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Hale Irwin

Irwin teams with mentor to push U.S. Senior Open

Ticket sales for the 2008 event went on sale Monday.

By **JOE E. CERVI**
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

COLORADO SPRINGS - Golf has been far better to Hale Irwin than football.

And he has golf pro emeritus Dow Finsterwald to thank.

Finsterwald, the legendary director of golf at the Broadmoor, took Irwin under his wing after he finished his football career at the University of Colorado.

The two golf legends were reunited Monday to launch ticket sales for the 2008 U.S. Senior Open.

"After getting the stuffing beat out of me playing football, I came to the Broadmoor in the spring of 1965 and asked Dow one thing: Do I have the game to play professional golf?" Irwin said. "He took me to the range and asked if I could hit a draw, so I hit one. Then he asked if I could hit a fade, so I hit one. He was the guy who believed in me and is responsible for getting my career started."

Irwin, who won the U.S. Open in 1974, '79 and 1990, and Senior Opens in 1998 and 2000, is the honorary chairman of the Open at the Broadmoor. He hit a ceremonial first shot Monday - from the veranda of the dining room three stories high to a green 76 yards away - and unveiled the championship's ticket.

"Why do they always show me hitting out of the sand?" Irwin joked as his blast out of the bunker is a picture on the official ticket.

Irwin has 20 PGA Tour victories and 45 more on the Champions Tour. He is scheduled to compete at the Broadmoor, as are recognizable names like Tom Watson, Mark O'Meara, Greg Norman, Craig Stadler, Nick Price, Nick Faldo and Seve Ballesteros.

Because the International folded two months ago, the void in professional golf in Colorado will be filled in 2008.

"Colorado is naked without professional golf," Irwin said. "Colorado deserves professional golf. Players overwhelmingly enjoy playing in the state of Colorado."

Championship director Douglas Habgood said the U.S. Golf Association had a good working relationship with the International and was saddened by its sudden demise. That said, Habgood also said his championship already has benefitted.

"We hope people are hungry for (professional) golf in 2008," Habgood said. "We have already received commitments from many of the International's volunteers and we think we're going to eclipse any attendance record of previous Senior Opens."

Tickets for the championship officially went on sale Monday. There is a variety of ticket options and they can be purchased at TicketsWest or any King Soopers, or by calling 877-281-OPEN.

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