

HICKORY GOLFERS BRING OUT THEIR NIBLICKS AND CLEEKs

By Nick Morgan - Mail Tribune - Oct 21, 2017

Centennial Golf Club seemed to turn back time Saturday as two dozen Northwest Hickory Players teed off in their favorite tweeds, argyles, plaids and knee-high stockings with wood-shafted clubs made prior to World War II.

The vibrant and offbeat ensembles brightened an otherwise gray and drizzly course during the first of a two-day California-Oregon-Washington Cup that finishes up Sunday.

Donning a brown coat Sherlock Holmes might've worn, Ray Tokareff of Ashland was eager to participate in his first tournament after 18 months collecting for the hobby. He showcased a collection of hand-forged clubs that'd be foreign to a modern-day pro shop, including a niblick, mashie, jigger and cleek.

"The names are fun," Tokareff said, adding that the designs were used for different distances in a time before irons were standardized with numbers.

"Smooth-faced clubs are particularly interesting to play with," Tokareff said of his 1890s forged club made from old horseshoes. "They do a lot of unexpected stuff."

Tokareff said his interest started about a year and a half ago when he met Northwest league captain Martin Pool and tried his hand at the sport. He said he got a couple of lucky holes that he hasn't really matched since.

"Like golf always does, it sucks you in," Tokareff said. Today he has plenty of clubs — at least four complete sets — to lend to anyone who's interested in trying the sport.

Among the most experienced golfers at the tournament was Jim Von Lossow of Spokane, Washington, a nearly 50-year Professional Golf Association member. He said that the past several years he's played hickory golf have "revived my interest in the game," owing to the added challenges, players' willingness to share pointers and camaraderie.

"I've had more fun playing hickory golf than I ever had playing professional golf," Von Lossow said.

Glen Thatcher of North Bend said he got into the hobby more for its history and crafting his clubs. He seeks out vintage MacGregor clubs from the early 20th century, but they typically need restoration before they're playable.

"I'm a MacGregor junkie," said Thatcher, wearing a vintage-style cap embroidered with the company's logo. "That's all I play with."



Dressed in a cream-colored sweater, knee-high socks and tweed hat, Erik Beer of San Francisco said his interest in the hobby stems from the added challenge he finds equipping himself for the game before he ever gets to the course.

He's been playing for six years, but said the sport's popularity is building around the globe, with leagues in Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Germany, and a World Hickory Open is held in Scotland. He said Sweden is a "hotbed" for the sport.

He said from the beginning, he was "just smitten."

"It's like three hobbies wrapped into one," Beer said, describing finding antique clubs as "a little like an Easter Egg hunt," the crafting process needed to get the wooden clubs back to playable condition and, of course, enjoying the fruits of his labors on the fairway.

"Then you get to play with 'em," Beer said.

More information about the league can be found at www.nwhickoryplayers.org.

VIDEO LINK: <https://youtu.be/vcN0Dntod5A>

