

## An Idol Feast

by Edwin Wollenberg

Sports is a fantasy world. I would surmise that ninety percent of the fans live vicariously through athletes.

Depending on our sports preference, we watch as we are absorbed and completely carried away as Ivan Lendl's vicious backhand smash skips past his opponent, running back Walter Payton slashes through the line, and Babe Ruth points to the bleachers, signaling to the fans where he is going to deposit the next pitch. We get all hyped-up when hockey star Wayne Gretzky blisters a puck at the net or when Michael Jordan slam-dunks a basketball.

Gosh, how we'd all like to do these things.

But suppose you were given the fan's ultimate thrill. Suppose, you were told you could hold a fantasy dinner party for 12 of your favorite heroes, no matter what the era. Who would you invite to dinner?

It's a fascinating thought, and something that might make for an interesting mental exercise during spare moments (which I'm blessed with abundance). Just take a piece of paper and do some day-dreaming — you could have your own Field of Dreams. See what you come up with. Psychiatrists could claim such a list would tell much about your own personality.

If you invited all tough guys, would that mean you had a similar personality? How about nice guys? For example, would you want Kareem Abdul-Jabaar and Wilt Chamberlain sitting at the same table? They were bitter rivals in their NBA careers, but how would they be over steak and potatoes? Or, how about boxers Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier breaking bread together or sharing chitterlings? Would their personalities clash and would another "Brash Brouhaha" break out? The list could go on, and on, and ...

Me, I'm partial to golfers.

It's natural, I guess, because they've been my bread-and-butter since I was 11 years old, and I have yellowed pictures to prove it. But limiting yourself to one sport and 12-guests is awfully tough. There are so many wonderful golfers and associated members of the game to choose from.

My first choice would be native western Pennsylvanian, Arnold Palmer, whom I met personally when he played at the club I retired from. Yes, I've always been a member of "Arnie's Army". He could sit at my table any time.

And to keep him company, his long-time rival, Jack Nicklaus, could get the seat next to him. They could debate who is the better player or who is more loved by the fans.

But the rest of my party would be a variety of personalities, some reverent, some irreverent, and some on excerpts and hearsay gathered during their career and prominence.

Of course, there would be Bobby Jones, owner of all the top amateur records and four U. S. National Opens. The only golfer to achieve the "Grand Slam" in one year; winning the U.S. National Open, U. S. National Amateur, British Open and British Amateur, all in 1930. And, he might enjoy having Ben Hogan (also winner of four U. S. Opens) on his left. From what I've read, they were both swing technicians of the highest degree. They could debate the swing, past and present.

But if you're going to have a party, you've got to have some live wires so it doesn't resemble a wake, right? So, enter two of golf's similar spirits — Walter Hagen and Doug Sanders.

Both seemed to live life to the fullest, sometimes even at the

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(An Idol Feast cont'd.)

expense of career achievements. Coining a favorite phrase: They stopped and smelled the roses along the way.

A dinner party with either of those two would be a lively affair. Both could keep a party going into the wee hours of the morning. Or, for that matter, well into the next day.

It wouldn't be a dinner party without the best story telling golfer, Slamming Sammy Snead. Not only can Snead spin yarns about his playing experiences, but the West Virginian hillbilly revels in telling ribald jokes. He might even touch lightly on his entire career earnings of \$620,000, compared to Tom Kite's single event windfall of \$625,000. So, put Snead beside Sanders and Hagen.

To keep a bit of the game's tradition intact, several men come to mind that would fill the bill perfectly. They are Francis Ouimet, Chick Evans, Old Tom Morris, and our modern day red-headed, freckled faced Tom Watson.

Ouimet made history before my time as the first American amateur to win a U. S. Open (1913). On the other hand, Chick Evans, placed second in the 1914 National Open, at the Midlothian Country Club, one stroke behind Walter Hagen. Two years later (1916) he won both the National Open and the National Amateur, and did it with a set of 7-hickory shaft clubs.

I had the personal thrill of playing a few holes with him in 1956, when I was the superintendent at Navajo Hills Golf Club and he was doing an article on Public Golf Courses in the Chicago area for the Chicago Sun-Times. As I recall he was 66 years old at the time, and carded a 78, on postage stamp greens averaging 3200 sq. ft. and a course he had never played.

Coming out of the caddie ranks around Chicago, he proved that a wealthy, country-club background was not a prerequisite for success. He helped establish the Evans Scholarship Fund, which still helps educate Chicago area caddies today. A wonderful warm person, a gentleman and a pioneer of the game.

And so, I'll have to give the nod to Evans over Ouimet.

Old Tom Morris could probably be cited as the real pioneer. He won four British Opens in the early years of the championship. Tom Watson, the modern day Old Tom Morris, owns five British Opens. Those three could then talk forever about the oldest major championships, providing insight on the past and present to their dinner partners.

That leaves two spots on the table and they would go to a pair of slightly off-center characters. Characters that are synonymous with golf, but their "specialized" part is rarely mentioned in the highlights and commentaries of the many P.G.A. events.

The first that come to mind is the late Fred Kruger, superintendent (greenskeeper, in his day) at the Olympia Fields Country club when I was initiated into the golf-related profession in 1928. Digressing here momentarily, it was the year Johnny Farrell won the U. S. Open at the Olympia Fields Country Club. Tied with Bobby Jones at the end of 72 holes, they played a 36 hole play-off which was won by one stroke by Farrell. The first-place purse was \$500. Can you fathom today's pros playing five days for such a paltry sum!

Getting back to my eleventh guest, he was in charge of 72 holes and some 700 odd acres. He performed miracles with the maintenance mechanisms and ingredients available to Golf Course Superintendents at that time. I shall be forever grateful for the seed he planted in my life. (cont'd. page 22)

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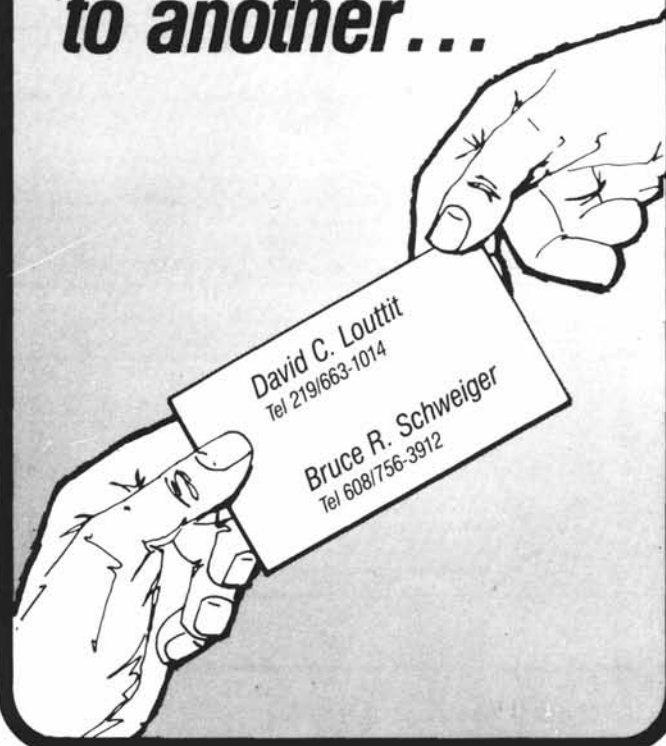
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The last spot to be filled would go to my long time friend and colleague, Warren Bidwell. Who was always available to listen to problems and share some knowledge or solution to correct or arrest many turf situations. Today, Warren, in his semi-retiring and twilight years, is still respected for his input and thoughts to improve the playability of the game for the future, and keeps in focus with fellow superintendents.

Fred and Warren would sit side-by-side. To discuss from where they came to give not only the pros, but all golf enthusiasts the wonderful and immaculate groomed courses they are privileged to play today.

There are many other golf celebrities deserving to be invited to sit at this honored dinner party, but the cut was decided to be 12. Sorry.

These are my selections. How about yours?

## Senior Golf Day Pictures

by Ray Schmitz



*Bill Kraft & Ben Coker*



*Joe Reents and Tom Walker*



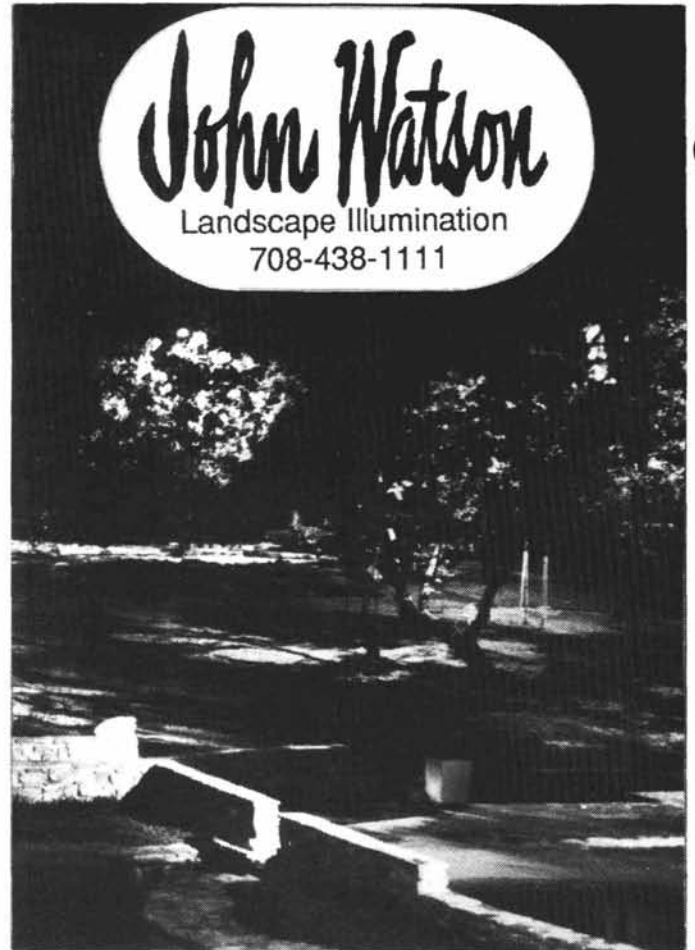
*Our "Senior" speaker for the day  
Carl Hophan*



*Dudley Smith, Bill Fisher (Ed's dad), & John Stephenson*



*Les Rutan, Pete Wilson and Pete Leponis*



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