



*Left: Butch Buchholz
Right: Jack Nicklaus*

Q&A

BY AVA ROOSEVELT

Jack Nicklaus & Butch Buchholz



Two sports, two legends and one great friendship.

As you can imagine, my heart leaped, full of trepidation, as I was summoned to a very-last-minute live interview with the two champions. Fully armed with all I could read about both Jack and Butch, I was trying to prepare myself for what turned out to be the most emotional interview I've ever conducted.

Jack Nicklaus, who is widely regarded as the most accomplished professional golfer of all times, hardly needs an introduction. Neither does Butch. A professional tennis player who was one of the game's top players in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he is the founder (in 1985) of the fifth largest tournament in the world, formally The Lipton, now called the Sony Open.

Of all the extraordinary accolades, Hall of Fame inductions and trophies, which both athletes received through the years for their phenomenal sports, business and philanthropic achievements, being humble was never mentioned. Yet as we spoke, their modesty impressed me most and evoked renewed passion for living, being fit and giving back.

Ava Roosevelt: Now that I've overcome my initial awe, please tell me how you met?

Butch Buchholz: I met Jack sometime in the 60s, I think with Billy Talbert.

Jack Nicklaus: When you joined the club [The Bears Club] is when we actually started spending time.

Butch: Yes, but we played tennis and golf years before that. Leigh Livesay said to Jack, Butch Buchholz is a friend of mine, and so let's play tennis and golf. We played two or three years at Loxahatchee, with Cliff Drysdale. It's been 18 years.

Ava: So, I take it, it was not a friendship at first sight, it took years?

Jack: It was love at first sight!

Butch: Jack loves to play tennis, I love to play golf. Livesay is a good tennis player and good golfer, and Drysdale is a pro tennis player who loves to play golf, so that's how it started.

Ava: You're both of German descent – your ancestry and your age – was that a common denominator in your friendship?

Jack: We were both over the hill before we met! Seriously, I don't think our ancestry had much to do with it. I knew of Butch growing up, playing tennis. I followed tennis, but I didn't follow it to the degree I follow it today. When you're playing something [golf], you don't follow anything else except your own sport.

Butch: I really didn't start playing golf until I was 28, but I did follow golf when I used to do outings for Billy Talbert.

Jack: Yes, I remember the first time Billy came down. He brought Chuck McKinley with him [Butch's doubles partner]. I'll never forget playing with Chuck and getting hit right in the nose with the tennis ball with the kick serve.

Ava: Is the switch to prefer each other's sport something that is age related or fitness related?

Jack: Neither. I think it's just interest related. I mean we both love tennis and we both love golf, we have common interests – Butch likes stone crabs, I like stone crabs. We have a lot of fun together.

Ava: With golf and tennis, the games are really different. I mean, golf you play against many other competitors...

Jack: Actually they are very similar.

Ava: How so?

Jack: Well, I keep telling Butch when he's trying to hit a driver, hit a top spin backhand. Cliff Drysdale tells me my chipping motion is always great for drop shots. The motion is exactly the same.

Butch: Even though they're individual sports – you're still doing mental things. It's still all about what's going on up here, in the head.

Jack: That's right, it's all mental.

Ava: What would you tell a young person, providing that their talent was already established? Would you recommend they play golf or tennis?



Jack Nicklaus, US Amateur Championship, 1961

Jack: Play both. My father introduced me to all sports. My dad was the city tennis champion in Columbus. I didn't really play tennis until I was in my 30s, but he introduced me to it when I was a teenager, so I had enough fundamentals to be able to not start from scratch. Butch would've loved to have started playing golf as a teenager, because you would be a lot better golfer.

Butch: Jack played college basketball.

Jack: No I didn't. I got recruited to play, but I elected not to play.

Butch: I think for a tennis player, he needs to show by the time he's 12 to 14, 15 that he has the potential to be a top 10 tennis player in the world. I think you see that earlier in tennis than in golf.

Jack: Yes, you guys specialize a lot earlier and are washed up at 27.

Butch: Yes, they quit at 27.

Jack: In golf, you're really just getting started at 27.

Ava: Whom do you give the most credit for becoming the legends that you are?

Jack: My father introduced me to all sports, he got me started. He turned me over to a golf teacher named Jack Grout at age 10. Jack was like another father to me all my life until he passed away in 1989. I don't think Butch would ever have become a champion or I would have ever become a champion if we didn't have the desire within our own selves to be so – you can lead anybody to water, but you can't make them drink.

Butch: Once you get to that stage, it all depends what's in your heart, and what's in your head. My dad was a teaching pro at

a public park in St. Louis. He never got mad at me when I lost. I was ranked number 1 in my teens. I was also playing basketball. That year I played the Orange Bowl, the tennis tournament, and I lost to somebody in the finals whom I had never lost to before. We get back home and my father said, "Now let's see, you're the number one junior in the world – what is your world ranking in basketball?" I got it. If I had not stopped playing basketball, I would have been playing basketball tournaments in March when Billy Talbert invited me to come down during spring vacation and play in Puerto Rico and Jamaica. I beat two guys who had world rankings, and I was 17, and because of that I got picked to go play the French, Wimbledon, the Australian Open and if I hadn't... Well, that was the hardest thing to go to that coach and tell him I'm not playing basketball.

Jack: When I was Butch's age at 17, I had actually narrowed it to basketball and golf, but I mean I had NO idea I was going to be a professional golfer. I was just another kid who played golf, and I didn't even go to college on a golf scholarship. They recruited me for basketball, but I think that was more because they didn't give golf scholarships. I was just having fun playing golf, and when I was 18, I won an amateur tournament (probably the 5th or 6th ranked amateur tournament), and that got me on the Walker Cup team, and so now all of a sudden I made the Walker Cup team, so I figured I've got to be one of the 12 best amateurs in the country, and that was pretty nice. Later that year, I won the US Amateur, when I was 19, and so I was ranked number 1. The next year, I played in the US Open and I finished second. I said, 'Maybe I'm better than I thought.'

Ava: People call you a God of Golf, an individual of multifaceted talents, a marketing genius...

Jack: No, I'm not, I have a lot of people that work for me that are smart and they give me all the credit.

Ava: What do you consider your greatest accomplishment to date?

Jack: Ahhh, five kids, 22 grandkids, by far.

Ava: And you, Butch?

Butch: Same. I have three kids, five grandchildren. He knows all 22 grandchildren's names and birthdays. I think that's pretty good.

Jack: I don't think I know them all... I have a cheat sheet with their names and birthdays that I carry.

Ava: Do you influence the lives of your grandchildren in any way?

Jack: Sure I do, by showing support. I influence by staying out of the way. I think what I've actually done with my kids is what my father did with me. I introduced all my kids to things but never really forced anything on them.

Butch: That's always a balance.

Jack: It's a tough balance, particularly when your father is Butch Buchholz or Jack Nicklaus. And so my kids have done pretty much the same thing, they all play all sports. We raised our kids – it's time for them to raise their kids, and we support them to whatever level it's necessary to do so.

Ava: Who beats who at which game, and how often?

Butch: We're actually partners when we golf together, although he beat me today when we had an individual game. In tennis, he is very smart when he picks his doubles partner, Cliff Drysdale. So not only does he beat me in golf, but he is smarter in picking a partner.

Jack: He would obviously beat me at tennis. He's a tennis player, who is past his prime, but a tennis player who's past his prime can still play tennis. I'm a golfer past my prime and I can still play golf. He's not a golfer, he's a tennis player, but he loves to play golf and I love to play tennis.

Butch: I will tell you about Jack's tennis. He understands doubles better than some pros, seriously. He can go out there with anybody, and he's going to have a good time and he's not going to embarrass himself.

Ava: So how is Butch's golf?

Jack: Butch is an 8 handicap in golf and I'm about an 8 handicap in tennis. We're pretty much the same. We're pretty comparable. I know that Butch can play golf with guys his age and never embarrass himself, except for today!

Butch: Probably the worst round I've had in 20 years.

Ava: What more would you like to accomplish in your lives?

Butch: I want to see my children and my grandchildren do well and be happy. A little over a year ago, PGA asked me to become part of the Doral Golf Tournament, the Cadillac World Golf Championship. I am the Chairman of that event and I was supposed to do it on a part-time basis and all of a sudden it's a full-time basis! As long as I'm making a contribution, I'm happy with that. I'm just so thankful for my life and everything that tennis has given me and my family.

Ava: What about you, Jack?

Jack: Keep my wife happy, that's number one! I'm still working full-time – I travel to China, Russia, South America or Africa. I'm designing golf courses. When I played my sport, I tried to play as much around the world as I could – when the Iron Curtain went down, I wanted to do things in Russia, when apartheid got abolished, I wanted to go to South Africa. I'm doing more golf courses in China than you can imagine – at least 15 golf courses are under construction there right now. The Olympics are going to be tremendous – it's been a great thing for tennis. We haven't been in the Olympics since 1904, and you're bringing China, Russia, India, Brazil, countries with large populations, which now

will be government supported to grow the game. I don't play my game very much anymore, Butch doesn't either, but we both love our game. We're both very concerned about the game. My personal ambitions are really the ambitions of helping others. I don't need the income today, Butch doesn't need the income, neither one of us are what you would call wealthy people, but we're very comfortable.

Ava: Listening to you, you are both very rich in my book, Sir.

Jack: I'm very rich in being able and having the enjoyment of playing my sport, and enjoying my friends.

Butch: We've had this game for the last 18 years. It's Camp Nicklaus. You go play golf and then you go play tennis at Jack's house [on grass courts].

Jack: We call it Golden Bear Day Camp.

Butch: But you must know, there're always these little friendly bets, \$50, and inside of Jack's kitchen cabinets, inside the doors, are these \$50 bills that he's won from Cliff Drysdale over all these years. When you go to his house and people come in for the first time, and they think, 'oh yes, I'm going to see the Masters trophy, or the US Open and all the trophies that he won,' but no. You go into the kitchen and you open up the cabinet door and see all these \$50 bills all plastered in there.

Jack: And it got so full we had to start another cabinet! And I have another one that's called OD Money – that's Other Dummies money.

Butch: Mine's going in the cabinet today. Jack's wife, Barbara, always wants to know, what happened today? Can Jack come in the house? It's been fun.

Jack: My biggest problem is if I lose, I get to reach in my pocket and pay it off. If I win, I have to give it to my wife and she puts it in the cabinet. So I can't come out ahead! ●



Butch Buchholz, semi-final round, The National Tennis Championship, 1960

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