

Date:	12 th August 2009
Prepared by:	Thomson Perrett
Release date:	Immediate Release
Subject:	Peter Thomson's 80 th Birthday

Accolades for Peter Thomson on his 80th birthday

Tributes are flowing in from around the world for golfing great Peter Thomson AO, CBE who is about to celebrate his 80 birthday.

The five-times British Open champion was born in Melbourne on 23 August 1929 and grew up in Brunswick, a stone's throw from the Royal Park public course where he learned to play.

His first victory of note was the Royal Park club title in 1946 at the age of 16 and his last was the 1988 British Seniors Championship. Along the way he won as a professional at least once a year from 1950 to 1973 and while most of his victories were overseas, he gave his home town some thrilling moments.

Among them were winning the 1959 Canada Cup for Australia with Kel Nagle and captaining the International Team to its only victory against the might of the United States in the 1998 Presidents Cup, both at Royal Melbourne.

His record of nine wins on the US Senior in 1985 is yet to be threatened and he remains the only man of the 20th and 21st Centuries to win the British Open three years in a row (1954-56). In addition to his brilliant playing career, he found time to design and build more than 100 courses around the world, serve as the chairman of the Australian PGA for 32 years, run for Parliament in Victoria and pioneer the professional golf circuit in Asia while his writing for newspapers and magazines continues after 55 years.

Peter is still very involved in course architecture and can be found in the design office at Coromandel Place on a daily basis. Current projects at Thomson Perrett include two 36-hole courses on the drawing board for China, two more in Egypt, one about to open on Dent Island in Queensland and an Australian Rules football ground in Tianjing, Melbourne's sister city in China.

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Further information and interviews

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Tributes:

Jack Nicklaus: Peter Thomson has been a great ambassador for Australia and a global ambassador for the game of golf.

I remember when I was 17 years old playing in my first US Open and my first major championship. It was at Inverness and although I missed the cut, I went out the next day and crawled on my hands and knees up the back of one tee to watch Peter Thomson and Roberto DeVicenzo tee off. At that age, when you watched the swings of great players, you could not help but go out the next day or so and emulate them. I know I did.

Peter was a terrific player and he had a game wonderfully tailored to links and seaside golf. He was very good in the wind, able to land the ball short and run it into the greens. Anyone who wins five British Opens obviously loves and understands seaside golf.

I had an opportunity to captain against Peter in the 1998 Presidents Cup. It was my first Presidents Cup and was held at Royal Melbourne in Peter's home country. He not only represented the International team well, he was such a gentleman and sportsman, and he embodied what the matches were all about. We had a great time at Royal Melbourne and it was an honor to captain against him. Unfortunately for me, Peter did a better job than I did!

Arnold Palmer: Dear Peter, It's a little hard to believe that we are both closing in on our 80th birthdays, isn't it? We have had some wonderful experiences on and off the golf courses over the years, like when we were the captains in the Presidents Cup back in 1996. That was a memorable week.

Of course I knew how fine a player you were all along, but, since you didn't play over here a great deal during your best years, a lot of American golf followers didn't know just how

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good you were. You certainly showed them when you came here several years to play the Senior Tour and had that remarkable 1985 season when you won nine times.

Let me beat you to the punch and wish you a happy 80th. Have a great day! Arnold.

Ian Baker-Finch: I was fortunate to be able to spend some time with Peter Thomson in the early 1980s as my golfing career began on the Australian Tour. Had it not been for Peter's help and guidance in those early years I would be buffing clubs in the back room of a country Queensland pro-shop as my game stunk, to say the least. Many of his important swing and shot tips and life lessons stay with me to this day and I share them with great delight. One of my most memorable weeks in golf was spent with Peter as Co-Captain of the 1996 President's Cup team. We had a great, fun week and we all learned what a true role model and leader of men he was. It is my honour to have had such a wonderful opportunity to know Peter and Mary Thomson and I owe my career to his fatherly advice and instruction. Thank you Peter and Happy 80th birthday!

Gary Player: Peter Thomson is arguably the finest golfer Australia has ever produced. Frankly, he deserves much more recognition of his achievements, not the least of which are his five British Open Championship victories. He is a prolific reader, articulate, intelligent and I have the utmost respect for him. Vivienne and I send him our best wishes for a very happy birthday.

Jack Peter, CEO World Golf Hall of Fame: "What Peter Thomson achieved in his career is that of a quintessential Hall of Famer. His achievements on the course are so stellar that you can't imagine how he went beyond that to contribute to the golfing society through course design and intelligent journalism for more than 50 years. His five Open Championships--of which three were consecutive--continue to be among the most impressive records in golf.

I hope Peter Thomson feels as proud of his achievements in golf as the World Golf Hall of Fame is proud to recognise him. It is of great importance to preserve the legacies of the legends of the game, and Peter Thomson will always have a secured spot and story told through the Hall of Fame. On behalf of the Hall of Fame members, more than 200 volunteers and staff, happy birthday to a dear friend of this grand game".

Peter Alliss: I consider Peter Thomson to be one of my dear friends from the world of golf. I first saw him on June 16th 1951, playing in the Penfold Festival of Britain tournament at the Queens Park Golf Club in Bournemouth. I had just completed my National Service and went down to the course from my father's home, which was about six miles away, to see this young "whizz kid" playing in one of the first tournaments in the UK.

In 1954-55 we spent some time together playing tournaments, in the early part of the season, in the United States. At that time he had won the first of his Open championships,

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so was someone of considerable stature.

I can't believe Peter is 80, he always played with a jaunty spirit, which I found most attractive. I don't think the Americans ever really admitted, or even considered, what a great player he was. I particularly was delighted when he went over as a Senior, setting all sorts of records, winning nine events in a season and then casually washing his hands of it, saying, "Well, that's it, you can see I can play a bit!" And I don't think he ever bothered to return, which I thought was typical of Peter Thomson.

It's been an honour to have Peter as a friend and to be part of the golfing scene when he was the height of his powers. Happy birthday, old friend – it's all very fine now but I do, in many ways, think we had the best of it!