



Member Profile

Michael D. Brown

Fredonia, Wisc., USA

It started with softball, says Michael Brown, who says he played a lot between 16 and 20 years old. Most games, he says, ended up at taverns where arguments ensued as to who let the team down when it lost. He looked for a sport that was more conducive to friendships.

“My Dad took me golfing a few times in my teens, I found it very peaceful and challenging,” he recalls.

He remembers watching Arnold Palmer’s early “Inside the PGA Tour,” a late-night segment that later morphed into the now 24-7 Golf Channel. Brown would arrive home from his second shift job just in time to pick up a few tips on drivers, irons, chips, putts and sand traps.

“I would watch and then go out and try to copy what they said to do,” he says. “I found golf to be a very personal game, one that teaches you how to handle the highs and lows. It is a constant learning about your inner self, most importantly controlling your emotions, principles that not only help in golf but elsewhere in one’s life.”

As with everyone else, the journey to improve began in earnest. Driving tips from Jack Nicklaus, bunker tips from Lee Trevino, and so on.

Finally, Brown broke into the 80s, then the occasional 36 for nine holes. It was a constant battle not to shoot yourself in the foot, he says. “By the way, I always seem to be successful at hitting my foot!”

With his current handicap hovering around 11, he shoots between 80-85. His golfing friends and neighbors continue to play steel and are 18-24 handicappers.

Brown worked for 20 years at a Harley Davidson facility where he was a tool and die maker, engineer, and supervisor. Battling some health issues, he was fortunate to be able to retire early and picked up a job on the Camelot Golf Course, near his home.

“I did everything possible: cut greens, fairways, rough, rolling greens, change holes, measure the speed, tear down and rebuild the cutting machines, sharpen and set up all the greens mowers. Now I’m learning the golf game from the green keeper’s side. It is fascinating to learn how much work it takes to provide every golfer with the best possible experience.”

Hickories entered the picture one morning when he was asked to start earlier than usual.

“My first hickory swing was June 18, 2021 around 7:45 a.m., on a par 3. Driving up to the seventh green to cut a new hole I saw two guys putting out with wood shafted clubs. One was dressed in old corduroy pants and a vest.”

They were Dave Long and Tom Gassnor, members of the Wisconsin Hickory Golfers, and now very good friends of Brown’s.

“I was intrigued and cut the hole as quick as I could to catch up with them on the next tee where I asked them if I could try a shot. I’ve always wondered what it was like for Bobby Jones to hit these things and I was about to find out. I was handed a beautiful Sunningdale play club and a soft ball.

“Dave gave me some advice on how to swing. So, hoping my boss wouldn’t catch me, I teed up a ball, took a few smooth practice swings and proceeded to hit it 230 yards to the fringe. That was all it took. I fell in love instantly. Dave invited me to play a whole round with them the following week. A week later I owned my first set. I am now a total hickory junkie! I still think about the fact that if I hadn’t been changing the cups that morning I would not know this hickory golf nation existed. It was one of the best encounters of my life.”



Michael D. Brown, top, on the famous Swilcan Bridge on the Old Course in St Andrews; and above with his wife, Leanne, at the 2021 Foxburg Hickory Championship.

How often do you play hickories?

I play hickory almost all of the time. I mostly play for fun anyway and, as my neighbors point out, I should be the low score with the superior technology I play with.

What’s in your play set?

I’ve resisted using replicas because half the fun of the hickory clubs is the search for what works for you. So, the following are all originals:

- 12 degree Terrier Play club
- 18 degree Tom Cahill Bulldog
- 24 degree Star fancy face.
- 24 & 28 degree Stewarts
- 35 degree Monel Metal jigger
- 35 degree Stewart Jigger
- 40, 44, 48 degree Stewarts
- 50-56 degree One Shot niblicks
- 60 degree no name sand iron.
- Original Chicopee putter

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

As I was learning how to change my swing and play better by watching “Inside the PGA,” there were a lot a references to Ben Hogan. I’ve really enjoyed reading his “Five Lessons” and “Power Golf.” But since I began playing hickories, I’ve spent time on YouTube searching for videos of early players. There are quite a lot of these. Bobby Jones’ swing fascinates me. His body and arm action with those old short flying balls are amazing and he could still hit it 260-270 yards. Unfortunately, being on the back nine of my life is very hard to try these moves that require great flexibility. But I enjoy it and after 42 years of playing I still have the same desire to learn as I did in 1982 when I started this process.