

**T**here's a time-honored tradition in our wonderful game called sandbagging. It manifests itself in many unseemly ways, but is most often found in a player's casual comment that he's "not that good." These guys are usually found near the top of every net event leaderboard.

I, however, am not shaving the truth when I assert that I'm "not that good." The fact is I stink. However, thanks to the modern miracles of graphite, titanium and the Pro-V, I can get the ball around the course in about 100 pokes. Say what you will about what technology is doing to the game, but it's been a godsend for high-handicap schmucks like me.

That fact was hammered home last month when I found myself standing on the first tee of the Golf Club of Dublin (Ohio) awkwardly gripping a hickory-shafted brassie that probably could have been used by Francis Ouimet. Yikes.

I came to be in this unusual circumstance thanks to two old friends. The first was Dr. Mike Hurdzan, the renowned architect who hosts the annual charity event that requires players to navigate a modern course using less-than-modern equipment: wooden-shafted mashies, niblicks, gimjerts and thingacracks (OK, I made those last two up). Hurdzan's event raises funds to supply new, customized wheelchairs to deserving individuals.

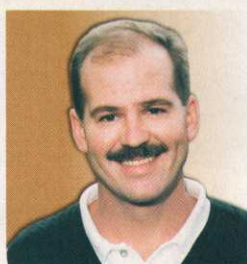
The second person behind my presence in Dublin was Wayne Horman, the professional-market seed honcho from the nearby Scotts Co. Wayne needed a really mediocre player to fill out his team for the event (which was, thankfully, a scramble) and invited me to join.

Wayne is the guy who's driving the testing and approval process for Round Up Ready bentgrass, so this was an interesting low-tech experience for someone who's trying to introduce a decidedly high-tech product to our market.

So off we went attempting to hit these antiques. In a nutshell, it was tougher than a two-dollar truckstop steak. No hacker-friendly oversized faces or cavity-backs. No

## A Hickory-Sticks History Lesson

BY PAT JONES



BASED ON MY  
EXPERIENCE, IT  
OCCURS TO ME  
THAT WHAT OUR  
INDUSTRY REALLY  
NEEDS IS A GOLF  
COURSE TIME  
MACHINE

forgiving shafts that can flex like a circus contortionist. No laser-guided putters that caress the ball gently into the hole. It was a history lesson consisting of stiff hickory, clunky steel, slick-leather grips, 2-foot divots and mounds of frustration. By the turn, we had turned more clubs into kindling than I'd seen broken in my entire life.

And, of course, it was an absolute delight.

Why? It was a reminder that golf is supposed to be a game that pits human vs. nature, requiring creativity and skill. We quickly learned the joys of punching a low two-iron in from 120 yards. And getting four attempts at an 8-foot putt was by no means an easy thing using a "10-iron" with a shaft as crooked as Boss Tweed. Pars, which are usually considered failures in a scramble, were met with cheers and high fives.

As I considered the experience on the drive home that evening, it occurred to me that all the advancements in sticks-and-balls have been matched stroke for stroke by advancements in our side of the business. In fact, as Byron Nelson is fond of pointing out, the biggest change in the game since his heyday is not the equipment, it's the conditioning of the course and the putting surfaces.

So based on my hickory-stick experience, I think what our industry really needs is a golf course time machine. All whining, Big Bertha-wielding weekend warriors who beef about course conditions could be beamed back to the days of horse-drawn mowers and unirrigated greens and left there until they beg to come back.

Now that would be my definition of a great history lesson.

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