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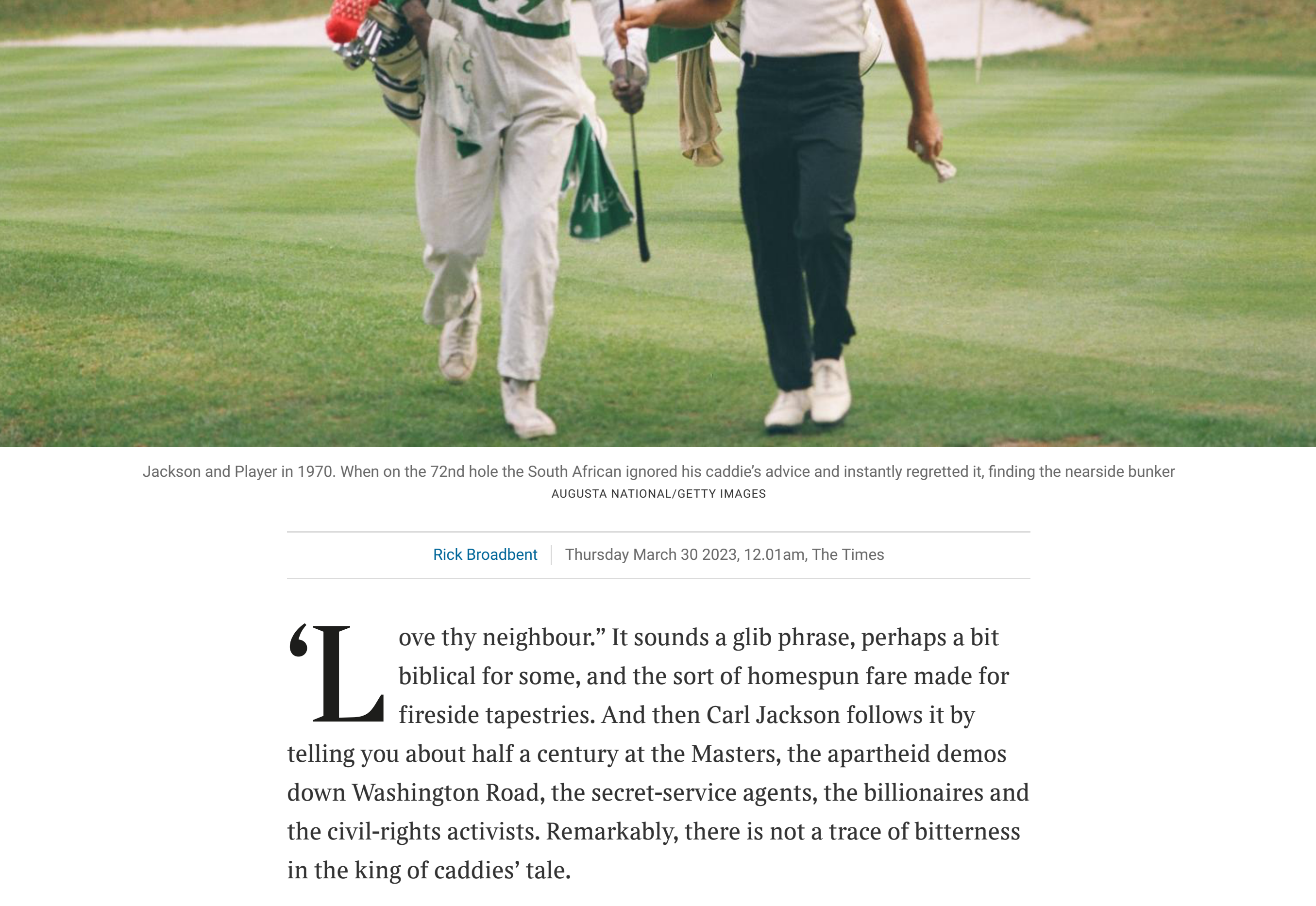
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THE MASTERS | CARL JACKSON INTERVIEW

The Masters: I had a secret-service guard when I caddied for Gary Player, says Carl Jackson

The Augusta old-school sage, 76, recalls his famous round with South African great, his tear-jerking win with Crenshaw — and overcoming the odds in a racially divided America



Jackson and Player in 1970. When on the 72nd hole the South African ignored his caddie's advice and instantly regretted it, finding the nearside bunker
AUGUSTA NATIONAL/GETTY IMAGES

Rick Broadbent | Thursday March 30 2023, 12.01am, The Times

‘Love thy neighbour.’ It sounds a glib phrase, perhaps a bit biblical for some, and the sort of homespun fare made for fireside tapestries. And then Carl Jackson follows it by telling you about half a century at the Masters, the apartheid demos down Washington Road, the secret-service agents, the billionaires and the civil-rights activists. Remarkably, there is not a trace of bitterness in the king of caddies’ tale.

Jackson, 76, and 6ft 5in in his boiler-suit pomp, is the man who bestrode Augusta National as an old-school sage. He also straddled generations. He first worked the Masters as a 14-year-old in 1961. When Augusta National bowed to player pressure in 1982 and stopped using the all-black club caddies in 1983, “loopers” with names like Stovepipe and Cigarette Jones disappeared. Jackson endured.

Ben Crenshaw knew a good thing when he saw it and the pair would team up at Augusta on 39 occasions, winning in 1984 and 1995. The latter was one of Augusta’s most emotional as Crenshaw crumbled in pain and pleasure four days after burying his swing mentor, Harvey Penick. The photo of Jackson’s ursine hug was a badge of honour for a club that has had a chequered history as well as monochrome one.

For the first time Jackson is telling all for a forthcoming documentary, *Rise Above*. After a record 54 appearances at the Masters, he remains relevant to the game, with Jordan Spieth and Scottie Scheffler both heeding his advice before their wins, in 2015 and 2022 respectively. His impact crossed the ropes, though, as highlighted in 1970.



Jackson, pictured in 2012, first worked at the Masters as a 14-year-old in 1961
SCOTT HALLERAN/GETTY IMAGES

“That year apartheid was very pronounced in the world and Gary Player was catching flak for being South African,” Jackson says. “The NAACP [civil rights organisation] was on Washington Road picketing and both Gary Player and his caddie, Arness Nipper, received death threats. Nipper quit, so who could work for Gary Player? It came down to me. I was one of the shop employees. I thought about it and said a quick ‘yes’ because this was the best chance I’d had to win the Masters.”

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Player, though, had a friend with him and preferred his advice during practice. Jackson remembers: “Gary Player said to me, ‘Carl I’m going to make your job real easy this week — I just want you to keep my clubs clean and keep up,’ sort of keep quiet. I took offence to that. For the practice round we were getting a bunch of hard looks. I said a couple of things over the top of what they were thinking and they tried to prove me wrong but I was correct. When it came to the tournament I had my own personal secret-service guard checking up on me. It was a serious time.”

Player quickly learnt to listen to his caddie and accepted his club choices, right up until the 72nd hole. In the fairway, tied for the lead, Jackson recommended a five-iron. Player said his adrenaline was up and that was too much club. “And he hit a beautiful six-iron into that Sunday pin at the Masters and it fell short, in the trap. Once that was done and over I exhaled by going into the shop, into the bag room, and I just cried. It was a testing Masters.”

He had faced bigger tests. Jackson grew up in Sand Hills, a poor, black community bordering the Augusta Country Club and the Augusta National. Yards and a world away, he says this bastion of white privilege never provoked feelings of injustice, merely an opportunity.

“The elite was just over there and we had our place on the corner where we would group at night,” he says. “Pretty often the wealthy kids, the white kids, would drive through our neighbourhood and call us that name, the n-word, and then even little old ladies would try to pick up a brick to throw at the car. Then there was all the marching and rioting, but I could not be any part of the riots. It made no sense to me, because when they were over no one was going to jail but black people.”



Crenshaw and Jackson on the 18th green after winning in 1995, days after the death of his swing mentor Penick
JEFF HAYNES/GETTY IMAGES

The second-oldest of nine children, he never knew his father and had to drop out of school to look after his siblings. He says his grandfather instilled “integrity” in him. One day, aged 13, he filled in as a caddie at Augusta National. Jack Stephens, a billionaire member who would become the club president, took a liking to him. “They were going to pull me off the property because of my age, but he stepped in and figured out a way to keep me. He hired me over a fully grown man. My life changed.”

Stephens, who would be friends with Jackson for life, had seen something in him. The documentary-makers call it dignity and grace. Jackson calls it instinct. “It’s built into you. They use yardage books now but they were not known until around 1973 at Augusta National. The way it was done was: we figured out how far a guy hit a seven-iron and then we could go either way and get him on the green. We didn’t have any numbers. They are refining it now but one thing tech doesn’t tell you is what to do when the wind is 25mph. That’s when the instincts have to be there. I see good caddies lean on the numbers too much now and it costs them.”



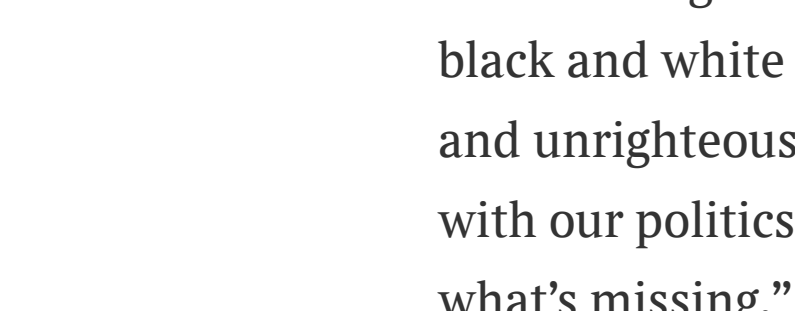
Crenshaw and Jackson, all 6ft 5in of him, in 2015
JIM WATSON/AFP PHOTO

The second Masters triumph transcended golf. A painting of him comforting Crenshaw by the artist Henry Drake, titled *Hush Now... You Won* hangs in the house of the rapper Drake. With the Masters no longer using the club caddies, and the festering racial and economic fault-lines in Augusta, it was an image that mattered.

“That was a stressful week because Mr Penick had died and Ben had to carry that around. People would be shouting out they were sorry and I’d have to get him focused on the next shot. It took a lot. I remember at the back of the green the other caddie reminded me to get the flag as a souvenir. As I turned around there’s Ben, all crossed over. I say, ‘What the heck is wrong with Ben?’ He was gone.” When Jackson was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2000 it was Crenshaw who paid for the prohibitively expensive treatment in South Africa. That time Jackson broke down in tears.

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Jackson was the first black guest to play at Augusta, alongside Stephens, in 1988. He still works for Stephens’s son. The documentary is in post-production and will show Jackson as a man who built bridges rather than raged against the machine. Why did he not grow bitter at Augusta’s dividing lines? “The way I assess things is it’s not a black and white thing,” he says. “It’s a hate and love thing, righteous and unrighteous, and that’s still tearing our country apart. It starts with our politics. You have to have respect. Love thy neighbour. That’s what’s missing.”

He drifts back to being the boy at home, looking at schoolbound pals and “knowing in my heart I was losing”. He adds: “When you face obstacles you can be defeated or you can try to rise above them.” It is why he set up his Carl’s Kids Foundation, “for kids like me growing up in needy, stressful situations”. And then in a graceful debunking of modern golf mantras, he says: “They’re growing the game but I feel the game is not considering what I call south-of-the-railroad tracks.”

With a hand in the grassroots this evergreen giant was also have another in this year’s Masters. “Jordan Spieth said, ‘We go off Carl’s information,’ and in that time he won one Masters and left two on the table,” he says with a smile. Last year Crenshaw asked him to advise Scheffler, who duly won. He did, but didn’t reveal all of his secrets. This year? “If Scottie wants it, I’m here,” says the man from next door.

The Masters

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