

Off The Fringe

Caddyshaft?

INDUSTRY NEEDS TO SAVE CADDIES FROM BECOMING AN ENDANGERED SPECIES **By J. Clark O'Donoghue**

We all know that golf is a game with a deep and colorful past. Unfortunately, one of the most cherished aspects of the game — the role of the caddy — is now in jeopardy.

According to some, the job of caddy is about 500 years old, though this is difficult to substantiate. The Professional Caddies Association (PCA) notes the position grew out of the tradition of personal servants employed by gentleman golfers at least as far back as the 18th century. Caddies of old were often men of “hard backgrounds,” says the PCA, some of whom were of very questionable char-

acter. Willie “Trap Door” Johnson was a notably crooked caddy whose fake limp enabled him to maintain a special boot on one of his feet that hid “lost” golf balls, which he later sold back to his own clients.

Over time, the role of caddy has evolved from servant of questionable repute to the golfer's right-hand man. An experienced caddy can help plan the overall game and offer sound advice.

Today the job is endangered, primarily by the growing use of golf cars on U.S. courses. In the 1950s golf cars were a new concept. Today they are a fact of life. The problem is accelerating as cars equipped with technology to

estimate yardage and other play factors compete with the training and knowledge of caddies.

The adoption of the golf car appears to be an economic issue. Years ago a caddy got paid \$5 per bag; today a good caddy gets \$40 per bag, up to \$80 per bag at some clubs. Add to that the fact that golf cars can be a lucrative source of revenue for the club, and it's easy to see why they are popular.

Perhaps the most important aspect of caddying goes beyond the confines of the game itself, to the development of character, leadership and ability in the young people who traditionally fill the role. Today there are only a handful of caddy scholarship organizations in the country. To honor and support the caddy's role, the Golf Association of Philadelphia in 1958 established the J. Wood Platt Caddy Scholarship Trust. It was named in honor of Philadelphia's premier golfer of that era, an accomplished player who was the scholarship's first contributor. The Platt Caddy Scholarship continues its mission to provide financial assistance to deserving caddies so they can pursue their educational goals.

With debate raging over the current costs and future role of the caddy, one only has to look to the historically important effects of this long-held tradition. Like the caddies of old, today's caddy-scholars have been enriched by the legacy of the ancient game's traditions. Their future contributions to the sport are worth the investment of continuing the caddy tradition.

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