

Let's play golf

January 2, 2014



Sequoyah Country Club

Americans love golf. We have roughly 17,700 courses in the United States, which is half of the world's inventory of golf courses. We have several Golf Channels on television and multiple magazines and even entire sports stores dedicated to golf, golf equipment and golf clothes. Indeed, golf is a big business, sport and hobby.

Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, William Clinton and Barack Obama have added prestige to the game in our modern era. Each American generation since the early 1900s has had its golf idol(s) such as Bobby Jones, Harry Cooper, Ben Hogan, Sam Sneed, Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Lee Trevino, Tom Watson, Greg Norman, Phil Mickelson and Tiger Woods to name only a few

But we Americans did not invent or originate golf. Golf, or something very similar, was played by the ancient Romans and by the Chinese in the late Middle Ages, and in the 15th century in Scotland, it finally developed as the sport we now recognize. Golf became so popular that King James II of England and Scotland wrote an executive order forbidding his military (particularly the officers) from playing golf, fearing it would detract from their time at archery.

The first modern-style golf course was built in 1574 as the St Andrews Golf Club (now the "Old Course") in Fife, Scotland. The first set of standard rules was developed in 1744, and the first official golf tournament was played in 1860 at the Prestwick Golf Club in Ayrshire, Scotland. The U.S. Golf Association was formed in 1894, and the U.S. Professional Golf Association in 1916. The United States now has at least 13 national championship tournaments each year.

Golf came to South Carolina in the early 1900s. Probably the oldest formal course in South Carolina was developed as the Aiken Golf Club in 1912. South Carolina now has more than 360 courses, including the

famous Harbor Town Golf Club on Hilton Head Island and the Ocean Course at the Kiawah Golf Resort. Myrtle Beach has more than 70 courses and has become a major golf destination.

Florence now has approximately 20 courses in the area, and it also is an important destination for golf tourism. Incredibly, the economic impact on our area from golf tourism is at least \$3 million per year without considering the multiplier effect. Several quality golfers live in our area, including Tommy Gainey, Paul Brown, Billy Hoylen, Mark Gaynor, John Orr, Buddy Baker, Billy Womack, Rick Beasley, the Jones boys, Gregg Jones, Tim Crouch, David Stone, Paul T. Davis, McCuen Elmore, Richard Warren, Allen McCall, Brian Falcone, Greg Raines, Jay Saleeby, Michael Thigpen, Brice Elvington, Keith Buckhouse, Tom Kasler and Rocky Pearce, to name a few.

We play host to a PGA qualifying tournament at the Florence Country Club, and several of our major local institutions have tournaments each year. A few of my friends play golf each weekend. They bet roughly 50 cents per hole, because they can't afford much more, but they have a great time.

Unfortunately, I can't play golf, since my legs significantly differ in length, but I can tell you how to play and I can putt well. I was a professional golf caddy from 1964 to 1967 and at my peak made approximately \$150 on a weekend day. I loved my time on the links in beautiful weather at the Sequoyah Country Club in Oakland, Calif. Ironically, I didn't like caddying for doctors, because they didn't tip very well and took too long to play a round.

But I made many friends among the members and traveling pros. I never will forget Bill Dailey of Dailey Chevrolet and a founding partner of the Oakland Raiders football team. He always took an interest in what I was doing at college and gave me tips that doubled almost everybody else.

Occasionally, he would bring along his first coach and later partner, Al Davis. About Mr. Davis, I can say little, for as they say, “Do not speak ill of the dead” (from Greece, 3rd Century AD).

By the way, a warning to Florence golfers: My wife, Shirley, has taken up golf lessons. ... FORE!!