



# Start me up

**As hickory golf gains more converts, SoHG members share their tales of getting started.**

**LOW NET PRIZE BRINGS HUBRIS AT COST TO HEAD**

There is an odd strain of individual at my club – I'm sure you're familiar with the type – that persists in thinking I'm "a little bit off" for my

interest in hickory clubs. To deflect their barbs, I joke that I've found that the secret to my continued happiness is in climbing farther and farther up smaller and smaller pyramids. One of these pyramids is clearly hickory golf. Now let's be frank: I'll never be a golfer of note with my modern clubs. Tiger Woods is not threatened when I tee it up; Greg Norman doesn't ring me looking for psychological counseling. But with my hickories, I believe I have found my calling.

In fact, for those of you who may not be familiar, I humbly reign as the 2005 National Hickory Champion, Reserve Division. Ah, the very sound of it: National Champion! The whole week following the NHC last year, I was walking around my house saying to the wife "the national champion would like his eggs over easy this morning," and "the national champion would like you to change the TV channel." That was, of course, immediately before the frying pan and the remote control (respectively) hit me in the (somewhat over-inflated) head.

Of course, this new found hubris has come at a cost. Some unsavory members of my club got me drunk (I assure you, they put me in a head lock, and the damnable crew forced the offending scotch right down my gullet!) And, in this compromised state, I let slip that "Reserve Division" is an indicator meaning I got the "low net" prize. Upon learning this, they teased me mercilessly – but deep, deep, down I could sense the teaming froth of their inner jealousies! Never mind. Upon the completion of the Orvis Cup last month, I was quoted in the Wall Street Journal and shown on New England Sports Network TV holing out a 12-foot putt – a treacherous downhill breaker. "When," I regally sniff at my celebrity-challenged compatriots, "was the last time you were quoted in the press about your golf game?" [Cricket... Cricket...]

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**WHY I TOOK UP HICKORY GOLF?**

I first hit a hickory club at the collectors meeting in Louisville and really enjoyed it. I played off and on with hickories just to sharpen up before hickory events. However, the more modern equipment I tried, the less enjoyment I was getting out of the game. Last fall I started playing only with hickories and just find that golf is more fun and interesting with this equipment. Ninety percent of my play is for social reasons so I want to use equipment that is going to give me the most pleasure. Hickory clubs do that.

**How hickory golf changed my swing?**

Actually, my swing has not changed. The only thing I had to adjust to is length. It has improved my tempo because on longer holes, I realize I may not reach the green, so I tend to overswing less and rely on my short game more.

**How hickory golf has increased my enjoyment of the game?**

Tremendously. I find great appeal in the uncertainty involved in the equipment and the challenge involved in striking the ball well. The game is just more interesting to me. There are many more varieties of shots in a round of golf now and that makes it fun.

Swing tips that have helped my hickory game.

Keep good swing tempo and balance. Don't try to hit the ball to hard.

Other thoughts.

People should play golf in whatever manner gives them the most pleasure. Hickory golf may not be for everyone but however you play, enjoy it and don't take it to seriously. It's a game and as my favorite golfer, Walter Hagen said, "Stop and smell the flowers now and then."

MIKE STEVENS

#### TEMPO AND ENJOYMENT

I recently took up hickory golf after many years of collecting. Playing with hickories has really helped me with the tempo of my swing and the overall enjoyment of the game. I'm looking forward to playing in more events next year and finding a good putter and sand club to fill out my set.

TIM FLYNN

#### REDISCOVERING DELIGHT IN GOLF

I actually played my first golf with hickory clubs. First, a cut-down and then because I couldn't afford second-hand steel shafted ones!

I kept my old mashie and a couple of years ago 're-found' it and decided to hit a couple of balls with it. What a delight!

I was getting increasingly disillusioned with golf; I didn't realize it at the time, but my hightech clubs were to blame. Trying to maintain distance as I got older I was trying to hit the ball hard, and the forgiveness of my irons allowed me to get away with bad swings – also there was no difference in feel between a good and a bad shot, hence no feedback, and my swing, which at one time had been good enough to sustain a scratch handicap, became uglier and uglier, and my scores became worse and worse.

With hickories of course there is instantaneous feedback together with that ecstatic feeling that one gets when hitting the ball in the sweet spot!

Of course my tempo has improved, and on the few occasions I play with regular clubs, I score better.

As for hickory golf increasing my enjoyment of the game, well, for a start one meets a great bunch of guys (and gals), real golfers who really love the game; I really enjoy stringing the ball; I have rediscovered the joys of the pitch and run; I get to play great courses as they were designed to be played; and I get to manufacture shots instead of just "dialing in a distance." Oh! and I also enjoy the club repair aspect, although for any fancy stuff I send it off to the real experts.

FRANK BOUMPHREY

#### GOLFING JOURNEY LEADS TO LOVE OF HICKORY

I came to hickory as a way to relax after the regular tournament season of modern golf and as a vehicle to play with my children. I knew nothing about this segment of the golfing world and bought a set of smooth faced replicas and two long neck woods from a manufacturer in Scotland, which I noticed on the Internet. The clubs were not cheap, but the day they arrived, I took them to the Zanesville Country Club for nine holes and shot 37 from the championship tees of 3,500 yards and was hooked. I even contemplated using them in an inter-club scratch match the

following week, but felt it might be an insult to my competitor. Well, that level of prowess did not continue, but I found early evening rounds to be quite enjoyable with the hickories.

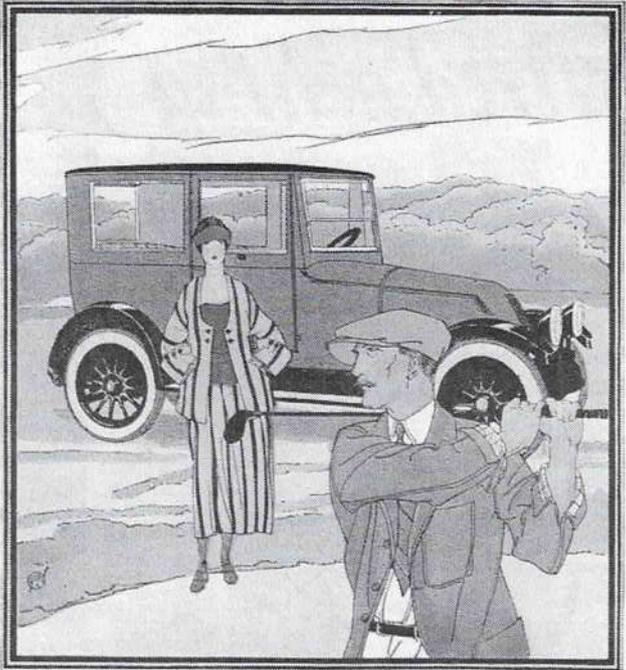
My good friend, Dennis Paustenbach, had some old hickories and he gave me a few of them to display in my condo in Pinehurst. I am not one to collect things but it was fun to see them in a rack with some other memorabilia from my personal golfing journey of persimmon woods and the J driver which was one of the first metal heads on the market.

Dave Ellis had some old clubs and we decided to play hickory together off and on and then we heard about the Hickory Open in Pinehurst and planned to attend in 2004, but a foul weather report kept us at home. In 2005, we determined that we would attend and asked Jim Clawson from the University of Virginia to join us. I contacted Mike Just of Louisville Golf and bought four irons and two replica woods, and had him re-shaft several old clubs that had nice heads. One was a Stewart mashie niblick and he told me that I had a nice club, but I did not know why.

We played the fousomes event at Pine Needles and Dave and I experienced the strain of alternate shot with hickory to a smooth 92. During the competition at Mid Pines, I struck the ball beautifully, but had 42 putts for a first round of 87, followed by a second round of 81 with better putting.

During the club show, I talked with Scott Patrick from Scotland, which whom we had played alternate shot, and first became aware of the significance of Tom Stewart as a club maker. Chris McIntyre befriended us and joined us during the final round and I began to be educated about hickory golf clubs.

CONTINUED, 14



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# STARTING UP

CONTINUED FROM 13

We had so much fun at the event and loved seeing the old clubs at Donald Ross' home during a cocktail party.

Breaking clubs became an issue and we found a skilled club maker in Zanesville, who had never worked with hickory. He attended the Dayton show in January and became intrigued with the way things were done and Joe Lawler has become our resident club physician, taking Tad Moore hickory and putting them back into play in short order. We now had a sustainable system of procurement through e-Bay and local repair. I took my hickories to Arizona in December 2005 and broke several on the hard desert floor. A trip to Florida with friends was more suitable with only one casualty.

In less than a year, I have accumulated at least four full sets of Tom Stewart irons and assorted woods from E-bay, Chris McIntyre, Randy Jensen, and John Sherwood. My hope is to have sufficient clubs so that I can provide the hickory experience to golfing friends when we visit Pinehurst on golfing holidays. I will also have to admit that procurement of hickory clubs can be addictive and as they say in the lottery, "Please play responsibly." My wife is now a bit concerned when the long cardboard shipping boxes arrive from UPS.

I can honestly say that the fun I have had with hickory ranks with any other golfing experience I have had. Clubs have personality, they have a history, they give you honest feedback on your swing, and you get a knot in your stomach when one shatters on a fat hit. But when you tee it up, and feel the release of the hickory into the ball at just the right time, there is nothing to

compare to it. I will continue to play both modern and hickory, depending on the occasion, but there is no doubt that most of my pleasant memories going forward will be with the old clubs. I hope to return to Scotland to play the historic venues with hickory and to tackle the wind, rain, sand and gorse.

TANNER STEWART

## NEW FOUND ENJOYMENT AND A SMOOTHER SWING

I received my first exposure to hickory golf at the AGM of the British Golf Collectors Society three years ago at Royal Liverpool, site of The Open this year. My foursome partner was the BGCS Captain. I was the only one in my group playing modern-day clubs. I was intrigued by their shotmaking, and attracted to the fact they were only carrying six or seven clubs. As the day wore on, I found myself more and more interested in their shots and less and less interested in my shots.

Four months later while in Scotland, I decided to head to The Old Course at Musselburgh Links to try a round with my very own rental set. After paying my eight quid to play and 22 quid for the rental clubs, I was off to the first tee. The young lad in the starter's building gave me three golf balls and mentioned if I returned all of them, I could keep one. I wondered how many returned none and kept three? Two hours and 18 holes later, I returned with three balls in hand, and excited about pursuing this hickory thing further.

When I returned home, I obtained some clubs, and have been enjoying golf in a new light ever since. I played a lot of golf in my 20's, but had been playing less and less the last five to 10 years. A big part of that was getting married and more recently, the birth of our daughter. But an even bigger part of it was the back pain I had been experiencing. I live in Texas and things are pretty warm here. Despite the heat, I felt tight while I was playing, and would be stiff and sore after playing. I noticed with the hickories that I didn't experience any back pain while playing or after I played. I am not sure if it is a result of swinging a little slower, carrying fewer clubs, a renewed interest in playing the game, or some combination of the three.

I mentioned swinging a little slower. That is probably the only thing I think I have changed. I am a feel player. I don't get too technical, and don't really understand that part of the game. It is obviously very important to hit the sweet spot, so I tend to concentrate on making solid contact, and to slow the swing down just a bit. I don't try to force things, and always take more club and choke down on the grip just a bit.

The enjoyment I get out of playing hickories has been profound. I find it to be a great joy to get together with people from all over the world who share a love for the game and respect its history. It really makes me appreciate how good Harry Vardon and Bobby Jones were. Take into consideration not only the clubs, but the ball they were playing, the condition of the links and the difficulty traveling. Things were very different for them.

I recently played a round with my father. He played with his modern day clubs, I played with my hickories. When we reached the 18th tee, my father asked if it would be OK for him to play the hole with my clubs. I encouraged him to swing away, and down the fairway we went. We ended up playing the 18th hole three times. My hope is that he will join me for a hickory event sometime in the near future.

MARK WEHRING

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