



Member Profile

Allen Johnson

Randolph, Vermont, USA

A lifelong resident of Vermont, Allen Johnson was born and raised in Rochester, a small town of 1,000 in the central part of the state. He graduated from Rochester High School in a senior class of 14 people. "I was fifth in the class, which tells you how smart I am," he says.

Golf wasn't a part of his life then, but baseball was. "I played little league and on our high school and college team," he says. "I was not a big fellow, so I played in the infield, mostly second base. I did a little pitching, too, in high school. In 1965, our team was state champion for high schools of our size."

Johnson studied at the two-year Vermont Technical College, earning an associate's degree in highway engineering technology. After that he served part-time in the Army National Guard for six years while working in highway engineering and land surveying for about eight years. After that, he became an independent insurance agent/broker for the next 36 years. He retired in 2013.

In 1988 Johnson moved to Randolph, all of 15 miles from his hometown of Rochester, and it has been his home for the past 30 years.

Golf did not come to Johnson until his 39th year. At one point, his boss in the insurance agency recommended they take up the game, as it might be good for business. Johnson did not object and was happy to learn the sport. "They even purchased a membership for me at the local Montague Golf Club in Randolph," he says.

In 1999, he recalls, he was browsing eBay looking for insurance memorabilia when he saw a wood-shafted Royal putter. "I had never seen these things before and I bought it, got interested in them and bought a couple more," he says.

His interest piqued, Johnson got in touch with GCS co-founder Bob Kuntz to learn more about working on wood shafted golf clubs. Kuntz referred him to Eric Wolke. "It was Eric who really got me going," Johnson says. "Through emails and phone calls he really helped me out. He sponsored my joining the Golf Collectors Society in 2000."

Even though Johnson was enjoying his occasional work on hickory clubs, he did not swing them until 2006 at a GCS event in Manchester, Vt. There he was able to meet Wolke, as well as Pat Kennedy, an avid GCS member and hickory golfer, and Randy Jensen, then at the top of his game in the world of competitive hickory golf.

Also at that event was Wayne Marquait whom Johnson says offered great encouragement early on and was a important influence on his hickory golf experience. The two have become good friends.

"I recall I brought some of my clubs down to that event, but decided to play a rental set," he says. "But on the first swing with one of them, the head flew off. I decided I could as well or better with my own."

The combination of four hickory experts and their stories and his first hickory round did the trick. By the time the event was over, Johnson was hooked.

Johnson, who will admit to only a "high handicap" does not usually play hickory golf until about September. Until then, he estimates he plays about 10 percent of the time with his original sticks. "I usually play in our men's league with my modern clubs, a set of Taylor Made M2s with graphite shafts and a senior flex. After August, it's generally all hickories."

He enjoys working on his own clubs and can often be found in the workshop of Gary Eley in neighboring Burlington, Vt. He is the current president of the Vermont Hickory Golf Association. (www.vthga.org)

Johnson and Brenda, his wife of 45 years, have a daughter, a son, and three granddaughters.

How often do you play hickories?

About 10 percent of the time until September and then about 90 percent of time.

What's in your play set?

I've never swung a replica club, because half the fun of the hickory clubs is the search for what works for you. So, these are all original clubs:

Brassie – Wright & Ditson St. Andrews
 Brassie – Wilson Plus Success
 Mid Iron – Tom Stewart Dot Face
 3 Iron – George Nicoll Indicator



Allen Johnson studies a putt at a 2016 foursomes match at the Copley Country Club in Morrisville, Vt.

Mashie 5 Iron – George Nicoll Mashie
 Mashie – Tom Stewart Dot Face
 Spade Mashie – George Nicoll Zenith
 Jigger – Tom Stewart Dot Face
 Mashie Niblick – George Nicoll Forgan
 Niblick – Partridge, Horace Co.
 Putter – Spalding Mallet

Favorite club?

There are two: my Nicoll/Forgan mashie niblick and my Spalding mallet putter. Some of my regular partners say I should use the old ones more often.

What ball do you play?

I play the Maxfli Noodle and the Callaway Supersoft.

Favorite course for hickories?

My favorite course is my home course, the Montague Golf Club, built in 1913.

Favorite hickory tournament?

This is the one that I host every year and is now in its ninth year – The Vermont Hickory Classic. I love it and will keep doing it as long as I can afford it. One year we had almost 30 players and I was really touched that these guys would come and be loyal to this event. The year that Hurricane Irene hit Vermont so hard (2011) our course had only six playable holes at tournament time. But the guys came anyway and we played those holes three times. That really says something about your hickory golf friends.

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

I enjoy the varieties you find in the old clubs. I don't have any really valuable clubs, but I like the old face designs and the different shafts. I also have a nice collection of Vermont golf course postcards and that is interesting to me. There is one from the 1920s of the White River Golf Course in Rochester, where I started playing. It shows the old railroad track through the course.

Best thing about hickory golf?

It's the people, of course. I have met local guys in Vermont and across the country. I don't get around a lot, but through phone calls and emails, I have gotten to know such guys as Roger Hill and Pete Georgiady. It's been great fun.

Ideas to promote hickory golf?

It is just doing what you can. For example, here in Vermont, I helped form the Vermont Hickory Golf Association. We've promoted hickory golf in the state and through our tournaments. From my side, I will take loaner sets to my course and invite other players to try them. They are welcome to keep them and play them for awhile. Even our former pro would play them, coming to my event where he won twice.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

The books I read most often are Pete Georgiady's value guides and Roger Hill's book on George Nicoll. I've been in touch with Roger and he has given me some clubs and I bought some from him.