



## Member Profile

# Peter van Eekelen

### Christchurch, New Zealand

October 2022

When the hickory bug hit, it hit hard, with Peter van Eekelen having no interest in old wooden sticks, even when presented the opportunity of playing in the inaugural New Zealand Hickory Open played early March 2022. He said he had enough trouble playing with a standard set let alone taking on the challenge stepping back in time. Long time friend, and head course superintendent for the Christchurch Golf Club, Mark Lawson, planted the seed and kept at it with Peter finally swinging a hickory club “just to see what it was like.”

By the end of that week he had his first set ordered via eBay and the packages haven’t stopped hitting his front door since that first delivery.

Fast forward six months and it’s a different world with a fully functioning workshop for club restoration for play and about 60 sets under reconstruction or refurbishment and a functioning website for moving the clubs along.

“I need to start shift some of them so I can have more room for rebuilding & reconstruction for play,” he says. “I do the whole thing, clubs and bags and build the bag stands. It’s a bit time consuming but I really enjoy doing it.”

Having had a previous role as a cabinet maker and joiner, the reconstruction and rebuilding of clubs has been relatively intuitive, but Peter has already built an impressive network of mentors across the U.S. and U.K. chasing up those important details that make sure the job is completed correctly.

Peter has played golf on and off for the past 25 years and has taken it up as his primary sport in the last 10 years, currently playing off an 11.6 handicap.

Sport has been an integral part of Peter’s life having a competitive career in tennis with his first wife, Nicky, who passed away from cancer, leaving three teenage boys in his care. They are now 30, 27, and 25 and are well on their way. Now re-married to Charrette, he has a stepson aged 16 “who adds a bit of ginger to life again.” The family lives in Christchurch where Peter was born.

“I’m a member of The Christchurch Golf Club, New Zealand, established in 1873 and the second oldest club in NZ,” Peter says. “I’m a member of the Men’s Committee as well as the organising committee for the NZ Hickory Open, which we held our inaugural tournament last year, with Sir Bob Charles as our playing Patron for both the Club and the tournament. He is an avid hickory player. I have just got our first weekly hickory golf competition off the ground starting this October – the Harry Vardon 9 hole Challenge. The field is already booked out. This event will be a feeder for the NZ Hickory Open which we are hosting again next year in March at Christchurch to coincide with our club’s 150th anniversary.”

Peter is also organizing an interclub competition with sister clubs in NZ – Balmacewen, the oldest club in NZ (“beating us by a year”), Royal Wellington and Royal Auckland golf clubs.

“We have now extended the invitation to our sister clubs in Australia, Royal Queensland and Royal Sydney. They, too, are looking at participating in the Interclub as this also feeds directly into the NZ Hickory Open,” he says.

Peter hopes his website will generate interest from the local market in New Zealand. “I have quite a varied selection of the original UK master forgers,” he says. “And on through to the golden years with American manufacturing taking it the next step before steel shafts took the world of golf by storm.”

Peter’s workshop can be found at:  
[www.thehickorysticksgolfemporium.co.nz](http://www.thehickorysticksgolfemporium.co.nz)  
“It’s a work in progress,” he says.

#### How often do you play hickories?

*At the moment I am lucky to get out twice a week playing the original NZ Hickory Open Course on Thursday nights which is a nine hole setout designed by Sir Bob Charles, our Club Patron, and then again on Sundays when I take on the 6,574-yard Blue Tees for a full round. This really tests my wood and long iron play, sometimes taking three woods to reach the green on par fives. Playing with hickories has substantially improved my normal game with a slower swing and better ball contact. I get the odd occasion where I can just get out and play the inside paddock and I make the effort being dressed for the occasion in either English Tweed complete with jacket and waistcoat or lightweight American plus 4s and a jersey depending on what set I’m playing with. The likelihood of being seen in public, with my wife, dressed for such an occasion would be non-existent as I leave the house amid peals of laughter.*

#### What’s in your play set?

*My main play set is a rebuilt set of George Nicoll No-Shok Wizard irons reshafted back to hickory and a set of Tom Bracewell woods with a George Nicoll gem putter. Grips finished with the Louisville tack grip and built up for the size of my hands. It’s a bit controversial in the world of hickory, but they are just lovely to play with and the heads are perfect for reshafting. My second set is a set of Tom Stewarts with a couple of ivory fancy face woods. I also still play with my first set of Duralites which set me off on the path I am on now. My main putter is the Nicoll Gem and it is fantastic and makes my score look better than it is on more than one occasion.*

#### Do you have a favorite club?

*It’s hard to decide between my mashie niblick or my putter. The mashie niblick pulls off some wonderful shots from bunkers, rough and greenside and it sets me up well for the putter which has a predilection for one-putts.*

#### What ball do you play?

*My preference is the Callaway Super Soft but I play with the Wilson Duo on occasion.*

#### Favorite course for hickories?

*Well that has to be Christchurch Golf Club, our home of hickory. The course was originally designed as a links course and is known as the Shirley Links. Over the years a lot of trees had been planted and finally the decision was made to rebuild No. 8, and 11 in line with Peter Thompson’s redesign and remove the majority of the trees. Significant*



**Peter van Eekelen in period attire for hickory golf. At top, “The Englishman – and yes, I play with the jacket done up, waistcoat and tie,” he says. The bottom photo is “The American, which is a bit more relaxed in hot weather.”**

*work was undertaken with our waterways and new mound-ing was reintroduced a couple of years ago. The result is a beautiful rolling course with inviting greens that truly test the putter. A few trees remain, giving the course some definition, and a wayward drive is punished with a long grass rough. The course is the home of the New Zealand Hickory Open and I am lucky to be able to play that setup on a weekly basis during the week with the alternate tee setout.*

#### Favorite hickory tournament?

*Being a relative newby I turned down the opportunity of playing in the NZ Hickory Open but have since started a weekly competition called the Harry Vardon Challenge, a nine-hole competition that follows the NZ Open layout. I have now been invited to be part of the NZ Open Committee due to the obvious enthusiasm for hickory golf in addition to being the hickory golf ambassador on the CHCHGC Mens Committee.*

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

*I have been on a crash course, reading everything from the club makers as well as the players. One of the best books so far is The Clubmakers Art which has explained a lot about what I am working with. I have also been reading biographies of a number of players to get a better understanding of what it was like to play and the constraints they had to achieve what they did. We really don’t appreciate how lucky we are today playing modern courses with clubs of yesterday.*

#### Best thing about hickory golf?

*The camaraderie and joy that comes from playing. It’s just surprising to see how much more fun it is to play hickory. Whilst I am very competitive, the focus for my hickory game is the application of the club to the ball to get the best result. I focus more on the individual shot than the score and the interplay between players is a far more supportive and enjoyable experience. When helping others play their first rounds, watching the lightbulb turn on when they get it, is truly an amazing shared experience.*

#### Ideas to promote hickory golf?

*I have now implemented a weekly summer competition, the Harry Vardon Challenge, at our own club and am now working my way through the hickory Interclub South Shore Cup, which is between our sister clubs in New Zealand and Australia. I am also in the middle of putting together some play sets to loan out to others and frequently carry a spare set ‘just in case’ I can get another convert across the line. I have joined the SoHG to assist me with a bigger network to facilitate the ongoing promotion of hickory play in New Zealand. I now have a website in play and am coming to terms with social media to further promote what we are trying to achieve in both making play sets available and the opportunity to play.*

#### Most recent book on golf that you read?

*Ben Hogan, An American Life, by James Dodson, and The Clubmakers Art by Jeffery B. Ellis.*