



Member Profile

Tom Tracy

Star, Idaho, USA

A recent convert to hickory golf, Tom Tracy took up the “modern” game as a 12-year-old in Wisconsin. “I was a baseball nut all my life until then, and just knew I would play shortstop for the Milwaukee Braves one day. Then we moved to a new town and I didn’t have a dozen friends to round up for a daily baseball marathon, so my dad took me to the local 9-hole public course. The bat-ball thing was familiar and I loved the idea of being able to play alone or with a couple other kids and compete for a score individually. Didn’t play much baseball after that.”

Tracy won individual conference titles in high school in Racine and college at University of Wisconsin– Stevens Point. After graduation, a stint in the Coast Guard, and earning a masters in physical education from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Tracy and his wife, Sue (also a native Badger), moved to Boise, Idaho in 1988. In 2010, he retired from the Idaho State Police, and is also a retired commander in the USCG Reserve.

“I’ve always been fascinated with the history of golf and wondered what it would be like to play hickory shafted clubs,” he says. “Last summer I was wasting time as usual and came across a used set of Tad Moore irons for sale on eBay. I thought they were Tad’s personal clubs and on a whim I bought them. Sue thought I was nuts. After swatting them around the practice area at our club, I decided it would be good to have a couple woods and a putter, and so ordered them from Tad.

“Meanwhile, I found out there were competitions for hickory players, and that the U.S. Hickory Open would be played in 2016 at one of my all-time favorite courses, the Links of Lawsonia Links in Green Lake, Wisc. On another whim, I signed up to play. Now my wife knew I had lost it. I had never even seen anyone else play with hickories, much less competed with them. Lo and behold, despite many sketchy shots, good putting and a couple of miracles allowed me to win the senior title! It was great fun, of course.”

Later last fall, Tracy played in his second hickory tourney at Gamble Sands, Wash. and won the senior title with fine rounds of 71-75, edging area pro Jim Von Lossow in a scorecard playoff on the last hole.

Tracy plays to a 4-handicap with modern clubs and is about a 7 with hickories. He plays at Plantation Country Club in Boise, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

“It is a great venue for hickory golf,” says Tracy, who would like to start a state competition there. “To my knowledge, there are few or maybe no other hickory players in Idaho. With the help of the Northwest Hickory Players I’d like to help change that.”

Tracy and his wife have two daughters who live in the Midwest and two sons in Boise and Pullman, Wash. He says he is campaigning to have Sue (a 9 handicap) take up hickories – “But she’s not quite crazy enough yet.”

How often do you play hickories?

This year I only played about 25 percent of my golf with hickories, but hope to play more next year. It will be more fun when we have more hickory players in our area.

What’s in your play set?

My entire play set are Tad Moore replicas. I have his Pall Mall woods (driver, spoon, cleek) and Victor irons, which are replicas of the set Spalding made for Bobby Jones about 1931. I also have his Gibson Dominie Sander flanged niblick, which is a great club. I have an original Reynolds aluminum driver, quite rare I believe, made playable by Jim Von Lossow, that I sometimes use as well.

Favorite club?

It has to be my putter, a stainless Tad Moore Chicopee, a replica of the club made by Spalding about 1919. It’s a center-shafted flanged blade that also has replaced a favorite old Ping in my modern bag. For some reason, I hit my Victor 2-iron better than other irons. Must be the shaft, can’t be the operator!

What ball do you play?

Last summer, when starting out I had no idea what to play. After reading the blogs online, I tried out a number of “soft” balls, such as Wilson Duo and the Callaway Super-Soft. I have found I like a urethane cover, which spins more than the surlyn covered balls, so now I’m playing the Callaway Chrome Soft, which I also play with modern clubs.



Tom Tracy’s balanced follow-through for the photographer at the 2016 U.S. Hickory Open where he captured the Senior title.

Favorite course for hickories?

Hard to narrow down to one. Of course, Lawsonia Links in Green Lake, Wisc. will always be a favorite. Gamble Sands in Brewster, Wash. is a great links-style layout overlooking the Columbia River and a blast to play. Sue and I went to Ireland in 2015 and played some not-so-famous links. Donegal GC, Narin and Portnoo, and Cruit Island (check it out) would all be fabulous for hickory play. Please keep them secret!

Favorite hickory tournament?

I haven’t played in many, but of course the U.S. Hickory Open is our national championship. I would love to play in the World Hickory Open in Scotland one day.

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

Francis Ouimet’s story is heroic. Sport in general could use more like him. Walter Hagen’s accomplishments are often overlooked, and his attitude about golf is healthy for most of us. He was no doubt competitive, but had a great philosophy about missed shots. He expected to have several “foozles” each round, so when he hit a poor shot, it was just one of those he expected and he moved on to the next shot. We should do likewise. And for a “tough guy,” Old Tom Morris is hard to beat. Pulling thousands of gorse bushes by hand, and a bracing dip each morning (year-round) in the North Sea. Everyone interested in golf history should read Tommy’s Honor, by Kevin Cook.

Best thing about hickory golf?

It’s a bit masochistic, but the challenge of it. As if golf isn’t tough enough, we choose to play with implements which make it more difficult. But when a ball is hit on the sweet spot and the shot comes off as planned, it’s a feeling that is hard to describe.

Ideas to promote hickory golf?

More media coverage of major events would spark interest. Local newspaper and TV sports coverage could get more involved. Regional organizations such as Northwest Hickory Players are doing a nice job of creating websites with links to lots of interesting topics such as creating a play set, club collecting and club repair, as well as local opportunities for competition. Some states have statewide organizations; it would be nice if every state eventually has one. I don’t know if much has been done with juniors yet. Youth clinics put on by some of the accomplished hickory players could spark interest for the next generations. Hickory Golf Day in May is a great idea, we just need more players providing clubs for events at local courses. And we need more women players.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

Pilgrims in the Rough, by Michael Tobert. A great humorous travel book about St. Andrews, with lots of history and fun. Golfers and non-golfers alike would enjoy it.