



Member Profile
Jim Davis
 Grand Rapids, Mich., USA



Jim Davis ponders yet another legal notice forbidding him to enter a hickory golf tournament.

“Mine has been a curious progression.” Thus does the SoHG’s secretary, communications director, Wee Nip editor, and dean of high handicappers describe his route to the lofty heights of hickory golf glory.

A native of St. Petersburg, Fla. where, somehow, he managed a high school diploma, Jim also beguiled the authorities at the University of South Florida into a high-powered English literature degree. Forsaking the temple of academia for the ink pot, Jim, following a summer of a shenanigans on Cape Cod, convinced a northern girl that his rash would be short lived, that his prospects were worthy and that he might be worth a marriage.

This line of action took him to Grand Rapids where, after dabbling in the greenhouse and house painting arts, he married the girl and secured gainful employment at the local newspaper. (He had help... his late father-in-law had been a long-time wire editor on the universal desk.)

Some 30 years later, Jim was paroled from his cubicle and, with a pat on the back and the dubious security of a modest newspaper pension, set forth to explore what hickory golf might bring.

Oh yes, there was a daughter along the way, as well as a Masters degree from Western Michigan University. The daughter is doing well, the MA is buried somewhere in a desk drawer.

“I blame most of what followed on Ralph Livingston,” Jim said, caressing a pint of bitter brew. “If it hadn’t been for him and (Roger) Hill...” He lets the thought slide.

After meeting Livingston in 2002, Jim was convinced to give the sport a try. Since then, he’s managed a visit to two NHCs, a Southern 4-Ball (where the committee is divided on whether to allow him to return), the GCS Region 4 in Austin, and one or two USHOs at French Lick. And there was a trip to Scotland in 2004 where, in the luck of draws, he was paired twice with Randy Jensen and once with Chuck McMullin, both hickory golf champions. (Neither man will speak of the experience.)

A favorite event, he says, is the Belvedere Hickory Open, where his visage is as yet unfamiliar to the local constabulary. He also looks forward to regular outings with the Michigan Hickory Tour, which meets at clubs around the state, failing, so far, in its attempts to stay one step ahead of him.

Jim now fills his days with the harmless drudgery of newsletter work, fielding hickory golf questions, and serving as the editor of the *Bulletin* for the Golf Collectors Society in addition to providing as-yet uncensored material for the SoHG’s *Wee Nip*. Now and then, he descends to the cold crypt of his Michigan basement, where the space heater is fired up and hickory clubs are refurbished.

There’s not a thing he would change, he says. Well, maybe one. “I really wish I hadn’t sold my Mickey Mantle cards to that *^%\$^#& 12-year-old.”

Jim and his wife, Barb, have been married for 40 years and make their home in Grand Rapids.

How often do you play hickories?

All the time. Why play anything else? Anyway, John Greene will tell you no matter what’s in my hands, I can’t hit it.

What’s in your play set?

Strange weapons, I call ’em, like Hagen. I’m always swapping them out but here’s the group of veterans. The late Ralph Livingston helped in their selection, and Jay Harris tweaked a couple of them for weighting.

- Jack White driver
- Jack White spoon
- 1-iron “Stoneded” Ernest Sales of Sunningdale (Staynorus)
- Mid iron Westward Ho!
- Jigger of some kind, stainless
- Stewart Mashie
- Stewart Mashie Niblick
- Stewart Niblick
- Stewart Putter AB Vardon (Christchurch, New Zealand)

Favorite club?

That Westward Ho! mid iron. I love that thing. It gets me out of trouble; solid, reliable, the last bit of sanity in a shaky game.

What ball do you play?

Wilson Duos and Dave Brown’s replicas.

Favorite course for hickories?

Any old traditional course that will allow me access. Hickory golf lives there.

Favorite hickory tournament?

I sure do like the Belvedere, but I’ve had great fun at all I’ve been fortunate to attend. Pete Georgiady’s NHC is a must-play. I suppose the McNabb Cup ranks the highest. You have to know people to get invited to that one.

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

Walter Hagen is a fascinating character, but there is so much to enjoy about golf history on a large scale that it would be difficult to narrow to particular people, places or things. (I do love being around Rives McBee and listening to his stories. There is one fine gentleman.)

Best thing about hickory golf?

This is something I’ve been trying to answer for a long time. I think it’s because modern hickory golf allows players to re-connect with the game on many levels. Hickory golf is where golf lives. And, to paraphrase Ben Hogan, you meet a fine class of people in this sport.

Ideas to promote hickory golf?

Support regional groups. Tournaments are great fun, but that shouldn’t be the overall emphasis. Find or start a regional group and get out there with guys, and ladies, to enjoy rounds on the traditional courses in your area. Learn what authentic, original clubs are all about. Support the SoHG in its effort to maintain a central nexus for information, standards, and resources. Get other people involved, whether at your club or with friends. This sport grows on a grass roots level.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

“James Braid and his Four Hundred Courses.” Now I’m working my way through an anthology of golf stories, “The Impossible Art of Golf” by Alex Morrison; as well as “Advanced Golf” by James Braid. One last mention – Bernard Darwin is a favorite writer.