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# Going Home Again to Play Golf

By

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Even though it had been years, seeing the first hole at the Wellesley Country Club golf course through the pine trees was thrilling. I knew this route like the back of my hand because I traveled this road, almost daily during the late 60's and early 70's. Located 15 miles west of Boston, MA, this is the place where I had spent much of my childhood learning how to play the game of golf. This is where I started my employment life as a caddied. Earned my first paycheck, cleaning members golf clubs and where I began my brief trip into the world of the professional golf industry. As I drove along Forest Street that bright Sunday morning, my golf mind was already at work - I noticed the pin was in the back left of this long and narrow 1st green.

My life changed in 1964. That was the year my parents became members of the Wellesley Country Club (WCC) - an old New England country club that featured a pool, tennis courts, and an 18 hole golf course. By joining WCC, my father who had played golf while growing up in upstate New York was getting back into the game he loved. My mother, wanting to share in his enjoyment, started taking group lessons. Sunday afternoons while the kids were at the pool, my parents would be on the golf course.

Because of the lack of caddies, my mother had to drag her golf pull-cart around the golf course. After hearing her complain my father decided he could resolve this problem. He'd have one of

his sons, pull his wife golf pull-cart. Being the middle son, I was selected.

"What was a caddie?" I wondered, after being told I would be caddying for my mother. I would find out soon enough. While the other kids went to the pool next weekend, I went with my parents to the golf course. I spent the afternoon walking around the hilly New England golf course, pulling my mother's cart. At the end of the round, my father gave me two dollars.

Wait a second. Getting money for spending the afternoon walking pulling this golf cart around a golf course? Great! My future employment was set. I couldn't wait for the next weekend!

In the beginning, everyone thought it was cute that my mother would have her son pull her cart. Mom told her friends, "at least I know he's not getting into trouble." Once school let out for the summer, I went to the club to caddie. Although I didn't know it, this simple act of a youthful teen wanting to make some money caused quite a stir with some of the members. Thankfully my father and Les Bond, the new golf professional at the club, came to my rescue. They had the insight to be rational about the situation. The club needed caddies (this was before golf carts took over) and here I was willing to caddie. It was decided that when I was a caddie, I was to be treated like a caddie. When I came to play, I was to be treated as a member. It worked because club rules stated only adults could play on the weekend mornings. Little did they know I would later break that rule when I qualified for the Club Championship six years later.

By high school, I became one of the top caddies in the club. Members would request my services.

WCC also became the place where I got my first job. For one summer I was the "backroom" boy - cleaning clubs, carts, and picking up range balls. It was during this golf season where I honed my short game. Although most of the staff dreaded picking up the practice golf balls on the practice range, I enjoyed the task. While picking up the driving range, I used this time to practice. Using a pitching wedge, Ted Joyce an I would hit golf balls into the ball bucket. All this practice paid off. Today my short game is still one of the most reliable parts of my game.

Golf stayed with me as I moved along in life. I found the attraction of the golf course kept pulling at my heartstrings. The idea of spending my life around a golf course sounded like an excellent way to make a living. Les Bond welcomed me back as WCC became my second stop in my 5-year apprenticeship program New England golfers have to travel to qualify for their teaching/club professional club golf pro card. For one season I was WCC Assistant Golf Pro, Caddie Master, and Weekend Starter.

Because of the country club politics, after the 1979 season, I decided the golf profession was not to be my life. My future traveled along a different path. A path that took me away from my New England home. Now I managed computer systems for the City of Manassas, Virginia. My golf game was relegated to weekends. What would it be like to go home and play the golf course where I learned the game? That's what I found out when I went back to the Wellesley Country Club to play a round of golf.

The seed to play the old course was planted at a cocktail party by Bob Mustard. A former

member of WCC and someone I used to caddie for, Bob is now retired and living on Cape Cod near my mother. We often meet at social gatherings when I visited the Cape. Knowing our love for the game, our conversation whenever we get together discussed golf courses we had played.

A phone call the next afternoon put me in contact with my former boss. "Come on up. We'll find you a game," was his reply to my request to play the golf course. "It will be good to see you."

As I drove up the coastline early the next morning, my palms were sweaty. My mind raced. I tried to remember the WCC layout. Is the course layout the same? What enhancements have they made to the golf course? Did they ever lengthen the 13th hole, moving the green up the hill? Would I remember where to hit some shots? Like keeping it left on number 12, or you'll roll into the pond. It had been almost twenty years since I had last walked those fairways.

I made the trip to my old hometown in record time. With a few minutes to spare, I took the long way to the golf course past the old home on Abbott Road. As I went by the old three-story Victorian house, I recalled walking this very street on my way towards the golf course. Located about a mile away from the golf course, club members would often stop and give me a ride as they were heading towards the same place.

Arriving at the club, I found little had changed. Located across the street from Babson College, place looked pretty much the same as it did 20 years ago. Still, my heart was pumping as I

walked towards the clubhouse.

It was a strange feeling, walking into the WCC pro shop. Like stepping back in time. The young assistant looked familiar as he stood behind the glass counter chatting with members as they walked towards the first tee. Then I remembered I did that twenty years ago.

In the office behind the counter, I found Les Bond. Although age had brought on white hair and an ample belly, he still had the suave good looks. As we chatted I recalled a girlfriend during my teen's thought he looked a bit like a young Sean Conery – the actor who initially played James Bond. He re-introduced me to his son Chris, the young man behind the counter doing my old job. I recalled the day he was born. Now here he was a full-grown man. Time moves on through the years.

After buying a sleeve of logo golf balls, with some time to spare, I walked through the old clubhouse. Along the walls were plaques denoting the champions of different tournaments held at the club. The Spring Cup, Fall Four-Ball and of course the Club Championship. During my time I was either a caddie or player in many of these tournaments. Although my name was not on any of these plaques, I saw the name of Joel Spangler. He was the WCC club champion from 1970 – 72 the years. Two of those years I played and lost to him in the semi-finals of the Club Championship. I wonder what ever happen to him?

As I went out to the practice range, I saw glad to see caddies lined up on the far side of the 1st tee.

That was the same place I stood years ago. On the practice tee, I also saw a few members I had caddied for or played with years ago. Often I could recall the face, but could not remember the name.

Chris paired me up with three longtime members. All were good golfers who were regular players on Saturday morning. When it was our turn to play, Les decided to have some fun. Only used during tournaments, Les used the PA to announce his former Assistant Golf Pro was now on the tee. Talk about pressure. I could hardly put my tee into the ground! With everyone watching and using a three wood for control, I hit a decent drive just into the right rough leaving me a short iron to the green. I ran the approach shot long into the rough behind the green. My short game saved me this time as I chip to within inches of the cup for a par.

The golf course for a late spring day the course was in fantastic shape. The greens were medium speed and ran true. Other than some minor tree growth, the layout hadn't changed. Even the 13 hole was the same. They used the space on top of the hill for additional parking. As I played, my memory recalled the trouble spots – like hitting a three-iron off the tee to lay-up before the creek on the 7th hole. I did keep my drive left of the tree in the middle of the 12th fairway. My length helped tame the 15th hole – a long 440-yard par four over rolling mounds into a driver and easy eight iron to 3 feet for a birdie.

All in all my round at WCC was pretty standard for me. I hit some good shots and missed others, ending up shooting an eight-over par 80. For a 10-handicap golfer, that's about right. Thanks to

my partner's great back nine we were able to take a few dollars from our opponents.

After a late lunch in the Oak room, I stopped by the pro shop and thanked Les. He told me to keep in touch and not to be such a stranger. As I headed for the airport, I reflected on the day. Yes, you can go home again in golf. In fact, I recommend it!

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