

'Nobody enjoys it and it's not fair': Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Lee Trevino and Annika Sorenstam address golf's pace of play problem

[Adam Schupak](#)



When Jack Nicklaus says slow play is a problem, you know the topic has officially jumped the shark.

Nicklaus was asked to opine on the pace of play of professional golf

during a press conference on Saturday at The Woodlands in Houston ahead of competing in the Greats of Golf, a nine-hole exhibition played during the Insperity Championship on PGA Tour Champions.

"They do have a problem on the Tour today," Nicklaus said. "The golf ball is a part of the problem. The longer the golf ball goes, the longer the courses get, the more you have to walk, the longer it's going to take. I don't think it's good for the game. (The USGA and R&A have proposed) bringing the golf back. I think it's a good start. It's the first time they've done that in forever. We'll see where it goes with that.

Nicklaus has long been a proponent of rolling back the golf ball but acknowledged that slow-play penalties are also overdue to be handed out.

"It's got to be equitable," Nicklaus added, "but they need to make an example and stay with it. It's not very pleasant to watch somebody stand over the ball for half an hour."

Slow play has made headlines recently after weather delays forced the Masters to go to threesomes and split tees in the final round and the glacial pace was exposed on TV. Brooks Koepka, who played in the final group, called out Patrick Cantlay, who also [took his time on multiple occasions](#) at the RBC Heritage the following week but pointed out that he was never put on the clock in either instances. Slow play has been a chronic problem in the game and rarely gets addressed in any meaningful way. But that wasn't the case in Nicklaus's rookie year.

The Golden Bear always was a deliberate player but he learned early in his career that his pace of play was too slow. He was penalized two strokes during the second round at the 1962 Portland Open by PGA

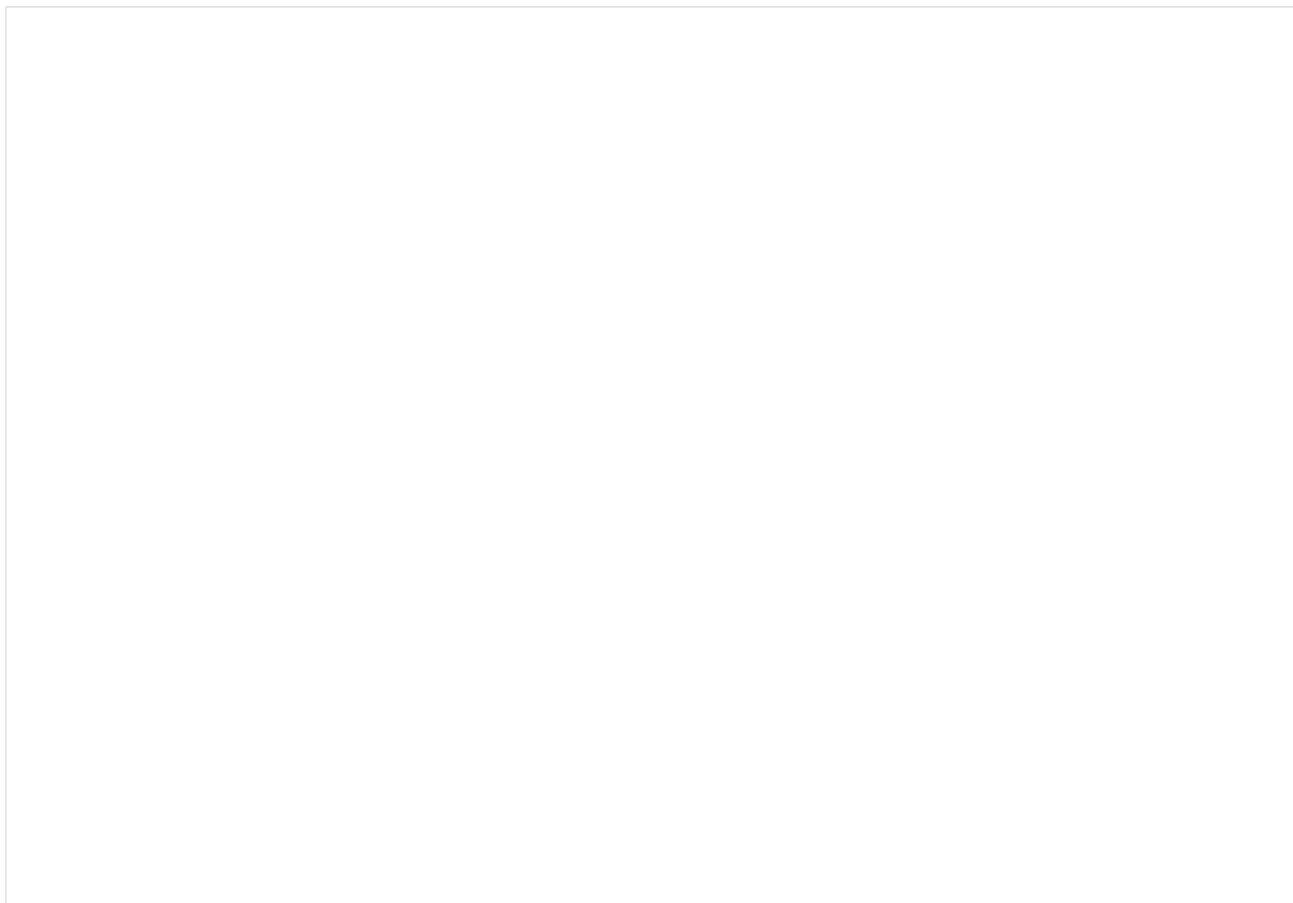
official Joe Black. Nicklaus still rolled to a six-stroke victory but he learned an important lesson that day.

"It was the best thing that ever happened to me," Nicklaus said, noting that Black told him, "Jack, you can take as long as you want over the golf ball to play but be ready when it's your turn."

"I always tried to stay out of everybody's way," Nicklaus continued. "I didn't want to bother anybody lining up my putt while they were lining up their putt so I stayed back. I didn't want to start walking my yardages off. I took a while over the golf ball but that wasn't the problem. The problem was being ready to play. I realized after playing on the Tour for a while that it's also a courtesy to the field. It's not fair to do that."

Nicklaus also blamed caddies for being part of the problem.

"By the time they get through talking, I couldn't hit a shot anyway," he said. "It's a problem."



The Greats of Golf gathered on Saturday, April 29, 2023, at the Insperity Invitational and played a nine-hole exhibition. (Courtesy Insperity Invitational)

Gary Player echoed that sentiment. "It's just not fair to the others to be taking the amount of time," he said. "You are allocated a certain amount of time and you have to adhere to that or you should be penalized."

Player noted that golfers have three practice rounds and then they spend too much time around the green doing Aim Point and studying their yardage books. "You didn't see Bobby Locke, Ben Crenshaw or Tiger Woods doing that," Player said.

"I read the green from 50 yards," Lee Trevino added. "Keep staring at it while you're walking you can see every curve on that green. Before you ever get there to read that putt you know exactly the direction it's going."

Annika Sorenstam said the problem with pace of play starts at the junior level.

"The juniors watch the pros and they see the Masters and see how much time the pros take and do the same thing," she said. "I know the AJGA does a good job, but then they get to college and it all goes away and then they turn pro. I think it is a root problem from the beginning.

"Nobody enjoys it and it's not fair. We're running out of time, time is a precious commodity, right, so I think start at the very beginning and teach them to hit when you're ready and go. The more we think, the more complicated it gets, right, so just hit and go."