



Member Profile

Richard Bullock

Clearwater, Fla.

Richard Bullock has always had an interest in golf's storied history. Even in the 1950's Richard knew about hickory shafted clubs, having handled them from time to time when he was a teen growing up in Richland, Wash. He worked on clubs, particularly persimmon woods, at the local course pro shop. Both his parents encouraged his interest in golf, but Richard's father particularly instilled a love for the game as they played together. At age 14, when his dad introduced him to golf, Richard knew this was more than just a game to him.

He earned a golf scholarship to Purdue University. Although he later postponed the pursuit of a golf career for the deeper joys of raising a family, he still racked up an impressive amateur profile. It includes qualifying for the USGA Mid Amateur in 1992 and the U.S. Senior Opens at Pinehurst in 1994 and Congressional in 1995.

Then, in the late 1990s, his game was put on hold while he and his writer wife, Kathy Nappier, took an early retirement, sold everything (but the dog) and sailed the Caribbean for several years. In 2000, they returned to the U.S. and settled in the Tampa Bay area of Florida where Richard became a teaching pro at the Ben Sutton School of Golf. He and Kathy also revived their real estate investing and, between the two income streams, supported their addictions to golf and writing.

But it wasn't until Jan. 20, 2011, when he read a column in the St. Petersburg Times (now the Tampa Bay Times), that Richard discovered there was a hickory movement afoot. The U.S. Pro Hickory Golf Championship – organized by Mike Stevens and Kody Kerchoff, and held at the Temple Terrace Golf Club in Tampa – was his first hickory tournament. It was love at first strike.

How often do you play hickories?

I try to get out at least twice weekly.

What's in your play set?

I have a mix of antique and replica. My replicas are a Tad Moore driver, a Louisville driver and a Louisville cleek. With the antiques, I have a matched set of Spalding Kro Flight Sweet Spots ranging from a driving iron to a mashie-niblick. I have two other niblicks: an O.A. McGregor and a Tom Stewart. My putter has no maker's mark, but it's in the style of a flanged Orion. And, lastly, I'm having a lot of fun experimenting with an H. Brine brassie. I'm modifying it to the loft of a baffy. Which, by the way, is another perk in the hickory play culture: I get to refresh my interest in working with and modifying clubs.

Favorite club?

I don't have one. If I did, that would make my other clubs jealous. Seriously, though, having been playing regularly for just over a year, I'm having a lot of fun just getting to know my clubs.

What ball do you play?

I play a McIntyre rubber core, or a number of other low-compression balls. On occasions when others are playing higher compression balls, I might also.

Favorite course for hickories?

Again, being relatively new to hickory, I'm still discovering the best courses in the Tampa Bay area for hickory and loving the exploration. But I do particularly enjoy the local Donald Ross designed courses.

Favorite hickory tournament?

The U.S. Professional Hickory Golf Championship at Temple Terrace Golf and Country Club. Of course, being so new to hickory, it's the only sanctioned hickory tournament I've played to date. But I have been fortunate enough to play in a few major contemporary golf tournaments over the years, so I know a well-run competition when I see one. Granted, since it was my main introduction to hickory, it will probably always be a sentimental favorite. But, even with that qualifier, it's no exaggeration to say that Mike Stevens and Kody Kerchoff have organized a terrific event at Temple Terrace. As for other hickory tournaments: the Mid Pines Hickory Open, the National Hickory Open and the Nebraska tournaments are all on my "bucket list."



Florida hickory player Richard Bullock and his wife, Kathy, are planning an RV tour of the American west. As part of the tour, they hope to sow the seeds of hickory golf along the way. (Look for a regular blog from the couple on the SoHG website as they make their way around the country.)

Any particular player or aspect of golf history you especially enjoy?

Definitely Bobby Jones and Walter Hagen. I have numerous books on these players. Both had exceptional mental approaches for both match and medal play. As far as my favorite aspect, other than the play itself, I'm a collector of unusual and patent clubs.

Best thing about hickory golf?

*1. The camaraderie with like-minded hickory golfers committed to preserving the game the way it should be played.
2. The learning curve that I'm on, as a new player. It's a great adventure, discovering what I can bring to hickory from my regular play and learning the discipline of this demanding style of golf. I love the accuracy that hickory play requires and learning how to handle hickory's unique and difficult shots.*

Ideas to promote SoHG, hickory golf?

Both my wife and I, each in our own ways, have fallen head-over-heels in love with hickory play. Our goal is to promote hickory play and help beautiful, vintage courses across the U.S. continue to be relevant in an age of ever-lengthening golf courses. With that in mind, this coming spring and summer we're taking our retirement to the next level with a Western U.S. RV tour. Kathy and I will be on our own little hickory golf whistle stop, which we hope will contribute to the spread of hickory play. I'll be entering various national competitions along the way. And we'll both be exploring the communities we visit with an intention to encourage and create a hickory-enthusiastic environment at golf clubs that express an interest. We intend to "sow hickory nuts" and help organize new tournaments at choice, hickory-friendly courses. Kathy, a professional writer, will be keeping a blog about our hickory adventures. We're very, very excited about becoming full-fledged ambassadors.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

The best two for me this year were "The Mystery of Golf" by Arnold Haultain. Published in 1910, it is a treatise on the game in all its facets by a fellow who was a recent convert. Lots of valuable insights. The second was "Tommy's Honor" by Kevin Cook, a recent publication about our beloved game in the 1800's. A real in-depth picture of golf and life for that time period.