

## **Peter Jacobsen—the “Johnny Carson of Golf”**

Peter Jacobsen’s world of opportunities comes together this August at the Jeld-Wen Tradition

*By Jim Pasero*

If you dial up the PGA Tour’s Greater Hartford Open on the Internet looking for this year’s tournament, the face that you’ll see on the home page is Peter Jacobsen.

And why not?

He’s the defending champion, having shot four consecutive rounds in the 60s (63,67,69,67–266) to win last year’s tournament for the second time in his career—only this time he won it at the age of 49.

Winning on the PGA Tour at 49 is a big deal. Just think of past champions who have won late in their careers and the lore that persists about their triumphs—Julius Boros winning the PGA Championship in ’68 at 48, or Jack Nicklaus winning the Masters at 46 in ’86. And the oldest golfer ever to win a PGA event—Sam Snead in 1965, when he won the Greater Greensboro Open for the eighth time in his career at 53. It’s no wonder winning the Hartford Open at 49 earned Peter Jacobsen the PGA Tour Comeback Player of the Year in 2003. Not a bad accomplishment for the world’s undisputed “clown prince” of golf—a clown who honed his skills for 20 years as the AT&T national pro-am partner of actor Jack Lemmon.

No wonder the Hartford Open wants him adorning their website.

But it’s false advertising. Peter Jacobsen is not going to Connecticut this year. Instead, the former Lincoln High graduate is busy this year (August 23–29) serving as the defacto “player host” for the Champions Tour, Jeld-Wen Tradition. The Tradition is the last senior major of the year, and the only major on the Champions Tour, like the Masters, to be by invitation for a limited prestigious field.

Two months ago on March 4, Peter Jacobsen turned 50. At the age when most professional athletes might be on the lecture circuit, or writing their memoirs, Jake is actually getting busier. A lot busier. After a short recovery from minor hip surgery this April—here’s just a brief sketch of his hectic travel plans this summer. “I will play at the British Sr. Open, the Jeld-Wen Tradition, the Sr. U.S. Open, the U.S. Open, the Sr. PGA, and the PGA. I am busier now than before.”

And that’s just his golf schedule, which is just a fraction of Jacobsen’s business. Says Jacobsen about his career and his aggressive promotion of both golf and his career, “I’ve won seven golf tournaments in my career, and I hope to win more, but I love opportunities in the game, whether it’s television, or tournament operations, or

tournament creation, or golf course design. I look at that all as opportunities within the game, and I've jumped at those opportunities and I'm glad I have."

This summer Peter has jumped on so many opportunities that his worlds are coming together in late August at the Jeld-Wen Tradition. His company, PJP Productions and Ed Ellis will be running The Tradition for Jeld-Wen. One of his three current shows on The Golf Channel (founded by his close friend Arnold Palmer and run by Cleveland High School alum Dave Manougian) will be aired from the deck of The Reserve Vineyards and Golf Club. "Peter and Friends" will discuss "the state of the game and the day's events at the Tradition."

Jacobsen will also be playing in the tournament, chasing a major championship title on a course that he knows well and was for five years the home of the Fred Meyer Challenge.

But before he gets to the Reserve this August, he's jumping on his other golf opportunities, playing full-time on the regular PGA tour, playing part-time on the PGA senior tour, and anchoring three shows on the Golf Channel...and yet there's more.

In April Jacobsen began airing a two-month long weekly "Real Life" series of 90-second vignettes shown on CBS during PGA telecasts. Jacobsen stars, hosting fellow golf professionals who share their hobbies.

Want to see Steve Elkington tend a garden, Steward Cink bake pastries, Brett Quigley go surfing, Bob Burns brew beer, Joe Ogilvie pick financial stocks, Tim Petrovic's Jim Morrison memorabilia, or Oregon's Ben Crane fly-fish on the Sandy River? Tune in this spring on CBS telecasts beginning with The Heritage Foundation in April, and end with Nicklaus's Memorial Tournament in late May. The series is sponsored by Jeld-Wen.

Gina Monterossi, the series' producer and a Jeld-Wen employee, explains the company's thinking behind the spots: "We came up with the idea along with Peter. We wanted to see what we could do with Peter in a creative way, using talented but lesser known players, giving TV viewers a peak into their lives. We pitched it to CBS, they agreed to it, and it airs as part of their telecast."

Two of the episodes were filmed in Florida, two in Texas, and two at Hilton Head in South Carolina. And, one, of the seven, Ben Crane fly-fishing was filmed in Oregon in December on the Sandy River. Not to worry about how Oregon holds up to the other sunnier locations—Monterossi says the Oregon episode is spectacular. "We caught the only beautiful day we had in December."

If Jacobsen is a natural performing for Jeld-Wen in the CBS "Real Life" series, it's a skill he's spent years perfecting—beginning some years back now as one of the programming foundations of The Golf Channel. Jacobsen stars in "Plugged In" with Los Angeles-based comedian Matt Griesser, otherwise known as the Sign-Boy in the Foot-Joy ad campaigns. Jacobsen also hosts "Peter and Friends," where he talks the game candidly with his peers.

And even more exciting, this year Jacobsen is revising the once made-for-television show “Celebrity Golf,” which aired in the ‘50s, starred Sam Snead, and was moderated by Burns and Allen regular Harry Von Zell.

How did Peter Jacobsen gain such a prominent role on the growing Golf Channel? Peter explains: “I built the first NIKE golf shoe with Rick Long, and when we started the NIKE golf program, Dave Manougian was the national sales manager for NIKE. So I’ve known Dave forever. A couple of years ago we met at the AT&T Pro-Am and said, let’s do some programming. We now do three shows for them.”

Jacobsen explains the motivation behind the popular and imaginative national shows. “What I’m happy to be part of is fresh programming. We created ‘Plugged In’ and ‘Peter and Friends’ because I thought there was a niche that needed to be filled. People wanted to see an interesting side of golf. On ‘Plugged In,’ we do some silly things, some funny things, and on “Peter and Friends” we actually sit and talk about issues.”

Jay Kossoff is Jacobsen’s producer for his three Golf Channel shows, and Jacobsen says he’s lucky to have him. “Kossoff is the most requested producer of any of those shows on the Golf Channel.”

Kossoff discusses the unusual chemistry between Jacobsen and Griesser in the series “Plugged In” when they approach the “man on the street” to teach golf. “We were in Hawaii taping on the beach teaching the public golf—Matt and Peter style, says Kossoff. “It’s not real golf they are teaching, but it’s amazing what they can get people to do with a golf club.”

And it’s amazing that despite all the hijinks, says Kossoff, “People learn something.”

How does the producer know when “Plugged In” has hit its mark? “When I get to the point that I’m crying because I am laughing so hard, then I know it’s a success.”

“Peter and Friends” discusses the state of the game and Kossoff knows exactly why it works. “Peter has been there, so the pros will talk to him about things they wouldn’t talk to others about.”

Kossoff gives this example: When Peter talked to Australian Craig Parry about what NBC commentator Johnny Miller said about his swing, Miller said, “Craig Parry’s swing would make Ben Hogan puke.”

Miller is controversial in his commentating style and players have tremendous opinions about Johnny Miller and Peter loves to fuel that fire,” says Kossoff.

Both shows, “Plugged In” and “Peter and Friends” are ratings favorites at The Golf Channel. But the show debuting this month, “Celebrity Golf,” has the potential to capture national attention. In the early ‘60s version of the show, Sam Snead took on Hollywood

types in nine-hole celebrity matches. Some of the stars taking part back then: Harpo Marx, James Garner, Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin.

Golf Channel president Manougian got the idea for a remake of the series when the network bought Bob Hope's library. "In Hope's library were these classic episodes, and we began airing them," says Manougian. "We're always thinking about how to use Peter more and more and so I talked to Peter about it at last year's Jeld-Wen Tradition, and the more we talked about it the more excited he got about it."

By May, four episodes of "Celebrity Golf" were taped. In the episodes, Jacobsen takes on Hollywood legend Dennis Hopper, Spin City's Richard Kind, Animal House's D-Day—Bruce McGill, and actor George Lopez. And of course, Jacobsen, with apologies to Snead, has brought his own style to the new "Celebrity Golf."

First of all, a moderator like Harry Von Zell, isn't needed. Says Kossoff, "We don't need an announcer with Peter; Peter is his own announcer. He asks the questions, does his own play by play, he can pull it off."

He also hits some spectacular golf shots along the way.

Another change in the format of "Celebrity Golf" concerns a rumor that Peter doesn't go undefeated in his matches. "I can tell you right now that I get beat," says Jacobsen. "Dennis Hopper beats me."

Producer Jay Kossoff won't comment on Peter's won-loss record but he does say one of the most interesting aspects of the show is the conversations that emerge during the matches. "Bruce McGill talked about acting and about John Belushi. Dennis Hopper talked about how golf saved his life when he quit drugs, because golf was the one diversion that gave him something to concentrate on."

In the original show, Sam Snead tied actor James Garner, but it is doubtful that Snead made a habit of draws with Hollywood types. The black and white tape shows Snead not looking very happy over his tie with Garner or the two-iron Garner hits inside of Snead on the next to last hole.

Manougian says that episode with Garner and Snead shows why golf is such a fun game. "If you put James Garner in a baseball game he would not hit a great pitcher, no way, but in the game of golf it can happen—you can make that one swing and hit it as good as Peter and Tiger would hit it."

Another reason Peter's matches may be closer than Snead's. "I'm very liberal with mulligans for my celebrity opponents," he says. "I'm a lot more charitable than Sam. After all, you can always take the mulligans out in the editing process."

Says Kossoff about the mulligans, "Peter likes a close match."

Hard to imagine the depression-born West Virginian Snead, who had a habit of burying his money in coffee cans in the backyard, giving mulligans. Not so Jacobsen.

Adds The Golf Channel's Kelly Tilghman about the mulligans, "That's just Jake. He loves to buck the system. If there is a pattern, he wants to break it—to put the Jake touch on things. To me he is the Johnny Carson of golf."

The Johnny Carson of Golf he is. But he's also a good enough player, as he proved last year on the PGA Tour, to *win* the Jeld-Wen Tradition. So on August 29<sup>th</sup> don't be surprised if he is sitting on the balcony of The Reserve interviewing the tournament's winner on "Peter and Friends"—himself.

If anybody has the training and talent to interview themselves, it would be Jacobsen. And that's without a mulligan.