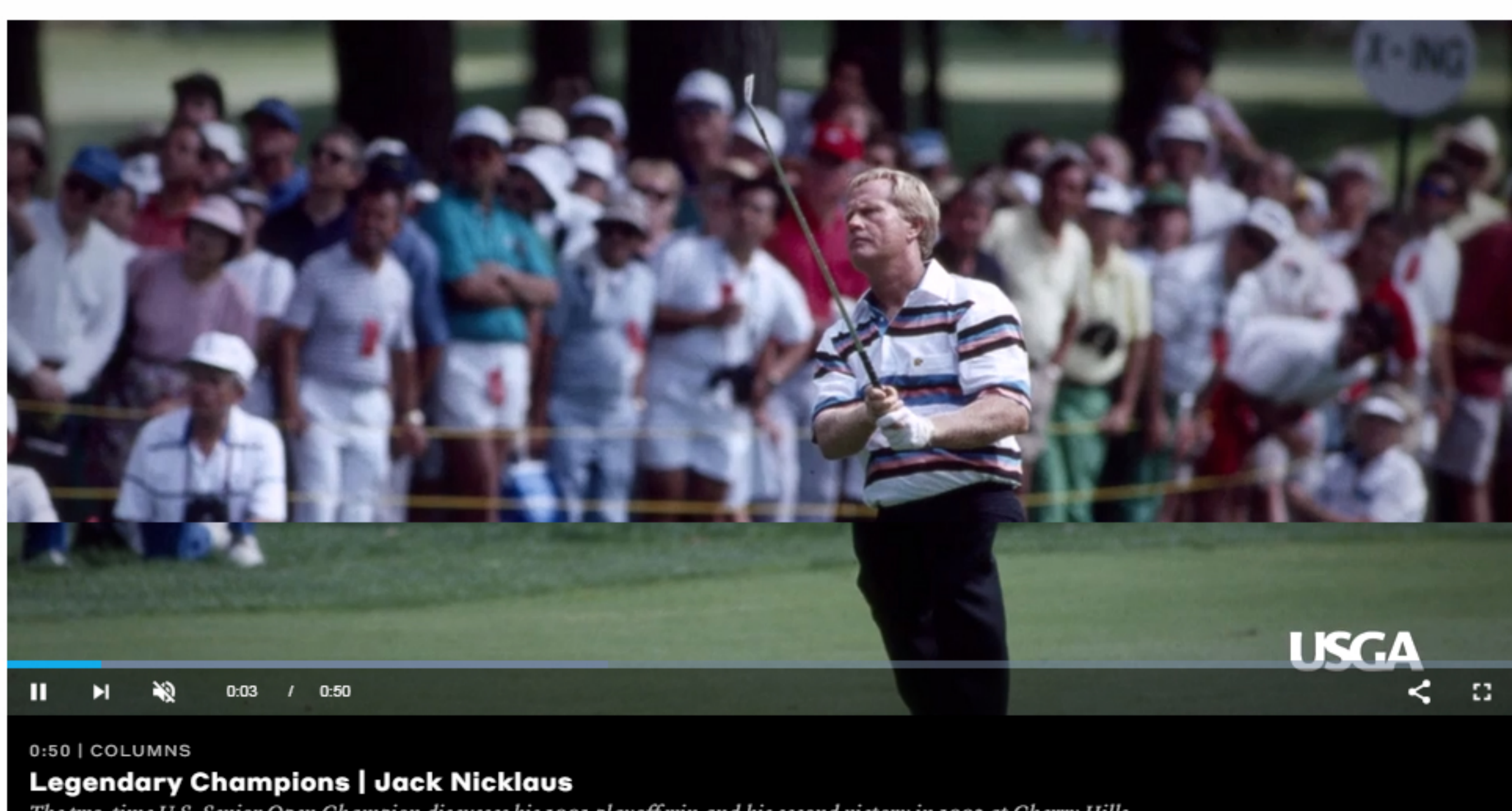


Sanderson Farms Championship View Round 1 →	T. Hoge -4 / Thru 7	1	D. Chopra -3 / Thru 9	2	Z. Johnson -3 / Thru 6	2	R. Streb -3 / Thru 6	2
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COLUMNS

7 things I learned watching Jack Nicklaus play golf

By [Erika Larkin, GOLF Teacher to Watch](#) / SEPTEMBER 18, 2019 SHARE



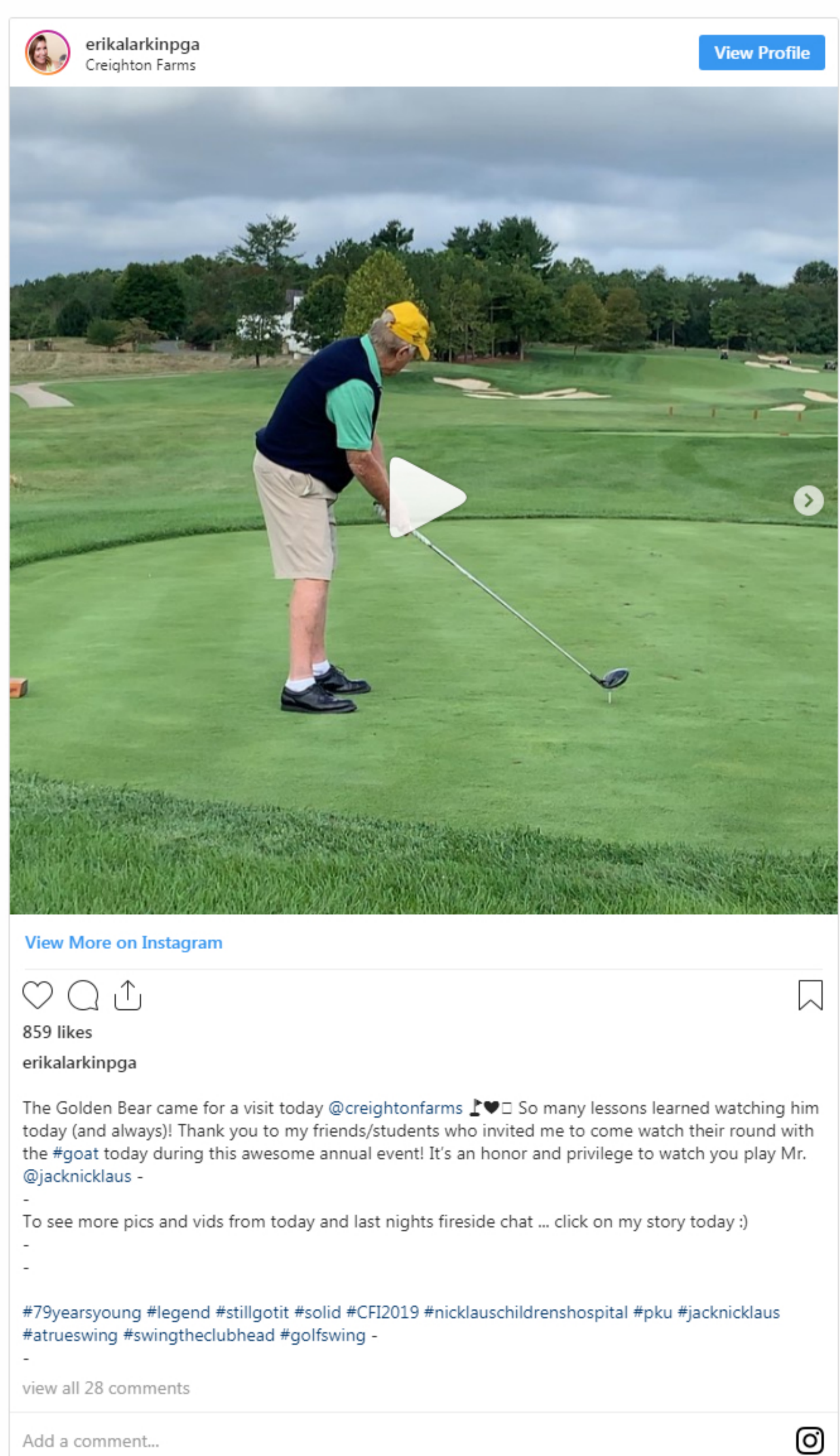
I was born in 1980 and have been playing and watching golf since 1988. I am a PGA Teaching Professional and self-proclaimed golf nerd who lamentably missed the era of the Golden Bear. I always wished I could travel back to see Jack in his prime and experience the excitement that he brought to the game. But as luck would have it, I didn't need a time machine to watch him play live. I got my chance on Aug 26, 2019.

I am the Director of Instruction at the Club at Creighton Farms in Aldie, Virginia. It's a Nicklaus Signature Design golf course and we are honored to host the Creighton Farms Invitational annually with [Jack Nicklaus](#). Large funds are raised for the [Nicklaus Children's Health Care Foundation and PKU Alliance](#). So per usual Mr. Nicklaus arrived in town a couple weeks ago for the big event.

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This year was special as I received an invitation to watch him play with the lead group (comprised of four of my longtime students as well as Jin Park, Tour Pro.). I immediately accepted and got the camera ready for my front row seat to watch a legend!

So what did I learn? What did I observe? What did my teaching pro brain think? Here are my seven takeaways...



1. Warmup! No excuses!

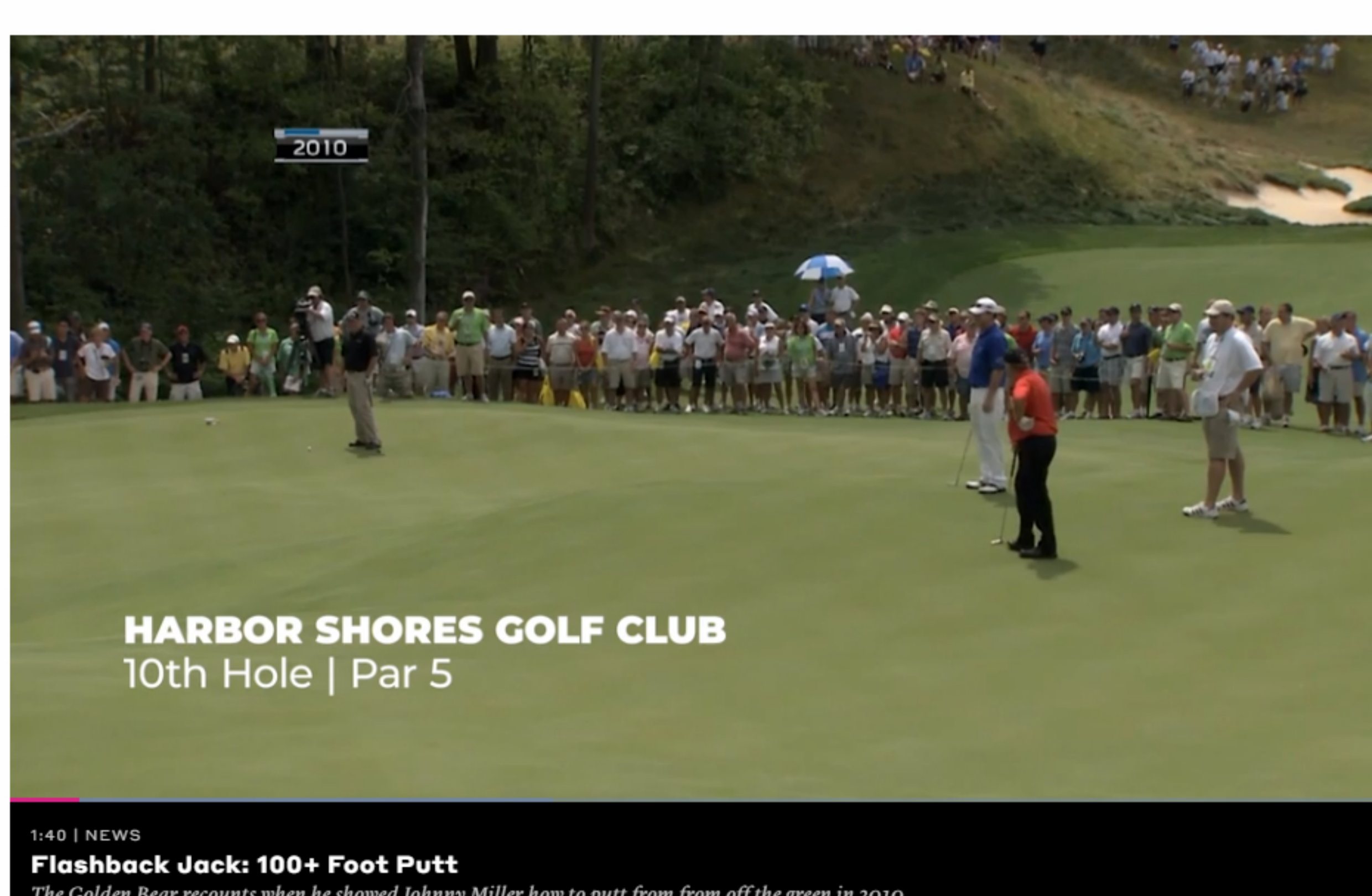
So many golfers skip the range and run to the first tee. The fact of the matter is, all good players warmup and legends warmup too! This event was a Pro-Am Shamble. I'm sure he could have winged it and skipped the warmup, but he didn't. Before the round, Mr. Nicklaus headed to the range, worked his way through his bag from wedge to Driver in about 25 shots. He took his time in between hits to shake out his shoulders and crack a few jokes with the gallery (which included another legend, [K.J. Choi](#)). He loosened up physically, mentally and set the tone for the day. Get ready to play... Jack still does.

2. Have a solid pre-shot routine, always

Every shot he hit was preceded by a consistent pattern of aiming, walking in, setting his feet, two looks at the target and then hit. This routine has stood the test of time and he looked confident over the ball. Come up with one that works for you and stick with it. It's only a "routine" if you do it routinely.

3. Swing your swing

People think they have to change their swing as they age. Mr. Nicklaus' swing DNA is the same as it was in his prime. He has not reinvented his swing at all from what I could see. Now, it may a little shorter and slower but its iconic; he swings it away upright, shallows the club in the transition, gets it on plane and turns to a finish. Great to watch. Now if you're saying "I didn't have a great swing before I aged" then consider his pattern as one to emulate. I think it is a great "senior" swinging motion. Getting a little height and width on the backswing is a great way of leveraging gravity and momentum on the way down and will minimize the need for a big rotational wind-up in the backswing which is more physically demanding. Swing your swing...or swing it like Jack!



4. There is no substitute for solid contact

His shots still have that cracking sound of a perfect shot. He might not be as fast as he once was but he still found the middle of the club face most every time. I often tell students, what you might lose in club head speed you can make up for in "smash factor." This means that the ball speed you gain from solid contact will help you hit it farther than any off center hit trying to force more club you can't control. Think about that and choose wisely.

5. Shift your weight if you can't hold your finish.

I noticed Mr. Nicklaus was not able to hold his balance the end of his swing very well. I observed him walking gingerly all morning and favoring his right leg in his stride. With that said, he often fell back to his right leg, but after impact. He effectively shifted his weight in his transition through impact where it is most critical to the swing bottom and clean contact. Getting through the ball is a big deal, so if you can bear weight on your front side without pain, do it in any way you can for as long as you can!

6. Competitive fire still burns

Mr. Nicklaus was one of the fiercest competitors this game has ever seen. When performance does not meet expectations it can lead to disappointment and frustration. I have heard many of my elders say that as you age the challenging part is that your mind still thinks you're 30. I was trying to put myself in his shoes and think how he must feel when he doesn't hit like he used to. After the few misses I observed, there was grumbling self-talk, a correct "Ohh Jack"s. He even had a few misreads (on his own course) that he rubbed back and hit again in an effort to correct his shot. He wanted to play well, and who doesn't? It isn't fair for him or anyone for that matter, to compare himself now against his younger self. We all do it to ourselves though, don't we? I guess its just part of life and I got to see a first hand example of this in a bittersweet way. I saw glimpses of The Golden Bear and I also so his shadow, but the shadow is still pretty amazing to watch.

7. Golf is the best

As I reflected on the day, I kept thinking, "how cool is it that Jack Nicklaus can still even play golf?" It might be only a dozen times a year and not his prime performance but he is teeing it up for 18 holes and hitting 200 yard drives and sinking putts and enjoying a golf course that he built! You don't see Bobby Orr on the ice anymore or Jim Brown suiting up for a quick game. Keep that in mind as you too, can enjoy this wonderful game for a lifetime. Thanks for playing Mr. Nicklaus, watching you was a treat I will never forget.

