

editor's
letter

BY
BENNY TEO

IN TIME WITH


ROLEX



FROM GREEN JACKETS TO GREENS KEEPING

orn to a former farmer turned greenkeeper, Jose Maria Olazabal has risen to the highest point of euphoria and been down the depths of career threatening injury and then up again, stronger than before.

The 53-year-old World Golf Hall of Famer has two Masters titles under his belt. He has also captained a winning Ryder Cup team on American soil and is now an accomplished golf course designer.

Swing caught up with him over an interview in which he talks about his golf and two new courses in Greece.

SWING: We heard it was interesting how you got introduced into golf.

JMO: Well actually, I wasn't introduced to the game by anybody. My family lived and worked on a farm before I was born, until the landlord sold the land to build a golf course and my parents worked there.

My mum placed the flags in the first nine holes to commemorate the course opening one day, and I was born the following day.

I lived in the middle of the course, and between Mondays and Fridays it was empty, as only businessmen played in Spain at that time, so my father would find balls for me during his shifts as a greenkeeper and someone gave him a putter for me to use – those were my first steps in the game.

When did you know that golf could be a career for you?

When I was 18, I told my mother and father that I would love to give professional golf a shot. My mum was a little reluctant, but she said, "If that's what you want, okay, then do it. But you have to finish your studies."

And that's what happened. I turned professional in 1985 when I was 19 and I went to Q-School at La Manga, where I managed to win and get membership on the European Tour.

And now you're a Hall of Famer. Let's go back to that first Masters win in 1994, how was it like?

I must say that when I'd imagined myself winning a Major championship, I'd always assumed it was going to be an explosion of joy. But when I actually did win the tournament, it was more a sense of relief. I didn't enjoy the whole process of winning the 1994 Masters that much.

Injuries then struck, and you suffered a spell out due to arthritis.

I remained strong for a while but obviously during those two years' ('95, '96) process, there were big lows to endure. I learned to appreciate the small things in life, being able to wake up with no pain, do whatever you want to do, to practise, to stay with friends,

to go and have dinner with them, you learn to appreciate all these things.

And soon after, you won another Masters.

When I won in 1999, I really enjoyed every step that I took over the four days.

That was because of what I went through during those two years. I was playing with Greg Norman and on the 13th hole, I pushed my tee shot right so I had to lay up with my second and hit my third to about 15 feet.

Greg hit a wonderful tee shot, a wonderful second shot and made his putt from 40 feet. The crowd went crazy, they started clapping and yelling. Believe it or not, when that happened, I told myself that there was nothing better than that in golf.

Many pros turn to golf course design at some point in their career, and so have you. What particular ideas do you bring to this role?

I try to use elements that the land provides. At the same time, however, you have to consider every type of golfer and from there you either soften or intensify the natural features so, first and foremost, the weekend players can play it with minimal struggle.

From there you can add in tricky templates and features to test the best and add character.

Your latest project is in Greece, Costa Navarino. What are you creating there?

There are already two courses and we're planning on building two more. The East Course goes down the valley and will be a tree-lined course through the rolling hills.

The West Course is on the very edge of the cliff and there will be a beautiful view across the bay from a number of holes and it will be quite a challenging course.

The weather is generally fantastic in the area, and guests will have four golf courses, the beach, the sea, some amazing cuisine and a resort with strong emphasis on activities.

What is the most enjoyable part of building golf courses?

When you have a piece of land going from first picturing the hole, to when the whole process is finished, and the grass is perfectly grown.

The part that I like the most is just seeing the change of the land and then the final result. That's when I really feel pride in what I do.

**SWING
TEAM**

SUPERVISING EDITOR
S. Murali
muralis@sph.com.sg

CREATIVE EDITOR
Jacqueline Wu
wuyej@sph.com.sg

EDITOR
Benny Teo
benny.teo@sphacom.com

WRITER
Jeremy Theseira

SUB-EDITOR
Ida Karsia

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Godfrey Robert
Spencer Robinson
Ven Sreenivasan
Rohit Brijnath
Rahul Pathak

MARKETING AND PARTNERSHIP ENQUIRIES
Vivien Cham Business Director
9746 0379, champs@sph.com.sg
Daphne Tay Business Director
9620 1418, taykhd@sph.com.sg