

## Golf Historical Society



John B Jones & Billy Casper

I managed to insert myself into the company of one of the great masters of golf, Billy Casper, shortly after his induction into the 2009 SCGA Hall of Fame this past October in Universal City, Los Angeles. Billy was sitting at the center table next to USGA President Jim Vernon. Billy's acceptance speech was emotional. What would you expect? He loves his life!

He was previously inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame and PGA Hall of Fame.

Billy Casper was born in San Diego in 1931 and joined the PGA tour in 1954. Despite playing against the "Big Three" (Palmer, Nicklaus, Player) in their prime, **Billy racked up 51 wins and 3 majors**, which were **two U.S. Open's** and the **1970 Masters**. In the 1966 Open he beat Arnold Palmer in an 18 hole playoff. Casper had a deadly short game and was a prolific putter.

Billy Casper was PGA player of the year in 1966 & 1970. He won the Vardon Trophy five times. He played on eight consecutive Rider Cup teams from 1961 to 1975. He won nine more times on the Senior tour, where he added the Senior U.S. Open to his credits.

Since his days at the top of professional golf, Billy now owns and manages over 100 facilities through Billy Casper Golf.

Billy Casper won the 1968 Los Angeles Open at Brookside golf course in Pasadena. In 1969 the tour returned to Rancho after improvements to the clubhouse and to the ugly driving range. The PGA felt that the "Brookside course was not of the caliber on which a tournament of the stature of the L.A. Open should be held", despite their excellent clubhouse and parking facilities. To be fair to Brookside, which was built in the 1920's, Rancho was designed from the start as a championship golf course with ample viewing areas for the public, that have since vanished due to the abundance of overgrown trees on the course.

Here is an excerpt from an interview with Billy Casper about the Rancho Park golf course from January 1969. The # in brackets is our normal Rancho Park numbering. The pro's always played the course reversed, starting at our #10.

**"On the whole it is an exceptional course... and it is always a great experience to play it."**  
Billy Casper on Rancho Park.

No 2 (#11) - Par 4, 461 yards.

"It's quite an interesting hole. It requires a good long drive and many times I have hit a wood in to the green. But normally it's a two or three iron. In early morning, this hole plays against the wind that blows from the east, and, of course, this is when it plays at its longest. But in the afternoon the wind blows from the west and the hole plays considerably shorter.

The chances of making birdies on this hole are very limited. There are sand traps on each side of the green and it requires a well hit shot to get you on the green, because you are using a long club. I am very happy to walk to the third tee with a par on this hole.

No 5 (#14) - Par 4, 430 yards.

"This is an exceptionally good hole. From the tee, you shoot to a plateau fairway and if you hit the ball to the left you can hook it out of bounds. If you hit to the right you hit it down the side of a bank and then you must play to an elevated green that sets in the side of a hill. Although the hole is only 430 yards, you can play as much as a drive and a 3 wood at times. At other times you can play a drive and a middle or short iron. Usually you are hitting into the wind."

No 11 (#2) - Par 4, 450 yards.

"I believe this hole is very similar to the second hole. It's the type that you usually play with the wind in the afternoon and against the wind in the morning. But what makes this hole so tough is that the green is very, very small. And it's raised several feet and most of the time you are going in there with a long iron. It is very difficult to have the ball stop on the green. Many times, in order to salvage a par, you have to play a good pitch shot or a good chip shot. There are very few birdies made on this hole - unless the fairways get very hard and you are hitting a medium or a short iron to the green. In the morning against the wind, you often will have to hit a wood to a very small green."

No 12 (#3) - Par 3, 200 yards.

"This hole is always played against the wind and because of the wind it often plays longer than 200 yards. It has a rather unusual green, like a figure 8. It's long but there's not too much width to it. It's very difficult to hit."

No 17 (#8) - Par 3, 215 yards.

"This probably is one of the most important holes on the course. If you are playing well in the tournament, you usually play it late in the afternoon, and if it's a clear day the sun is setting and it is very difficult to see the pin position. From an elevated tee, you will hit any club from a 4 iron to a 4 wood against the wind. If you are in contention, you are primarily interested in making par."

No 8 & 9 (#17, #18)

"The easier holes, of course, are the five-pars. Any time you have a hole that is 500 yards plus with very little trouble, it is a potential birdie hole. I think the 4th hole (#13) also is a relatively easy hole."

Casper thought the par 3 holes at Rancho were all "exceptionally good... if you could play these four holes in even par for the tournament, you would have accomplished a lot."

[Billy Casper Golf web site](#)

US Open Story about Billy Casper



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