

Going Back to The Future Has Never Been So Thrilling

By Glen Turk



Special thanks to Deb Patton for giving up her column so graciously. It is only fitting a feature on Hickory Clubs should be located on the Forward Tees, the recommended teeing ground when playing with clubs that look more than 100 years old.

I admit it; I was getting a scotch bored with this enduring game that serves not only as my main recreational pursuit, but the basis of my primary income. After shooting four consecutive rounds between 74 and 76 all while hitting the same driver, 8-iron or wedge combination over and over again, I yearned for something more. But instead of going new school with music and crazily-formatted scrambles, I decided to go old-school...way old-school.

What I originally figured was an elaborate April Fool's Day joke turned into an epiphany that has renewed my passion for golf. And to think it all started with a Mashie-Niblick.

The man who deserves the credit for this back to the future transformation is Brian Oar, a well-respected golf photographer from St. George, Utah. During a visit to Sand Hollow – Utah's number one course, he recommended we partake in an amenity that in my humble opinion all golfers should try at least once in their life.

For Sand Hollow Resort features a nine hole Scottish-inspired Links Course that is the ultimate throwback experience. To complete the journey, the

resort stocks 20 Louisville Golf replica Hickory club rental half sets so players can experience what most have only seen through Hollywood in movies such as *The Greatest Game Ever Played* or *The Legend of Bagger Vance*.

So on a crisp, clear April Fool's Day I waggled my first hickory-shafted Spoon (roughly a 4-Wood) praying not to completely whiff and fall over in total embarrassment. But to my utter surprise and delight I hit the ball "on the screws" and watched a perfect little draw fly 180 yards in the air and roll another 60! I feathered a wedge on the dance floor to about 25 feet and somehow two-putted for an opening par and I was immediately hooked.

After a round of 39 that including birdieing the last hole (an uphill par-5 playing just under 500 yards from the forward tees), I pondered, why was the last two hours of my life so enjoyable? To begin with, maybe it's the creativity of not knowing precise yardage or how the ball will react once it hits the ground only adds to the thrill level. Or possibly, it's doing something so far out of your comfort level that all expectations drip away until you are only left with taking one shot at a time – and isn't that what we should be striving for every time out on the links?

Fast forward (or rewind in this case) to July 28th, 2016, one day after my custom set from Louisville Golf arrived in a plain cardboard box stuffed with old newspapers that cemented the retro-feel. I placed my

How to Begin Your Hickory Journey

By Bill "Ernie" Ernst, Society of
Hickory Golfers Board Member



If you are interested in learning more about Hickory golf, I would suggest checking out the Society of Hickory Golfers web site www.hickorygolfers.com for information on events, play groups and mentors around the country and the world. The web site also has great articles on play sets, how to acquire clubs, maintain them and resources for materials. Another great resource is a local play group of members who have been playing hickory golf for some time. Members are more than willing to lend you clubs to try and are great resources in helping you build your play set. These individuals are always willing to share their knowledge and experiences in playing Hickory Golf. For instance, in Wisconsin visit the web site of the Wisconsin Hickory Golfers at: <http://www.hickorykummelcup.com>.

When you begin to build your play set, it normally would consist of 6-8 clubs. A Brassie (serves as both a driver and fairway wood, about 13-14 degrees loft), Mid-iron (for long iron shots, about 25-27 degrees loft), Mashie (for approach shots, about 34-36 degrees loft), Mashie Niblick (short approach and pitch shots, about 43-47 degrees loft), Niblick (lofted for bunker and pitch shots, 52 -57 degrees loft) and a Putter. Remember this is a play set not a collector set. These clubs were meant to be played. There were millions of clubs

made in the Hickory Era from 1900-1935. You can find these clubs anywhere such as Antique stores, rummage sales, Ebay, or even Craigslist. You can use modern balls when you play, just make sure it is a softer compression ball. You do not want to play a hard ball as it is just too hard on the shafts. (Editor's Note: MGM recommends McIntyre Golf Balls (www.mcintyregolf.com) out of Nebraska as they make a series of replica golf balls that play perfectly with hickory sticks.)

Finally, where you should play? In the game of Hickory golf you will notice you normally require a run up area to the green and if you notice courses built in the 1900-1935 era usually always have this as a feature. But remember its golf and the course design should not be the determining factor in your course selection. We normally play yardages in the 5800-6200 yards. You will notice the only difference in yardage is off the tee. You will not be as long off the tee as you are with a modern driver, but you will not notice a significant yardage difference in the rest of your game. Hickory golf is not bomb and chip golf. Your option in shot selection is limitless, especially if the course allows for an approach shot that allows for a run up shot. That is one of the truly fun aspects of playing Hickory golf clubs.

half set with all the cool names (Benny, Mashie, Niblick etc.) in a ratty old bag with tassle head covers and ventured to La Belle Country Club, a 1896 gem near Milwaukee, WI whose pro in 1900, Willie Anderson, went on to win four U.S Opens – the only player not named to Hogan, Nicklaus, or Woods to do so!

My good friend Brian Weis of GolfTrips.com, who has also been bitten by the hickory bug, joined along for a trip down memory lane, which was only juxtaposed by our modern attire (that can be remedied by heading to www.golfknickers.com) and using a range finder to calculate roughly how far our new clubs went. Again, time and my swing seemed to slow down as we both navigated the par-71, 5,800 parkland layout with clubs that went only roughly 10% less than our current TaylorMade and PING sets. Our occasional bad shots were met with laughter, not curses, as our only thoughts

were becoming submersed in tradition and learning the nuisances of swinging hickories.

I did however invent a new scoring system, as I circled my first par on the 3rd hole thinking it was just as good as a birdie with normal clubs. So when Brian actually did birdie the par-5 7th I placed a diamond around his four. The rest of the round was more of the same, two golf nuts staying off our smart phones and enjoying the field before us.

So if this sounds like a worthy pursuit, please see the sidebar below by Bill "Ernie" Ernst, who serves on the Board of Directors for the Society of Hickory Golfers. He will explain everything you need to know to get you started in this grander version of the Greatest Game Ever Played!