



## Member Profile

# Steven Cope

Stockton, Calif., USA

Steve is a graduate of California State University Stanislaus, holding a degree in Organizational Communications, and he currently works in the educational field as a substitute high school teacher. He writes: “But let’s be honest here: This isn’t LinkedIn... and none of you are here to read my resumé. On to the golf stuff!”

A golfer since the age of 10 and a history buff long before that, one might say Steve was destined to discover hickory golf at some point.

Steve’s golf odyssey began the week after he graduated fourth grade, when his mother, desperate to get him out of the house for the summer, read about an upcoming junior golf clinic at the local municipal course. She merrily dropped him off on the designated morning with the requisite entry fee and a cheerful “Have fun, kiddo! I’m going shopping!” blissfully unaware of the lifetime obsession she was starting.

That obsession grew slowly at first. Trips to the driving range with second-hand clubs gifted from a neighbor. Testing fledgling skills on a nearby par-three course. Mustering the courage to take his first, tentative steps onto a championship-length course. His first par. First birdie. Playing in local junior leagues. The road was slow but inexorable.

In his senior year of high school, Steve played his way into the state sub-sectional tournament, thereby earning the right to have the living pants beaten off him by Johnny Miller’s kids.

“Yeah, if MY dad had a U.S. Open trophy on his mantle and a Claret Jug to keep it company...,” he sometimes laments.

Hickory golf, on the other hand, is a much more recent development for Steve. THAT particular mania started one evening in April of 2025. While innocently browsing YouTube, he stumbled across an episode of “Adventures in Golf,” where host Erik Lang visits a hickory tournament. Steve was immediately enthralled. While approaching golf through a historical lens was something he’d casually pondered on occasion, the realization that – “Holy crap! There are people who actually DO this?!” – hit like something of a thunderbolt. It wasn’t long after that epiphany that Steve had scoured eBay, assembled a set of hickory clubs and was out hickory-hacking his way around the course, old-school style.

Otherwise, when not blowing his hard-earned money on antique golf equipment, Steve is blowing it on his extensive collection of HO-scale model trains. Or, failing that, he’s at work, serving as a substitute high school teacher. (Because golf and trains don’t fund themselves.)

### How often do you play hickories?

*About once a month, if I had to say, although I’d like it to be more than that. But life and seasonal climate tend to have their own opinions on the matter. As a recent convert to hickory golf, my intentions are to maintain a foot in both worlds, (hickory and modern), but we’ll see how that goes.*

### 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:*

Spalding Gold Medal brassie  
R. L. Finnegan bulldog spoon  
Spalding Gold Medal irons:  
Driving Iron  
Mid-Iron  
Approach Iron  
Mashie  
Mashie-Niblick  
Niblick  
Jigger  
Putting Cleek  
Saint Andrews Golf Company wood-headed putter

### Favorite club?

*Difficult to say, but probably the woodie putter: it’s such a classic look when you’re standing over the ball. And honestly, it halfway reminds me of the club Ted Knight pulled out of that velvet sleeve at the end of “Caddyshack.” (Ohhhhh Billy... Billy... Billy.)*

### What ball do you play?

*Mostly Callaway Super-Soft, although I’ve recently started using McIntyre replica balls for a more authentic experience. But they’re a bit toward the pricey side of things, so when there’s trouble in play, (i.e. water), I still fall back to the Callaway.*

### Favorite course for hickories?

*This is a tough one, as there’s actually two courses at the top of my list, and I’m loathe to rank one above the other. Catalina Island Golf Club is one of the two: A short, nine-hole track with an 1892 vintage, it’s an almost ideal design for hickory play. And playing up into Avalon Canyon with sweeping views of the town and the Santa Barbara Channel beyond is always impressive.*

*The other is Northwood Golf Course in Monte Rio, Calif.; another nine-hole course, set into a grove of ancient coastal*



**Steven Cope has taken up the grand old game and looks to expand his hickory horizons.**

*redwoods along the banks of the Russian River and boasting an Alister MacKenzie pedigree. Playing down fairways framed by trees so tall their crowns disappear into the coastal fog... the game becomes a spiritual experience.*

### Favorite hickory tournament?

*Probably the Oddball Tournament in Washington, Ill. You’ve got to love any event that uses feather balls for competitive play.*

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

*The evolutionary journey of the game would certainly qualify. To look back and see how certain ideas and concepts appear, evolve, disappear, and occasionally re-emerge decades later in different forms is an intriguing study. Technology, economics, politics, social conventions – all of these things have played a role in shaping the game and the means by which it is played. The narrative of the game’s development forms a grand arc from this perspective, and is quite fascinating!*

*Beyond that, I’ve always found Craig Wood interesting, although that interest might actually be a misplaced sense of pity. Gene Sarazen stealing the green jacket off his back with that double-eagle in the ’35 Masters had to be a tough blow to overcome.*

### Best thing about hickory golf?

*Hmmmm... Something of a tough question here, as the answer has shifted over time:*

*When I first picked up a hickory club, I viewed it as a sort of experiment in living history; a general quest to experience golf as it was a century ago. But as I’ve discovered more about how the game was played back then, certain aspects have grabbed me more than others.*

*I suppose what I find most appealing is how cerebral the game used to be. In our modern age of “bomb-and-gouge” tactics, we’ve come to view hazards as mere fly-over territory. That trap in the right-front corner isn’t much of an issue when you can simply rope your titanium driver for 270 and lob a wedge in over the top of it. But with the lower trajectory and lack of spin afforded by hickory clubs, you can’t carry that bunker, or at the very least, can’t hold the green if you do. So scoring requires you to take it out of play entirely by placing your drive on the left of the fairway. And this in turn requires you to be thinking of such when you’re standing back on the tee.*

*In this way, the game becomes more like a chess match than an athletic endeavor. Success depends largely upon understanding the course and thinking three shots ahead as you negotiate its various pitfalls. It rewards comprehension and cunning as much as it does strength and skill, and this appeals to my academic nature.*

### Ideas to promote hickory golf?

*Honestly? Just get out and play more! Every time I take my hickory sticks out for a round, I get a handful of people stopping me to ask about them. And this invariably leads to discussions of what I’m doing, why I’m doing it, and typically a short lesson on golf history as well. It’s amazing how people respond to catching a glimpse of such antique equipment. So, in a way, the clubs themselves are our greatest ambassadors.*

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

*Currently, I’m in the process of re-reading Five Lessons: The Modern Fundamentals of Golf by Ben Hogan. As one of the foremost golf instructional volumes ever written, it’s good to leaf through it as a refresher every now and then.*