



## PRESS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**ATTENTION: NEWS/ENTERTAINMENT**  
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### **Gary Player's Own Childhood Poverty Inspires Charitable Work**

On **Sunday, October 27**, just five days before his 78th birthday, international golf champion, sport ambassador and philanthropist Gary Player shows why he remains an inspiration for millions of people across the world. Player, one of the greatest golfers of all time and a man who has raised millions of dollars for the education of underprivileged children, is the first athlete to feature in **21 Icons South Africa**, which showcases extraordinary South Africans who have lived inspirational lives. The episode will be screened at 6.57pm on SABC3, and a portrait of Player by photographer and filmmaker Adrian Steirn will be published in the Sunday Times.

As Steirn remarks in the episode: "Gary Player would have been successful at anything he chose to do." Turning pro at the age of 17, a mere three years after he started playing golf, Player has racked up more than 165 professional wins, including nine majors, in a career spanning six decades and as many continents. He has been called the world's most travelled athlete, clocking more than 25 million kilometers, and his dedication to fitness and a healthy diet is world renowned. In fact, ESPN The Magazine chose a nude Player this year for the cover of its annual Body Issue, an honour which, according to its website, goes to "athletes who have pushed their physiques to profound frontiers".

"Have you done any sit-ups today?" Steirn asks Player as they prepare for the 21 Icons photo shoot. "Not today," Player answers, "but I did eleven hundred last night."

The thoroughbred racehorse breeder explains his longevity — and exceptional energy — thus: "If you stay fit and you watch your diet and you stay lean, you're going to last longer. You know, in the racehorse business they say 'the longer the race, the

leaner the horse', and that applies to life. If you stay lean, you're going to live longer; the less you eat, the longer you'll live."

Player ascribes his success to his never-give-up attitude. When he decided to turn pro at 17, everyone, including his father, thought he was crazy. "But I was never influenced by what other people thought," he says. "I just believed I could do it, and I want to tell young people that you're the one who's got to believe it. Other people can't decide for you — you've got to believe it. And if you have a problem in life, nobody's going to solve it except you. I've seen so many potentially great players who could have been great had they had the right attitude. It's really 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it."

Of course, Player has also been successful because of old-fashioned hard work. "I always worked harder than everybody else," he says. "There was no entitlement in my life whatsoever. I woke up and I practised every morning at 6 o'clock and I finished every night at 7 o'clock. I practised all day long, every day, and exercised. It was a very insular life, but to become a world champion you have to sacrifice a lot of things."

Spending time with his family is one of the things he had to sacrifice, he reveals in 21 Icons. "I have missed my family a lot and been deprived of that, which is the saddest thing," says Player, who has nevertheless been blessed with a long and happy marriage. He married wife Vivienne in 1957 and they had six children, and today they are the proud grandparents of 22 grandchildren.

"You've got to try to fill your life with love," says Player. "I think that's the essential ingredient, because if you fill your life with love you have respect for everybody, and then you receive love."

Steirn's portrait of Player was taken on the small golf course on his farm near Colesberg in the Northern Cape. It will be auctioned at the end of **21 Icons South Africa** and the proceeds donated to The Player Foundation. Having a social conscience is important



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to Player, who established The Player Foundation with Marc Player, Black Knight International CEO, in 1983 to provide quality education, nutrition, medical care and extracurricular activities to impoverished children both in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. Through the annual Gary Player Invitational charity series staged in the US, Asia, Europe and South Africa, the Foundation has raised more than \$50 million for the cause.

“I was very poor,” says Player. “I had a very difficult childhood with my mother dying when I was eight and my brother going to war and my father working on a mine. I can vividly remember saying as a schoolboy, well, if I ever do well in life, one thing I’m definitely going to do is help underprivileged people. This has been the great thrill of my life — that I’m able to go around the world raising money for underprivileged children and to see how much one changes their lives.”

Public participation is invited on **Twitter: @21icons;**  
**[www.21icons.com](http://www.21icons.com)** and  
**[www.facebook.com/21icons](http://www.facebook.com/21icons)**.

**21 ICONS South Africa** is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa, Nikon and Deloitte and supported by The Department of Arts & Culture as a nation-building initiative.

#### **PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS**

Sporting great and philanthropist Gary Player reveals to Adrian Steirn how he almost did not take up golf – “the sport for sissies” and why he has managed to his sporting talent into an international empire that has benefited thousands of impoverished children.

#### **PHOTOGRAPH DETAILS**

Shot on the Gary Player Stud Farm near Colesberg, Northern Cape, Adrian Steirn’s portrait of Gary Player shows him standing in front of a sign promoting the “Colesberg Open”, which references his beloved hometown. Normally clad in his Black Knight golfing attire, on this rare occasion Player agreed to dress in an old-fashioned golfer’s outfit.

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On behalf of **21 ICONS South Africa**

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