

## Player relishes the good old days

### Houstonian hooked on his hickory-shafted vintage clubs

By TODD HVEEM For the Chronicle

June 17, 2009



It was through book collecting that Mark Wehring discovered a love for golf. But there's a hitch.

The 41-year-old Houstonian is not hooked on golf the way it is played today. He is hooked on the way it was played before 1931 — with hickory-shafted clubs and rubber-core balls.

"I have been a golf book collector for a long time," said Wehring, whose collection includes volumes about vintage golf clubs. "The British Golf Collectors home has been at Royal Liverpool in Hoylake, England. I went to the annual meeting in 2004, and everyone was playing hickories. I liked the sound of the ball coming off the club faces, especially the woods. Since then, I have been hooked."

So much so that Wehring said of the 30 competitive rounds of golf he plays each year, about 25 are with hickory clubs.

"I went out and acquired clubs shortly thereafter," Wehring said. "It's not like going to a golf professional and getting custom-fit or buying a set off the wall. I had to acquire a club here and there. Then, when you find a club you like, you have to hit them to try them out. Each club is so unique and different in weight and feel."

## **Bag of antiques**

It took awhile, but Wehring assembled a “play set.” Most of the clubs were made between 1909 and 1922, he said.

“I might hit my hickory driver 235 yards off the tee, so I will lose about 50 yards,” said Wehring, who is a 4 handicap with modern clubs and a 5 handicap with hickories. “My brassie is similar to a 2-wood. It has about 14 degrees of loft. The spoon is like a 4-wood, and my bulldog has a shorter shaft. It is like a rescue or utility club. It has more arc in the sole to it to get through the rough.”

He said the mashie, which is similar to a modern day 7-iron, was a player’s most versatile club in the early 1900s.

Wehring said after Bobby Jones won the Grand Slam playing hickories in 1930, the clubs started to fade from existence.

“After that, you saw an introduction to steel-shafted clubs,” he said. “But there is still a large contingent of players out there today playing hickories. It really changes the game. Windy conditions and firm ground add to the fun.” There is an emphasis on course management.

Wehring, a compliance officer for Invesco, has won three major hickory championships in the United States. He won the Fred Oman trophy at Onion Creek in Austin in 2005 and 2008.

“In 2008, I shot 72 the second day,” he said. “That is my lowest score in the U.S. in a competitive event.”

He has also won nine major championships overseas, with a 70 in the Scottish Hickory Championship at Gullane, Scotland being his lowest round ever.

Wehring plays locally at Westwood Golf Club, and is a member of Royal Dornoch Golf Club in Sutherland, Scotland.

## **Blast from the past**

Ironically, Wehring grew up playing tennis.

“I played golf in high school, but I grew up primarily as a tennis player,” he said. “I had some injuries my senior year in high school that ended my competitive tennis. Those circumstances allowed me to look at golf more seriously.

“The wonderful thing about golf is the variety of courses, and it can be played for a lifetime. I have met some wonderful people and been to some wonderful places. I guess you could say I am kind of hooked on it.”

Just not the way most folks are.

“There is nothing like the feel of a well-struck shot with clubs that are 80-100 years old. “It gives me an appreciation of how good players like Bobby Jones, Walter Hagen and Harry Vardon were in their day. I am playing the same equipment and the same ball. Plus, their greens weren’t as good. They were great shot makers.”

**By TODD HVEEM For the Chronicle**

**June 3, 2009**

Mashie, anyone?

Mark Wehring made a rare hole-in-one.

Wehring was playing the Cypress Creek course at Champions Golf Club when he aced the 150-yard 16th hole using a hickory-shafted mashie.

Wehring has won national and international hickory championships. He is currently the championship holder of the English Hickory Championship, Welsh Hickory Championship and Central England Hickory Championship.

