



Member Profile

Rob Birman

Prospect, Ky., USA

Rob Birman, a fraternal twin, is one of six children and the only golfer in the family. He was born in Silver Spring, Maryland, but the family moved to Berwyn, Pa. when he was three months old. As a youngster, Rob caddied at a local country club and played on Mondays. “Some of my earliest golf memories are of watching the Masters with an uncle in North Carolina on Easter break (a retired physician). He used to allow me to accompany him to his club and use the putting green and he was the first person to show me how to grip a club.”

Rob played casually through high school and college with no specific training. He studied music (percussion instruments) as an undergraduate and completed graduate training in arts administration. Wanderlust struck and after grad school Rob moved around a bit – Philadelphia, Boulder, DC, Miami Beach, Dubuque, Boston, Santa Barbara, San Francisco and, currently, Louisville. “I got fitted for clubs for the first time in San Francisco and got serious about lessons,” he says. With good clubs in the bag he began to play regularly, or when time permitted. Rob’s career has been one of managing or serving as CEO on several professional orchestras.

“I’ve been managing orchestras for the past 20 years and appreciate the diversity of life experience that the profession provides,” he says. “No two days are alike. Golf allows me to network with volunteers, business associates and to support local charities.”

His career with orchestras has often meant traveling and Rob has toured throughout the U.S., U.K., and Germany. Kentucky is now home and he says it feels just right.

“I feel fortunate to live in Louisville with Mike Just (of Louisville Golf) so close at hand. He has been most encouraging and is a steady source of information and resources for new hickory players.”

Rob was recently asked by the SoHG Board to share his non-profit expertise in help with recruiting new sponsors for the annual tournament series. “I’ve enjoyed working with Tad Moore, Eric Wagner, Chris Deinlein and Breck Speed to help broaden the base of financial support for the programs and services of the Society,” he says.

“There is a definite parallel between studying music and playing golf,” he says. “Both are largely solo endeavors where the entire focus is on personal development and achievement. I used to love the hours I spent in the practice room, working on myself and my ability to perfect my musical technique. The same holds true with golf on the driving range. It serves as a time to work on incremental progress and consistency of technique, and like music, one never finishes the work.”

How often do you play hickories?

I have been playing hickories exclusively since August 2011. I first encountered hickories at a charity tournament at Valhalla (in Kentucky). A year later, I followed a convivial group at French Lick at the U.S. Hickory Open, and started collecting clubs, books and materials the very next day.

What’s in your play set?

I carry 13 clubs in a Belding circa 1904 bag.

Brassie, Louisville Golf
Bulldog, Louisville Golf
56 degree niblick, Louisville Golf
Gassiat putter, Louisville Golf
Unmarked wood cleek
Stewart smooth face mid-iron
Spalding Dysart crescent iron
Burke deep-groove mashie
Spalding Kro-Flight jigger
Cann and Taylor lofted
Robert Simpson niblick
Vulcan Mashie niblick
Frank Johnston smooth faced niblick
And a Bob Titterton bag stand!

Favorite club?

I have two. For 90 yards and in, it’s my early 1900s smooth face Frank Johnston niblick (“key” cleek mark). But for muscle, it’s my 25-degree bulldog, I feel invincible with that club.



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At the 2012 Southern 4-Ball Rob Birman displays a balanced finish... and a bit of style!

What ball do you play?

I play the Bridgestone E6 and love it – 80 compression, great durability, harmless to my vintage irons and wood cleek.

Favorite hickory tournament?

I haven’t met a tournament I haven’t adored. I’m partial to Mid Pines simply because of the crispness of the air and the opportunity to sport tweed breeks and a Norfolk jacket; that’s living!

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

I’d have to say that Harry Vardon is the man I would have liked to meet most. He wasn’t flamboyant but he was masterful in match play. I enjoy his writing as well. As far as makers go, I would have loved to see Robert Simpson (Carnoustie) in his workshop.

Best thing about hickory golf?

I’d have to put the sound of the game at the top of my list, followed closely by the shot-making opportunities that hickory players must conjure. There may be one hundred and twenty-five ways to hit a 125-yard shot!

Ideas to promote SoHG, hickory golf?

Like most things in life, I believe people don’t know what they like, they like what they know! The key that everyone seeks to find is the magic bullet to excite the “next generation.” It is exciting to see SoHG growing so quickly and I’m anxious to try to help recruit more of my generation into the sport now, not merely after they get tired of the same old air game that modern American golf has produced. I think one day SoHG will have mobile vans that will show up at local clubs for the day and allow unassuming amateurs to give this game a try.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

I just read Basil Ashton Tinkler’s biography of Joyce Wethered, subtitled “Great Lady of Golf.” I read about it in an archived issue of “Through the Green,” the superlative newsletter of the British Golf Collectors Society. There is a high-speed video of her swing on YouTube that would make any of today’s pro golfers envious.