

The Transformative Power Of Care And Opportunity

An Interview with Gary Player, Founder, and Amanda-Leigh Player Hall, President and Executive Director, The Gary & Vivienne Player Foundation



Vivienne and Gary Player with Amanda-Leigh Player Hall (left to right)

World's Most Traveled Athlete having traveled more than 26 million kilometers. In 2016, he captained the South African Olympic Golf Team in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Amanda-Leigh Player Hall has worked in the architecture field, and as a freelance artist, but her passion lies in helping others. She served as a Spanish-speaking missionary in the U.S. and coached college level tennis as a certified professional. She worked for several years with The Gary Player Foundation as an art director – and for various other notable nonprofits.

FOUNDATION BRIEF *With the desire to support, uplift, and develop underprivileged and vulnerable children, The Gary & Vivienne Player Foundation (garyandvivienneplayerfoundation.org) was first established on the Player's estate outside of Johannesburg in South Africa and now serves children in need in both the U.S. and S.A. Building on their legacy, Gary and Vivienne Player have devoted their life's work to making a difference in communities and to individuals- they remain committed to protecting and enriching the lives of precious youth and will continue to do so in every way possible*

EDITORS' NOTE Gary Player has won 167 professional golf tournaments worldwide and is one of only five men to capture golf's coveted career Grand Slam. He won nine Major championships on the PGA Tour and nine Major championships on the Senior Tour and is the only player in history to complete the career Grand Slam on both Tours. Off the course, Player has raised approximately \$100 million dollars for underprivileged children's education globally through the efforts of The Gary & Vivienne Player Foundation and the Gary Player Invitational series in South Africa, China, U.S.A., U.K., U.A.E., and Japan; he has designed nearly 400 golf courses worldwide; he has bred more than 2,000 winning racehorses on the Gary Player Stud Farm in the Great Karoo of South Africa; and in recognition of his achievements in golf as well as his dedication to charity, Player has received numerous awards including the Laureus Lifetime Achievement Award and the PGA Tour's Lifetime Achievement Award. He currently serves as the Global Ambassador to the World Golf Hall of Fame and has been dubbed the Black Knight, Mr. Fitness, and The



Family photo with Jack and Barbara Nicklaus at GVPF event

Gary, where did your passion for the sport of golf develop and what do you feel were the keys to the success you achieved in your career?

In South Africa, golf has always been a popular sport and has produced more major champions, post-WWII, than any other country other than the United States of America – 23 major champions, which is remarkable for a country of our size. We have hundreds of golf courses and the best climate in the world, so it's conducive to people playing the sport. My father was a man who worked in a gold mine, as a poor man, 8,000 feet under the ground. He got me to start playing golf, even taking out a bank loan to buy my first set of clubs, thank goodness. I've enjoyed this great sport so much and I've had such an epic journey. It's enabled me to travel more miles than any human being in the world. I don't know how to be thankful enough. Golf has done so much for me and enabled me to get a proper balance in life. The keys to my past successes are numerous. Obviously, having a sharp mind, treating my body like a holy temple, enjoying punishment and adversity have been instrumental in my journey.

The fact remains that being on your own in hotels for months at a time away from loved ones is not easy. You've got to keep persisting no matter the obstacle. You need to read and become well-versed from lessons of the great leaders of the past and how they succeeded in life. My favorite example is Sir Winston Churchill, and there are countless reasons he was such a tremendous leader for the world.

Those striving to achieve success must be patient. You've got to exercise which helps your body as well as your mind. And no doubt, you have to practice hard. But the main reason comes deep within. This is called "It." The ones who have "It" become superstars, and to be a superstar, you have to win six majors or more. There have only been 15 players in the history



Gary Player after receiving the Medal of Freedom award



Gary Player and Amanda-Leigh Player Hall with Jasmine Walker from ECS Out of School Time program (center)

of golf that have won six majors or more. And that's a gift from the Man Above.

I also must mention the role my late wife, Vivienne, played in my career. She was a fantastic golfer herself and was really the only person I took advice from about my game. She sacrificed so much for our family with me being away playing in tournaments. My career would have simply been impossible without her by my side.

When you look back at your golf career, what are you most proud of?

What I'm most proud of in my golfing prowess is that I've won the most professional golf tournaments – and I've won all over the world – not just in one or two countries. My goal early on was to be a true world champion of golf. And when I won them, I had to travel by plane, sometimes just Vivienne and myself with all six children. There were no luxury private jets. It used to take us 40 hours from South Africa to America. Traveling with a lot of children was extremely hard, but was just normal at that time.

Secondly, I'm the only man who's won the Grand Slam on the Regular Tour and the Senior Tour. And I've won more national titles – US Open, Open Championship, South African Open, Australian Open – than Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and Tiger Woods put together. So, those are the things that I've been most proud about.

But above all of that, not related to golf, is that I was awarded the Medal of Freedom from the American government, their highest civilian honor. It meant so much to me because I had to battle and overcome adversity every step of the way. South Africa had an apartheid system and I was demonstrated against. Many people threatened my life for years around the world. In fact, in the PGA Championship in Dayton, Ohio, they threw ice in my eyes, telephone books on my back, charged me on the green, and screamed on my short putts – and I still only lost by one shot. Then I came back to South Africa and sponsored golfers to go overseas, Black golfers, that is, and I resigned from

the PGA because they wouldn't put two Black gentlemen on our PGA committee, so it was a battle against apartheid.

What was your vision for creating The Gary & Vivienne Player Foundation in the U.S. and how do you define its mission?

It was very easy to decide on our Foundation's key pillars because I struggled like a junkyard dog as a kid. Seeing other people suffering, I said, "One day, when I become a champion – and I didn't know I would become a champion golfer, but I was determined to become a champion at something – that I would change the lives of people." That's the great thrill that I've had to raise and continue to strive for. Just between Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and myself, we have raised hundreds of millions of dollars in our lives for changing the lives of people.

I decided to start The Gary and Vivienne Player Foundation, which my daughter runs for us in Philadelphia. This is for America only. America has always been a Good Samaritan of the world and helps people, but one also must understand that in America, one out of every six children live below the poverty line. More money must be put into helping the youth of America. One of my favorite quotes is by Benjamin Disraeli – "The youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity." Let's build up the youth of America so it stays number one. It's very difficult to stay number one, and there needs to be a concerted effort from the top down. I know any help our Foundation can give will be much appreciated. We have a board, because with a foundation, you have to have top businessmen and top businesswomen, people who really know how to run affairs, to make a difference and also keep a strict eye to control expenses.

Amanda, will you provide an overview of the Foundation's initiatives?

The mission of The GVPF is to ensure that underprivileged and vulnerable children have a safe and nurturing environment in which to



Gary and Vivienne on their first date at the age of 14

thrive. Our vision is to help break the chains of intergenerational poverty through education, health, and housing. For example, we've partnered with Place of Hope to provide stable housing and mentoring for children in foster care and supported Elevate's efforts to improve literacy rates in underserved communities. These initiatives embody our commitment to creating lasting change.

What interested you in leading The Gary & Vivienne Player Foundation and how do you focus your efforts in the role?

I have always been passionate about serving those less fortunate. Growing up in South Africa, I was surrounded by poverty which instilled a lifelong commitment to service. At 21, I worked as a missionary in the inner cities of New York and New Jersey, witnessing firsthand the transformative power of care and opportunity. These experiences deeply inform my work today as President and Executive Director of The GVPF. In this role, I wear many hats, but my greatest passion is working with the nonprofits we support and volunteering with them to understand their needs. Loving and serving the children is where my heart lies, and it guides how we plan impactful events and build partnerships with individuals and corporations to sustain our mission.

Will you highlight your career journey?

The greatest privilege and opportunity in my life is helping my parents run The Gary and Vivienne Player Foundation. Building upon their lifelong dedication to philanthropy, I have the honor of ensuring my father's golfing legacy – and their shared legacy of lifting and loving those less fortunate – continues into perpetuity. With a background in mission work and nonprofit leadership, I've been able to channel my passion for service into growing and sustaining our mission.

Gary, what are the keys to driving lasting change in the Foundation's efforts to help lift children out of poverty in the United States and South Africa?

To lift children out of poverty is our main goal, and this is done through love. We give children love they might not already have and love can come in many different forms. So many children have no love in their lives. They might not have a mother, a father, a brother, a sister, a grandfather, or a grandmother. So, we must

make sure that they have love in their hearts. Secondly, we've got to give them a home, a place to live, a place in the sun to grow. We've got to make them feel they're wanted. And we've got to educate them. Education is the light. The country that's the best educated will end up the best country in the world, eventually. That's absolutely imperative. So, there are a lot of things we need to improve upon. Children need a great education, and this is something that can only be done by people making a very big effort over a long period of time.

We've got an American system of education in the schools that needs to be improved across the board. When I think of South Africa and our schools, we're way ahead of America. The students learn to speak four or five languages. They are taught about world affairs. A small thing, but they stand up when the teacher comes into the classroom as a sign of respect. This is something I hope comes back under the next U.S. administration.

Though the people of America are divided, I hope all can agree we have to do something to make the overall education system improve. Parents will be absolutely happy when we have discipline in the schools, and we can go from strength to strength.

Amanda, how critical are metrics to measure the impact of the Foundation's work?

The statistic that one in six children in this country lives in poverty is startling, underscoring the importance of finding ways to break the cycle. Data shows that education, health, and stable housing are critical pathways to achieving this. While love and stability are difficult to measure, we focus on key indicators like literacy, graduation rates, and career persistence. By partnering with organizations such as Elevate, Gantry Group, and Place of Hope, we ensure children are mentored and supported through



Gary Player embracing a child who received needed sports equipment from Good Sports

life-changing opportunities. These metrics guide our decisions and help us maximize the impact of our resources to break cycles of poverty and empower future generations.

Gary, what has made philanthropy so important to you and was giving back instilled in you at an early age?

Because when you suffer, you see, one has always got to say to yourself, if you hear of somebody with problems, how would that affect me? How would I like it if it was my child? Not just turn the page and forget about it – give it some thought and discover how you can help. Most of the people in America are so fortunate. America is a land of milk and honey, but we've still got to make a concerted effort to change the lives of people less fortunate. The way you do that is by people being dedicated and using their resources to raise money that will make a long-term impact. America has been the Great Samaritan since I've been coming here for more than 70 years. I've seen a big change. Now, we've got to make this effort – a special effort – to help the young people of this great country.

With all that you have accomplished in your golf career and with the impact that the Foundation has made, are you able to take moments to reflect and appreciate how you have affected so many lives?

I often ponder and think about this – how have we been able to make this change, for example, for the organizations that the Gary and Vivienne Player Foundation partners with. I am happy to know we have changed the lives of thousands of young people, but our work is far from over. Philanthropy is work that is never finished.

Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and myself have changed the lives of millions of people around the world. I often sit back and think how lucky I am that God has given me the opportunity to change the lives of all these people. I know what it is to suffer, and I don't want to see any young people in America suffer. I don't want to see it at all because it's unnecessary. So, I do think back, and the word that comes to mind is gratitude – I'm so grateful to be in this position. I say a prayer every day of my life of gratitude that I'm able to make a difference in people's lives. We all have a debt to society. Anybody who can afford it should make an effort to change the lives of young people.

Amanda, what are your priorities for The Gary & Vivienne Player Foundation as you look to the future?

Although I want to believe my dad will live forever, my priority is ensuring we grow and secure the resources to enable The GVPF to continue this vital work in my parents' name for generations to come. I dream of a legacy that goes far beyond golf records – a legacy cemented in the lives of children whose futures are transformed through love, care, and opportunity. My focus is on expanding our partnerships, increasing our donor base, and building sustainable initiatives so that we can reach even more children and families in need. This is how we will honor my parents' vision and ensure their impact continues to grow. ●