

# THE Black KNIGHT SPEAKS

*Interview:* RICHARD ASHER

GARY PLAYER HAS MORE AUSTRALIAN  
OPEN TITLES THAN ANYONE. SO  
WHEN THE SEVEN-TIME CHAMP  
TALKS, YOU LISTEN...



**You won the Australian Open a record seven times: do you have a special affection for the tournament?**

Outside of the four Majors, the Australian Open was arguably the most important tournament in the world. The Australian Open tennis was and still is a 'Major', and in my day the golf was well on its way to becoming a Major too. People forget Norman von Nida. He won the Australian Open three times and played all over the world. And he went round the globe collecting people to play in the Australian Open.

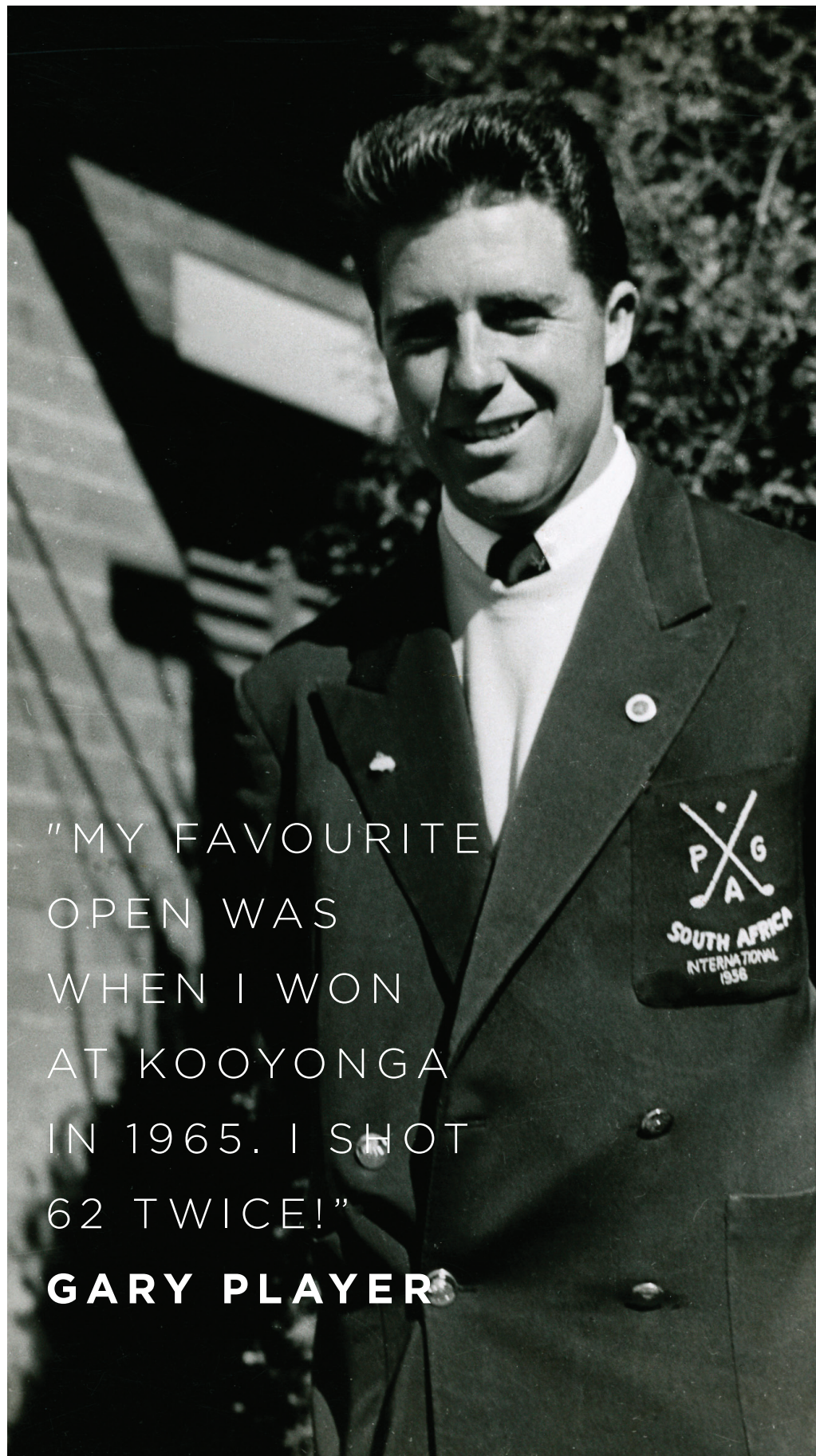
**How did he do that?**

There was a man called Noel Morris who worked for Slazenger. Von Nida used to go and tell Morris 'you've got to bring this man, you've got to bring that man'. And all the top players – Arnold Palmer, Lee Trevino, Jack Nicklaus – went to Australia to go and play the big Australian events! Nicklaus and I were battling to have the record for most Australian Open titles, and it was a battle right down to the end. But I'm just so proud to have the most Australian Opens.



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**GARY PLAYER**



"MY FAVOURITE  
OPEN WAS  
WHEN I WON  
AT KOORYONGA  
IN 1965. I SHOT  
62 TWICE!"

**GARY PLAYER**

## 1965 AUSTRALIAN OPEN: PLAYER BLITZES KOORYONGA

NAME	SCORE	ROUNDS
1. Gary Player	(-28) 264	(62-71-62-69) Tournament record
2. Frank Phillips	(-22) 270	(71-64-66-69)
3. Jack Nicklaus	(-22) 270	(66-63-70-71)

### Do you have a favourite memory from the Australian Open?

My favourite Australian Open was when I won at Kooyonga in Adelaide in 1965. I shot two 62's! The first was on day one. I was rooming next to Jack Nicklaus in the hotel and he said to me: 'You know I shot 66 today and I'm four shots behind you – how the hell is that possible? I'm gonna get your South African butt tomorrow!'

The next day he shot 63 and I shot 71. I had a total of 133 and he had a total of 129. We were travelling back to the hotel that night and I said, 'How can I have an average of two 66's and be four behind? I'm going to get your big fat American butt tomorrow!'

The next day I was 10 under after 10 holes. We didn't have electric scoreboards in those days, and he sent his caddie over to find out how I was doing.

'Mr Nicklaus wants to know how you're doing,' asked the caddie.

'I'm ten under par,' I replied.

'No, not for the tournament,' he said. 'How are you doing today?'

'Yes, I'm ten under today!' I told him.

He ran back and he told Jack. When Jack went by me on the next hole he said: 'You damn liar, you tried to put me off!'

'Jack, I swear I'm ten under,' I replied.

I shot 62 again and I went on to win the Australian Open with a record score of 264. And it's still a record today – nobody has ever broken that record since 1965! I can tell you, that doesn't happen in sports...I don't know how it's managed to stay there that long.

### Isn't there a sequel to that story?

So I'm standing in the airport that evening feeling pretty excited. I've got a pair of yellow pants on with a white shirt and a white jacket. This little old lady comes up to me and says, 'Sir, I can see you're the bus driver, where do I get my ticket to go downtown?'

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“THIS LITTLE OLD LADY COMES UP TO ME AND SAYS, ‘SIR, I CAN SEE YOU’RE THE BUS DRIVER, WHERE DO I GET MY TICKET TO GO DOWNTOWN?’” **GARY PLAYER**



‘No, M’am,’ I said. ‘I’ve just won your national championship, here’s my medal!’

And I gave her my medal! My son hunted for that medal for our museum for years and years. I think he had to pay somebody in the family three grand to get it back.

**What are your other memories of playing in Australia?**

I have such a great love for Australia. I can hardly explain it, I’m a very sentimental person and I often get a tear in my eye when I think of travelling right through Australia for 20 pounds a game everywhere from Alice Springs to Wagga Wagga to Darwin. It was just the most wonderful time and the people were so fantastic. I’d play in all these exhibitions and stay at a member’s house in the evening, staying up late, dancing with the members and having a great time – not like today! It was a very different world to today where guys are all business. I don’t criticize them, I can understand it, but it just doesn’t exist any more.

**And wasn’t it from the Melbourne Sandbelt that you proposed?**

Yes. I won the Ampol tournament in 1956 [one of Player’s first big prize purses], when



the Olympics were on in Melbourne. And I wanted to get married; I’d been going out with my fiancée since I was 14 but I didn’t have the money! The Ampol was played at Yarra Yarra and it was it was one of the biggest prize funds outside of America. I said ‘if I win this tournament we’ll get married’. And I won it! And a man called Mr McDougall, a dear old press man, sent a telegram to Viv saying ‘will you marry me’. And of course she did.

**Did you have any trouble with anti-apartheid demonstrations and protests**

**Above left:** Player with the Australian Open trophy after winning at Kingston Heath in 1970 **Above:** The Black Knight contemplates his next shot in the 1968 Australian Open at Lake Karrinyup. He lost out to Jack Nicklaus that year.

**when you played here in Australia?**

When I teed off at The Australian Golf Club in Sydney there were some South Africans expats standing there who’d married Australians, standing there with their babies, screaming at me that ‘you can’t have a baby of a different colour in your country’, like it was my fault that apartheid was invented!

# GARY PLAYER

Then when I hit off they were charging me on the greens. There was a police van going up the fairway with me for 18 holes, and as these people came out of the gallery and charged me, the police grabbed them and threw them in the van. They also used to write signs in white chalk on the greens. So I had a bit of a rough time there. But anyway, that was something you had to live with being a South African.

**But you had help from Kerry Packer...**

Yes, he did the Australian Open a lot of good and gave me a lot of help when I was having

those problems during apartheid. He paid for all the police to look after me. Man, it was front page news, when else have you ever seen people running out of the gallery charging golfers? And it must be the only time in history a police van has gone rolling up the fairway!

**Who were your fiercest Aussie rivals?**

The toughest I played against were Kel Nagle, Ossie Pickworth, Bruce Crampton, Peter Thomson and Greg Norman. But the greatest of all time has got to be Thomson. You've got to go by the record books, and he won five Majors.

**Which are your favourite Australian golf courses?**

The ones in Melbourne, the Sandbelt courses. You had to drive the ball so straight. The tragedy now is that the modern golf ball has ruined them! The ball is going so far and the clubs are hitting it so far that they've made those courses a little antiquated for Pros. Not for amateurs though, and the amateurs are what count!

**Below:** A concerned-looking Player on his way to a seventh Australian Open title in 1974. Again the venue was Lake Karringup in WA.



“PACKER DID THE AUSTRALIAN OPEN A LOT OF GOOD AND GAVE ME A LOT OF HELP DURING APARTHEID” **GARY PLAYER**

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Player made it a record seven Australian Open titles in '74 - and his mark still stands today



“ADAM SCOTT HAS GOT THE BEST SWING ON TOUR”  
**GARY PLAYER**

**Why do you think the International team is struggling in the Presidents Cup?**

We’ve always had, individually, a stronger team than America. So what’s the problem? We just haven’t played well enough! You come up with all kinds of damn excuses...but we just haven’t played well enough. Amen.

**What’s your take on Adam Scott’s finish to the 2012 Open Championship?**

It was all course management that cost Adam. I hope he gets over it and I feel he will. He’s young, he’s got the best golf swing on the tour and I hope he’ll get over it because he’s a wonderful gentleman.

**When will we see you in Australia again?**

I’ve designed 300 golf courses in the world and I’ve never done one in Australia. And I’d love to, just to get the opportunity to go back there.

**PLAYER’S MAJORS**

YEAR	TOURNAMENT
1959	THE OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP
1961	THE MASTERS
1962	PGA CHAMPIONSHIP
1965	US OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP
1968	THE OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP
1972	PGA CHAMPIONSHIP
1974	THE MASTERS
1974	THE OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP
1978	THE MASTERS

PLAYER WON THE AUSTRALIAN OPEN SEVEN TIMES AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN OPEN 13 TIMES