



Member Profile

Ben Jones

Kalamazoo, Mich., USA

(Ben Jones is an absolutely new member of the SoHG, having joined in mid-August 2018. In fact, he has yet to acquire a full play set, for now setting out with only a putter. That, he says, is soon to change with his first visit to a hickory golf outing, where he hopes the veteran players will outfit him with a good, playable starter set. Below, he shares his perspective on starting the hickory journey.)

Ben Jones learned golf in the fall of 1974 at age 14 by hitting three-wood shots back and forth with his best friend, Mike. They stood in a clover field that had been harvested for hay on the Jones family farm in Kansas. They would sometimes play over a three-hole course that Mike laid out in the back pasture on his farm, a mile west. Before long they were riding their bicycles – clubs tied to the frame with baling twine – over country roads to the nine-hole golf course, four miles distant. That course, a WPA project, had sand greens. Green fees were \$2, which you put in the slot of a padlocked box nailed to a plywood sign announcing the name of the place, the Horton Lakeview Country Club.

That winter, Ben picked up fallen ears of corn that the combine had missed and amassed a pile big enough to sell for \$85 at the elevator. That bought a set of Voit department-store clubs and a spot on the high-school golf team. Some 15 years later, he was playing with that same set and same friend, Mike, at a course in Lawrence, Kan., where they were paired with a guy playing a set of Hogan Apexes. Ben asked to try his 4-iron for a shot, pured it, and experienced the thrill of playing a blade. He promptly ordered a second-hand set of Apexes from Kansas City. He's played that set ever since.

With time, he married a girl, Irma, from Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and moved to Kalamazoo, Mich. – equally unlikely occurrences, but nevertheless, they happened.

Ben has a degree in journalism from the University of Kansas and works as a book editor for an economic think tank in Kalamazoo, the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research – where, fortunately, he does not have to do any of the economic thinking, merely run a red pen. He came back to golf late last year, after having played only sporadically for many seasons. His most “Bagger Vance”-like experience in golf was probably coming onto a 12-point buck standing in the middle of the fairway as he played a round of nighttime golf under a full moon. He would like to think that buck endowed his 4-iron with mystical powers, but results, alas, have been spotty.

How often do you play hickories?

I've never picked up a hickory club, other than as a prop for the picture on this page. My office at work is littered with fancy-face persimmons from the 1940s and '50s, and even a couple dozen putters from the '30s – I have a very understanding boss – but no wooden sticks. I'm looking forward to the challenge.

What's in your play set?

Ask me after the McNabb Cup tournament in Muskegon next month (September 2018). I'm hoping to acquire a set there. I understand many of the players bring clubs or sets to trade or sell. I realize the ideal way is to build a set over years, but that will have to come with time.

Favorite club?

A lumpy-looking putter I acquired at a yard sale for one dollar. I like the weight and feel of it.

What ball do you play?

Ben Hogan “The Hawk,” which has a compression of 70–72. The balls are no longer made, but I have an unending supply thanks to eBay. I will switch over to an old-fashioned ball for the hickory events.



Ben Jones is prepared for hickory golf with his, as yet, only club, a putter he describes as “lumpy” but with great weight and feel.

Favorite course for hickories?

As a new member, I'm looking forward to playing in the Wisconsin Hickory Open this fall. The venue, the Links Course at Lawsonia, looks stunning.

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

Well, my father is Robert Jones and went by “Bobby” in grade school, so I try to claim that lineage by reading about Bobby Jones! But really, I'm a nut for Ben Hogan. Like many, I read his Five Lessons in high school. In steel-shaft competition, I wear Hogan apparel, play Hogan clubs and balls, and lug around a Hogan staff bag. With the move to hickory golf, I'm hoping to get more acquainted with the earlier era of golf, before Hogan, Snead, and Nelson came along.

Best thing about hickory golf?

Not having actually experienced it yet, still I would say the romance of it. I recently saw Booth Tarkington's Tudor home in Indianapolis and promptly read a novel of his published in 1914 to get a notion of that time and place. Hickory golf harkens back to an era when golf and society were perhaps more genteel and measured, before galleries began shouting “Baba Booey!” or “5-Hour Energy!” or whatever the current fad is. That sense of a distant, unreachable past appeals to me.

Ideas to promote SoHG, hickory golf?

In place of the Wednesday pro-am, at least one tournament on the PGA Tour (or, more likely, the Web.com Tour, since the PGA stars would never go for playing with equipment that might show them up!) should feature a hickory event, with the pros playing alongside amateurs (preferably SoHG amateurs), and everyone using sticks. All participants dressed to the nines, of course!

Most recent book on golf that you read?

Golf's Golden Age: Robert T. Jones, Jr., and the Legendary Players of the '10s, '20s, and '30s, by Rand Jerris. Each page features a brief profile of a golfer along with his photo – rather like the member profiles on this website. I'm also a fan of the P.G. Wodehouse stories, set in the hickory era.