



Member Profile
Randy Jensen
 Omaha, Neb., USA

If not for a strong competitive streak and a liking for golf, hickory golf champion Randy Jensen might have become a filmmaker.

"I loved Federico Fellini (early 20th century Italian filmmaker), Stanley Kubrick, and Charlie Chaplin," he says. "I had a strong attraction to their work."

Jensen, who was reared in Omaha along with three brothers, studied at Creighton Preparatory School and then took up psychology, sports, and film at Creighton University in Omaha.

"I can show you many hours of movies I did over the years, mostly action/adventure type stuff and comedies," Jensen says. Most were shot between 14 and 25 years of age.

But it was a love for sports that would form his future.

"My dad was an auto mechanic and he did not care much for sports; he thought it a waste of time," Jensen says. "But I loved watching sports on TV. I was a New York Yankees fan and Mickey Mantle was my favorite player. I really got hooked on it, but later, when I was 13 or 14, I transitioned to golf. I recall watching Arnold Palmer and thinking his swing was just like hitting a low fastball."

Jensen says he remembers at a young age thinking he could play excellent golf – before even trying it. In his teens, he totally embraced the sport because he realized he did not have to depend upon anyone else for his performance. It was all up to him.

"I could practice as much as I wanted without having to find somebody to pitch (a baseball) to me," he says. "In golf, it was the lowest score that wins. No judgment call, just you and the course, nobody else deciding whether you play or not."

He would play all four years on the Creighton University golf team. After graduation, he pursued filmmaking for a while before deciding to open a golf shop. He would operate Classic Golf in Omaha for the next 25 years, buying and selling clubs, repairing them and eventually getting into hickory golf through acquaintanceships with early Golf Collector Society members, such as Tad Moore, Bob Farino, and Bobby Grace.

Jensen met Farino in the mid-1980s at a PGA merchandise show. The two shared an interest in golf collectibles and 1940s-50s classic clubs. At another such show, Jensen was introduced to Tad Moore with whom he could talk about technical aspects of golf clubs and clubmaking.

Then, in 1994, at a GCS show in Ypsilanti, Mich., Jensen found himself in the final threesome of a long-drive contest with Micah Boseman of Chicago and Ralph Livingston III. "Here was this really skinny guy who was so enthusiastic about golf collecting and hickory clubs. He really cracked me up, but that enthusiasm was infectious."

With Livingston, Jensen began to explore hickory clubs in depth, especially those made by Tom Stewart; then it was trying out hickory golf tournaments; then it became going to Scotland to visit links courses and explore tournaments being held there.

"At one point, he [Livingston] says, 'There's this guy, Pete Georgiady, and he's starting up a gutty ball event at the Oakhurst Links in West Virginia. We gotta go to this!'," Jensen says. "So, I say, great Ralph, let's go. And I find out about this great tournament using pre-1900 equipment and replicas of old balls. That was fantastic."

But it was not just the NHC that drew Jensen as a competitor. For a while during the late 1990s and early to mid-2000s, he was winning darn near everything he attended.

Jensen attended the first 15 National Hickory Championships, winning the title a record eight times.

Other hickory golf titles include:

- Seven GCS National Championships
- One Canadian Hickory Championship
- Two Scottish Hickory Championships
- 19 Heart of America Hickory Championships
- Three Southern 4-Ball titles (with Rob Ahlschwede)
- Four GCS Region 4 Championships

He was a runner up to Jay Harris in the first U.S. Hickory Open at Mimosa Hills in 2008. He has also competed on five Hickory Grail teams (a fixture of the British Golf Collectors Society) and has won countless other events at various regional hickory golf outings across the U.S.

Just before he took up hickory golf full-time, Jensen also won the Omaha World-Herald Publinks Tournament in 1989, 1993, and 1995.

He was called the "Tiger Woods of Hickory Golf," by writer Jonathan Dee in a March 2005 article for a national publication.

In 2008, he published *Playing Hickory Golf*, which has become a staple of information on the wood shaft golf game, with detailed information on choosing, maintaining, and playing original wood shaft golf clubs.

In his years of hickory golfing, Jensen has covered a bit of territory, having played in Great Britain, Sweden, Germany, France, and Canada. He was a participant in The Great Match, an October 2012 re-enactment of matches between Willie Park and Tom Morris. Arranged by Lionel Freedman, the match featured European professional and hickory champion Perry Sommers, originally of Australia, as Jensen's opponent.

Jensen has been quiet on the national hickory golf scene these past half-dozen years, and sold his shop in 2012 to Tony Tubrick. His attention of late has been on deciphering a variety of Napoleonic riddles associated with a rare and usual piece of jewelry from that period.

He still enjoys working on clubs and getting out with friends at local and Midwest regional events. He and his wife, Angie, were married in 2014 and make their home in Omaha.

"I'm still in pretty good health and if I really think about it and want to get back out, I'm sure I could practice more and compete in more events," he says.

If he does, hang onto your hat.

How often do you play hickories?

It was about 100 percent of the time starting in 1996. I once tried to go between hickories and moderns and that took about two weeks to transition from one to the other. But, you can't do that seriously and expect to shoot low scores. So, about 1996, just after I won the Omaha World-Herald event with modern clubs, I went to hickories full time. My good friend Ralph Livingston was already doing it so, I thought, why not?



"I've been hitting balls into a lake in front of my house for practice – nothing better to do with all those Titleist Pro V1s I find littering my home course."



Randy Jensen at Oakhurst Links in 2004. The National Hickory Championship is a title he has won eight times. (Note the deer in the background.)

What's in your play set?

(What's in your follow length)

- 1) Jack White deep-face (1 5/8-inch) driver, 9 degrees, 44 inches
- 2) R. Forgan brassie 12 degrees loft, 43 inches
- 3) Ben Sayers patented "Masta" spoon, 16 degrees loft, 42 inches
- 4) R. Forgan Bulldog 18 degree loft, 41 inches
- 5) William Gibson / Harry Vardon "Mongrel Iron" 18 degrees loft, 39 1/2 inches
- 6) Tom Stewart driving mashie, 23 degrees, 39 inches
- 7) Tom Stewart / D&W Auchterlonie "Iron" 26 degrees, 38 1/2 inches
- 8) Tom Stewart mashie iron 30 degrees, 38 inches
- 9) A.G. Spalding & Bros. Robert T. Jones, Jr. Kro-Flite 5 iron, 35 degrees, 37 3/4 inches
- 10) Robert Condie jigger 35 degrees, 37 1/2 inches
- 11) Robert Condie / Tom Morris mashie 36 degrees, 37 1/4 inches
- 12) Tom Stewart / Gene Sarazen (personal club) spade mashie 40 degrees, 37 inches
- 13) Tom Stewart / D&W Auchterlonie mashie niblick 44 degrees, 36 1/2 inches
- 14) Tom Stewart / Ben Sayers "Benny" 48 degrees, 36 1/4 inches
- 15) Tom Stewart / Tom Morris niblick 52 degrees, 36 inches
- 16) Walter Hagen Own (personal club) convex-face sand iron (made by Gibson), 56 degrees, 35 3/4 inches
- 17) George Nicoll (extra large) niblick 60 degrees, 35 1/2 inches
- 18) George Nicoll / Tommy Armour, Zenith model blade putter (personal club), 8 degrees with face bulge, 35 inches

Most swingweights are about D-2, except the niblicks of which the Nicoll and Hagen have 340-gram heads (heavy). Every year I evaluate several new clubs to see if any will make my first team set. New for 2017 are the Gibson/Vardon mongrel iron, and Condie mashie. In the past, I have played with anywhere from 11 to 15 clubs. All the woods and four irons have original hickory shafts; plus, the Hagen has the original "Danga" wood shaft from the African Baobab tree. All shaft flexes, besides the Hagen, are "X" equivalents, within a half flex. Lie angles are slightly flat – putter has the original lie angle at 66 degrees (and original loft at 8 degrees with 290 gram head). All grips are brain-tanned buffalo leather, rough-side out, very slightly oversize, treated with pine tar and Tiger Stick.

Favorite club?

Always the driver, the niblick, and the putter. Those are the ones that have to be your best clubs. I absolutely love the driver I have, it's fantastic.

What ball do you play?

I was the first one to win a tournament – in 2007 – with the McIntyre ball. It came out of the REX mold. It was a Wilson remold. Dave Brown does these balls now. I also like to test modern balls and the Wilson Staff FG is next on my list. However, I've always found the Bridgestone B-330 RX a very good ball for hickory golfers, with its low compression and softer cover.

Favorite course for hickories?

There are so many! I really enjoyed gutty golf over the Oakhurst Links, but my favorite course in the world are the links at North Berwick. It's quirky, interesting and perfect for hickory. The area is also beautiful and the weather in that region is nicer than up north. Still, there are so many good courses.

Favorite hickory tournament?

It's not easy to choose one. I love the NHC, Tad Moore's Southern 4-Ball at Highland Park – I really like that course – and the Canadian Hickory Open in Edmonton on Ron Lyon's course, The Legends. He built that course himself – and it is superb.

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

I always ask people, "Who is the most influential figure in the history of golf?" to see their response. Of course, it's Old Tom Morris, absolutely. You would be amazed at how many modern golfers have never even heard of him. If you ask that question you get a lot of Palmer and Woods, and those are not horrible answers, but when you have a guy like Old Tom who was responsible for so many innovations in the game. And everybody really liked him, at a time when there was often a lot of friction. I like the whole era of hickory golf and its changing champions from the Morris and the Parks, to the Great Triumvirate of Vardon, Braid, and Taylor; to the era of Hagen, Sarazen, Armour, and Jones.

Best thing about hickory golf?

It is just so much fun and sometimes players lose that sense with modern golf. You watch Sergio and guys like that hitting 350+ yards and for the average player that is hard to relate to. But with hickory shaft clubs, you throw those expectations out the window and it puts the fun back into the game. Golf is meant to be challenging, sure, but also fun and entertaining and sometimes people lose sight of that.

Ideas to promote hickory golf?

You know, Ralph Livingston was the best person ever to promote the sport, through the NHC, the Hickory Grail that he and David Hamilton created, and helping to found the SoHG – Ralph could get everybody enthused. And that is mostly it, sheer enthusiasm for the game. You feel that connection to the history of your game, a hundred years ago, and you hold an old club in your hands and wonder who might have played it at that time.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

I am always drawn to books on instruction. I want to know what great players do to shoot low scores. And when I read Harry Vardon's How to Play Golf, I felt like he was talking directly to me about how he plays such great golf. It is all still so relevant – not dated at all. We do the same things today. It's a fantastic book; you can get a lot of helpful ideas from it.