

# Does age affect competitive spirit?

By M.B. Dillon  
staff writer

The U.S. Senior Open.

The words conjure up images of golf's aging giants whose names and games no longer match, and whose birthdays mark the slow passing of another generation of golfing greats.

You wonder how players like Arnold Palmer, Sam Snead, Tommy Bolt and Julius Boros cope with the aging process, and how it affects them during competition.

It seems there are as many theories as there are pros, pros' physicians, sports psychologists and sports medicine specialists.

Arnold Palmer's physician, Dr. Bob Mazero of Latrobe, Penn., said, "Age is reason enough for anybody to develop psychological hang-ups when it comes to competing.

"That's because the elasticity and strength of muscles deteriorate, which affects the psyche, but also because our society equates youth with vitality.

"Arnie has been able to overcome many aspects of age because he keeps his body like a fine-tuned machine. He exercises and runs religiously. He's in such good shape that his coordination and energy reserve are way above average for his age.

"Also, he has a competitive urge that's greater now than it ever was. He's very demanding of himself. For those that know Palmer well, it's something to behold.

"HE'S AN EXAMPLE for golf's senior citizens," said Mazero. "I'd bet that people walking with him on rounds during the Senior Open won't be able to keep up unless they're in shape."

Dr. Ed Zimmer, a Birmingham psycholo-

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**—Dr. Bob Mazero  
Arnold Palmer's doctor**

gist, cites Sam Snead as another golfer who adapted to the ill-effects of age.

"As Snead got older, his game got worse," Zimmer said. "But he accepted the fact that his eye-motor coordination was deteriorating. Eventually, he changed his putting style to compensate for his shakiness.

"But he's an exception. A lot of golfers hang in there with their old ways, just hoping they'll reclaim some of the old glory."

Bob Rosburg, a 54-year-old pro golfer and an entrant in the Senior Open, said "nerves are the first to go."

"As you get older, your nerves aren't as good, nor is your ability to concentrate," he explained.

"Physically, there aren't a whole lot of problems. But the USGA Seniors (U.S. Senior Open) is the only tournament that requires you to walk, and it makes a big difference in that tournament.

"It had a greater effect last year when

the minimum age was 55 — but it will affect a lot of guys this year. The fellows who are favorites for this tournament — Littler, Palmer, Goalby, January and Barber — are playing and walking a lot. The golfer who plays less is at a distinct disadvantage, especially when he's up against a flatbelly who plays everyday and can hit the ball further."

**DR. ROBERT TEITGE**, a sports medicine specialist and the team doctor for the Detroit Lions and Detroit Tigers, said a lot of golfers "get smarter with age, and that compensates for physical deficiencies."

"Winning is very psychological," said Teitge. "It's a matter of how a competitor perceives himself and whether or not he's excessively preoccupied with age. If he is and if he's out of shape and dwells on the fact, it begins to affect him adversely. If not, experience acts as a attribute and can contribute to winning."

Dr. Robert Singer, a sports psychologist from Florida State University and head of the U.S. Olympic Sports Medicine Committee, considers golf the sport least vulnerable to decreasing physical capabilities.

"Age does make a player more prone to physical problems," Singer said. "But the big thing is the tremendous concentration and the controlling of anxiety that golf requires.

"The mind can do funny things. The key is to keep playing steadily, dealing with stress and anxiety on a regular basis.

"THAT'S JACK Nicklaus' trick — his ability to concentrate well over a long period of time. The power to cope with stress and keep oneself under control is of greater significance than people think."

Dr. Steve Konstenius, a Birmingham psychologist, agrees that performance is largely determined by psychological factors.

"It's true that age brings physical deterioration, but physical shape and approach to the game have a lot to do with results," he said.

"We're so segregation conscious in this country. It's engrained in us that once

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**—Bob Rosburg  
pro golfer**

people reach a certain age, they can't do things any more. The young and old in America don't interact — having a seniors tournament in itself is a reflection of that.

"If you enter competition expecting to perform poorly, you will. There are plenty of athletes who've overcome age. Look at George Blanda."

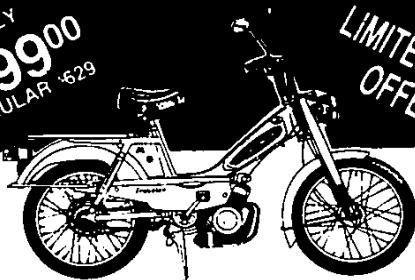
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