

Goin' Old School

By Lane Osborne

I recently received an email from a friend asking me to check out the online link to an old golf course in North Carolina. In order to do so, I had to create a user name and password which seemed odd, but I went along with it to get to the information about the course. Shortly thereafter I received an email from The Carolinas Hickory Golf Association (CHGA) confirming my acceptance into their association and welcoming me to the group. I was doing all of this on my cell phone and had unknowingly joined the organization.

So, when I got home I went to their website to see what kind of group I had just joined. The website had countless photos of young and old alike wearing Tam o' Shanter caps, bow ties, plus-fours, and an array of tartan, argyle, and plaid patterns. The photos were all in color, but if they were rendered in sepia or black and white you would swear they were taken in the 1930's. At first blush, the group seemed like golf's version of Civil War re-enactors, clinging to a bygone era, but for an organization whose mission is to preserve "the traditions of the ancient game of golf" it's not the least bit surprising...it's part of their charter (as paraphrased below):

We adhere to the equipment guidelines published by the Society of Hickory Golfers. Play [competitive matches and tournaments] shall be, as much as possible, on courses designed and built during the hickory era, i.e. prior to about 1935 and hickory shafted golf clubs used which are either manufactured prior to 1935 or are appropriate to the period.

1935? I have enough trouble playing the game with equipment made in 2011! For a little over a month now, my friend has been playing with a set of hickory shafted reproduction clubs and clamoring about how great they are. He's usually fawning over them while my Ping hybrid flies past the spot where his driver left him. When I quickly grab a 60-degree wedge to hit a flop shot to a pin tucked behind a bunker, he's often rattling around in his bag searching between clubs with names like "spoon, cleek, niblick," and "benny," trying to decide on the right one for a given shot.

The day after he surreptitiously sent me that link which led to my joining the CHGA, we played golf together and I decided to try playing a few holes with his hickory sticks to find out what all the hullabaloo was about. It was infectious. The game was totally different. It was like playing golf as a kid again, rediscovering what I loved most about the game. There was the soft feel of the persimmon headed driver, the rebound of the hickory shaft after impact, the inventiveness and creativity I had to rediscover with a set that only has 9 to 10 clubs. Heck, even the challenge of trying to find a sweet spot the size of a dime was kind of fun. I still prefer to play golf with all of the modern technology and conveniences, but from time to time, I may be found walking the fairways, goin' old school.

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"I'm playing a gutta percha number 3."

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