The Jemsek empire grew from a Demshuk dream

By Vern Putney

In the fall of 1941, 28-year-old Chicagoan Joe Jemsek was working in a defense plant along with “other” jobs as owner-operator-head professional at West Chicago’s St. Andrews Golf Club. These two 18-hole courses and clubhouse were thriving. Jemsek, to whom a dime was a big deal during the Depression, had taken as his bride a year earlier Grace Hough, and had socked away $22,000.

What more could a couple ask?

Joe suddenly dropped a bombshell on Grace. “There’s going to be a war,” he declared. “We’re going to have a war.” Joseph H. Jemsek, owner of a defense plant, was not buying it. “See how long it lasts,” he retorted.

In six years, Jemsek rose through the ranks from caddie to professional to head professional in 1952. In 1951, he paid $400,000 for the two 18-hole courses and clubhouse; added a third 18-hole course in 1963 and Dubsdread (Number Four) in 1964.

As a visionary, Jemsek had a far-seeing eye into the golf future. He also had a promotional flair to accompany a shrewd business sense.

In 1954, during the World’s Fair in Chicago, a platform had been built 60 feet up a tower nearest the lake to stage a long-driving contest.” Jemsek said. “It was everything,” he said, “and I had a devil of a time with it. I was the last contestant, following some slugging Scotsmen who were in the U.S. to work. Their specialty was a slight hook for extra distance on hard, dry courses at home. They hit their three allotted balls into the teeth of the wind which was blowing from left to right and, of course, killed distance. So I stood on the left side of the platform and hit high fades. The wind did the rest — an average of 501 yards each.”

Jemsek quickly capitalized on his John Daly-like drives. His lesson rates shot up from $2 a half hour or six 30-minute sessions for $10, to $3 a half hour and six lessons for the full $30. “This was a day in a $2 minimum daily wage was inaugurated.”

Caddies stood in line to learn his power secret. Overnight, he was famous.

For more than 40 years, Jemsek has been identified with charitable causes linked to golf. In 1952, he staged the first National Golf Day at Cog Hill GC, drawing 10,000 spectators. Featuring Bob Hope, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, it became an annual fund-raising arm of the PGA of America.

In 1977, Jemsek received the NGF’s inaugural Herb Graffis Award. He’s especially proud of being a Class A member of the National PGA and, in 1988, being the first PGA member and first public course owner to be elected to the United States Golf Association’s Executive Committee.

USGA presents Bob Jones Award for sportsmanship to Gene Sarazen

PALM BEACH, Fla. — Gene Sarazen was presented the United States Golf Association’s 1992 Bob Jones Award for distinguished sportsmanship in golf.

Sarazen accepted the award Feb. 1, shortly before his 90th birthday, at a dinner here, following the USGA annual meeting. The Bob Jones Award is the highest honor given by the USGA. It has been presented annually since 1950 in commemoration of Jones’ vast contributions to the cause of fair play both during and after his distinguished playing career.

The two men were contemporaries, born within three weeks of one another early in 1902. Sarazen on Feb. 27, Jones on March 17. They won their first Open Championshipships within a year of one another — Sarazen in 1922, Jones in 1923.

It seems the world of golf course maintenance equipment is full of compromises. If you want to save a few bucks on a mower, you take your chances on the quality of its cut. But if you want a more reliable cutter, you pay top dollar.

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