

SORENSEN

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talked about his admiration for Utah's emphasis on family values. The latter has always been a theme with Nicklaus.

I still remember an interview I had with him about a decade ago when I asked what the highlight of career was.

Instead of mentioning his 1986 Masters victory or winning the British Open at St. Andrews twice, he said, "That my kids all know their father."

Nicklaus was most proud of the fact that he had been a good father and was close to each of his children, despite his worldwide success.

"Utah is, in my opinion, as good a place in the country to raise a family," he said Friday. "You see the family values in

Utah. You see the people here and the things they do. The family is very strong here. I enjoy that when I come out here, because that's been a big part of my life."

Of the thousand-plus athletes and coaches I've interviewed in my day, Nicklaus has to be among the top 10.

He's direct and honest, almost to a fault. He won't hold back if you ask a question that he doesn't like and can be a bit brusque, like the time in the late 1990s when I asked him why sons of famous golfers have never really found any success on the PGA Tour. He didn't like the implication that his sons were failures as golfers, and let me know it.

The other day he did the same thing when I asked about the deep bunkers at his new Red Ledges Golf Course.

I've seen nearly every course in Utah and these bunkers are by far the deepest I've ever experienced in the state, some even rivaling the bunkers of British Open courses in Scotland. However, Nicklaus seemed defensive, saying they weren't "exceedingly deep" and then joking that they were "gentle for me."

My all-time favorite interview with Nicklaus, which I've written about before, occurred six years ago, before the first round at the Champions Challenge. About five reporters were interviewing him when we ran out of questions.

However, Nicklaus, sitting in his easy chair, made no move toward the door and spent the next half hour just shooting the breeze with us with no time constraints or

worries about spending extra time with media types.

Because he wasn't thrilled about going out and getting mobbed by autograph seekers, he sought the comfort of a few small-town writers and told us stories of what it was like to be recognized throughout the world, how technological advances were hurting the game of golf and about his new diet and how certain fruits gave him, uh, gas. I'll probably interview Nicklaus again this fall at the Champions Challenge and next year and the year after that.

Perhaps when I'm retired and sitting on the porch in my rocking chair, I'll more fully appreciate all of opportunities I had to talk to perhaps the greatest golfer of all time, right here in Utah.

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