

My Diamond Anniversary In Golf

By Bob Hope

Golf is a great game. I've been at it for 60 years, and a little more if you count my first aborted stab at it. Back when I started playing the game seriously in the spring of 1930, the only people who made real money from it were chiropractors.

Most golfers started playing the game because it looked interesting. I thought it was boring. But I also thought it would be less boring than what I was doing - sitting around hotel lobbies between vaudeville shows.

Why did golf bore me? Well, as I confessed to Dwayne Netland in our book for Doubleday, "Bob Hope's Confessions of a Hooker: My Lifelong Love Affair with Golf," the first time I tried the game I was a total failure. That happened in 1927, when I was 24 years old. It was at Highland Park, a public course in Cleveland, OH, the town where I grew up. I understand some of you readers manage public golf courses, and my hat's off to you for making golf available to the general public. Unfortunately for me, I was one member of the public who wasn't yet ready for golf.

I couldn't even advance the ball. Some shots I'd whiff, some I'd just scuff along the ground. I just didn't seem to have any feel for the game, so I said the hell with it and quit. Maybe some of you golf course superintendents out there had the same experience the first time around. And now you're reading *Golf & sportsTURF*, while I've got the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic coming up in February. As I always say, there's Hope for everyone.

Then, in 1930, my real love affair with golf began. I was in vaudeville, playing the Orpheum circuit, the northern route. I was doing afternoon and evening shows in Winnipeg and Calgary up in Canada; in Minneapolis, MN, and in Seattle and Tacoma, WA. (Yes, I was an international traveler even then. But in Calgary 60 years ago, there wasn't exactly a stampede to the theatre to see me.) So there was nothing to do in the morning except sit around hotel lobbies, hoping my agent would call and have me paged so I'd look important.

Sharing the bill with me that season were the Diamond Brothers, a comedy act. I used to see the Diamonds come clattering through the lobby every morning with their golf bags, but I wasn't really interested.

Then, one day in Seattle, they invited me to come along. I borrowed a set of clubs and started hitting the ball pretty well, to my surprise. I got hooked on golf that day, and I've been addicted to it ever since.

Speaking of addiction, I'm against drugs, both as a father and as a golfer. At least golfers just *move* the grass plants a little bit. Other athletes are smoking them! Golfers don't take drugs, because it would be too obvious. The alligator on their shirts would roll over on its back.

Yet I'm delighted to be hooked on the game. In fact, I consider golf to be my profession and comedy just a way to pay my green fees. I've spent so much time on golf courses that I'm regularly

continued on page 26



Hope has helped promote golf around the world.



Gerald Ford is one of Hope's many presidential golf partners.

Bob Hope

continued from page 25

mistaken for a doctor, especially since I started handing out two aspirins to my caddies as tips.

Yes, golf is my real racket, and I try to play every day. My home club is Lakeside, in North Hollywood, CA. But since I travel so much, I've played most of the top courses in the United States and, in fact, the world.

I've played in sunshine and in snow, and even off the decks of aircraft carriers. The best thing about playing on a carrier is that it comes equipped with its own ball washer. Of course, your caddie has to know how to swim.

However, when you commune with nature on those beautiful courses like Pebble Beach, Cypress Point, Capilano in Vancouver with that glorious view from the tees, Deepdale and Meadow Brook with Long Island Sound in the background, or the desert courses around Palm Springs, with the mountains looming just off the green fairways...well, it's just fantastic being out there.

I hardly ever travel without my golf clubs, though I stick pretty close to Los Angeles and my second home near Palm Springs during the winter months. But in 1983, for some reason, I did five shows in Minneapolis in March. Well, we got hit by two blizzards. I had to kick away the snow to open the stage door at the theater. After getting home, I went to the Eisenhower Medical Center to have my head examined.

I'm not the only golfer in my family. My wife, Dolores, just loves the game, and she has always been a competent player. She

has a record at the Lakeside Golf Club that may never be eclipsed—five times the women's club runner-up, never the champion. I've kidded her a lot about that over the years.

My handicap today is 20, and I'm comfortable with that at a time when my age, 87, is finally within shooting distance of my score. (I have already shot George Burns' age, by the way. As for Milton Berle's, it's too close to call.) But at one time, in the early 1950s, I had it down to six. It was actually a four for one week in 1951, when I went over to play in the British Amateur at Porthcawl in Wales. But that's another story, and we're talking sports turf here, right?

Actually, as you may suspect, like most



Sam Snead helped Hope get his handicap down to 4.

golfers I don't know much about turf management, except that without it I'd be playing on dirt. Yet I really appreciate what you guys are doing for duffers like me, and that's why I'm recalling some of my own experiences in golf especially for you.

Incidentally, I was happy when the following quotation from the GCSAA magazine, *Golf Course Management*, was brought to my attention recently. Mike Mongiello, CGCS (Eldorado), cited my attention to members of your profession during the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic:

"He knows who all the superintendents are (where he plays). He's very congenial. He'll wave and say something like, 'Great job!' or 'Great shape.' He knows who has been out there early supervising the mowing and seeing to the turf." Thanks for those kind words, Mike.

However, I have a confession to make: I have a typical amateur's ego about golf course design. Most golfers think we could design a golf course if we had to, and I'm no exception to that rule. Maybe that's what they mean by "Ignorance is bliss."

Anyway, I have another confession to make, just between us golf course supers, right? Lately I've begun to think of myself as sort of an amateur course designer. Honestly! I believe that I could lay out a course in three hours. Build this par three over the water, install a trap there to catch the tee shots on the dogleg of a par four. It's not such a big deal.

Merion and Pine Valley, two of the finest courses you'll find anywhere, were designed by amateurs who had never built another golf course. Hugh White did Merion and George Crump did Pine Valley. And what superb jobs they did. Even Jack Nicklaus started as a golfer (and what a golfer!) before he began designing courses. So give us golfers a break, Pete Dye, wherever you are.

Actually, we're the lucky ones. We can just take the efforts of golf course designers, golf course superintendents, and their crews for granted, and go out and enjoy the fruits of their labors any day of the week, if we can spare the time from our schedules. But believe me, fellas, those labors are very much appreciated by yours truly.

It's easy to be a nice guy when you're playing golf, unless you're the club-smashing type, because golf has a very salutary effect on the soul. In other words, it's a great relaxant. It has given me a chance to see some of the world's most beautiful scenery and meet some of the world's nicest people. An awful lot of them are golfers, and

a few of them were White House residents. President Eisenhower, whom I knew particularly well, was perhaps the most famous golfer among our presidents.

I've had the pleasure of playing golf with six presidents—Ike Eisenhower, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jerry Ford, and Ronald Reagan. Reagan doesn't play much anymore, but he once broke 100. I think that's pretty good for a man on horseback. But George Bush seems to prefer pitching horseshoes on the White House lawn and at Kennebunkport. I wonder if he gets them from Reagan at a cut rate.

High on my list of the things I love about golf are the courtesy, good sportsmanship, and good humor I have found on courses from Alberta and Alaska to Winnipeg and Wyoming; from St. Cloud in France to St. Andrew's in Scotland, the country that gave birth to golf.

Say, those Scottish caddies are great. I get new material from them all the time. One old fellow at St. Andrews told me, "I had a golfer who was so lousy he threw his clubs into the water. Then he dived in himself. I thought he was going to drown, but I remembered he couldn't keep his head down long enough."

Of course, golf is big business today. The purses have become fantastic, and the commercial tie-ins are sensational. Take Arnold Palmer. Or better yet, take his bank account, especially since he started doing ads and commercials. Unfortunately, the earlier legends of golf didn't have this opportunity. They were born too soon to cash in on the big TV money. So was I. However, I just played on through.

When I received the Old Tom Morris Award several years ago from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, Arnie was the presenter, because he had been the only previous recipient. I felt pretty good about winning the award, because it's one of the most prestigious honors anybody like me could hope for. To a dedicated golfer like yours truly, it ranks right up there with the Oscars.

So I was pretty excited when I reported to a hotel in Las Vegas for the ceremony. I knew Arnie was already there, because I saw his tractor in the parking lot. Confidentially, Palmer was not in a real good mood that day. He had just seen a commercial on TV that he wasn't in.

But seriously, I think it's great that our star golfers are involved in so many commercial enterprises, including those TV commercials. It's good for them and good



Two giants in golf, Hope and Arnold Palmer.

for golf. They've certainly earned it. But I sometimes wonder if Palmer isn't getting too involved with commercials. When he missed a putt the other day, he put the ball back and called out, "Take two!"

Actually, I have always been pleasantly

struck by the fact that no matter how fierce the competition or how big the purse, professional golfers have always behaved like the ladies and gentlemen they are.

You won't see in golf the childish temper tantrums that sometimes cheapen and demean other professional sports.

In fact, they won't even let me get away with that sort of stuff at my own tournament, the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic. And I even brought in a tantrum permission slip from John McEnroe!

Whenever I think about all the people who have made golf great, many of whom I've had the honor and joy of playing with—people like Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Morris, Jan Stephenson, Gene Sarazen, Nancy Lopez, and Ben Hogan—the list goes on longer than I do—I am struck by the fact that not only were they all fine golfers, but fine human beings.

Well, thank God, I've now spent 60 years playing golf. And I'll keep on playing, the good Lord willing, until I do shoot my age. That might not be till I'm 125. You never know!

Editor's Note: The 32nd Annual Bob Hope Chrysler Classic will take place in Palm Springs, February 2-10, 1991.

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