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Frozen in time: Hickory golfers compete at Country Club

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Rick Lehman tees off on the eighth hole at the Longview Country Club during the Pacific Northwest Hickory Championship on Saturday, June 19.

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or a brief moment over the weekend, time was stuck in the 1920s and '30s at the Longview Country Club.

F Players used clubs with wooden shafts, dressed in old-fashioned clothing and reminisced about a time long before golf was all about having the newest, most highly engineered clubs on the market. The throwback event was all part of the Pacific Northwest Hickory Championship.

For John Quickstad, the throwback tournament had a bit more meaning. Quickstad's grandfather, Herb Hoover, set a nine-hole course record at the Longview Country Club in 1930.

“He was kind of our family golf mentor,” Quickstad said of his grandfather. “Everybody in our family — and there's like 50 or 60 people now — we all play golf and every year since 1973, we go down to Neskowin, Oregon for a family reunion and we have a golf tournament that's part of that. So we have trophies with names on them going back 40 or 50 years.”

Before the tournament kicked off, Quickstad displayed the same clubs his grandfather used to set the course record. He was also honored with the ceremonial first tee shot and used one of his grandfather's clubs to kick off the tournament.

“These are the clubs he used to set the course record...They're family heirlooms,” Quickstad said.

Hoovers' influence has been a major part of Quickstad's life and taught him that the game of golf should be shared with important people.

“The golf was fun, but the memories I cherish are about the time I spent with my brothers and my mom and my dad playing golf,” he said.

Quickstad, as well as over 50 other competitors, got to compete using similar clubs to the one's his grandfather used to set the record. The Northwest Hickory Players, a group organized to preserve the history of golf, hosts tournaments like the Pacific

Northwest Hickory Championship year-round. The tournament features clubs from the sport's Hickory era dating back to tee times that came before 1935.

On Saturday, some players used clubs that were over 100 years old.

To effectively preserve the history, most competitors wore era-appropriate golf attire, tailored to fit their own personal style. The players were also barred from using modern technology like rangefinders to aid them in ways that players from the '20s and '30s wouldn't have been able to accomplish. Some exceptions to the rules were made as many players used golf carts and some traded out the classic footwear for a more modern and supportive style.

Rob Ahlschwede competed in the tournament and was also one of the founding members of the Northwest Hickory Players in 2014. Ahlschwede takes the Hickory approach more seriously than some others.

"I've played nothing but Hickory for 20 years now," Ahlschwede said with pride. "I have a set of personal-use Ben Hogan Apex irons that I bought brand new and I played them for about two months before I went all Hickory."

Ahlschwede said he enjoys the history of playing with Hickory and the "unique kind of challenge" that it provides. After all, the Hickory game differs greatly from what the modern players can do with newer equipment.

"Today's guys hit driver, and then whatever wedge is next," he said. "With these, you have to think your way around the golf course. You have to plan your shots a little better."

Despite some players having heirloom clubs in their bag, not everything about the game back then was different from today. Players are still constantly changing the clubs they carry in their bag and searching for the missing pieces to be able to make every shot on the course.

"In fact I bought a club today that I'm going to try to get in the bag...Everybody does," Ahlschwede said. "Very few guys have a set that they stay with forever."

The passion for the Hickory style of play was evident. Many golfers like Ahlschwede beamed with pride as they showed off the unique clubs in their bags to other players that were just as interested to see what they were carrying. Eventually, the fledgling Hickory players develop a better feel for the clubs and learn how to compete with them.

“Playing Hickory is all about tempo,” Ahlschwede said. “These clubs are not really more flexible, unless you don’t really have good shafts, but they torque.”

The passion for Hickory has gotten more players involved in the Pacific Northwest thanks to the Northwest Hickory Players.

“Right now, Washington state has more members in the Society of Hickory Golf than any other state in the country,” Ahlschwede said.

Tournaments like these have a unique appeal and attract a crowd of people highly invested in the old-fashioned approach to the game. They enjoy the active nature of preserving history while playing.

“It’s not a recreation like Civil War reenactors, because we’re actually doing it,” Quickstad said. “We’re actually competing and making the shots. It’s like time stands still. It’s really neat.”

The Longview Country Club was chosen for the tournament because it was built during the Hickory era. The exact year of opening is up for discussion, according to Longview Country Club PGA professional, Jason Hoth, but seems to fall between 1923 and 1925. With that sort of lineage, the club is a near perfect match for the old school style that Hickory players are used to.

“What’s fun about it is the front nine is virtually unchanged from 1925 in terms of the routing of the hole,” said Martin Pool, a member of the Northwest Hickory Players that planned the event. “They probably added a couple bunkers through the years...So it’s fun to see a golf course sort of in its original state.”

As for Hoth, he noted it was the first time he's experienced this kind of unique tournament.

"This is the first one I've ever been around and it's really cool," he said. "It makes me wish I was born then. It was a lot simpler times."

Hoth liked the opportunity to promote the Longview Country Club to a new set of players.

"It's just a chance to showcase our golf course to people that maybe haven't played here before," he said.

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