

Louisiana's Big Three have made their mark

The Hebert brothers and Freddie Haas left their home state to stake a claim in world of golf

By Vern Putney

NEW ORLEANS — As Huey Long symbolized Louisiana politics, so the brothers Lionel and Jay Hebert and Freddie Haas of nearby New Orleans communities epitomize the Pelican State's professional golf excellence.

The Heberts are the only brothers to have won the PGA Championship — Lionel in 1957, Jay in 1960.

Haas stunned the golf world Aug. 20, 1945, at Chickasaw Country Club in Memphis, Tenn. The 29-year-old amateur shattered Byron Nelson's tournament win streak at 11. Haas carded an 18-under-par 270, 10 strokes less than Nelson. He collected \$100 in war bonds, Nelson \$1,600.

Not even being the first American golfer to be a member of both the U.S. Walker and Ryder Cup teams could top that in Haas' book of memories.

All three remain strong players, though Haas underwent an operation early in January and may not resume competitive action until mid-February.

Haas, of the New Orleans suburb of Metairie, had a leg up on golf because Dad Fred Sr. was a top-flight club professional.

The Heberts were born in Lafayette, about 14 miles from New Orleans. Golf wasn't high on the priority list. The boys' acquaintance with the soil came by working in the family garden. They soon "escaped" for caddie duty at the lone small nine-hole golf course in Lafayette.

There were no instructors, no pictures, no books. At age 16, Jay saw Sam Snead play in the 1939 New Orleans Open. Snead became his role model.

However, Jay reasoned that for every Sam Snead in the world there were 100 pros "selling soda pop at country clubs and not making much money."

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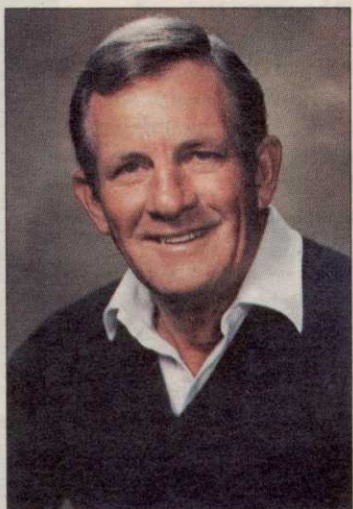
— Jay Hebert

Becoming a greenkeeper seemed to offer far more job security.

Jay enrolled at Southwestern Louisiana Institute. Four years in the Marine Corps took precedence. Emerging as a lieutenant, Jay attended Louisiana State University and led LSU to the 1947 NCAA championship.

After the Heberts graduated from LSU, Houston pros Jimmy Demaret and Jackie Burke introduced them to some pros in the East.

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— Lionel Hebert

Lionel. "Golf took on a whole new meaning up there."

The Heberts worked at golf clubs in New York and Pennsylvania and had some success in very competitive tournaments.

Jay struck out for the PGA Tour in 1956, and in 1957 won the Bing Crosby and the Texas Open. His next big score was the PGA title at Firestone Country Club in Akron, Ohio. Even with Snead entering the final round, he posted a two-under-par 70 for the victory and \$11,000.

In 1961, Jay captured the Houston and American Golf Classics.

From 1955 through 1965, Jay racked up a string of runner-up finishes.

Other achievements included PGA quarter-finalist in 1957; Ryder Cup member in 1959 and 1961 and captain in 1961; chairman of the PGA tournament committee in 1957, 1958, 1963 and 1964 and member in 1956, 1957, 1962 and 1963.

Jay left the Tour in 1971 for promotional work. He's long been with RJR Nabisco, promoting customer outings and junior golf.

He recently added a deep bow to the nation's golf course superintendents and a hope that they "enjoy the warm hospitality of the great city of New Orleans."

The Heberts' hearts remain with golf courses and their roots.

Jay, who in 1968 married Barbara Henny and moved to Houston, still takes a strong interest in the "men behind the scenes."

"Next to being able to teach and

perform," Jay declares, "golf superintendency is the most challenging of professions. Trying to please members who perhaps are not up to par as to what you are trying to do is a difficult task. But most have succeeded. When you work hard — and they do — remarkable things happen.

"When I play an outstanding course, I make it a point to contact the superintendent and congratulate him," Jay added.

One such standout is veteran Charlie Joachim, superintendent at Houston's Champions Golf Club, where Jay is a member. The 36-hole Champions, former site for the National Open and Ryder Cup, will host the National Amateur in 1994. Lionel, who won his PGA crown as a rookie, edged Dow Finsterwald, 2 and 1, in the match play final.

Still, Lionel believes the current medal play is a better test of golf skill. "It's a game of ball management, of knowing when to challenge the course and when to lie back. In match play, you can mess up one hole and it's no big deal. In medal play, every stroke is important."

Lionel, like Jay, works for Nabisco. He left the Tour in the mid-1970s, and helped launch the enormously popular Senior Tour.

Lionel, who turned 64 on Jan. 20, last November led his team to a win in the two best ball pro-amateur division of the inaugural \$100,000 World Champions tournament at Wigwam Resort in Litchfield Park, Ariz.

Lionel finished in the top 20 of the



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— Freddie Haas

Classic that featured 30 former PGA Tour champions, ranging in age from 60-year-old Gay Brewer to 83-year-old Paul Runyan.

Haas, whom Jay termed a "golf phenomenon," tied Tom Nieporte and Snead with a 75. Haas turned 76 on Jan. 3.

Tagged "No. 1 Iron" in his early Tour days because of a whipcord 135 pounds on a 6-foot-2 frame, Haas has put on little poundage while piling up tournament credits. Staying in shape has been a big help on the Senior circuit.

Haas first won in that category in 1966, lost to Snead in 1970 and three-putted the 17th hole for another runner-up finish in 1977.

Haas can claim one golf distinction that perhaps never will be challenged. From 1946 through 1991, he never failed to collect a Tour paycheck.

Haas had his first tractor ride on his pro Dad's Metairie course at age 5. Soon the junior Haas had shouldered mowing and watering duties when not caddieing.

For him, meeting course playing challenges was more exciting than grooming layout. But one early experience gave Haas pause. As a 20-year-old amateur, the NCAA champion from LSA walked to the first tee somewhat nervously at Baltusrol Country Club in Springfield, N.J., in 1954.

It was his first of 19 U.S. Open appearances. Ten thousand persons were lined up, impatient to have Haas and his partner hit their drives and clear the decks for the next twosome, Snead and defending champion Sam Parks.

The crowd groaned outwardly, Haas inwardly as the ball rose 200 yards in the air and 100 yards off the tee. What the gathering didn't see was Haas recover for a birdie 4. Haas tied for sixth and pocketed \$570.

The proudest Open moment for Haas was playing in the 1941 Open at Colonial in Fort Worth, Texas. The field included his Dad, Fred Sr. and Masters champion Ed Dudley built the first PGA course, at Dunedin, Fla.

As for continuing on the Senior

Tour, Haas says, "At just the mellow side of 50, the latest influx of players are too supple and hit the ball too far. And they still think they're going to hole all the medium and long putts."

Haas sees his future task as making golf more enjoyable and economical for families. He believes his patented Mod-Sod grass is the answer.

He cited the case of Tour pro Hay Haas (no relation), who installed a Mod-Sod practice green in the backyard of his home in Greenville, S.C.

"We'll have no privacy," his wife pointed out. She was right. Guests were smitten with the outdoor diversion.

"I had no idea it would be so popular," she confessed, "and it's become ideal for entertaining."

Freddie may crash the Guinness Book of Records quite apart from competitive skills. Last April, he spearheaded a volunteer crew of Highmore (S.D.) Country Club members constructing nine Mod-Sod green in 4-1/2 days. They celebrated by playing on the afternoon of the fifth day. (See story, page 86.)

Haas sees Mod-Sod as the best way over the next decade to beat the high cost of course construction.

"Communities such as this small farming area can make golf affordable and courses practical to build," Haas declares. "Highmore is the 11th Mod-Sod course. All have defied harsh weather conditions."

Haas' switch in golf emphasis to the construction side may make it a bit easier for wife Paula. She's been his constant companion in the grueling grind that has criss-crossed this country innumerable times and touched several corners of the globe.

Meanwhile, the Hebert name may continue to be prominent in golf.

Jay and Barbara have two sons — Jean-Paul, in his third year at the University of Texas and on the golf team, and Jason Philippe, a freshman at Texas A&M, who will be on the golf team.

Jay will turn 69 on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14.