



Member Profile

Pete League

Austin, Texas, USA

Texas man Pete League grew up in Atlantic City, N.J. When he was 12, his family moved to Pleasantville, about three miles from the Atlantic City Country Club.

“I learned from a grade-school friend that one could make some money at the golf course carrying bags,” he said. “The next day I hitchhiked a ride (very common at that time, 1949) and the driver turned out to be a gentleman named ‘Sug’ Franklin, a member of ACCC who also happened to know my father. He introduced me to the caddie-master, John Turner, and then he (Mr. Franklin) took me to the range and taught me how to shag balls. He also let me carry his bag for nine holes. I remember him giving me 2 dollars. I was thrilled. Caddie fees at the time were \$1.50 for 18 holes.”

Pete began to caddy regularly for head pro Buck Worsham, brother of both Lew and Buddy. The latter was Arnold Palmer’s Wake Forest roommate. Other odd jobs included working in the bag room (no carts then) and baby-sitting for club owners Leo and Doris Fraser.

“Leo was well-placed in PGA circles, later becoming president of the PGA of America,” Pete says. “Jack Nicklaus gave high praise to Leo for brokering the agreement between the touring pros and the PGA when things got messy about how the tour was to be managed.”

After graduation from high school in 1955, Pete spent two years in the Navy where he saw 19 countries. He worked in Greenland for 18 months, then attended the Univ. of San Francisco where he graduated with a degree in business administration (industrial relations) in 1966. He began working in the human resources department for Shell Oil Co. in a variety of assignments.

Golf started to become an occasional thing as Pete, who had been competed in running events since high school, got more involved in racing. “I competed in everything from 880 yards to ultra-marathons,” he says.

He competed in 37 races at the marathon distance or longer, including one 50-miler. Ever the enthusiast, Pete helped promote the sport, and founded California’s first ultra-marathon (1964) as well as the Houston Marathon (1972) and a number of other events in Texas, Ohio, and California.

After retiring from Shell in late 1991, Pete set up a new MBA Career Management Center and MBA Alumni Relations programs at George Mason University (Virginia) and then did the same thing at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California.

Somehow along the way, he started playing golf on a more regular basis and found a few of those interesting hickory clubs at flea markets.

“My handicap dipped to 5 at one point, but currently hangs out at about 10+,” he says. “Lynn and I retired to the Austin area in 1999 to be near our son, Tim, and his wife, Karrie, and their twin girls. Tim is founder of Alamo Drafthouse Cinema.

“It was in 2005 that I became aware of and joined the Golf Collectors Society. That led me to Max Hill. When I first saw his collection, I muttered ‘Holy S___’, or something like that.” (A common reaction on seeing the enormity of Mr. Hill’s endless stacks of clubs.)

Hill promptly got Pete hooked on hickory golf and then craftily asked him to help with the GCS Region Four Hickory Tournament that Hill had organized and hosted for years. When Hill’s term as Region Four Director for the GCS expired Rives McBee came on, followed by Pete in 2013. Pete also took over the hickory tournament, which has evolved into the Onion Creek Hickory Classic (www.OnionCreekHickoryClassic.com).

Engaging and energetic, Pete decided he needed to do more. Thus, he has volunteered on golf course maintenance crews at some significant events that include 21 majors – one Walker Cup, one Ryder Cup, and almost 20 AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Ams.

“In 2010 I worked all four majors – could that be a ‘Pete Slam’?” he wonders. “At Onion Creek Club, I have been president of the club’s Men’s Golf Assoc., chairman of the green committee, a member of the handicap committee, and facilitated the property becoming an Audubon International Certified Cooperative Sanctuary in 2011. I also served for about four years on a Texas Golf Association course rating team.”

Pete says his golf collection is a modest one, perhaps 100 hickories, mostly putters; 400-500 golf books; and the usual mixed-bag of golf “stuff” most of which has some personal meaning.

“I basically consider myself a rookie collector with no



Pete and Lynn League at St Andrews in 2007.

aspirations to be much more,” he says. “My primary interest is in putting on the best hickory tournament I can and playing hickories.”

How often do you play hickories?

Essentially full-time from mid-October through March and the Onion Creek Hickory Classic, and only part-time the rest of the year. While I would love to play in more hickory tournaments, my budget cannot handle the travel.

What’s in your play set?

A very mixed bag. I will switch the two iron sets from time to time. And sometimes I’ll use a mixed bag.

Driver: Tad Moore Selma Star

Spoon: George Wright 925

A six-club set of A. G. Spalding Bros., semi-deep groove irons with a Benny Plaunt repro Stewart/RTJ niblick/sand iron.

A seven-club set of Benny Plaunt’s repro Stewart/RTJ irons.

Putter is a Brown-Vardon style, Spalding-Gold Medal, Accurate

Favorite club?

The Brown-Vardon putter. It’s in the bag 24/7/365, steel clubs or hickory clubs.

What ball do you play?

Srixon soft-feel.

Favorite course for hickories?

Pacific Grove Golf Links, Pacific Grove, Calif.

Favorite hickory tournament?

C’mon. Get real. The Onion Creek Hickory Classic. After that, Ron Lyons’ Canadian Open Hickory Tournament. But to be fair, I haven’t played in very many tournaments.

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

Bobby Jones, Harry Vardon, Walter Hagen, and Ben Hogan. I guess my interest in Jones comes from my having caddied a number of times as a kid for Charles Price, the golf writer and Jones’ friend. In 1954, Hogan gave a 36-hole (Sunday-Monday) exhibition at Atlantic City Country Club. For about 45 minutes or so, early on the first day, it was just Hogan hitting balls on the range, his caddie shagging balls, and me watching from about 15 yards away. Quietly. No one else in sight. I remember it like it was yesterday.

Best thing about hickory golf?

Camaraderie. Best people in the world!

Ideas to promote hickory golf?

Get some young blood interested. Build relationships with The Frist Tee Organization. Be passionate about the tournaments we now have. Promote hickory play within our respective clubs, men’s and ladies’ golf associations. Get to know the golf writers in our home cities.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

Kevin Robbins’ outstanding biography of Harvey Penick. Tremendous research went into this book. Kevin has agreed to be a guest speaker at the Onion Creek Hickory Classic.