

BY
BENNY TEO

IN TIME WITH

ROLEX

MEET THE NICKLAUSES

If all goes according to plan, there will be a new Jack Nicklaus golf course within easy reach by the end of April 2018. However, it will be a co-design

built together with his son, Jack Nicklaus Jnr.

The new Forest City Golf Course, sited within the \$100 billion mega city project by Chinese developer Country Garden across the Second Link between Tuas and Johor Bahru, is set to open in two months' time.

Both Nicklaus were at hand late January, together with Nicklaus Design associate Sean Quinn, to conduct a site inspection for their first co-design project in Malaysia.

But what is a co-design golf course, we asked him during a visit across the Causeway, at the soon-to-be constructed golf course.

"When I do a Signature Golf Course, I take the lead," said the sprightly 78-year-old.

"When it's a Legacy or Co-design, then he (Jack Jnr.) takes the lead, and then I come in and try to disrupt him," he continued with an obvious glint in the eye.

"So Jackie's the boss for this golf course. Between Jackie and Sean, they do 98 per cent of the work out there, I come in and I add another two per cent somewhere.

When they are done with it, it will be a golf course that they have done and I have approved of and one that I like, and that's where the co-design comes in."

A humble estimate but were one to accompany him on the job, they would realise that the man they called 'The Golden Bear' still makes his own mind about what constitutes good golf design.

Seated next to him, Jack Jnr., offers a first hand explanation of his active contribution on each project that bears his name, pun not intended.



Jack Nicklaus makes a point while Jack Jnr. looks on.

"Most of the things I've learnt from the foundations of what a golf course should be, I learn from my father so we're going to agree on 99 per cent of the stuff that we do."

Nevertheless, he admits to seeing things differently occasionally and chalks it down to personality preferences.

"Like today, Sean and myself were (walking the course), and dad came on some of the holes and said, "I don't understand why you put that bunker there," or "looks like we may need another bunker there," or "we might need to make the green a little easier, more receptive." So while it's very rare that we don't see eye to eye on many things, when he sees something, he'll tell us."

And that includes his views on how the game needs to adapt into the 21st Century, with the golf ball as a key determinant in influencing change.

"My problem is that the golf ball continues to go further, which means that number one, it obsoletes all the old golf courses. Number two, to have a tournament golf course, you got to have likely 7,500 yards. Not everybody has enough money to get that much land or build it and it takes a lot of time to play a long golf course," said the 18-time Major winner.

"The game of golf needs to shrink to continue to grow. Now, we don't have the problem so much in Asia as we have in the United States, in Britain but it will happen here too where all of a sudden, they find that they don't have time for the game."

His solution is either to restrict golf ball

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— JACK NICKLAUS, WHEN ASKED WHAT A CO-DESIGN GOLF COURSE WAS

distances or have golf balls return to older technology when playing shorter courses, especially during tournaments.

"The golf ball's increased about 20 per cent in 20 years, so from 1995 to 2000, the golf ball increased 50 yards. That meant that every golf course built prior to 1995 is now obsolete."

"When I first started, we used to be able to play the British Open in two and a half or three hours. That was the length of a round of golf. Now we're four hours, sometimes five if we get a really difficult golf course.

"It's too long for the average person to play. They don't want to spend all that extra time on a golf course. They've got other things to do in life besides golf, so let's be mindful of what our problems were before and attack them as we go forward."

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