



The ‘Hickory Doc’ of Omaha

Kevin Cawley was born in Phoenix, Ariz. on Christmas day in 1952. The family later moved to Carroll, Iowa, where Kevin grew up.

Though his father loved tennis, Kevin excelled in such sports as football, basketball, and track. He became captain of his high school football and track teams, and was guard on an all-state basketball team.

“I grew up watching Arnold Palmer who was just awesome, a great role model. I play golf because of his inspiration,” Kevin says.

Kevin attended Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. where he studied for a medical career. He is now a practicing radiologist at Methodist Hospital in Omaha.

“While at CU I met a cute cheerleader named Cindy and I never left Nebraska,” Kevin says. “I played golf whenever I could and would sub for the golf team whenever they needed a player. During this time, I often played with a pretty good underclassman whose name was Randy Jensen. I would learn more about this great player later on. Over the years my handicap has bounced around between 6 and 16. It’s currently 7.9.”

Kevin says that he and Dr. David Brown, former president of the SoHG and an orthopedic surgeon, have been good friends for 30 years. The two met at Methodist Hospital and often take golf trips together.

“I joined the Happy Hollow GC in 1981 and told Dave he should join, too,” Kevin says. “He had more friends there. One day he told me that he might join Happy Hollow but that I would have to play hickory golf with him. I had no idea what he was talking about, but agreed to it. One October day in 2008 he called me up and said he had just joined Happy Hollow and he had hickories for me to try. And so it began!”

Kevin started to play more with hickories that winter and at first was disillusioned. “I thought it a waste of time, but the more I played them, the more interested I became, not only in vintage clubs but in the history of the game. My club pro, Mike Antonio, started calling me the ‘Hickory Dickory Doc.’ Like Maverick in the movie *Top Gun*, this has become my call sign.”

He began to read more about the great names of the earlier golfing world – Jones, Sarazen, Hagen, Ouimet, Vardon, Taylor, and Braid – and was inspired by their stories.

“My personal favorite is Walter Hagen,” he says. “I own several of his prototype wedges and they are magic!”

As a new hickory golfer in Nebraska, it was inevitable that Kevin would meet Randy Jensen. “I remember going to his store where he would help me pick out clubs,” Kevin recalls. “We got to talking about CU and realized that we had already met as players on the golf team those several years ago.”

Their first hickory outing together was at Fontenelle Forest.

FORMER CREIGHTON UNIV. ALUMS, Dr. Kevin Cawley, right, with Randy Jensen during a hickory outing at Elmwood GC in 2016.



PHOTO/JOHNSON PORTRAIT STUDIO

THE TRADITIONALIST. In a nod to golf photography of yore, Dr. Kevin Cawley poses with clubs in a studio portrait reminiscent of the days of Old Tom.

“I was impressed with how well the players did with the clubs,” Kevin says. “I saw Randy hole his second shot on a par 4 and I thought that the stories of him as the ‘Tiger Woods of hickory golf’ must be the real deal.”

By this time Kevin wanted his own set of hickories, not loaners, so with the help of Randy, Connor Lewis, Kody Kirchoff, and Dave Brown, he assembled a couple of fine play sets, including a set of Tom Stewart irons once owned by Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago (see below).

With Randy, Kevin visited the 2013 Mid Pines Hickory Open and the two placed second in the two-man scramble. “I love Donald Ross and found the tournament in the North Carolina sand hills very special,” he says.

Kevin won the Omaha City Championship in 2014 and in 2015 helped found the Nebraska Hickory Golf Association (NEHGA).

“In 2016 we inaugurated the Nebraska Hickory State Championship in the sand hills of Nebraska at Dismal River GC,” he says. “It was a great tournament with Dave Brown edging Randy – courtesy of a 30-foot putt for birdie on the last hole – for the first title. We now have more than 30 members and it is growing as more players are looking for a different experience from the humdrum of modern steel golf.”

The NEHGA also created a Nebraska Hickory Golf Hall that year, installing as its first inductees Johnny Goodman, A.H. Findlay, and Randy Jensen. The celebration is held in conjunction with the Omaha City Championship.

Kevin plays with both original and authentic replica clubs, believing that the way to get new players interested in hickory golf is to



THE TOAST. Dave Brown, left, Durel Billy, and Kevin share a toast at the first Johnny Goodman River City Hickory Championship, 2016.

start them with replicas.

“I have found that once new players get comfortable with the replicas, they start to look for original clubs,” he says. “It is a journey, not a place. I want to add a special thank-you to Tad Moore and Louisville Golf for their support of hickory golf.”

Kevin and Cindy, now married for 40 years, have four children who all play golf and like to go out with dad for an occasional nine holes and catch up on goings on.

“Cindy is the best putter I have ever seen,” Kevin says. “I can’t wait to get my grandchildren – identical twin boys, so far – started in this great game.”

How often do you play hickories?

Originally only in the fall of the year, but now about 90 percent of the time.

What’s in your play set?

I have been fortunate to acquire the Stewart irons once owned by Cardinal Mundelein, who was Bishop of Chicago in 1915 and elevated to Cardinal in 1924. He took up golf when his doctors

prescribed exercise and built a 9-hole course on the grounds of the seminary now known as Pine Meadow. I got the clubs from Connor Lewis who in turn got them from Kay and Pat Esler who had them directly from the Cardinal Mundelein estate. Other clubs I enjoy include:

Robert Condie – cleek
Louisville Golf irons
Tad Moore – driver
Tad Moore – bulldog
Walter Hagen – wedge
Chicopee putter



Favorite club?

That’s the Sarazen-inspired Walter Hagen convex wedge. It is one of seven prototype wedges made by the Gibson golf company of Scotland. The shaft is danga wood made from the African baobab tree. This club is magical. I can feel Walter’s spirit channeling through his own club!

What ball do you play?

I love the soft feel of the Wilson 50s. In tournament play I use the McIntyre RTJ. It might be the best for use with hickory clubs.

Favorite course for hickories?

I love to play the Tom Bendelow-designed Hyperion Field Club in the Des Moines area. Bill Reed holds his annual Iowa Hickory Classic at this course. Overseas, there is nothing like Old Head in Ireland.

Favorite hickory tournament?

I love the Donald Ross course at Mid Pines, however the Nebraska Hickory State Tournament in the famous Sand Hills is very special. I also want to note a very special tournament victory for me, personally. It was the Senior Open title at the Chambers Bay Hickory Open in 2015, the one held just weeks before the U.S. Open itself. Thanks to Durel Billy for a great tournament!

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

Through the efforts of Walter Hagen private clubs opened their doors and finally welcomed professional golfers to use their locker rooms. To remember the occasion, Walter’s fellow pros gave him a grandfather clock which he left at Inverness with the following inscription:

“God measures men by what they are, not by what they possess. This vibrant message chimes afar the voice of Inverness. Thank you, Walter Hagen”

Best thing about hickory golf?

I play hickory golf to enjoy the fellowship it generates among like-minded golfers. It allows one to focus on the game rather than the scorecard. In the end, this makes you a better golfer with a greater appreciation for the rich golfing history that we enjoy.

Ideas to promote hickory golf?

- *To get new players involved, your organization or club needs several play sets (I suggest replicas) for them to try. Put clubs out at the driving range for all players to try.*
- *Once the new player is hooked, then his or her journey into original clubs begins.*
- *A strong local state organization is needed with dedicated players to provide a schedule that makes sense for your particular area.*
- *A champion who will help you promote hickory golf. We in Nebraska are fortunate to have Randy Jensen who acts as our ambassador of hickory golf to promote the sport.*

Most recent book on golf that you read?

I love all the classics. My favorite is a modern book, the King of Swings, by Michael Blaine. It’s about the great amateur Johnny Goodman who was all but overlooked in the hickory era due to the country’s great love affair with Bobby Jones. Many overlook Goodman’s resounding victory over Jones at the 1929 Amateur Championship at Pebble Beach. This is a book that every hickory golfer should have in the library!

