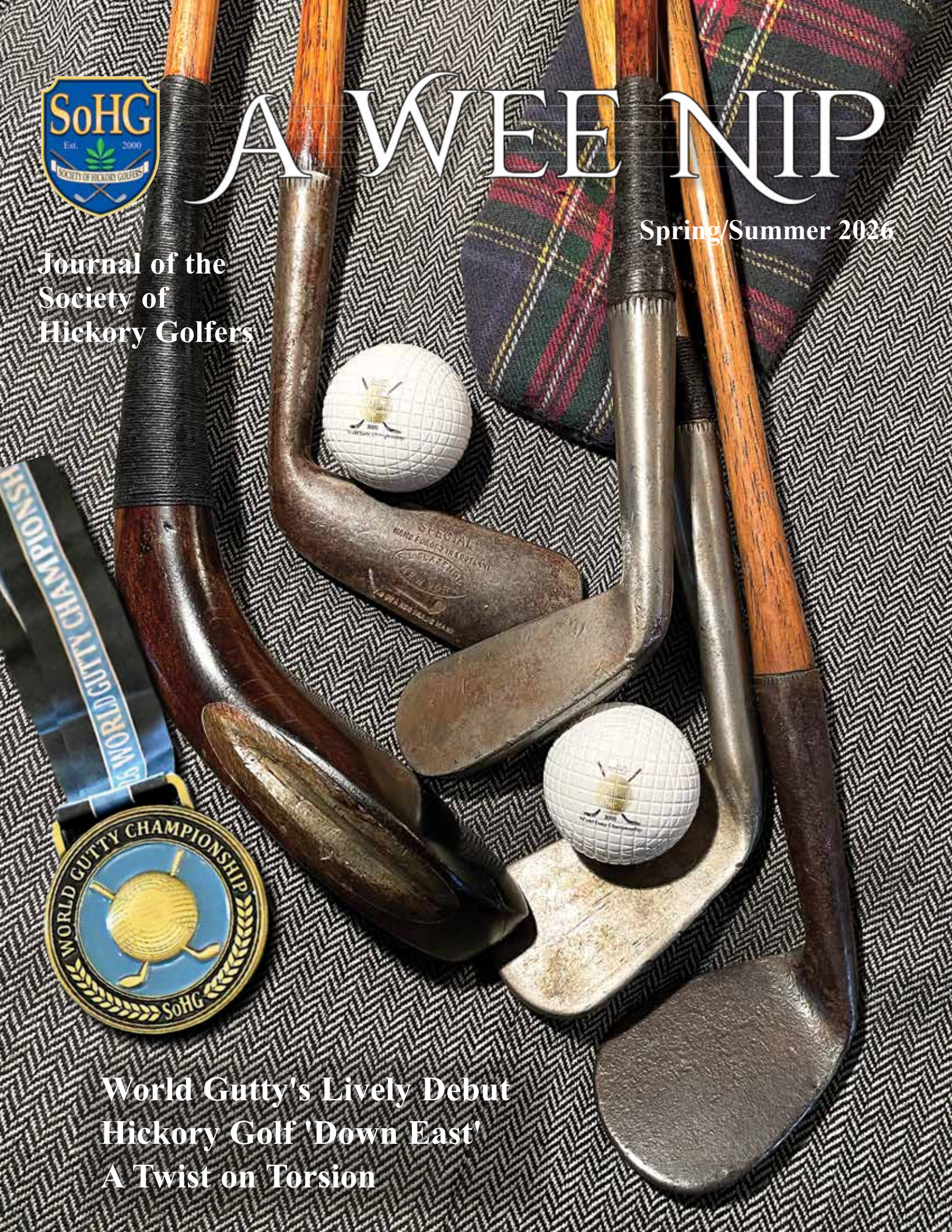




A WEE NIP

Spring/Summer 2026

Journal of the
Society of
Hickory Golfers



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Down the Fairway... Joey Piatek

President's Letter

A WEE NIP

Spring/Summer 2026
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opinions, comments.



JOEY PIATEK
President, SoHG

I remember a time in my earlier days of golf when I stopped worrying about the future. I'd hit a shot into some spot I couldn't see, and worry for the duration of the walk to the ball: "Is it in a hazard?", "Is it lost?", or "What was that?" Tiring of this worry, my thoughts became: "I know my ball is somewhere and no longer moving, so no amount of pondering its position will change where it now lies." I could instead spend the walk thinking about what I need to do on my next shot or at least enjoy the moment and be happy to be playing. My priest* reminded me of this recently by way of two sentences in his weekly message called "Words for the Wind":

There are many deaths in our lifetimes and many resurrections in our lifetimes, but we usually miss them because we are busy worrying about the future or trying to redo the past. It is in the present moment that we all live and we all die, that is the definition of eternity, an always now.

I think we all can benefit from being more in the present. This is a skill that makes it possible to play to your potential, and something that most good players do. Part of being present is being completely self-aware and honest with oneself, and dealing with a problem now, with no distractions from the past or future, just your own honest self, laid bare. Lack of honesty with oneself is the cardinal sin of golf: whether you over-estimate OR under-estimate your ability, you're losing strokes to an opponent who is not making these errors. It's easy to see that going for an impossible carry is not smart golf, but it's an equally flawed strategy to fail to take advantage of being able to hit a shot that your opponent does not have the ability to hit.

Hickory golf requires some adjustments in strategy to optimize scoring: drives go shorter, and the aerial route near greens is not always an option, so we need to play more conservatively, and to make sure that we use angles and slopes to help get the ball to the hole. Those of us who embrace the hickory game acknowledge this, and adjust our strategy as needed. If course architects have done their jobs well, the golf course will not simply reward a good shot and punish a bad one: golf holes should test a player's ability of live self-assessment.

SEE FAIRWAY, PAGE 5

A WEE NIP – SPRING/SUMMER 2026

SoHG News.....	5	Quiet Joys of Obscure Scottish Golf.....	32
Summer at the Edge of the Map	8	By Dr. Mike Jones	
Hickory Golf in New Zealand, by Peter VanEekelen		Equipment Tips.....	36
New SoHG Members	12	Club repair tips, by Tim Bell	
Favorite Club.....	13	A New Twist on the Auld Game.....	38
Gibson Star Niblick, by Mike Needleman		Getting a grip on torsion/flex, by Jim Davis	
Lang Willie Engelson.....	14		
A hickory golf original, by Dr. Mike Jones			
New England Hickory Golf.....	18		
Regional Spotlight			
Auld Gowf	26		
The World Gutty Championship, by Dr. Mike Jones			

On the cover...

Smooth-faced irons and splice-neck woods were the order of the day at the World Gutty Championship. Players enjoyed the match play format and the competition was keen. See the story and photos on page 26.



A word...

from the editor's desk

Jim Davis

A strong start to the season

Perhaps it is just me, but it seems like modern hickory golf is enjoying an upswing. In Europe, the Hickory Golf Masters promises a serious turn with the old game, including an emphasis on original clubs and tradition. In the Pacific/Asia region, golfers are finding new ways to explore the sport from New Zealand to Korea, China and Japan. The U.S. has just experienced its first gutty world championship and reports are that new courses are coming on with hickories in the mix. Social and mainstream media both are giving more and more



DR. MIKE JONES, en route home to Pinehurst following his visit to Florida and the World Gutty Championship.

attention to hickory golf. Can a recurring spot on the Golf Channel become a thing?

Well, we can hope.

In this issue, please welcome Dr. Mike Jones as a contributor, one who starts out with no fewer than three bylines, including several photos taken for the Auld Gowf department on the World Gutty Championship.

Jones is a retired physician who, when not playing hickories, enjoys flying his Cessna here and there. He's an amateur photographer and writer, too. He debuts in this edition of the *Wee Nip* with a travel article about a Scotland trip with his wife, Annie, a report on the WGC, and a profile of Lang Willie Engelson.

The latter was a request by *Wee Nip* editors to spotlight one of the true modern hickory golf pioneers. Lang Willie is a legend in the Carolinas and our sport is the better for his efforts in promoting the game.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *A Wee Nip*. Please do keep in touch and share your stories, articles and other contributions.

All the best for a great season of golf.



JIM DAVIS

Jim

Thank you SoHG Sponsors





SoHG News

Dave Brown new E-Nip Editor

David Brown, who crafts all those wonderful McIntyre golf balls, finds he still has a bit of time now that he is retired from orthopedic surgery. He has volunteered to take on the monthly e-Nip newsletter and will welcome your support. Please send him any news or photos you would like to share with the SoHG members. You can reach Dave at: mashiegolfer@gmail.com. (As were about to go to press, Chuck Felder of Mission Viejo, Calif., volunteered to assist Dave. The two will team up to produce the e-newsletter.)

A U.S. team for the China Hickory Open?

Gary Krupkin, chief organizer of the 2025 U.S. Hickory Open, is planning to go and would like to build a U.S. team to join him. Check the SoHG website for information on the China Hickory Open (Nov. 16-18 near Hong Kong), or email Gary at krupkinlaw@gmail.com for details.

Website Upgrade Close to the Finish Line

Our new website launch is very close. We are at a point now where some particularly complex coding is required – membership fee structure, handicap system, and regional playing groups presentation. We are quite sure Society members will find it a refreshing update and it will certainly do much to raise the Society’s stature as a credible organization. Two items of note: a new membership fee structure that will offer print or digital-only membership options; and an automatic renewal feature, common on most membership sites, that can be easily disabled should the member wish. Your editor is hopeful the website may be in place sometime between late April and early June.

USHO Updates

Though the 2026 USHO sold out quickly, don’t be shy of going on the waitlist. As plans and schedules change over the summer, many who signed up find they must cancel and the waitlist grows shorter. As for 2027, all indications are that the Society will be visiting a spot in the Carolinas. Our USHO Site Committee is visiting potential venues and will have a report for us within the next month or so.

World Hickory Golf Day

Always the first Sunday in May – in 2026 on May 3. Get out with your friends to play or, if the weather is still inclement in your region, gather at the local pub in celebration. Send us photos, too.



FAIRWAY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Alister MacKenzie wrote: “The course should be so arranged that the player who attempts the most difficult shots is rewarded... and the player who attempts shots beyond his capacity is penalized.” Further, he said “Every hole should have a line of play which offers great advantage to the bold player... but at the same time a safer route for the less skillful.”

Then it is up to the player to make their choice. We see that PGA tour players are very skilled at doing this. They trust their short game so much that they often go for par fives in two, understanding that if they miss the green they still have a better chance of getting up and down for birdie from greenside than from further back in the fairway. Playing safe would mean losing strokes.

For us hickory golfers, this might mean hitting an unconventional shot to optimize our own individual strengths and weaknesses, and to take advantage of our mastery (or lack of mastery) of the characteristics of our individual clubs.

I think we could all stand to make improvements to be as self-honest and present as possible. Not just in golf, but in all things. Best wishes for a fun 2026 to us all.

**Ironically my priest does not play hickory golf even though he has the best name possible for a hickory golfer: Father Charles Niblick! Yes, that is his name.*

Joey



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Going the Distance – A Measure of the Game

A short time ago a fellow wrote to the Society with a question about the 2026 U.S. Hickory Open:

Do you know if distance measuring devices will be allowed? It is very silly that we don't allow these in some events. Has nothing to do with history. We allow carts....pro v golf balls.... the only thing a device does is speed up play. These 5 1/2 hour rounds are ridiculous. We are going to get the number, why make us look for sprinkler heads and then look at pin sheets (which they didn't have back in the day either.)

Please advise as I am not going to play if distance measuring devices are not allowed.

When advised that the USHO rules, in fact, disallow such electronic devices, our fellow responded:

Thanks. I'll sit this one out. Completely stupid rule. Enjoy the 5 hour rounds.

In a subsequent email, the writer said that if the SoHG would not change its policy then he could no longer support the Society and would not renew his membership.

While we regret the loss of a valued member, we certainly respect his decision. We hope, too, that he might respect our decision not to allow range finders, also called Distance Measuring Devices, or DMDs.

Our Society takes its bearings from the traditions and values of the golden age of hickory golf up to the early 1930s. There were no such advancements in technology at the time, nor golf carts either, for that matter. The latter, though, is more of a mobility issue than one of judgment in playing the game.

In that earlier day, the player came to his ball, assessed its lie, the conditions (wind, etc.), the hazards before him, and the distance that he wanted the next shot to travel. If he wished

to run the ball, he'd need to assess the various topographical difficulties – bumps, hollows, hard fairways or soft, and so on. To fly the ball, he'd also have to assess the distance he wished it to carry, and then roll, if any. He would then choose his club accordingly, perhaps with the aid of a caddie.

But all this was part of the game. It is a game, after all, and the player who wins is often the best at matching his course management strategies and judgments to his skill with his clubs.

The Society never has and never will dictate that regional hickory golf groups ban DMDs, or that individual tournaments do so either. If DMDs are allowed at this event or that, why, please do so and we hope you will enjoy your game.

The U.S. Hickory Open and the World Gutty Championship are the only two events directly sponsored by the SoHG, and DMDs are not allowed.

Hickory golf is a delight to play. There is nothing high-tech about it. In fact there is a wonderful fascination with the game as we explore what these clubs are capable of, and in the company of great friends and fellow players.

So, don't be too hard on us for disallowing DMDs at the USHO. We are not here to take away the fun, rather to approach the game from a time when the game was based on course judgment, knowledge of the equipment, courtesy, and respect for others. All these are no less a part of the sport than the ability to knock an approach stiff or sink a putt when 50 cents is on the line.

We will take our hickory golf with all the bounces, rubs of the green and luck, good and bad, that the game affords. But, if you will, please, perhaps not with range finders.

SoHG Board, USHO Committee



How far? What club?

SoHG Member Mike Schulze writes about how he got into hickory golf and why he still loves playing the sport today.

Why I Play Hickory Today

It seems like the popularity of playing hickory golf is on the rise. Today I collect hickory and play when I can, but I wonder how many golfers played hickory because they had no other clubs to play with. Here is my true story.

It was July, 1958, a hot summers day in the Midwest, USA. I was 13 at the time and I was trimming bushes in my mom's front yard. An older teenager was coming up my street. He had a hickory golf club that he was using like a cane. He gripped the clubhead in his right hand and tapped the handle tip on the asphalt like a blindman walking straight ahead. His shirt was unbuttoned and his shirt tail was hanging out. He was hot.



Out of the blue, he spoke to me, "Hey kid, how about a glass of water?" I'm not usually this quick thinking, "I'll trade you a glass of water for that golf club," I said. Surprisingly, he said, "yes" and I had my first hickory, a putter.

I immediately began building a three-hole golf course in my back yard. I sunk empty coffee cans in the ground for cups and trimmed the grass very short around those cups using my mom's good sewing scissors. Later, I paid a price for my choice of maintenance equipment.

I had one golfball, a mesh U.S. Royal, which I called "square dimples." Until I started to caddie, I was certain all golf balls had square dimples.

So, now I was set; I had a club, a ball and a three-hole golf course in my back yard. I played my course over and over the rest of that summer. There were hazards to traverse, two apple trees and a chicken coop, but eventually I would reach the green and putt out.

HICKORY, CONTINUED PAGE 11



2026 Nebraska Hickory Golf

Register online at NebraskaHickoryGolf.com

Opening Day 2-person Best Ball

May 3 Elmwood Park Omaha

NeKaWa Match Play

June 14 Shoreline GC Carter Lake IA

NE Hickory Open

August 23 Stone Creek GC Omaha

River City Championship

September 27 Oak Hills GC Omaha



Summer at the Edge of the Map

Hickory golf, hard ground, and a long journey worth taking.



CHRISTCHURCH GOLF CLUB

By Peter VanEekelen

By the time the bagpipes begin, the wind has already arrived. It moves in quietly from the Pacific, pressing against flags, brushing the tops of bent-grass greens at Christchurch Golf Club, tugging lightly at tartan and plus-fours. It is not violent. It is present. And on this ground, that is enough.

Eight thousand miles away, much of North America sits in winter. Courses are shuttered. Practice bays hum under fluorescent light. Golf is something simulated.

But here, in late January, it is high summer in New Zealand, and the hickory shafts are alive.

This is the New Zealand Hickory Open.

Where the Ground Decides

Founded in 1873, Christchurch Golf Club is one of the Southern Hemisphere's historic custodians of the game. Its Shirley course, carefully restored to its traditional links character, is not dramatic in the modern sense. It does not overwhelm.

It asks.

The fairways are firm. The greens, bent grass, cut tight and running true, reward conviction and expose doubt. Recovery is not accidental here; it is assumed. You punch the ball low. You accept the bounce and you admire the run. You play angles rather than yardages.

With hickory in hand, the architecture feels honest.

For North American players raised on aerial target golf, this is a shift, one that feels less like regression and more like rediscovery.

A Deliberate Journey

Travel to New Zealand is not casual. You do not stumble into this tournament.

You decide to go.

That decision shapes everything.

The week begins with a practice round on the full championship course on the Wednesday then heading into the Harry Vardon Challenge, a nine hole pairing of visitors and members that dissolves distance, immediately played late Thursday afternoon. Conversations replace introductions. Dinners are planned before the first scorecard is signed.

In 2026, competitors arrived from across Australasia and Asia, with Canadian representation and growing interest from the United States. The field remains intimate, large enough for legitimacy, small enough for connection.

You are not anonymous here.

Friday: Played for More Than Score

The Nations Cups set the competitive tone.

New Zealand once again defended the historic Anzac Flask in a contest decided by the narrowest of margins against Australia, heralding back to a brotherhood that was forged on the



GETTING INTO THE SPIRIT, a bagpiper sets the tone for the competition at the 2026 New Zealand Hickory Open.



THAT FIRST HICKORY HOLE-IN-ONE. Andy Gordon, second from left, a new-to-hickory player, scored his first hickory ace on a Christchurch 145-yard par 3.

beaches at Gallipoli. China pushed to within a stroke in their match, signaling a closing gap and rising global standard. South Korea made its debut, with plans already in motion for an expanded presence next year.

The format, nine holes of Foursomes, nine of Singles, forces adaptability. There is no easing into it. By the final green, national pride feels personal.

And yet, by evening, rivalry softens into shared table conversation inside the clubhouse. The dinner that follows blends storytelling, scholarship, and the sense that hickory golf's global community is still small enough to feel familial.

Alternate Shot, Exposed

Saturday's Foursomes are where the week sharpens.

Alternate shot with hickory reveals everything, tempo, trust, acceptance.

In the 2026 NZHO, Anthony Doyle and Jason Tilley delivered a round spoken of in reverent tones by seasoned international players. On the short 7th, Tilley struck a niblick that disappeared for a hole in one, a moment that seemed to suspend time before releasing it in applause.

It was not the only ace of the week. A first-time hickory competitor, Andy Gordon, playing with hired clubs adjusted to fit, holed out on a par 3 in swirling wind, proof that this championship leaves room for both mastery and magic.

Sunday Wind

Championship Sunday arrives with ceremony.

Bagpipes. Announcements. A gathering wind.

Sir Bob Charles adjusted tee placements in 2026 to reawaken hazards long dormant. By midday, the breeze had strengthened, and the course became what links courses are meant to be, alive.

When the final putts fell, Anthony Doyle claimed his third

New Zealand Hickory Open title, reinforcing his place among the Southern Hemisphere's most accomplished hickory players.

Across divisions, Open, Reserves, Seniors, and Ladies, the champions reflected the event's growing international character, including strong representation from Australia and the greater Asia Pacific region.

But the leaderboard, as ever, told only part of the story.

The Space Between Shots

What lingers about the New Zealand Hickory Open is not simply who won. It is the walk between greens beneath Southern Hemisphere light. The firmness underfoot. The quiet weight of a well-struck mashie.

Prizegiving unfolds beside the 18th green. Sir Bob offers words of recognition. The evening closes with pipes, laughter, and a traditional Address to the Haggis that feels both ceremonial and entirely unforced.

The participant list in 2026 included players from New Zealand, Australia, China, Korea, and Canada. In 2027, Japan returns. Korea expands. Conversations are building for greater North American representation.

There is space here for Americans willing to cross the equator.



SANG JUN OH of South Korea.

SEE NEW ZEALAND, PAGE 10



2026 NEW ZEALAND HICKORY OPEN AND ASIA / PACIFIC CHAMPIONSHIPS. *The international field for the NZHO and the ANZAC Flask. Top right, Sir Bob Charles, patron and past champion of NZHO, presents the champion's trophy to Anthony Doyle. At right, the ladies champion, Ms. Du Du of China.*

NEW ZEALAND

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

The Long Road to Sunday

The 2027 championship has been deliberately shaped around a principle that feels increasingly rare: a proper Open should test both skill and endurance.

- Wednesday, Jan. 27 – Official Practice Round
- Thursday – Harry Vardon 9-Hole Introduction
- Friday – Nations Cups (9 holes Singles/9 holes Foursomes)
- Saturday – 18-Hole Foursomes Championship (Championship Course)
- Sunday – 36-Hole Open Championship
 - Morning: 18-hole 1st Championship round
 - Afternoon: Second Championship round and 18 hole Divisional play

The decision to stage 36 holes on Sunday is no accident. It is a conscious nod to history.

When the Open was first played at Prestwick Golf Club, competitors contested three rounds of 12 holes in a single day. Stamina was assumed. Resolve was required. To win meant enduring the walk as much as mastering the strike.

The Meaning of 36

There is something clarifying about knowing that Sunday will be long.

Preparation changes. Conversations on Saturday evening carry a different tone. The morning round becomes an opening act, not a finale. The afternoon demands restraint when adrenaline urges otherwise.

That is the point.

Championship golf should leave a mark, not through spectacle, but through memory. The kind that lingers in your hands on the flight home. The kind that reminds you why you play with hickory in the first place.

The New Zealand Hickory Open now echoes that spirit.

The leading contenders will step onto the first tee Sunday morning knowing the day will not be short. The choice is yours to contest the full 36 hole Championship. Others will join in the afternoon for Divisional play, ensuring that every competitor remains part of the story while preserving the integrity of the Open itself.

It restores something elemental: the understanding that Sunday must be earned.

Why Make the Journey?

January in North America is a season of patience.

In Christchurch, it is summer.

The New Zealand Hickory Open offers:

- Championship links golf played on firm, authentic ground
- An intimate international field where names and stories matter
- A mid winter escape into light, wind, and competitive rhythm
- A setting that invites exploration beyond the tournament, mountains, coastline, vineyards, and open road

It is not the easiest tournament to reach.

That may be precisely the point.

Because when you finally stand on the first tee, wind in your collar and hickory in your hands, the distance feels justified.

Golf was meant to be played on ground like this. In wind like this. Among people who understand why that matters.

The New Zealand Hickory Open is not simply another event. It is a long way to go for something real.

And that is reason enough. ↪



HICKORY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

I watched all the golf I could on our black and white TV and came to realize that I had to have more clubs. A local antique shop provided the solution. In the window was a full set (?) of hickories in a musty leather bag. In exchange for a \$5 bill, I was in business.

My driver had a bamboo shaft that seemed to work just fine. The brassie was all one wooden piece. The shaft went right on into the head. I have never seen anything like it since. I don't remember much about the irons, but one was a mid-iron and my favorite had deep grooves, probably a mashie.

Caddying was next for me. I got a job at a nearby nine-hole Country Club at \$1 per nine or \$2 for the 18. My boss had a beautiful, matched set of pyratone irons and woods, I took extra care of those clubs. My boss's son, Johnny, caddied for another member of our weekly foursome named Eddie Meyers. Eddie played a set of MacGregor steel shaft, diamond back irons. I just knew, in my lifetime, I would never be able to afford a set like that. Now I have that exact set in my collection.

I caddied on weekends the rest of the summer. One day Johnny invited me and two other kids who had clubs to play a full round of golf at the club on a Monday when members didn't play. This was great. My chance to break away from my home course to play a real golf course, the same one we caddied on. I had learned from caddying that you needed more than one golf ball to play a round, so I purchased a sleeve of PO-DO's at Walgreens for \$1. That, along with my U.S Royal should be enough. Somehow, I rode my bicycle to the golf course that Monday, toting my hickories.

The most unique hole on that golf course was the first: a 150-yard downhill par three with a creek running on both sides and around the back. What really made the hole unique, though, was that the tee box was only a few yards outside the pro shop door. Members would sit around the tee in Adirondack chairs sipping their favorite beverages and watching your less than stellar shots down to the first green. Fortunately, it was a Monday and there were no members around.

So, off we went on our first real round of golf. Johnny had the use of his father's beautiful, matched set of pyratone clubs. I was jealous.

That backyard practice must have paid off for me because I beat everyone with my hickories, shooting a 109. Only one problem. One of our guys had heard about giving putts "inside the leather". (No, its not that my hickory grips were longer than their steel shaft grips, giving me an advantage.) The problem was that when we got within gimmie range we picked up the ball and didn't know enough to count the stroke. The following Monday we played again and I shot 112, counting all the strokes, including the gimmies.

I was hooked on golf. The next summer I was able to buy a half year junior membership at that club for \$12, and I would practice every chance I got. I would lay my *Golf Digest* open on the ground and using golf balls that I had found in that creek I would hit them over and over, imitating the swings of Arnold and Gary. The next spring I made my high school golf team as a sophomore, still playing my hickories.

I ultimately transitioned to steel shafted clubs and won some ribbons and trophies along the way. I even thought about turning pro at one stage, but thought the better of it because I couldn't putt. Wise choice.

Today, at age 80, I still can't putt but I have a tidy collection of hickories and play them whenever I can. Is there any wonder why I have an interest in this hobby? 🍷

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THE LADIES SCRAMBLE at the Arizona Desert Hickory Classic raised \$875 for a veterans and first responders charity. The annual hickory golf outing at Sun City West in Arizona draws about 100 players from the community's winter residents and visitors.

Welcome new members!

These are members who have joined since December 2025. If we overlooked your name let us know and we'll add it to the next edition. Hometowns are added if the member included it in his/her membership data. Thank you to all who have joined as Lifetime Members and to those of you who renew at the five- and 10-year levels.

Stan Axtman, Hillsboro, Ore.
 Stephen Babcock, Albany, Wisc.
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 Skip Platt, Keswick, Va.
 Rick Rechter II, Hopkinsville, Ky.
 Doug Ruge, Omaha, Neb.
 Sam Sinclair, Ellicott City, Md.
 Breck Speed, Little Rock, Ark.
 Scott Staudacher, Grand Rapids, Mich.
 Tom Tracy, Star, Idaho
 John Willbanks, Colleyville, Texas
 Jeremy Wright, Louisville, Ky.



Our Favorite Clubs

MIKE NEEDLEMAN, OVERLAND PARK, KANSAS, USA

Mike “Needles” Needleman attended Mt. Prospect High School in Illinois where he earned Varsity Letters in football, basketball, cross-country and baseball; but not golf due to the overlap of seasons. However, he says he was always “swinging a club and hanging out with the golf team.” Mike is a certified golf teaching professional by The United States Golf Teacher’s Federation, USGTF. He is a member of the SoHG as well as the Golf Heritage Society, the Hickory Golf Association, the Nebraska Hickory Golf Association, and the KC Area Hickory Golfers. Mike is also founder and director of the Kansas Sunflower Hickory Match Play event. He is a full-time hickory player.

It was in the time span between May to July of 2015 that I became interested in hickory golf. I was hospitalized with a rare respiratory disease that remains undiagnosed to this day, yet miraculously disappeared. This afforded me the time to do some expert surfing on the web where I stumbled upon all things hickory golf.



By the time I was released, I had convinced myself to give this hickory thing a go and had formulated a plan on how to proceed.

Accordingly, I purchased my first set of hickories from Louisville Golf, taking advantage of a fall sale. I knew that Louisville Golf made replica clubs approved for use in SoHG events, those of which I hoped to play some day. I chose the E. Just and Bros. short set to begin my hickory career. Man, those clubs were pretty – so much so that I was hesitant to put them to the test.

My first hickory event was a poor showing at the 39th annual Heart of America in Des Moines, the summer of 2016. I began to show some success in subsequent events, but became the target of a few hickory purists (friends) who enjoyed teasing me about using replica clubs, which they called “cheaters”, and not the real deal. As a result, I began to entertain the idea of playing



50-DEGREE
GIBSON STAR NIBLICK

golf with original clubs. After all, I had witnessed many others playing original hickories and felt I could too.

Over time I have accumulated some great players; enough clubs for a couple of decent hickory play sets I use and can invite others to play with. Additionally, I own a T. Stewart series iron set from Louisville Golf that I truly love. However, from the mix I can say that by far my favorite club is a 50-degree Gibson Star niblick. It is the first original antique club I ever bought, doing so off eBay.

I truly love my Gibson niblick and feel extremely confident partnering up with this club, especially at a hundred yards out. It’s also a great club for pitch shots that require some height, and its sharp leading edge is perfect to use in wet sand when a bit of “digging in” behind the ball is needed for a clean escape. It’s great to have a club that can be put to use in so many ways. ↪

Bill Engelson – A Hickory Golf Original

Thirty years on the hickory circuit with “Lang Willie.”

By Dr. Mike Jones

Hickory golf is not for typical, average, ordinary golfers. Hickory clubs make a challenging game even more difficult. It makes an expensive game even more pricey. In a world full of golf snobbery, hickory addicts are even more selective about where and when they play. And don't even get started on the esoteric rules, history, and traditions. Without the right mindset, hickory golf can cause one to seriously reconsider their life choices.

But not for Bill “Lang Willie” Engelson. He has been a fixture on the hickory tournament circuit for three decades and has won just about everything there is to win. He was introduced to regular golf around age seven, when his uncle brought a set of clubs home from college. “Later on, a neighbor kid and I, we used to sneak onto the local golf course – turns out it was a Donald Ross track – find some balls and hit them.” But Engelson didn't get serious about golf until he entered the Coast Guard in 1961, as the sixth generation of Engelsons to serve their country in war and peace.

“Somewhere along the line, I began playing a lot of golf. I was just average. But if a player can play to their handicap, you're going to win some money,” he said, smiling at a distant memory. He never belonged to any golf clubs because he was working full time, but “I played in a lot of golf leagues while I was in the Coast Guard.”

After a full career in the Coast Guard – starting as an enlisted man, being commissioned an officer, and finally retiring as a Coast Guard commander – he and Donna, his wife of 50 years, began collecting antiques.

On one shopping expedition, “I found a bunch of wooden golf clubs sitting in a milk can, those old galvanized steel tubs about hip high, perfect for storing golf clubs. ‘What are these?’ I asked. The guy said, ‘Why don't you try them, I'll charge you five bucks apiece.’” So Engelson's introduction to hickory golf came from five dusty sticks of unknown pedigree or provenance.

Hickory Fun

Of course, Engelson did his research and first stumbled onto the Golf Collectors Society. But Engelson found they



LANG WILLIE ENGELSON dressed to the nines, all in black, and ready to win at Oakhurst in West Virginia from this 2005 photo. One believes even Old Tom Morris would be pleased to play a round with this gent.

were more interested in collecting than playing. As his network spread to other hickory aficionados, he learned how to repair clubs and began collecting better ones.

“Then the Internet comes along, and pretty soon I had 800 clubs,” he said with a chuckle. “You could buy them on eBay for \$30 or \$40. I'd just buy a bunch and pick out the best ones, and put the others in a rack.” His big house in Pinehurst (he and Donna have since moved to a smaller home) had a 400-square-foot workshop in the basement. “I used to buy a lot from John Sherwood from England. He'd come over here with 400 or 500 clubs, and we'd get first pick because we were good friends.”

Engelson began traveling to hickory tournaments, but they were few and far between. “You wanted to attend every hickory event because there just weren't that many,” he says.

Early in the 2000s, Engelson hoped to move from Virginia to Pinehurst. In preparation for a hickory tournament, he persuaded his wife, Donna, to arrive a day early to explore

the area. “We pulled into Pinehurst, into the middle of town with the Donald Ross statue, and she got out of the car. She looked at me and said, ‘I could live here.’ So we did.”

In the meantime, Engelson discovered the nascent Carolina Hickory Golf Association, but found it was more aspirational than organizational. Hickory enthusiast Tom Stewart had informed Engelson that the hickory scene was alive and well in Pinehurst, but when Engelson asked about joining the group, Stewart was flummoxed: the sum-total of their organizational efforts had been to buy a domain name and an email address. Engelson, who by this time had a very active consulting career in corporate strategy and planning, figured he could put it together. The association was formalized in December 2005 at Mid Pines, with Tom Stewart, Rob Pilewski, Doug Marshall, and Jay Harris.

“We had our first tournament in February 2006 and it’s been going on since,” he said. That inaugural outing featured 16 players at the Ross-designed Highland Country Club in Fayetteville, N.C., and was hosted by Greg Parks. To no surprise, the team of Willie Engelson and Harry Caperton led that pack with a final score of 60.

About 2010 or so was the peak of Engelson’s golfing ca-



LANG WILLIE IN ACTION AT THE 2008 CHARLES BLAIR MACDONALD in Niagara on the Lake in southern Ontario. The course claims to be the oldest golf course in North America and for many years hosted a gutty tournament with competition between Canadian and U.S. players. The host was long-time Engelson friend, the late Doug Marshall.

reer. He was turning 70 and playing constantly. On one Scottish trip with friend Ken Holtz, the duo played 16 different courses in two weeks. One memorable day was an alternate shot match at the historic Musselburgh Links – where golf has been played since 1672. His partner was Jörgen Isberg from Sweden.

“It’s a blind draw and I got Isberg,” Engelson said. “He is amazing and we came in first.”

In the afternoon of that same day, Engelson then played the Scottish Hickory Open on Gullane 3. Isberg

won the Open division and Lang Willie came in third, net. “I was in 14 different tournaments that year and had 10 top threes,” he said.



COMMANDER USCG 1981

We all remember when we were young, but even the most jaded reader might agree Lang Willie cut quite the dashing figure in his Coast Guard uniform. Donna surely was swept off her feet.

Making the Trophy His Own... Sort Of

Engelson recalled two other friends who touched his golfing career: Pete Georgiady, who ran the National Hickory Championship; and Lewis Keller, who owned and had refurbished the Oakhurst Links in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va. Lewis even had a summer home uphill from the clubhouse. Georgiady and Lewis hosted the National Hickory Championship at Oakhurst several times, and one year Engelson won the reserve Champion Division.

“Oddly, they didn’t have a trophy for that victory,” he said. “So I bought a trophy and put my name on it, along with the three people who had won it in the years before me. Then I gave it to Pete. They’re still using it. If you win something, it’s worth investing in a handsome trophy that will stick around for years.”

Playing in the inaugural Mid Pines Hickory Open was another important accomplishment for Engelson. “Rob Pilewski was the head pro at Mid Pines. He came to Oakhurst in the summer of 2004 and handed out flyers for the inaugural Mid Pines Hickory Open, in Pinehurst, in November 2004,” he recalled. “We hit it off together right away.”

That long-lived event has remained one of the highlights of the hickory calendar, and Lang Willie and Tad Moore have played in every Mid Pines Hickory Open for 20 years straight. More recently, Engelson’s son, Jonathan, has played

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

LANG WILLIE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

at Mid Pines with him and one year they won the father-son tournament.

Eventually, Engelson tired of the travel and the costs associated with bigger tournaments. Now, with 85 years on his broad shoulders, he rarely plays with his hickory clubs, but still enjoys the spirit and enthusiasm of the game.

Gutty Tournaments

Around the turn of the century, gutty tournaments became a special passion for Engelson.

Gutta-percha golf balls, commonly known as “gutties,” first appeared in 1848 and were used until the late 1890s. Gutties are made from the sticky sap of Malaysian sapodilla trees. It is a natural latex which hardens at room temperature but remains flexible; even today, waterproof boots in Scotland are called “gutties.”

“A ball made out of gutta-percha... it’s like hitting a rock. It’s really hard,” Engelson explained. This lack of compressibility means the ball simply doesn’t travel as far. “My friend Randy Jensen, who was playing hickory when I was first coming on the scene, probably only drove a gutty ball about 160-175 yards. It’s a lot shorter.”

At most gutty tournaments, players are restricted to using clubs designed to pre-1904 standards. Replicas are allowed because quality antique clubs, especially the woods, are too valuable to risk with actual play. Pre-1904 designs differ from more modern hickory clubs in three ways. They typically feature “longnosed” woods assembled using scarfed, or spliced, hosel. Irons have completely smooth faces, lacking dimples or grooves. Perhaps most frustratingly, gutty niblicks often feature very small clubheads, which makes them prone to shanking.

Engelson explained that the shaft of the club is the heart of the design. “The feel of a hickory club is centered on the shaft, not the head,” he said. “My workhorse club is a spoon. I’ve busted the head four or five times, but I always come back to it because the shaft fits me better than any club I have found. Here’s the truth: you can’t buy a golf game.”

“Nobody’s playing with really valuable antiques,” he cautioned me. “All of the gutty tournaments allow repros [reproductions].” He noted that while antique gutty clubs are



FOUR CAROLINA CAPTAINS. *The Carolina Hickory Golf Association is an important aspect of Lang Willie’s contributions to the game. At left, the amiable Chris Deinlein (from left), Lang Willie, and Richard Schmidt pose on the tee at Pinecrest Country Club in Lumberton, N.C. In the photo at right is the gregarious Andy Moye, current CHGA captain. Moye’s photo was taken at the Aiken Golf Club, a Ross course in Aiken, S.C.*

“A good hickory course has to be a goat track. It should not be groomed and well-manicured.”

not rare they can be expensive. “You could pay \$1,500 to \$2,000 for a serviceable club,” Engelson estimated, “and Jay Harris had several scare necks worth \$30,000, but he would never have played with them.”

While some voices suggest there should be restrictions against replica clubs in regular hickory tournaments, Engelson feels those restrictions are counter-productive. “Reproduction clubs bring people into the game,” he asserted. “Without replicas, hickory golf – and gutty golf in particular – could be priced out of the market.”

Dressing Dark

For decades, Engelson has enjoyed the nickname of “Lang Willie.” His grandfather called young Engelson “Willie” as a child. Engelson had a younger brother with whom he often played in retirement. “I could always outride him, so he started calling me Long Willie.” But that seemed pretentious until Engelson learned about Lang Willie Robertson, who caddied for Old Tom Morris in the latter half of the 19th century. Robertson was the same height as Engelson and always wore a black top hat, so Engelson figured that moniker was a perfect fit.

Which highlights the question of Engelson’s perennial sartorial selection: he’ll wear anything, as long as it’s black. In fact, Engelson’s closet only contains black clothes and he confirms he actually can get dressed in the dark.

“But I used to weigh about 80 pounds more than I do right



FITTING HONOR. For all he has done for hickory golf and the Society of Hickory Golfers, in 2012 Engelson was named the Society's Mike Brown Award recipient, its highest honor. Above, he accepts the award plaque from good friends and SoHG co-founders Tad Moore, center, and Roger Hill. The occasion was the Mid Pines Hickory Open, one of Lang Willie's favorite events.

now, and they say black is thinning," Engelson explained. "It doesn't take away 80 pounds, but it puts your mind at ease. My self-image is better if I'm wearing black. I just like it. I even drive a black car, too."

Engelson related a quirky story from decades before. "We had some great neighbors, and we used to go out to dinner with them a lot. But one time, one of the wives fessed up to me and said they're all going to surprise me: everybody was going to wear black at our next dinner. Sure enough, those three other couples all wore black." Engelson chortled at the memory. "That evening, I wore a pink shirt. It was the one piece of color I had, and I dug it out of the closet."

Perennial Favorites

If Lang Willie has any difficulties with golf these days, it's selecting his favorite tracks. "A good hickory course has to be a goat track," he said, chuckling. "It should not be groomed and well-manicured." Which is one reason he enjoys the classic courses of Scotland.

He's played the Old Course, but prefers the courses of East Lothian (an area of rolling hills east of Edinburgh). "I like Kilspindie Golf Club, in Gullane, just east of Edinburgh, and the Musselburgh Links, maybe the oldest golf course in the world," he said, peering into the fireplace. "And North Berwick, practically next door. Gullane 3 is another favorite over there."

People often ask Engelson about Pinehurst No. 2, but it's not on his hit parade. He says Donald Ross would "roll over in his grave" to see those greens. "Donald Ross never de-

signed turtleback greens. There are no turtlebacks at Mid-Pines. There are none at Pine Needles," he said emphatically. "I think turtleback greens are a bastardization of what Ross designed."

Engelson says Mid Pines, a Donald Ross gem in the Sandhills of central North Carolina, is his favorite course. "Nobody can read the greens until you've lived here four or five years," he said. In short, "I have the best hickory golf courses in the world right here: Mid Pines, Pine Needles, Southern Pines, and Pinehurst No. 3. We've got a lot of courses here in Pinehurst and most are OK, but none compare to those four."

That Bring-You-Back-Tomorrow Shot

Lang Willie was reluctant to summarize seven decades of golf by highlighting one particular moment. "You mean, like the one shot where you say, 'I got it?'" he asked. "Well, I'm careful to never say 'I've got it' because the Supreme Being is listening. And as soon as you say, 'I got it' he or she says, 'Watch this.'"

But as for the perfect day or the perfect shot? He mulled the question pensively. "I don't know. I haven't had an ace. But one year at Mid Pines Hickory Open, I hit an eagle on the [par 5] 15th. I hit a great drive, and my second shot was down by the left-hand bunker alongside the green. Then I flipped a niblick into the hole. It was about 60 yards uphill. That was fun."

Engelson is confident that hickory golf has a bright future. "Some tournaments don't draw as many players as they used to," he noted, "but the sport seems to be attracting younger players, which I find healthy." He also wonders if the abundance of tournaments is diluting the sport: there are many options so people don't have to travel to enjoy the hickory experience. "There's a lot of tournaments sprouting up here and there," he noted. "Whether they will last, that's something different."

Lang Willie Engelson has enjoyed his lifetime of golf, especially his hickory and gutty exploits. He's quietly grateful for what the game has given to him, and pleased that he's been able to give something back to the sport. Whatever happens next, he's always ready for a game.

"I've got a case full of medals and everything," he concluded our conversation. "I've done all I could hope to do in hickory golf." ☞



LANG WILLIE in a recent photo from a favorite haunt – One Hot Mamma's restaurant on Hilton Head Island off the South Carolina coast.



SoHG Regional Spotlight



The Splendor of New England

COUNTRY CLUB OF BARRE, VERMONT (14TH HOLE)



From rugged Maine south through New York, New England's scenic mountains and verdant valleys have attracted golfers since the sport first took hold in North America. Hickory golf throughout the region is represented in both organized groups and single tournaments. Taken together, they are an example of both the region's

trademark individualism and joy in uniting to celebrate common traditions and values... not to mention spectacular golf courses. Pour yourself a Cape Codder and enjoy a tour of hickory golf in New England and the people who play the sport in this historic land. ('Regional Captain' is a general term for area leaders.)

Maine Hickory Golf Assoc.

Forrest Dillon, Regional Captain
rforrestdillon@gmail.com

The Maine Hickory Golf Association (MHGA) was founded by Forrest Dillon in 2017 at Mere Creek Golf Club in Brunswick. Since 2017 the MHGA has hosted several tournaments at Mere Creek, but starting in 2020 the annual tournament moved to Cape Neddick Country Club. Cape Neddick is an 18-hole layout originally designed by Donald Ross in 1919, just minutes away from the historic Nubble Lighthouse and Ogunquit Beach. The players are discussing a Maine hickory tournament at Sebasco Harbor Resort or Biddeford-Saco Country Club.



FIVE FOR CAPE NEDDICK. *Maine's hickory golf champion, Forrest Dillon, far right, is pictured with players during a 2020 outing at the Donald Ross-designed Cape Neddick Country Club. Joining Dillon from left are: Jacob Orcutt, Peter Nowlan, Christian Williams, and Roger Dionne.*

Jacob Orcutt, Regional Captain

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Premier Hickory Event

Smith-Collett Classic



The Connecticut Hickory Golf Association celebrated its 5th year in 2025. What began as a project by Jacob Orcutt to compare the state's golf courses with their layouts from a 1934 aerial photo survey quickly grew into a play group in the spring of 2020 when Christian Williams (aka: The Hickory Hacker) relocated to the state from Kansas. Jacob and Christian, with support from the SoHG and an already vibrant scene of New England hickory golfers, quickly grew the group into an active local club that now numbers over 30 in-state members and another 30 from neighboring states and beyond.

The group's premier event is the annual Smith-Collett Classic held each June at the Shennecossett Golf Course. The title honors Alex Smith and Glenna Collett-Vare, two early stars of American golf. A second event, added in 2024, is a gutty golf event called the Goodwin Gutty Open. This is played at the 1906 Goodwin Park Golf Course.

"Gutty golf is growing in popularity in New England, thanks in large part to Massachusetts golfers Bill Wardwell, Bill Conant, and Chris Gilgun, as well as Christian Williams in New York, and we're hoping for an even larger field in 2026," Orcutt says.

Orcutt says that the number of clubs celebrating 100 to 125-year anniversaries has led to an increased interest in hickory golf throughout the region. The CHGA has been renting hickory clubs for tournaments and winning new converts to the old game.



2025 GOODWIN GUTTY OPEN



2025 SMITH-COLLETT CLASSIC



FROM LEFT: Jacob Orcutt presents Bill 'Wardy' Wardwell with a plaque honoring his play at the 2025 Goodwin Gutty Open. Wardy took the Senior title. Alexis Smith (middle photo) was the Glenna Collett champion at the 2025 Smith-Collett Classic. And at right, Louis Falcone (left) was the 2025 Smith-Collett Open division winner; Jeff Blomstedt took the Senior title.



SHENNECOSSETT GOLF COURSE

Hickory Golfers of Massachusetts

www.facebook.com/pg/hickorygolfersofmassachusetts/

Bill Conant, Regional Co-Captain

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Bill Wardwell, Regional Co-Captain

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Premier Hickory Event

Alexander Findlay Massachusetts Hickory Open

The Hickory Golfers of Massachusetts (HGoM) are based at the Country Club of Greenfield in Western Massachusetts. They call themselves ‘The Baystaters’ and they have a common interest: “We are golfers who have played most of our lives and love to play the game... the way it was meant to be played,” said Bill Conant, regional co-captain and member of the CC of Greenfield. “We love the 100-year-old clubs, courses, rules, and way of play that brought us to the present.”

Each year the HGoM hosts the Alexander Findlay Hickory Open Championship at Greenfield. The Findlay Hickory Open marks the beginning of the season in New England. This year, 2026, marks the 10th anniversary for the event, scheduled for May 8. The event honors one of the legends and pioneers of early golf in the U.S. Findlay designed Greenfield’s first 9 holes in 1896, making it one of the oldest courses in Massachusetts. He designed more than 100 over the course of his career and appeared frequently with Harry Vardon during his 1900 golf tour of the U.S.

HICKORY GOLF IN THE BAY STATE. *Clockwise from top right: The welcoming banner for the annual Alexander Findlay Hickory Open; the players at the 2023 Findlay event; Bill ‘Wardy’ Wardwell (left) with AJ MacVie, both winners at the 2024 New Hampshire Hickory Open; HGoM organizer Bill Conant, left, and Doug Lantz; and Canadian player Gary Melanson, left, receiving the low gross plaque from Kevin Piecuch, head pro at the Country Club of Greenfield, during the 2019 Findlay Open.*



Metropolitan Hickory Society

Bill Martin, Co-Captain

Jared Paletti, Co-Captain

metropolitanhickorysociety@gmail.com.

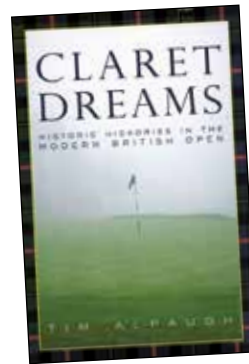
The Metropolitan Hickory Society (MHS) was founded in 2011 by Brian Schuman and was the first modern hickory golf organization to play events in Connecticut. Based in the New York City Metro area, the organization has members from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Originally called the Tri-State Hickory Players Club (not to be confused with Tri-State Hickory Golfers serving PA-WV-OH), it was intended to serve as “a true players club for golfers who appreciate the history and traditions of this grand old game... the Greatest Game of all.” The MHS has been an influential hickory golf group in the Northeast, hosting dozens of tournaments. Schuman also developed a hickory-era golf ball called “The Classic” (photo, lower right). In 2014, he inaugurated a World Hickory Match Play tournament that featured hickory champions from around the world for a competition at the Philadelphia Cricket Club’s St. Martins course. MHS founding member Tim Alpaugh is renowned for his club repair and restoration skills and was featured in the spring 2013 edition of *Links Magazine*. His equipment tips have often appeared in the *Wee Nip*. Alpaugh is also the author of *Claret Dreams* (2013), a delightful novel that imagines a hickory golfer in a modern British Open. MHS members in 2023 hosted the U.S. Hickory Open at the historic Inwood Country Club in N.Y., the site of Bobby Jones’ first U.S. Open victory in 1923.



BRIAN SCHUMAN
MHS Founder.



MHS OUTING from 2023 at the Ridgewood CC in Paramus, N.J. From left: Tom Sullivan, ‘Old’ Tom Morris, Mike Brandell, Frank Flood, Jared Paletti, Mike Guerrero, Bill Martin, Asher Fried, Ed DeSalvio, John Esposito, Brian Schuman, Michael O’Donnell, Tim Alpaugh, Mike Policano, John Wimmer, and Mike Stevens.



TIM ALPAUGH, the Hickory Doctor, was featured in the spring 2013 edition of *Links Magazine*.



MHS OUTING from 2023 at Ridgewood CC in Paramus, N.J. From left: Jared Paletti, Christian Williams, Andrew Simmons, Tim Alpaugh, Tom Sullivan, Ron Perlman, Mike O’Donnell, Bill Martin, Mike Guerrero, John Esposito, and Rob Wolf.



A MIAMI SWING in 2013 saw several players from the MHS play the classic Miami Biltmore golf course. From left are Mike Policano, Tim Alpaugh, and Brian Schuman.



New Hampshire Hickory Golf Association

David Webster, Event Organizer

dzweb@earthlink.net

Instagram is @nhhickoryopen

Founded in 2016 by Jim Pucci, the New Hampshire Hickory Golf Association (NHHGA) aims to “create interest in the modern hickory game for those looking to get something more out of this great game.”

After several years of hosting the New Hampshire Hickory Open at the Mount Washington Omni Resort, Pucci moved to Florida and David Webster, who was already hosting a hickory outing at the Lake Sunapee CC in New London, took on the event.

With changes at Mount Washington and the difficulty of managing two events, Webster wisely combined the annual New Hampshire Hickory Open with the Lake Sunapee event, a combination that has proved successful.

Lake Sunapee, a 1928 Donald Ross design, renovated and refreshed in 2013, was the home and club of The Squire him-

self, Gene Sarazen, when he wasn't wintering in Marco Island, Fla.

This year's tournament is planned for Thursday, July 9.

The 2025 New Hampshire Hickory Open attracted 45 players from 14 different states. Special guest Mary Ann Sarazen, the daughter of the golf legend, made an appearance to watch everyone tee off and spread some goodwill.

Another man with New Hampshire ties is SoHG board member Kevin Mendik, who last year organized an event at the exclusive Bald Peak Colony Club north of Lake Winnepesaukee. The NH players are hoping a return visit might be in the offing.

“Golf is good, Hickory is better,” Webster likes to say. In New Hampshire, that's certainly the shared experience.



JIM PUCCI,
NHHGA Founder.



THE 2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE HICKORY OPEN. *Players from 14 states had the pleasure of playing a beautiful course and meeting Mary Ann Sarazen, daughter of golf legend Gene Sarazen.*



NEW HAMPSHIRE CHAMPS. *Posing with event host David Webster are, from left: Gary Pomichter, Open division champ in 2025; and Marci Likens, Ladies champion in 2024.*



BALD PEAK COLONY VISIT. *In July 2025, several hickory players were treated to a round at the Bald Peak Colony Club, a newly established National Historic District on a north bay of Lake Winnepesaukee. The event was organized by Kevin Mendik. Above, from left: Bern Bernacki, Marci Likens, Matt Dodds, Jared Paletti, Jack Crosby, Keven Mendik, Bill Geisler, Bill Wardwell, David Webster, and Bald Peak member Dr. William Wilson.*



MARY ANN SARAZEN greeted the players at the 2025 New Hampshire Hickory Open. Above, she poses for a photo with Matt Dodds.

Ocean State Golf Society – Rhode Island

Louis Falcone, Regional Captain

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@ri_hickory_golf

Hickory golfer, club repair, and researcher of Rhode Island's golfing history.

Jon Pannone

@spargogolf on Instagram

Golf professional and owner of Spargo Golf club fitting studio. Plays hickories, persimmons, and modern clubs.

Premier Event

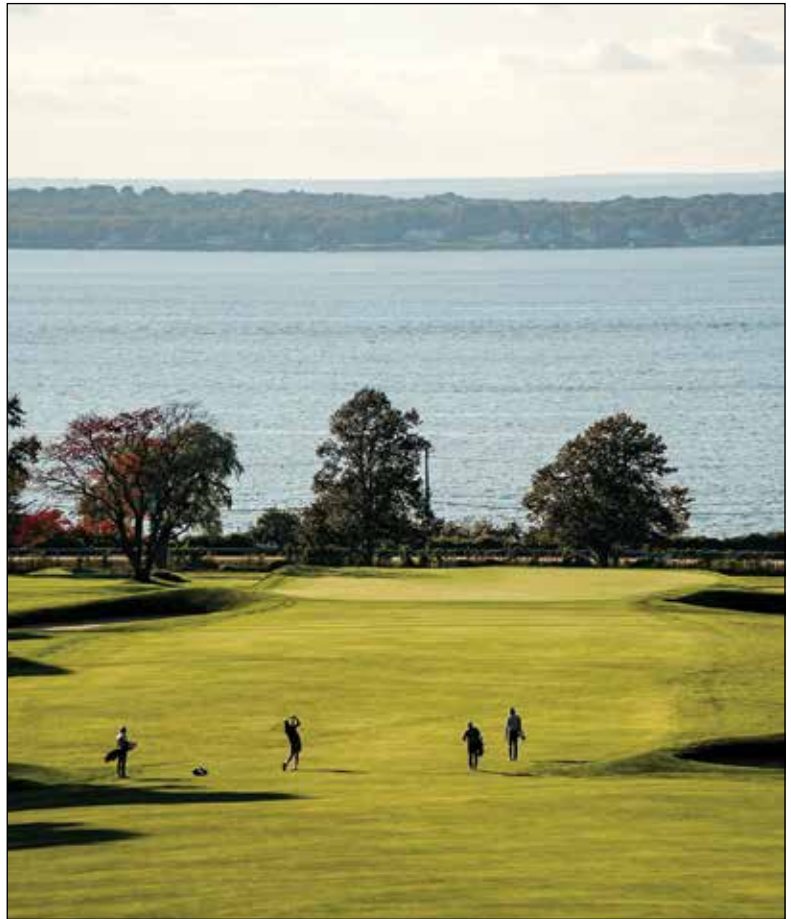
The Gold Mashie

Rhode Island's chief modern hickory golfer, Louis Falcone, is singlehandedly trying to interest his state's golfers in the modern hickory game and, in 2020, created the Ocean State Golf Society (OSGS). "The goal was to connect Rhode Islanders with the history of the game by showcasing stories from our past and offering tournaments that give a glimpse into how different golf was in previous eras," he says.

"We primarily have players from Rhode Island and into Massachusetts on Cape Cod in the group, and are adding new players every year," Falcone says. "We may also have one of the younger groups with the ages of the players ranging from 28-40 years old."

The OSGS is an informal group that gathers from time to time to enjoy the game. Its signature event is the Gold Mashie Tournament, a mostly invitation-only event that is a reincarnation of a tournament that was last played in 1928 and drew some of golf's biggest names to the nation's smallest state. The 2020 Gold Mashie Tournament was played at Wanumetonomy Golf and Country Club, an 18-hole Seth Raynor design from 1922 in August. In 2024, the event was played at the Wanamaconomie Golf & Country Club.

"We have started to invite winners from the Massachusetts and Connecticut hickory opens and are starting to expand that to the other local events. If anyone else hosts an event and would like to have an invitation sent to their winner I would be happy to speak with them in the future. We would like to have a larger Rhode Island Hickory Open one day, but have not taken the time to organize that yet. There are a ton of great, hickory friendly courses here."



TOUGH TEST. *The Seth Raynor designed Wanumetonomy, though highly scenic, poses an extremely difficult test. There have only been three rounds in the 70s over the six years the event has been held here. The players are exploring options for other courses.*

2025 GOLD MASHIE WINNERS. *Zak Kovat, left, holds the Gold Mashie and a blueprint of Ocean Links, the host of the original 1920s Gold Mashie. Runner-up Zac Belanger holds the Silver Mashie.*



Peter Nowlan, Regional Captain

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Allen & Brenda Johnson

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Thomas Wawrzeniak

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Premier Event

Vermont Hickory Open

The 2024 Vermont Hickory Open was contested August 10th and 11th at the Brattleboro Country Club, Brattleboro, Vt. Jim Gallagher, of Pitman, N.J, is now the reigning champion. Jack Crosby of Concord, Mass., is the Senior champion and Jeff Bloomstedt of Gill, Mass., is the champion of the Statesman division. Jeff Bloomstedt also earned the distinction of becoming the first competitor to ace a hole in 17 years of the Vermont Hickory Open, putting his tee shot in the hole on the 8th hole during round one. The VHGA is currently planning for its 2026 event.



VERMONT HICKORY OPEN CHAMPIONS. Jim Gallagher, left, with Peter Nowlan, was the Senior winner. Nowlan is president of the Vermont Hickory Golf Association and tournament director of the Vermont Hickory Open. At right, Nowlan congratulates Senior champion Jack Crosby. Below are the contestants at the 2024 event.





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Auld Gowf



Blast off!

Gutty players lift new championship to rousing start.



Adam Raftshol escapes a bunker on No. 4.
PHOTO BY MIKE JONES

By Dr. Mike Jones

The inaugural World Gutty Championship, sponsored by the Society of Hickory Golfers, teed off to a rousing start this past March 12-14 in Winter Park, Fla., just a few miles north of Orlando.

The Winter Park course dates back to 1914. The 9-hole, par-35 layout is an unusual urban layout, as Winter Park gradually enveloped the course over decades of growth. The track is crossed by six city streets, a cemetery, and an active Amtrak line. The primary defense of the greens are the numerous (and treacherous) bunkers. The course is one of 100 such tracks in the National Register of Historic Places.

The competition was organized by Bill Geisler (SoHG competition and handicaps chairman), Marci Likens and Scott Staudacher. Assisting were Elizabeth Geisler, Julie Staudacher, and Jim Davis, executive director of the SoHG.

The format was five rounds of nine holes, match play, using “Park” gutta percha golf balls from McIntyre Golf. The irons were smooth faced and the woods were all splice necks, even the replicas. Competitors played the ball down until it was holed, the stymie rule was in play, and players used moistened sand tees.

The players were categorized into two divisions by handicaps, never playing the same opponent twice. Each hole won delivered one point to the winner, with a bonus point for winning the match. Holes that were tied earned a half point. Three rounds were played Saturday and two on Sunday morning, with the championships decided by a final round on Sunday afternoon.

Right before this Championship, Florida had been blighted by a furious burst of freezing temperatures that damaged portions of the Winter Park greens, but despite their rough appearance they rolled true. Geisler was relieved that the

weather was not a factor during the event. At least not until the late afternoons when heat and humidity combined to create gusty storms, or the threat of them. Fortunately, by that time, all the matches had been completed.

After five grueling rounds, Joey Piatek and Frank Flood finished at the top in the Braid division while Scott Staudacher and Bill Andrews were the contenders for the third-place medal. Piatek and Flood were toe-to-toe right up to the last hole. On the ninth green, Piatek stymied Flood’s par putt. Flood’s attempt to negotiate the stymie failed and Piatek made his par for the gold medal. Andrews took the match with Staudacher.

Geisler was delighted with the dramatic finish, one where lightning sirens were just starting to blare. “Joey’s a 2-handicap while Frank is a 10, but they took it down to the last putt on the last hole. That’s great golf,” he said.

In the Taylor division the top spots were captured by Rich Grula and Rachel Weaver. In their championship shoot-out, Grula edged Weaver for the gold, two up with one to play, while Bill Hamilton defeated Ross Snelling for the third-place trophy, two and one. Both matches ending on the ninth holes.

It’s fair to say the players, the organizers, and the Society all consider the new event a remarkable success. “All we heard was, ‘Hey, I had a great time, the food was great, the course was great,’” Geisler said. “I was very proud of everybody.”

John Crow Miller chatted about the importance of hickory golf during one of the breaks. “People tend to take themselves too seriously,” he opined. “It’s all about friendship. You gotta make sure that after the tournament, you don’t end up with the same number of friends – that now you have more of them.”

A good measure of a successful tournament. ↪

INSET PHOTO BY BEVERLY WISE



BRAID DIVISION WINNERS

Braid Division champions, from left: Bill Andrews, third place; Frank Flood, second place; and Joey Piatek, first place.

PHOTOS BY GREG WISE



TAYLOR DIVISION WINNERS

In the higher handicap Taylor Division, from left: Bill Hamilton, third place; Rachel Weaver, second place; and Rich Grula, first place.



WGC'S FRIDAY NIGHT PAIRING PARTY was huge part of the fun. Clockwise from top left: Julie Staudacher, left, Elizabeth Geisler and Marci Likens played a huge part in the event's success; Greg Smith (Alabama) delivered a "Toast to the Stymie" as the players indulged in a wee nip (or iced tea); tournament medals and the beverage shared for the toast; a smiling Bill Andrews samples the fare from the delicious buffet; Joey Piatek looks over clubs for sale at a club swap table; conversation was lively and energy high at the party. (PHOTOS BY MIKE JONES)

NEXT PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Deal Hudson, left, and Bill Geisler go over tournament rules; Greg Smith (Wisconsin) discovers he was the model for the WGC poster; hickory veterans Tom Johnson (host of the Foxburg Hickory Championship), left, and Mike Stevens (captain of the Florida Hickory Golfers) catch up; former and current SoHG presidents – Bill Geisler (2017-18), Joey Piatek (current), Greg Smith (2020), and Scott Staudacher (2021-22); the first foursome of the WGC, from left – Gary Pomichter, Deal Hudson, event host Bill Geisler, Frank Flood, and David Webster; Rich Grula off the tee; Greg Smith, left, and Christian Williams discuss arcane matters of auld golf.





TOP FIVE PHOTOS BY JIM DAVIS



PHOTO BY GREG WISE



PHOTO BY MIKE JONES



PHOTO BY AARON RUPP



PHOTO BY GREG WISE



PHOTO BY GREG WISE



PHOTO BY GREG WISE



PHOTO BY GREG WISE



PHOTO BY AARON RUPP

ACTION FROM THE WGC

Previous page, clockwise from top left: Mike Johnson watches a shot fly; Bern Bernacki, left, and Adam Raftshol show high energy on the first tee; Bill Hamilton watches a tee shot as Mike Tracy, center, and Bill Geisler look on; a kilted Michael Sloan acknowledges his gallery; Rich Grula, left, and Adam Raftshol wait their turn on the tee.

This page, clockwise from top left: Parker Elrod lines up a tricky putt; Rachel Weaver putts while her daughter, and caddie, Isabella, looks on; John Crow Miller, left, and Parker Elrod cross the road from No 2 green to No. 3 tee; Marci Likens, foreground, congratulates Frank Flood as he leaves the 9th green and the final match of the 2026 World Gutty Championship. Flood fought a great match with Joey Piatek, back left shaking hands with Bill Geisler; but came up just short on the last hole, the victim of an unfortunate stymie. Below, Bern Bernacki handles a deft chip shot.



PHOTO BY MIKE JONES



PHOTO BY BEVERLY WISE



PHOTO BY GREG WISE



PHOTO BY GREG WISE

The Quiet Joys of Obscure Scottish Golf



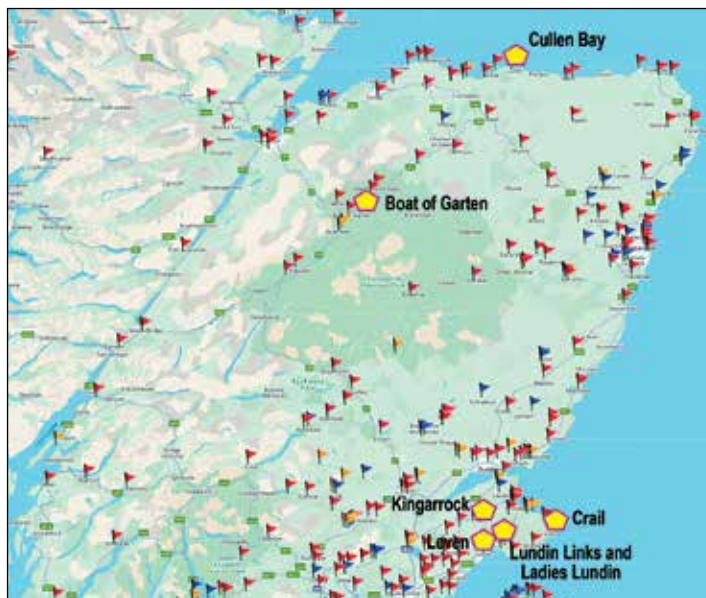
THE LUNDIN LINKS run alongside the Firth of Forth. The course is a beautifully preserved specimen of an antique layout, barely changed in more than a century.

By Dr. Mike Jones

Modern golf has very few rough edges. The golf balls are as consistent as the sunrise. The clubs are engineered for the optimal swing. Stylish golf courses are manicured within an inch of perfection. Every aspect of the game has been refined, polished, and perfected to deliver the most satisfaction any player can afford.

But hickory golf is different, and thankfully so. Our clubs, our replica balls, and even our clothing (not to mention our avoidance of high-tech accessories) purposefully make the game a little harder than it needs to be. As hickory golfers, we relish that extra challenge, especially if it involves Scotland, the ancestral home of golf.

Many hickory devotees (myself included) have spent too much time and money for pilgrimages to the brand-name courses in Scotland. But even the soul-killing Carnoustie, magnificent Muirfield, Royal Dornoch, and the Old Course at St. Andrews have been sweetened over time for today's golfer. Instead, better value and unexpected delectation can be found when players test their skills on the country's lesser-known courses. These layouts barely have been kissed by the passing of the years. They are far closer to the golf Allan Robertson, Willie Park, and Old Tom Morris knew. The prices are reasonable, tee times abundant, and the memories rich. Here are a few of my favorites.



THERE ARE MORE THAN 600 GOLF COURSES in Scotland, a land about the same size as South Carolina. On this trip, the author and his wife visited a dozen courses but particularly enjoyed the ones highlighted with the yellow pentagons.

Leven Links, 6,393 Yards, Par 71

An hour from the Edinburgh Airport is Fife, the last kingdom in Scotland and home to St. Andrews. Fife is a wonderland of uncrowded links courses. The championship track in Leven is a great place to start.

A true links course, there has been a 9-hole course on the property since the early 1800s. For decades Leven and its neighboring track, Lundin Links, were played as one course with two starting holes. They were split and each upgraded

to 18-holes in 1909. Leven has served as an Open qualifying course six times. George Nicoll made his famous hickory clubs in Leven for three generations, including my personal clubs that I use every day.

On a blustery September morning, my wife and I found Leven's first hole to be an ordinary thing; an irregular fairway floundering along the shore, with sketchy rough that barely slowed a wayward drive. The next three holes perk up a little bit before the course wanders away from the shoreline. The course comes into its own on the back nine, especially with a 30-mile-per-hour breeze. A good score will require length off the tee, the courage to play blind shots aggressively, and sharp putting with some very tricky greens.

The icing on the cake is the heart-stopping eighteenth with a "wee burn" (stream) running in front of the green. This is not bump-and-run territory; you'll need a strong niblick to avoid the splash. My only complaints about Leven are the lack of maintenance of the pot bunkers – many of those stern-walled structures have seriously eroded – and the ill-considered use of outdoor carpeting on cart paths. That said, it's a delightful experience.

Lundin Links, 6,314 yards, par 71

Lundin Links is the sister course to Leven, on the beach six miles east of its more famous cousin. It is smaller and to my mind more scenic, particularly because it remains largely as it was laid out some 100 years ago. This course claims contributions from Old Tom Morris, but was revised by James Braid about 1909.

The first fairway is particularly narrow and shares its turf with the eighteenth, so a sliced drive leads to rushed second shots as players watch your fumbles from the final tee box. Those first four holes flow westward (toward Leven) along the beachfront to the grey stone walls of the Mile Dyke. They are followed by the charming par-3 fifth hole that comes equipped with its own wee burn. The back nine climbs a lofty ridge, offering narrow fairways and wonderful views of the ocean. The par-3 fourteenth returns players to the beach with a vertical drop of at least fifty feet; even a hint of a slice will drop your ball over the Dyke and onto the Leven course. Lundin is in excellent condition, with proper pot bunkers and brilliant greens, and is a thorough test of the golfer's skills.

Boat of Garten, 5,837 Yards, Par 70

"Have you played our course before?" the pro inquired gently, to which I answered in the negative. "You're in for some fun, but watch out for the 'Boat Bounce'," he cautioned. That laconic admonition is the most understated warning anyone has ever shared with a golfer.

About 120 miles north from Leven, deep in the Cairngorms National Park, you will find the inexplicably-named Boat of Garten Golf Club. It is an old-fashioned parkland



THE "BOAT" is a parkland layout for players with strong legs and healthy lungs. The mottled appearance of the fairway highlights the dimples, which collect rainwater and remain green. The raised borders of the dimples are dry, hard, and scatter unwary shots unpredictably.

course of modest length and massive challenge. Modernized in 1932, the course wanders through a mature forest with broad fairways, thick rough, and tight greens. The first hole is a puff-ball par-3, a flat and straight 191 yards; it made my wife and I a bit cocky. At the second hole the course took charge, sneering at our feeble efforts. The fourth required a massive drive to surmount a ridge, only to find a deeper valley and another hill protecting the diminutive green. For the ninth hole, at only 152 yards, we needed a sherpa. I nearly gave up on the thirteenth, a vertical grind of 480 yards, only to discover it ended with a hidden dogleg to a green smaller than my dining room table. The fifteenth is a whisper over 300 yards, but the ravine in front of the green will break your heart. By my count, at least eight holes featured blind approaches. But that wasn't the hard part.

Remember the "Boat Bounce"? All of the fairways are speckled with irregular dimples, each about two feet in width and just three or four inches deep. The bottoms of the dimples are green and smooth, but if a flying ball tickles the edge of a dimple the results are catastrophic, easily bouncing twenty yards in the wrongest direction. Good shots are punished unpredictably, while some bad shots are rescued inexplicably. It is the "rub of the green."

The scenery is jaw-dropping. The sentimental little steam train that rides along the side of the course is delightful. The club house is one of the best I have seen in Scotland, and the food is excellent. I cannot wait to play this course again. But I'll be watching for Boat Bounces.

Cullen Bay, 4,623 Yards, Par 66

No amount of research will prepare you for the untrammelled joy of Cullen Links. The course is squeezed inside a bowl of red sandstone which looks as if it had been

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

SCOTTISH GOLF

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

transported from the American southwest. The rough-hewn fairways are surrounded by cliffs, high farmlands, and an enormous granite railroad viaduct. Laid out in 1870 on useless scrubble along the Firth of Moray, this Old Tom Morris original advertises itself as the “Shortest True Links Course in the World.” But what it lacks in length it more than delivers in character, as decreed by a sign at the entrance: “No Laying Up!”

Once again, my wife and I were surprised by a pussy-cat opening hole, which seems to be a consistent theme. Following a handsome local golfer wearing a bright red shirt, we tossed our bags on our shoulders and walked to the second tee and couldn't find the green. It was up – straight up – only 121 yards away, but 100 feet over our heads. I launched a niblick in what I thought was the right direction and never did find that ball. The next four holes played along the top of that ridge, offering spectacular vistas but narrow (maybe twenty yards?) fairways. We followed Mr. Red Shirt to the dizzying seventh hole: a 181-yard elevated perch, dropping 150 feet from tee to green. We worried about tumbling off the cliff.

Then the fun really began. By this point we had lost sight of Mr. Red Shirt, and holes eight, nine, and ten all cross each other – there were golf balls flying in all directions. We never did find the twelfth tee. The thirteenth aimed us at a red rock formation 60 feet tall. We threaded our drives between the stonework only to discover we were miles from the green. Local golfers loft a niblick right over the sandstone, but how would visitors know?

We staggered to the fourteenth hole to discover it crosses the par-5 fifteenth. While deciphering that, we were nearly killed by drives from the sixteenth landing at our feet. It was bewildering, delightful, and infectious fun. You cannot play this golf course without laughing, it's just that wacky.

Kingarroch Links, 2,200 Yards, Par 34

Kingarroch is the Holy Grail for hickory players. The course was the personal playground of the golf-addicted industrialist Frederick Sharp at the beginning of the 20th century. Unhappily, Sharp and almost every member of his family met an untimely demise. In an act of astounding generosity, the last surviving daughter donated the course,



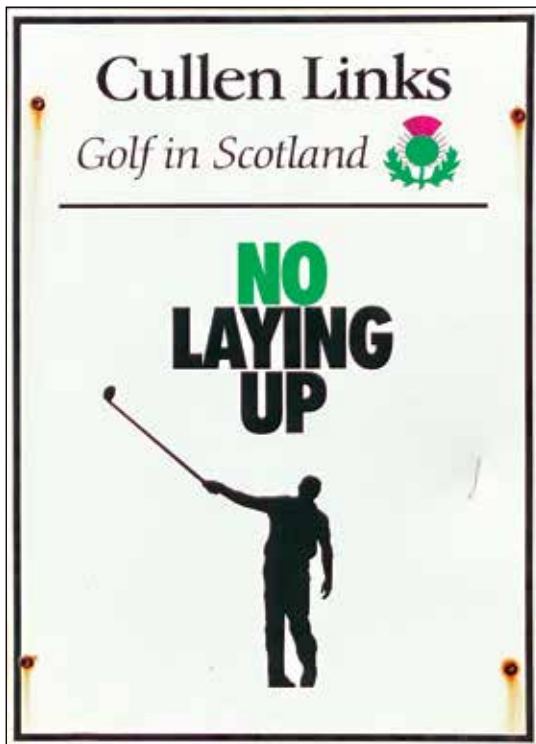
THE TEE ON THE 13TH HOLE AT CULLEN LINKS offers no directional guidance. The green actually is behind the rocky outcrop on the right. A golfer with mountaineering skills painted the white blaze on the rocks (visible at the right edge of the photo) to show the line to the pin, which the author did not know until it was too late.

the farm, the mansion, and all its antiques to the people of Scotland.

The Scottish National Trust (SNT) began restoring the old course in 2008. Tee times can be booked on-line (new technology is appreciated, just not on the course) and players are greeted by the lanky Dave, a grey-haired SNT docent, who offers an engaging mini seminar about the course and hickory golf.

The course is maintained using equipment from the 1920s so the fairways are rougher than modern players would expect. The greens are small and relatively slow. There are no fancy grasses, toxic chemicals, or oversized graphite clubs. This course is all hickory, and dozens of five-club loaner sets are available for free in the clubhouse.

On a bright autumn afternoon, my wife, Annie, and I walked this unique course. I teed off using a feathery I had brought for the occasion. The first hole is a gentle, climbing dogleg to the right with a massive oak in the middle of the fairway. The third hole features an enormous stone “folly” atop the hill behind the green. The fourth is a charming downhill par three, and the sixth is a sublime par four which showcases the mansion on the side of the hill. Wearing my plus-fours and switching to a McIntyre Oui-met mesh ball, the golf was sublime.



There was no highway noise, no airplanes, no sirens, no diesel engines. Cows and sheep munched in the fields around us. The grass was dry and held my ball high. Every swing was exactly right; every shot flew true and straight. It was as fine a day of golf as one could possibly hope for. I gave Dave my feathery ball in honor of the occasion. He was thrilled.

Lundin Ladies Golf Course, 2,365 Yards, Par 34

Back on the Firth of Forth, we accidentally discovered the Lundin Ladies Golf Club. We literally were looking out the window of our hotel at the gardens across the street and saw two people walking with bags on their shoulders. We discovered the clubhouse and I was chagrined to be rejected on its steps. Men could play, they told us, but none could enter the clubhouse. I found that awkward, but Annie was delighted.

It turns out the Lundin Ladies Golf Club was founded in 1891. It is the oldest ladies-only club in Scotland, and what a home it is. The first hole is a bland par-four (notice the pattern?). The third and fourth holes are an out-and-back duo to a gentle knoll with handsome views over the Firth. The sixth is a challenging downhill par-3, while the seventh climbs back up the hill you just strolled down. A burn comes into play on the sixth, seventh, and ninth holes.

But the real excitement is the second hole. It is dominated by three neolithic sandstone monuments between 14 to 17 feet tall. These “standing stanes” were placed in their current position 4,000 years ago, perhaps as a Stonehenge-style religious site. These stones are massive, and buried as deeply into the soil as they tower above it. The effort required to quarry, move, and place these stones simply boggles the mind; a reminder of the ancient history of Scotland.

Crail Balcomie Links, 5,800 Yards, Par 69

If I could only play one golf course for the rest of my life, it would be the Balcomie in historic Crail, just ten miles to the south of St. Andrews. Crail is one of Scotland’s oldest towns and was chartered by Robert the Bruce in 1310. Crail was a major seaport in centuries past, moving Scottish wool and coal to customers in the Low Countries. Today there are



THESE NEOLITHIC *standing stones have been guarding the second fairway at the Ladies Lundin Links course for about 4,000 years. In the photo above, they’re watching Annie Jones prepare for a shot to the green.*

cozy hotels, fine restaurants, and excellent shops, but nothing tops the golf.

The historical record of golf at Crail goes back to 1786. The peripatetic Old Tom Morris laid out these links in 1892. (There also is another, modern course on the property, but what’s the fun in that?) The course features spectacular views over the North Sea. Unlike almost all the other courses, the first hole on this course is a cracker. It requires a mighty blow to clear a disused quarry where the fairway would be on a lesser course. Outbound, the course flows along the edge of the surf and players can tempt fate by playing over the rocky beach itself. I have a wonderful memory of my brother-in-law on the beach at the fifth hole, after his swing failed to match his ambition.

The thirteenth hole is a heartbreaker: the tee faces directly into a grassy cliff, and your drive needs both distance and altitude to make the green. Perhaps most enticingly, the fourteenth hole features Constantine’s Cave. Legend holds that this is where Constantine, King of the Scots, met his demise in 874 at the hands of Dutch invaders. Tough neighborhood.

Like most hickory golfers, I am a fan of doing things the hard way. I play the ball where it lies. I putt everything out. I don’t use a rangefinder. It’s simply the right way to play our marvelous game.

I also am a fan of “silly” holes. Every great golf course needs a whacky hole just to remind us this is a game, not life and death. As Geoff Shackelford wrote, silly holes are “scorecard wreckers, dream destroyers, and incontrovertible proof that the architect inhaled way too many fumes from his drafting pens.”

Playing these lesser-known Scottish courses and their wacky layouts makes hickory golf even more rewarding. These courses were not bulldozed into submission; they were fused over otherwise unusable terrain. Their balls didn’t go as far. They were mowed by sheep. Mother Nature irrigated the fairways, or not, as chance would have it. These courses fit hickory clubs far better than most modern courses. These rarely seen, lightly played gems encourage you to touch history and channel your Old Tom Morris.

It’s a little like time travel, with good plumbing. ☞



Dr. Mike and Annie Jones on Lundin Links. Mike is a writer, an entrepreneur, a commercial pilot, and a devoted hickory golfer who thrives on the Donald Ross courses in his hometown of Pinehurst, N.C. He’s always accessible at PilotMike2012@gmail.com.



A Further Look Into Altering Shaft Flex

SoHG member Tim Bell read John Henry Williams on changing a shaft flex in the previous edition of A Wee Nip and was inspired to share a further look into this procedure. We'll begin with a revisit of John Henry's method. Both woodworkers offer important tips to keep in mind. – Editor

From John Henry Williams – When you are trying to change the flex on a shaft it is important to limit the amount of wood you remove at a time to prevent removing too much from one side or the other. I take a common crayon and rub it up and down the shaft. Then, using either a file or sand paper I remove that much colored wood. The crayon guides you from not going over the same area and removing too much material. Of course, you need to reapply the crayon, but it is a great visual aid in letting you know where you have filed or sanded. The crayon will also show any high spot and low areas that may need to be addressed before finishing. It also helps you avoid certain areas by leaving the marks on the shaft until you finish sanding the entire shaft before staining and applying finish. I find it helps me concentrate on specific areas I want to change and avoid the areas I feel are correct.



MARKING THE SHAFT is a great visual aid in helping the woodworker know how much or where you have filed, sanded, or scraped.

Now let's see how Tim approaches the task in his shop.

I have eased or reduced the flex on hundreds of hickory shafts for myself and clients. I use a large Stanley hand plane blade because it's easy and comfortable to hold, but you could very well just use a simple utility knife blade (either of these should be very sharp to reduce drag and keep from tearing wood fibers.)

(An internet or Amazon search for wood scrapers turns up several likely possibilities. The StewMac Ultimate Scraper, made for working on guitars, looks like it might be good for this use. – Editor's note.)

If the grip is already on the club I start drawing the blade from about 2 or 3 inches from the bottom of the grip pulling the blade straight down the shaft to within 3 or 4 inches of the hosel. Take care to avoid obliterating or damaging any shaft stamps. One must also guard against the blade sliding horizontally across the shaft, which will cut the wood fibers.

I then rotate the shaft minutely and repeat the draw/scrape process until I have worked my way all the way around the



A LARGE STANLEY HAND PLANE BLADE does the trick for Tim Bell to scrape his hickory shafts.



SANDPAPER WRAPPED AROUND THE SHAFT helps to remove rough wood fibers.



BEFORE AND AFTER SANDING. Tim Bell uses Easy-Off oven cleaner to oxidize the wood and raise the grain. The process helps him achieve the patina he desires.



SHAFT FLEX BOARD with a calibrated weight tells the story of the flex of a shaft, stiff to regular, or points in between.



A FEW OF THE TOOLS AND SUPPLIES need for shaft flex altering. with a calibrated weight tells the story of the flex of a shaft, stiff to regular, or points in between.

circumference, usually between 24 and 30 vertical scrapes. I have found that doing this twice around (and I use a soft pencil to darken the shaft to know where my second passes are) works out to roughly 1/2 a flex change. That means that somewhere between three and four full rotations will move a shaft from stiff flex to regular flex.

This is all in the judgment of the woodworker, however, as not all shafts are the same in grain density or thickness.

I have a shaft flex board on the wall that helps me determine the current flex of a shaft and how much I wish to adjust it. After scraping the shaft, I use 100-grit sandpaper wrapped around the shaft inside my palm to remove any rough wood fibers and then follow with 180 grit and then

220 and/or fine steel wool to finish. ALWAYS moving in the direction of the grain. To achieve the wood patina that I want, my method is to treat the exposed shaft with a combination of oven cleaner spray (to oxidize the wood, which can raise the grain and will need to be rubbed with steel wool after it's dry) followed by a mix of Fiebing's brown leather oil dye with linseed oil.

Once it's dry/cured I apply wipe-on polyurethane to seal the wood pores. I always test the shafts by hitting into a net or on the course between the sanding process and the staining process to avoid repeated work and you want to be careful of removing too much wood from the shaft, because there's no going back. ☺

A Twist on the Old Game

Torque, torsion, flex... what's it all mean for your hickories?

By Jim Davis

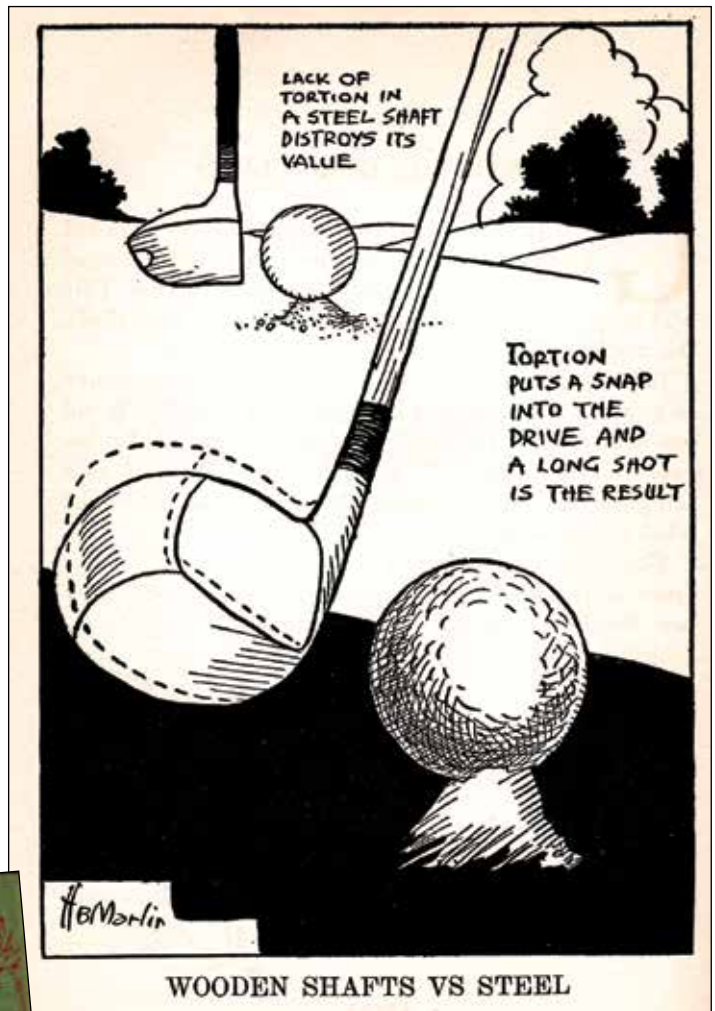
These clubs of ours, in case you haven't noticed, can bend and twist like nobody's business, certainly more than their modern counterparts. I've never thought much about torque, flex and whatever CPM refers to. I just have some clubs I really like and go and play a brand of golf long-conditioned to comfortable mediocrity.

The several clubs in my bag, including you, dear mashie niblick, were mysteries to be appreciated rather than solved. They are members of a select club, harboring penitential rules of admittance, secret grips known only to each individually, and only through much pleading and the application of exclusive recipes of finish coats do they reveal their true natures.

I suppose all hickory clubs have their "ways," being composed, as they are, of unique strands of DNA that make each one special. It says so, special, right on the back of the clubhead. So, I "listened" to each club, hoping that over time, like a patient middle school teacher, I would come to learn what makes each club "special."

This one likes a pronounced hip turn, that one prefers a shorter backswing, the woods will send a ball 20 yards dead right at the slightest hint of poor timing. The stories that niblick could tell... Of all clubs, she is the one that commands the greatest respect. Billy Joel even wrote a song that describes her to a tee. You know the one: "She's Always A Woman to Me." Tell me he didn't write that after a long, heartbreaking relationship with a niblick.

One afternoon, while gadding about through what I am pleased to call my golfing library, I came across a curious item from H.B. Martin (1873-1959), a cartoonist who somehow became ensnared by golf. He turned to writing about



the sport and, of all things, wound up becoming one of the founding members of the Professional Golfers Association.

Among Martin's 15 golf books, most of which he illustrated himself, was one called *What's Wrong With Your Game?* (1928), in which the good man set about the business of curing any number of golfing ills – slices, putting woes, incorrect movement of head and arms, the finish of the perfect swing, and so on. Then, taking a wild swing himself, Martin came up with the following goose:

Tortion [sic] in Golf Clubs

Golf pros and low handicap amateurs were not quick to take up the steel shaft until a steel shaft was made that could show tortion. This was at first a good selling point for the old steel shaft, the makers' offering it as an aid to better golf.

In reality a certain amount of tortion is necessary in any golf club unless it is a mashie or a putter. Wood has always been the ideal material for golf shafts because of this tortion. It gives life to a club just as a tall building is made to sway to meet the action of the wind and weather.

The best players from their own choice use wood in a championship match or medal round which means that they can obtain the best results with shafts made by nature's hands.

Not a fan of steel shafts, perhaps Martin had some stock in TW Minton. Regardless, his comments, written toward the sunset of the hickory era, started me thinking I had better wake up, cast a stern eye over the casual crew in my bag and assess their qualities re “tortion” (Martin’s spelling).

Let us be clear on our terms – torque and torsion are essentially the same and refer to the “twist” or circular movement that a shaft gives to a club head.

Flex refers to the actual bend, the flexibility, of the shaft as it moves through the swing.

Thus the flex of the shaft has a direct effect on torque – stiff less, and soft more.

Perhaps you have heard players say that you must “wait” for the head to come through on a drive or other wood shot. I took this to mean that shaft flex was everything, and that you had to know the merits of your club and the exact moment when to snap the hands through to complement the clubhead as it came along to do its work; assuming you had the skill to do all that stuff.

Fortunately, for all who cruise through hickory rounds innocent of care, there are those rare and worthy souls who cut right to the chase. To the workshop born, they delight in delving deeply into technical matters of composition, dimensions, loft, lies, torque and flex; plumbing depths the rest of us are either too lazy to explore or simply cannot be bothered to fathom.

Let us hear from three pretty darn good players what they think about Martin’s torque or torsion business. Careful now, we’re about to get serious and there is much to cover.

Mr. Randy Jensen

First on the tee, the Hickory Tiger himself, Randy Jensen, of Omaha, Neb. Still one of the better ball strikers anywhere, Jensen has more or less withdrawn from regular high-level hickory competitions, content to beat up on all his buddies and friends in Nebraska and elsewhere in the Midwest. In his heyday this handsome and solidly-built farm-raised young player won darn near every tournament he entered. His 2008 book, *Playing Hickory Golf*, is a bible of detail for those who would look into hickory golf, both theory and application. Herewith, a sample from his book bearing upon our theme:

Hickory Shaft Torque

To hear many modern golfers tell it, those old hickory shafts had so much torque, nobody could hit them straight. This is fairly amusing to many who have played some hickory golf, especially those who hit their hickory clubs as straight or straighter than their modern clubs. It is true that when you measure a hickory shaft for torque it has quite a bit higher torque than a steel shaft, but this often does not translate into poor course performance.

Torque, by the way, is the circular “give” or “twist” that a shaft has. Torque can be measured in degrees by clamping



A LITTLE FLEX THERE. That’s golf instructor Ernest Jones from his 1952 book, *Swing the Clubhead*. He was emphasizing the importance of the hands in the golf swing, and by swinging from a seated position, taking the legs and hips out of the whole thing. But the camera also captured the flex of the golf shaft.

the shaft at a specified point and applying a certain number of foot-pounds of pressure in a circular or twisting fashion to the clubhead. You can demonstrate torque to yourself by holding the grip end of your club in one hand and slowly twisting the clubhead in the other hand. A steel shaft or very high quality graphite shaft club will almost not turn at all. A low quality graphite shaft will rotate 45 degrees before you will want to stop before the shaft breaks in two.

A hickory shaft will rotate or “torque” a lot more than a steel shaft. In an excellent player’s swing, the body and hands are both turning quickly into impact, which, in essence, “spools up” the torque and neutralizes the higher shaft torque.

Granted the shafts of today are most remarkable for their high tech performance, certainly well beyond what Martin knew in 1928, almost 100 years ago. Furthermore, Martin praised wood shafts as ideal material for the proper torsion. Mr. Jensen continues his thoughts on the matter...

Mr. Jensen –

“The USGA legalized steel shafts in 1924, but the early ones did not play well – too heavy and too stiff. In fact, the only reason steel shafts took over in the 1930s was that

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

TORQUE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

they were cheaper to produce and they could charge more money for them.

For the modern hickory player, one of the biggest fitting issues is that the same shaft CPM for hickory vs steel or graphite produces a different flex. The hickory shafts need a higher CPM to play at the same flex, i.e 290 CPM on a hickory-shafted driver with Stiff flex. Modern clubs are often about 20 CPM softer for the same flex.

In case you are scratching your head, CPM is cycles per minute or the oscillation frequency of a shaft. This is measured by deflection distance under weight. A higher CPM/lower deflection indicates a stiffer shaft.

Clubfitters and workshop devotees often have deflection boards mounted on a handy wall for measuring these things. A club is fitted to a bracket on the board and extends horizontally across its face (see page 42). Several horizontal lines appear in a vertical column, each marked with a deflection number. A determined weight is affixed near the end, the clubhead end, of the shaft, which bends under the weight. Where it stops is measured and thus, the CPM/deflection measurement is determined. Everyone claps their hands and drinks are poured out.

Right. Clear? Let's move on.

Mr. Jensen –

Stiffness and torsion go hand-in-hand for playability.

Your hickory tempo is slower due to the heavier total weight of the hickory clubs: often a half to full ounce heavier in total weight. If you are “waiting” for the head, you are playing a shaft too soft for your swing.

The measurable “torque” in a hickory shaft is quite a bit higher than modern steel or graphite, but it has no effect on



THE HICKORY TIGER, so named for his prowess and winning ways with hickories, Randy Jensen is a student of the game who enjoys researching shaft and club characteristics to determine what makes for the best results on the course. The photo above is from the cover of his 2008 book, “Playing Hickory Golf.”

43" Steel or Hickory Shaft Driver	
MPH	FLEX
70-80	A
80-90	R
90-100	S
100-110+	X
Modern 5 Iron or Mashie Iron	
MPH	FLEX
60-70	A
70-80	R
80-90	S
90-100	X
Modern 45" Graphite Shaft Driver	
MPH	FLEX
75-85	A
85-95	R
95-110	S
110-120+	X

your ability to hit perfectly straight shots if you are playing the correct flex and make a good swing.

From a playing perspective, the higher torque value measured in a hickory shaft vs. a steel shaft has virtually no playability effect...surprisingly! However, hickory shafts are susceptible to internal cracking which makes the shaft lose all torque control, you just hit big slices – time to reshaft!

Do you feel the torsion? Do your wood headed clubs have a great flex, or are they stiff shafts with little torsion/flex? Fit hickory flex to the chart above (from my book) for best results.

The players in the day preferred red hickory for their shafts; this is the inner sapwood from a hickory tree. The red is lighter in weight than the outside “white hickory” and was used almost exclusively in the woods. Some players liked the white hickory for their irons.

When I was in my prime I used a 43¼” driver with 287 cpm (a slightly soft stiff); my hickory play speed was about 102 mph, but I could hit 115 mph with the hickory driver. My irons were all “X” flex. I now play a 43⅜” driver with a 282 cpm shaft and my irons are “S.”

Why, it's quite simple, really. Every schoolboy knows that the clubhead applies force to the ball to accelerate it according to $F=ma$. The mass of the ball is known. Thus, we can compute the acceleration, which is the change in velocity divided by the time it took to achieve the change. Torque!

$$F = m v_{ball} / t$$

Mr. Peter Flory

One of the finest hickory golfers today, Peter Flory of Glencoe, Ill., is a financial expert by profession, who has made an avocation of creating 3D working models of golf courses that can be played on video game systems, PCs, or golf simulators. That kind of thing brought him to the attention of Michael Keiser who, with his brother, Chris, and others, wanted to rebuild the historic Lido golf course on sand barrens near the now famous Sand Valley Resort course that they operate in Wisconsin.

Designed by Charles Blair Macdonald on Long Island in 1914, the Lido was considered one of the country's top courses, even better than Macdonald's National Golf Links. Macdonald famously spread mountains of sand over the site and added tons of organic material to create the course. In effect, says Michael Keiser in *Nature of the Game* (2022), authored by his father and Stephen Goodwin, it was the first "entirely manufactured" golf course in the game's history.

The original Lido eventually fell victim to both economics and the U.S. Navy's need for training grounds in the 1940s. (See the SoHG website for a story about Flory's work with the Keisers.)

Like Jensen, Flory has a long resumé of hickory golf titles won and continues to advocate for high-level hickory golf championships. On the matter of torque and flex, he had the following to share.

Mr. Flory –

I'm the least technical player possible, but here is how I think about it.

I achieve a fairly high swing speed, but I'm tall and do it over a longer arc. So, I don't stress the shaft as much as other players with my same swing speed and I don't need telephone pole shafts. I do like a little give in the shaft so that I can feel the head.

My experience is that most original shafts in hickory irons (at least the good makers) were pretty stiff and those are adequate for me. Most of them would qualify as stiff shafts compared to modern standards.



HICKORY CHAMPION Peter Flory depends upon stiff shafts in both irons and woods to manage the torque with his faster swing speed. While he's found original shafts in irons to be mostly stiff, he allows that he has had to reshaft his favorite woods with stiffer shafts to compensate for higher torque and a resulting tendency to hook. (Photo courtesy Jenn Koss.)

I don't feel much torque in any iron shaft that is stiff enough for me. When I'm swinging my irons, I don't ease off or do anything to time the shot. As long as I make good contact, tempo doesn't seem to play a role in my swing.

However, the woods are a different story. Due to the longer shaft, torque plays a huge role for drivers, brassies, and spoons. I have heard that a modern driver has about 3 degrees of torque in it and a hickory can have something like 12 degrees. That matches what I feel when swinging them.

I have had a very hard time finding any original shaft that fits my swing. The vast majority are too flexy and have too much torque for me. The results are that every shot has a significant hook bias for me.

To solve that problem, I've reshafted my best woods with stiffer hickory. Even with the stiffest shafts that I can find, there is still a timing element when I'm swinging hard with the driver or spoon.

I don't try to "time" the hit by slowing my tempo, but I do make small adjustments in terms of how I want to feel at impact and through impact. Those adjustments are related to how far from the inside I need to feel like the clubhead is before impact and how I feel like I'm guiding the swing path through the impact zone.

A lot of it is feel and experience and I'll find a way to adapt to the clubs since they are all different.

One thing that has improved my modern game is that anti-hook swing I've developed with hickory woods. Now, with the modern woods, I don't fear hazards to the left any more.

As long as I periodically play hickory golf, my modern game stays calibrated and I'm hitting it straighter than I ever have in my life.

But, again, I don't make any significant adjustments when hitting hickory irons... just the woods. ☺

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YOUNG HICKORY PRO *Matthew Hoffman is making a name for himself with his golfing talents. He is shown above on the 7th tee at the Inwood CC during his 2023 victory in the USHO. He appears to have a poetic streak as well, as the piece below attests.*

The Dance of the Hickory Shaft

2025, The Greenbrier Sporting Club

By Matthew Hoffman

A hickory shaft, so wild yet true,
With flex and twist in motions two.
A ship at sea, it bends and sways,
No modern steel behaves this way.

The Mashie stout, the Lead more free,
Each club its own identity.
A softer whip sends high and light,
A firmer shaft keeps shots in flight.

No factory mold, no measured cast,
Just nature's hand – its feel will last.
So test its twist, embrace its charm,
For hickory's soul is in your arm.

Mr. Matthew Hoffman

One of the younger breed of hickory champions, Matthew Hoffman, 28, is employed as an assistant golf professional at The Greenbrier Sporting Club, the private arm of The Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia.

Hoffman, who hopes to build a career in golf course development, was introduced to golf while in high school near Columbus, Ohio. Later, while playing golf for Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va., he began to caddie summers at The Golf Club, a Pete Dye course in Columbus. After graduation, he was hired as an assistant at the Sand Point Country Club in Seattle, Wash., where he was introduced to hickory golf by one of the members. In turn, he was had the great good fortune to be introduced to John Henry Williams, one of the finest hickory golf club experts going. Williams outfitted Hoffman with a set of clubs and two have been close friends since.

Hoffman won the 2023 USHO title at the Inwood CC in Inwood, N.Y., played there on the centennial anniversary of Bobby Jones' first U.S. Open victory in 1923, at Inwood. He says the frequency of his Tad Moore driver is 290, considered in the stiff range.

Here are Hoffman's thoughts on torque and flex.

Mr. Hoffman

The beauty of a hickory shaft lies in its movement – its torsion. Unlike modern steel, which is engineered for uniformity, hickory clubs each have a distinct character. Torsion is the blend of flex and rotational twist, the quality that gives these clubs their feel and responsiveness.

When swinging, I feel torsion most as the clubhead rotates through impact – some clubs twisting more than others. This natural movement affects both control and ball flight, requiring the golfer to develop a feel for each shaft's unique tendencies.

To experience torsion, hold a hickory club by the head, grip the handle, and give it a twist. Some shafts will resist, others will coil and release. Of the two George Nicoll Recorder mashies in my set, one (a 6-iron) has lead on the back for added swing weight and features more torque than the other, a 33-degree mashie (5-iron), even though their swing weights match. The 5-iron's stiffer shaft keeps shots lower, while the 6-iron's added whip sends the ball higher.

Each hickory shaft tells its own story, shaped not by machinery but by nature itself. ♪



DEFLECTION BOARDS, such as this one from GolfWorks, allow club repair experts to measure the flex in hickory shafts. It is an impressive bit of workshop technology and is sure to wow hickory novitiates. Get two! (Photo courtesy Bill Geisler.)



Really torqued!

By Jim Davis

In this age of artificial intelligence and photo manipulation, you have to wonder what's going on in these photos. Here's the scoop.

These photos (printed in the Spring 2013 *Wee Nip*) were taken during a Golf Historical Society of Canada hickory outing. That's Luke Saunders, a PGA Pro who appears to be hitting trick shots with a rubber club. The photos were taken with an iPhone by Joe McLean, who was then editor of the GHSC's magazine, the *Bulletin* (not to be confused with the Golf Collectors Society "*Bulletin*" of that same period). McLean confirmed that it was definitely not a rubber club, but a Hugh Logan spoon from his own playset. The shaft is 41 inches long, the loft 10-13 degrees. Saunders had a 115-mph swing speed and was initially reluctant to use the clubs. Turns out he did not break any of them.

Randy Jensen surmised that Saunders appears to be swinging a longnosed play club and that these were often made of ash wood. These could be super whippy, he said. That created a timing problem, especially when trying to match this club's characteristics to other clubs in your bag.

But THAT much whip? C'mon.

Peter Flory, our computer and 3D whiz, had the an-

swer, one known to photo hobbyists and other high-tech image experts. "It's called the 'rolling shutter effect' and is a product of the way smart phones and their digital cameras create images," he said.

The bent golf club shaft in photos such as the ones above, often called "noodle shaft," is an optical illusion, not a real physical bend. Digital cameras scan images from top to bottom. Quick as they are – think microseconds – as the camera's sensor scans the image, the fast-moving club is always moving to new positions, creating a time-based distortion of a fast-moving object.

Thus, when shooting a golf swing, the shaft may appear to bend backwards or forwards, making it look like a "noodle" or severely distorted. This is most common in smartphone cameras and consumer action cameras, especially when shooting in landscape orientation.

To eliminate the noodle, try shooting in portrait mode, turning the camera upside down, or using a camera with a global shutter. Or not; it's a cool looking effect.

While shafts do flex during a swing, (see the image of Ernest Jones on page 39) the extreme "C" shape distortion seen in many photos is purely a digital artifact.

There you have it. Now you know how to amaze and astound your friends with your incredible physics-defying golf swing. ↪



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