 1994 PGA Championship played at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa, Okla. Price lit the field on fire that year, going 11-under and leaving the nearest competitor six strokes behind. Shortly after hoisting the Wanamaker Trophy, Price did something that not many people, let alone Tour pros, do anymore — he sent Robert M. Randquist, CGCS, then superintendent of Southern Hills, a thank-you note.

"His comments to me during the trophy presentation and after the championship were sincerely gracious and appreciative. He really understands the contribution that superintendents make to the game and business of golf," says Randquist, who has since moved on to become the director of golf course and grounds at Boca Rio Golf Club in Boca Raton, Fla., and is currently vice president of GCSAA.

"The thank-you note that he sent me after the championship was one of only two that I have ever received from a championship winner, and it was the nicest I have ever received. He made us feel truly appreciated for our efforts to prepare Southern Hills for the championship."

Though Price doesn't specifically remember sending that note, he certainly remembers how great Southern Hills was that week in 1994.

"Southern Hills that year was phenomenal. You can tell — the edging of the bunkers, the depth of the sand, the consistency of the sand, the consistency of the rough cut, the meticulous detail that a guy puts in, all that stuff — we can see that. It's just looking and seeing and noticing," Price says. "You (write a thank-you note) when it's justified."

"Every golf course I'm going to do, I'm going to be involved in a big way. Only time will tell how good I am, but I'd rather build 60 or 70 courses throughout my life and they all be good ones, all be courses I've been involved with, as opposed to building 300 courses where I couldn't tell you what the seventh hole is on a particular course."

— Nick Price

Price's good nature extends well beyond the game of golf. Having lost his father at age 10, Price and his wife are generous supporters of numerous charities, especially those that help children who have lost one or both parents.

"If you've had the good side of life, it's good to help out people who have had the bad side of life," Price says of his charitable work. "Especially kids. Adults have the opportunity to get themselves out of a hole. But kids, when they're born in a situation? How are they ever going to get out of it? To at least provide some kind of help ... it's just being a human being, you know?"

The family that eats together

A favorite part of Price's day is sitting down and enjoying a meal with his "mates," whether it's an expensive Thai restaurant on the water in Playa Del Carmen, or a grilled Panini with Deariso and his assistants in the maintenance facility at McArthur.

Back at Grand Coral, it's time to take a break for lunch. Huerta loads up Price and Branthwaite in his Jeep. Bedwell and course photographer Adriana Huerta, Jorge's daughter and a high school senior, follow. Destination? The best fish tacos in Mexico.

It's a covered patio outdoors along a busy street in Playa. Price sits at the head of the table in a plastic chair as the group fills in around him.

Food is ordered. Customers can get just about anything they want, as long as what they want is a fish taco.

The topic of conversation quickly turns to Bedwell, the shaper extraordinaire, and his next job. The only problem is Bedwell doesn't have one lined up yet.

Price assures him a man of his talents won't go looking for work for long. Bedwell, not quite convinced, mentions something about a job possibility in Korea, before acquiescing that "something will come up."

Huerta recalls the first lunch he ever had with Price. It was Price's first visit to the course. In Huerta's experience, designers expect — or maybe demand — to get the royal treatment when it comes to lunch. So the project manager arranged for a gourmet meal at the beach club. Then Price blew him away when he said, "Let's go get some tacos."

Huerta went out on a limb and took him to a local dive that had a Mexican wrestler theme. The dive has since gone out of business. Apparently *luchadores* — Mexican professional wrestlers — don't conjure up a strong desire for tacos.

"The meal was all about the company at hand, sharing life and golf stories that had everyone there on the edge of their seat," Huerta recalls. "Nick has been the only player/designer who has engaged me in a five-minute conversation about my family. He was not only asking me about my family, he was showing me he cared about me as a person and not just as someone who works on one of his courses."

The first round of fish tacos arrive, and the group dives in. Requests for more fresh salsa come quickly as the current supply is scooped into individual tortillas. The group is jovial as the tacos have exceeded their lofty expectations. Another round is ordered.

It's an unusual cast of characters at the cantina: represented are four different countries, 36 years separate oldest from youngest, two arrived in a private Cessna Citation, one is a World Golf Hall of Famer and one (Bedwell) doesn't remember getting his most recent tattoo.

And yet, to the eyes of an outsider, this could be a family reunion.

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