

INTERVIEW

The flamboyant star
on his life in golf



WORLD EXCLUSIVE



BUBBA!

'Why I've never had a lesson'

'The reasons I'm so emotional'

'What it's like driving the General Lee'

'Why I bought Tiger's house'

'That shot at the 2012 Masters'

Interview Michael McEwan *Photos* Getty Images/Supplied

There are many words you could use to describe Bubba Watson. 'Conventional' is most certainly not one of them. A winner of five titles in nine years on the PGA Tour - including the Masters in 2012 - Watson has always done things differently, both on and off the course. By his own admission, he's a little bit goofy, a little bit crazy. He's also endearingly honest, candid, and, above all, really good fun. But, look beyond that laid back, fun-loving exterior and you'll find a gritty competitor who is determined to be the best golfer he can be. He is, in short, worth getting to know a little better...

Let's cut to the chase, Bubba: I can't think of another player who has won a major without ever having had a lesson. Have you really never had one?

No, never. Never in my life. My dad taught me the basics with a cut-down club when I was about six-years-old. He showed me how to grip it and then told me just to start hitting balls as best and as hard as I could. I've pretty much done that ever since.

Have any coaches ever tried to offer you advice?

Ha! No, they stay far away from me. I think I probably scare them a little bit! *[laughs]* Seriously, though, I've got some friends who are coaches but they've never tried to teach me or offer me advice or anything like that. I think they know that I do things a bit differently and they respect that enough not to interfere with it.

What do you think when you see players working on their games on the range with their coaches?

I don't really think about it. At the end of the day, we're all different. What's good for some people, is bad for others. A lot of the guys I'm friends with on tour like to see what they're doing on video, and get really into the technical stuff. They like to be able to see their positions and where they are at this point or that point. For me, it's not like that. It's more about feel and watching where the shots go. The ball flight and direction of my shots tell me everything I need to know about what I'm doing. That's not to say I look at guys with their coaches and think they're funny. Well, I guess I would if they were teaching them something that was completely, obviously wrong. But, like I say, there's no one, single method that works.

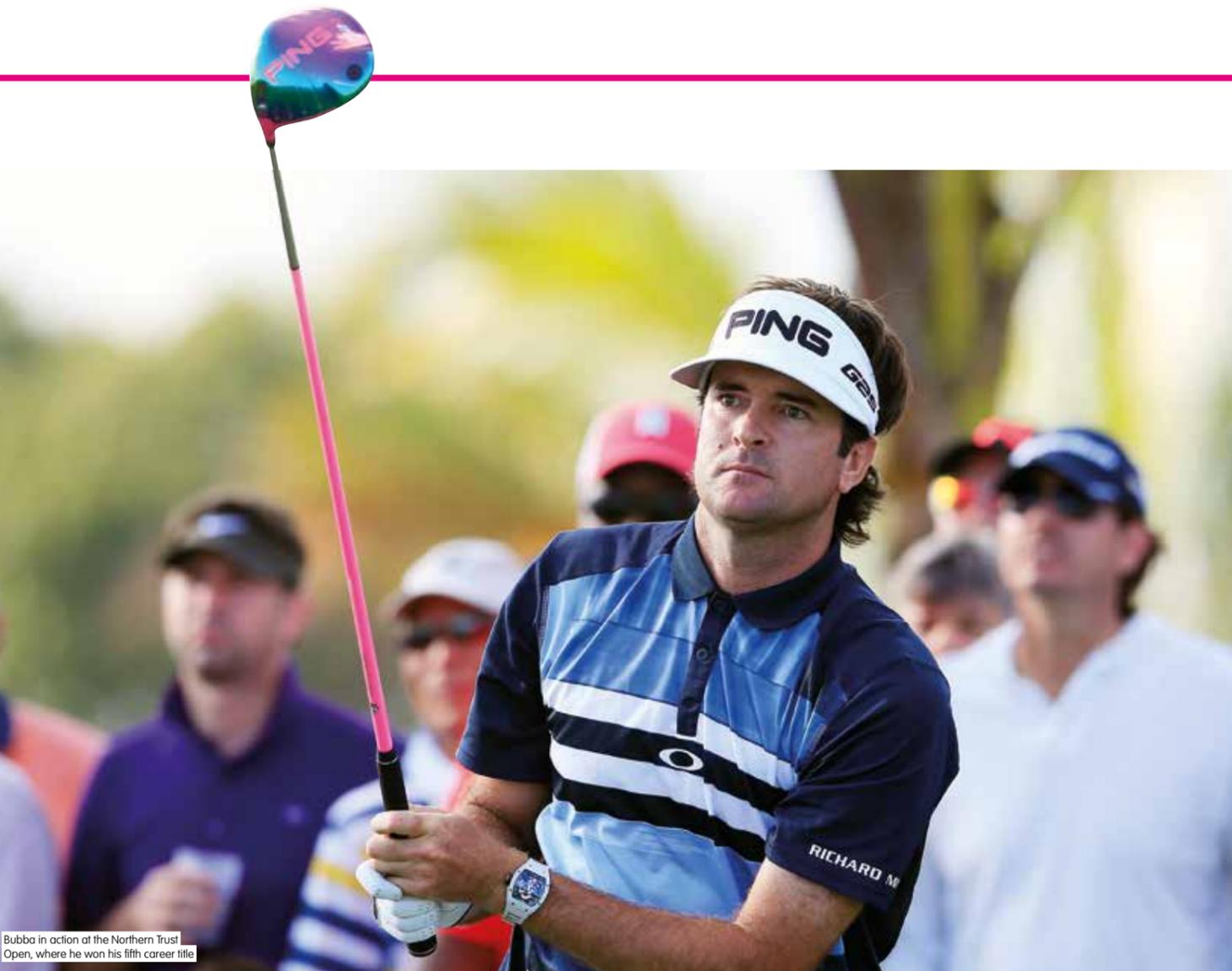
'I've got some friends who are coaches but they've never tried to teach me. I think they know I do things a bit differently.'

You say you play the game largely by feel, so what do you do when something goes wrong? How do you start to fix it?

Well, it won't surprise you I don't start working on technical stuff! No, for me, if I hit a bad shot, it's because I've made a mental error and that's the thing I probably have to work on more than anything else. You know, if I'm thinking about a bunker that might be in play, or a lake, or a big patch of rough, or three-putting - if I'm doing any of those things, then I'm not doing the right stuff. I've got to be 100% committed over every shot and not lose focus for a single second. I think, as time has gone on, I've got better at doing that and I think that's also why I've never really been in a slump. I'm not changing anything technical, which can take a lot of time; I'm just re-focusing and preparing myself better mentally.

Let's talk about your Masters win in 2012. Do you see that as having been the most pivotal point in your career so far?

You know what? I look back at that whole week and, man, I don't - I don't even really know what that was! It was a dream come true. It was the dream of all dreams. I remember I'd been having a good week and my mental preparation had been just right, so, when I got up on Sunday morning, I said to myself, 'Okay, let's just have a strong finish.' I wasn't really that nervous. I just wanted to give myself the best chance possible to win. No-one really took off at first in the final round - well, maybe except Louis [Oosthuizen] who had that 'two' at the [par-5] second - so, when I got to the turn, I realised I had a chance. Still, I never got ahead of myself, I never lost focus and stayed



Bubba in action at the Northern Trust Open, where he won his fifth career title

committed to playing every shot as best as I could. In the end, it proved good enough to get into a play-off.

Then there was that shot from the trees on the second extra hole to set up your win. Tell me about that.

Well, the lie was pretty good for a start. It was on the pine straw but it was a clean lie and was sitting nicely. The wind was blowing a little bit from left to right, which suited the shape I was trying to hit, and it was set-up for a hook, which is the easiest shot for me. So, really, I couldn't have asked for a better situation. It was perfect. Obviously, where the shot ended up was amazing, like 12 feet from the hole or whatever it was, but, my caddie and me, we were just trying to get it on the green. The fact we got it so close was a bonus. It's funny, my buddies back home have seen me play that shot so many times before. That big high hook, they've seen it a ton of times, so they don't really think

it's that special any more. But I guess on TV, to set up the chance to win the greatest golf tournament in the world, I suppose I can see why people think it was pretty cool. *[laughs]* Particularly for a guy named Bubba from Bagdad! *[laughs]*

You said you hadn't really been nervous during the final round but tell me, what was going through your head when you had the putt to win in the play-off?

Well, the first thing I noticed was that it was going to break a couple of feet, so all I was thinking about at first was lagging it up close enough to the hole that I could have a tap-in. I'd had a similar kind of putt earlier in the day, so I tried hard to focus on that and just concentrate on getting the right speed so that I could nudge it home. I did a pretty good job, got it to eight inches or something but, if you look back at the footage, you see that I motion for everyone to be quiet before I tapped

in. That's because I hadn't finished the job yet. Yeah, for sure, you'd expect to hole out from eight inches every time but I wanted to go through my routine properly and be safe because, you know, there was a Green Jacket riding on it. So, yeah, I was very careful and tried to just concentrate on getting that ball in the hole.

It was obviously a hugely emotional win for you. What do you think when you watch back footage of that winning moment?

You know, any time you win a golf tournament there are a ton of emotions. When you win a major, you can multiply that by whatever number you like. There was just so much that went through my head all at that one instant. I thought of my wife, my mum who was there, my dad who sadly passed away a couple of years earlier, and then I had my friends - like Rickie [Fowler], Ben [Craney], and Aaron [Baddeley] - all come →

NEED TO KNOW

ALL OF BUBBA'S VITAL STATISTICS

PERSONAL

Full Name
Gerry Lester Watson, Jr
D.O.B.
November 5, 1978
Birthplace
Bagdad, Florida
Lives
Isleworth, Florida
Family
Wife: Angie; Son: Caleb
Twitter
@BubbaWatson

CAREER

Turned pro
2001
PGA Tour wins
2010: Travelers C'ship
2011: Farmers Insurance Open, Zurich Classic of New Orleans
2012: The Masters
2014: Northern Trust Open
Teams
Ryder Cup: 2010, 2012
Presidents Cup: 2011
Career Earnings
\$21,631,925 (36th on PGA Tour Career Money List)
Sponsors
PING, EA Sports, Oakley, Kentwool, Richard Mille, The Greenbrier Resort, Titleist.

IN THE BAG

Driver
Ping G25, 8.5°
3-wood
Ping G25, 16.5°
Irons (3-PW)
Ping 555
Wedges
Ping Tour (52°, 56°); Ping Tour-S T/S (64°)
Putter
Ping Anser Milled 1





1 A tearful Bubba is embraced by his mother, Mollie, after winning the Masters in 2012 2 Getting ready to pull off *that* shot 3 Being helped into his Green Jacket by 2011 champ Charl Schwartzel



→ rushing down the hill to celebrate with me. It was overwhelming. And then, in the middle of all this, I suddenly had a thought for a pro back home in Bagdad, a left-hander, who gave me my first ever club - a 9-iron - when I was a kid all those years ago. Knowing that he was sitting at home, watching with his wife and kids... it was a lot to process. Very emotional.

One of the things I think people like about you is the fact that you're not afraid to show your emotions. Do you think more players ought to be like that?

Yeah, you know, going back when I was a kid, I had a dream to make it on the PGA Tour. That's all I wanted to do. Be a pro golfer, play on tour. Then you get out there and all you want to do is win. Then you want to win majors. Then you want to be the best in the world. Then you want to be one of the best who ever lived. Before you know where you are, you've lost that little kid inside you who was happy just to be on tour. So, I take nothing for granted. My next win could be my last win. I could have already had it. I hope not, but you don't know. So, for everything I've had out of this game so far, I'm just really grateful

and so blessed. To win, that's just incredible. To win a major, when there are only four a year and when you think of all of the great players who've never managed to do that, that's even better. But, for me, my dreams come true every time I play and I guess that's also where my emotion comes from. I expect nothing so, when I get something special, it's amazing.

Despite your success, you seem very humble, very down to earth. Is that a fair description?

Well, I don't know if I could describe myself as humble - I don't think I'd be very humble if I did! *[laughs]* But, yeah, I try to give back as much as I can. Golf has given my family and me so much that it would be wrong not to put something back in. When you reach a certain level, you have to give back. So, my wife Angie and I do a lot of charity work and I also try to help out with junior golf where I can. It's funny, I think

'Now I'm a dad, golf doesn't mean as much to me as it did before.'

back to when I was growing up. Junior events were mostly free and that's the only reason I got all the opportunities that I did. So, I want to give back and give others those same opportunities. And I think it's also really important to do what I can for the military. Those people who serve are the reason that we get to play golf in a safe environment. I have so much respect for them.

It was nice seeing you celebrate your Northern Trust Open win with your little boy. How much has being a father changed your life?

So much. Like, more than I can explain. I'm still crazy and goofy like before. That hasn't changed. But... how can I put this... golf doesn't mean as much to me as it did before. You know, I don't know if you know this but golfers like to pout. A lot. And I was particularly good at it. If I three-putted, it used to really get to me. Now, it doesn't matter because Caleb doesn't care if I've had a good day or a bad day. I mean, sure, if he sees me come home with a trophy, he knows daddy's done good *[laughs]*. But if I'm playing good or bad, he still cheers and that makes it hit home to you that golf is just a game. Things happen →

→ in your life to show you what's important. Golf? Sure, it's important. But my wife and my son are my rocks. They are the most important things of all. So, now, if I hit a bad shot, I've just got to suck it up and move on because I have to be a good role model for my son. I don't want him growing up and seeing me pouting.

Of course, behind every good man is an even better woman. You've found that with Angie, haven't you?

For sure. I'm so lucky that, one, she liked me back. That was kinda important. *[laughs]* But she's a pro athlete, too, and played basketball so she really gets what life is like for me. She understands what energy I need to be successful and what dedication is required. She knows when I'm tired, when I'm down, when I'm drained. And more than that, she understands what it is I'm feeling. She knows how to be to help make me be the best I can be. She's incredible.

You and your wife have overcome a lot. In fact, I think I'm right in saying that, on your first date, she told you she couldn't have kids. Has everything you've gone through off the course given you a different

perspective on life on it?

Absolutely. Look, when I started out, I was seriously young and seriously dumb. I thought I was going to be one of the best golfers ever. But Angie has helped me grow. You know, it's easy to say we've been through a lot together, because we have. But what's more important is what we've learned together. We've learned how to travel, how to practice, how to have a successful marriage whilst living on tour. And since becoming parents, we've had to learn everything all over again to create the right environment for Caleb. We've had to re-learn how to travel, how to pack for being away several weeks in a row, work out which hotels are right for him, and so on. So, it has been a constant learning process but a great one, too.

As well as being a family man, you're also a bit of a cult figure. Do you see yourself like that, as someone who does things differently?

[laughs] Yeah, I definitely do things differently but I think that's because of the way I grew up. I learned to play golf on my own with no-one standing over me saying, 'This is right' or 'That's wrong'. And you know what? It's →



WHY 'BUBBA'?

Some nicknames are easy to figure out. But how do you get from 'Gerry' to 'Bubba'? Apparently, the answer lies in American Football. When Bubba was born, he was a bit of a chubby baby and so his dad instantly nicknamed him 'Bubba' after former Gridiron star, Bubba Smith, *pictured above*. A winner of the Superbowl back in 1970, Smith was one of the bigger players of his generation - standing 6'7" and weighing in at nearly 19 stone - so, when Bubba's dad Gerry saw him, he nicknamed him after Smith almost instantly. The rest, as they say, is history.



1 With wife Angie and son Caleb after winning the Northern Trust Open 2 Bubba's 'selfie' headcover 3 Holing an important putt in the 2012 Ryder Cup

BUBBA'S CAUSE

In January this year, Bubba and wife Angie launched the Bubba Watson Foundation. Its mission is to enhance the everyday lives of people in need, with a particular emphasis on helping and inspiring children, young adults, and those associated with the US military. Interested in finding out more? Log-on to bubbawatsonfoundation.org



→ got me this far so it must be okay. For me, it's always been about taking the road that most people don't. It's been a constant 'off the wall' existence but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Some say you don't win enough. Is it nice to ram those words down their throats when you do win?

Nah, it's funny, I've been asked about this before and, you know, for me, I'm just honoured to be on the PGA Tour. I've been real lucky and, somehow, I've managed to win five times in nine years, one of them a major. I'd like to win the Ryder Cup but you guys don't seem to want to let that happen, so... [laughs]. But, yeah, like I said before, I don't take anything for granted and, likewise, I can't let what other people think affect me. Why? Because when I'm gone, I don't want to be remembered as a golfer. I want to be remembered as a person, a husband, and a dad. Golf's just what I do, it's not who I am. When I lost in Phoenix this year, a reporter asked me how it felt. I said, 'Hey, only one guy was able to beat me this week, so that's not bad. All I can do is try to go one better next week.'

Let's talk equipment. Our editor has held your clubs at the PING HQ in Phoenix and says he has never seen bigger grips.

That sounds about right. It kind of goes right back to how I started to learn the game. I've got a real strong grip so, rather than get lessons or change my grip, I just made my grips as big as I could. It suits me much better that way and, it's funny, a lot of people who see my grips like the look of them, and even more so when they actually get them in their hands. Like I say, it's not something that would work for everyone but, for me, it works just fine. And, you know, golfers are getting bigger all the time. There are guys on tour now who are 6'4", 6'5" and so on. Would they benefit from having grips like mine? Maybe.

It's rumoured that you don't really know the specs of your wedges, that you don't know their lofts or lies. Is that true?

I know my lofts but not my lies. What usually happens is I find something that I like and then I just tell the guys what I'd like fixed to make it perfect. What they do, I don't know. They might bend it a degree this way or that way, I don't really know, but they seem to make it work! I just let them do their thing. In general, though, I'm not massively clued-up on my specs.

People say to me, 'Hey, Bubba, how heavy is the shaft in your driver?' I dunno. Or the other day, I was playing in a charity event and a guy asked me how much loft I have on my putter. I was like, 'Putters have loft?' So, I called up my guys and they said it's about four degrees. I told the guy and he was like, 'Oh really, four', like it was the most amazing thing in the world.

Are you a bit of a gear nut? Are you the sort of player who can't wait to see the newest PING clubs, or are you not really too fussed?

I've actually just switched my irons. I'd been playing the last ones for about ten years but PING made these new ones and I liked the look of them, so I tried them on the range, loved them, and they've gone straight in my bag. With my driver, though, I always put the new one in play because it's always better than the last one.

What about things away from golf. Let's say you miss a cut on Friday - what do you do on the weekend?

It kind of depends where we are. If we're in San Diego, for example, there's so much to do there, from the beach, to the zoo, to the aquarium. If we're somewhere in the world that has good sightseeing, it's nice to get out and see what there is to see. Like China. I loved it out there. But if I'm close to home and Angie and Caleb aren't with me, I'll go home to them.

The videos you make have really caught the imagination, too.

Yeah, they're just a bit of fun and a way for me to interact with people. More often than not, the only place people see golfers is on the TV at tournaments where they're being boring, or slow, or not really showing their fun side. Lee Trevino and Rocco Mediate have always been good at showing off their personalities whilst playing but it's pretty rare. So, yeah, my videos are just a good way to show off my goofy side and have some fun with my fans. It's just a

good, fun way to show people that there's more to you than just golf.

I think people like the fact that you do things like that, though, and that you're so accessible. You seem to get how important the fans are.

Yeah, absolutely. People talk about growing the game. Well, the fans make the game. So, if people stumble across one of my videos and decide to follow me at an event, or on TV, or even pick up a club and try swinging it, then it's been worthwhile. You never know who you're going to influence.



Bubba's ride... the General Lee from *Dukes of Hazzard*

Tell me, what's it like opening your garage and seeing the General Lee sitting there?

[laughs] It's pretty neat. Every time I see it, I love it just as much as the first time. Think about it: it's a car, made for jumping, that's been on TV, in one of the biggest shows of its generation - that's pretty cool, right? My dad and I used to watch *Dukes Of Hazzard* when I was a kid, so when the opportunity came up to buy the first car ever made for the show, I had to have it. It's in mint condition, too. Is it hard to drive? Nah, just cool! [laughs]

Also, I believe you bought your house in Isleworth from Tiger. Tell me about that sale.

Yeah, well, Tiger and I are pretty busy

and so we just let our people deal with it all. But we're friends and I've shown him pictures of what we've done with the place. We pretty much bought it for Caleb. He's got three separate playrooms in the house, so he's done pretty well out of it! [laughs]

You button your shirt up to the top. What's the reason behind that?

When I swing the club, I feel everything. So, when I was a kid, if my collar was loose, I could feel it moving all across my neck and it was distracting. So I buttoned it up. Now,

I'm probably used to it, but I've got a pretty hairy chest so I think it's best I keep that thing covered up!

And, finally, will there be another Golf Boys video some time soon?

We've got no plans right now and you know why? The new wrap-around schedule. It's a year-round tour these days, so we haven't had time to make anything new. The ones we did before, we did in the off-season but we don't really have that anymore, so we don't have the chance.

You should ask Tim Finchem to bring back a proper off-season.

Maybe I should! Or I could go solo. Yeah, maybe it's time I started my solo career. That'd be fun! [laughs]

BAGDAD: BACK TO BUBBA'S BACKYARD

Bubba Watson's journey to the PGA Tour began by hitting golf balls around his mum and dad's back garden in the small town of Bagdad, Florida. Described in the past by Watson as 'a little piece of heaven', it covers a small area of roughly 4.2sq/m

and has a population of around 2,000. Naturally, locals are hugely proud of Watson. So much so that, shortly after his Masters victory in 2012, plans were unveiled to re-name the town's main street 'Bubba Watson Road' in honour of its most famous son's

achievement. Before Watson came along, the town - founded in 1842 - was most famous for being the original home of Mary B's Biscuits and Dumplings. It also once flourished as a mill town, which exported native pine wood all over the USA.

