



It's Been A Fun 22 Years!

By Rob Schultz

"Hey, mister, how long have you played golf?"

Those words echoed out just as I walked up to attempt a six-foot birdie putt. This youngster, wearing beat-up Nike tennis shoes, a t-shirt and baggy yellow shorts down to his knees, was looking up at me with a quizzical look on his face.

I wondered what made him ask such a question. He had joined my group at the turn and was quiet for most of the round. There were three holes to go and he finally talked. And all he wanted to know about was how long my tour of duty was with a game that I both adore and curse virtually every day.

I decided to ignore the question and concentrate on my birdie putt. But as I stood over it, the numbers flashed in my mind.

Twenty-two years.

My putt flew by the hole and I had a twenty-footer coming back to save par.

I played the rest of my round in a dream state. What have I accomplished? Where have I played? What are the highlights? What are the lowlights?

One at a time.

First, the highlights. The biggest was when I was 14. Living in Oshkosh, I had entered my first city tournament. C flight. It was match play back then, I won my first match, but had to play the city's biggest sandbagger in the second round. We called him The Jerk because he hated kids. He'd bet with us, then take our bikes as collateral after he won. When The Jerk heard he was playing me, he started making bets with his friends concerning just how bad he'd whup me.

On the first tee this forty-year-old buffoon stared me down and said, "I'm gonna smoke your ass kid." After nine holes we were deadlocked. Then, on the tenth hole, I drilled a sixty-foot putt from the fringe for birdie. A gallery had formed by then and they all hollered their approval.

On the eleventh tee The Jerk told me he was taking the tenth hole away from me because I had replaced my ball on

the fringe with a new ball. We had agreed we could change balls on the green, but he said we never agreed to change balls on the fringe.

He started laughing and said to his friends, "Watch this sucker fold."

The Jerk seemed prophetic after he won the eleventh hole to go two-up. I spent the entire eleventh hole wondering what hit me. I had figured it out by the time I got to the twelfth tee. Then I got mad. My whole family had come out to watch me and they all heard me look The Jerk right into the face and say, "Listen crudface, if you say one more word to me I'm going to rip your rocks off with my wedge. Understand?"

Tough talk for a fourteen-year-old. My mother nearly fainted.

I won the rest of the holes and defeated The Jerk 3-2. Among the kids at the course, I was a hero. They got their bikes back.

Later on, before I grew so fast I couldn't even walk without tripping, I would win a few tournaments in high school and play well in some outings. But nothing matched the feeling of beating The Jerk. I could feel myself growing up.

Speaking of growing up, I must

discuss one other highlight. First, I must admit I'm going to sound like a sexist, chauvinistic, woman-ogling pig. OK, I'll live with that.

It was a gorgeous Sunday afternoon and I decided to go out by myself to the course to play 18. I decided to hit a bucket of balls before I teed off, but I never got the chance because just as I got to the driving range I was told to join the group on the first tee.

I walked angrily to the tee box, because I blew \$2 on a practice bucket and the starter never gave me a chance to hit one ball. But then I saw her standing there on the first tee. Blue short shorts. White, tiny halter-top. Long blonde hair. Thin long legs. Dark tan. She could have been Miss America.

And she was standing at the blue tees.

I looked back at the grinning starter and mouthed the words, "Thank you."

After I introduced myself to my new playing partner, I pointed to the ladies' tee and said, "Don't you want to play from those tees?"

She answered by smacking a drive 245 yards, down the middle. She birdied the first hole and finished with a 74.

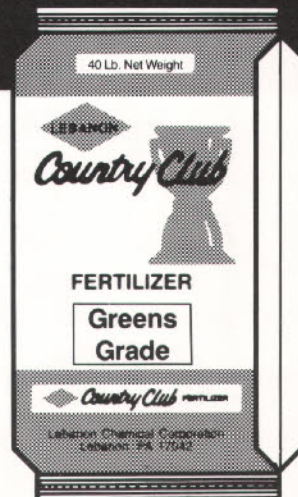
I was mesmerized the entire round and shot about 234. All I could think about was that I was playing with Christie Brinkley, Elle MacPherson and Cheryl Tiegs all rolled into one. And she had a two handicap.

Her name was Gaylin and she played collegiately for some college in

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the south. She was visiting her brother.

"I sure had fun out there with you today," she said with this sweet smile. "It's too bad I have to leave tonight. If I had met you a few days ago we could have had some fun."

Gulp. I tried to say something but my voice went up about ten octaves. All she heard was whiny, screechy gobblegook.

I walked into the clubhouse as she walked away and saw about a hundred noseprints on the window. I was instantly mobbed by all these lecherous male hacks; some of whom had spent the afternoon hiding behind trees just hoping to sneak a peak at her. Nobody let me leave for at least two hours. They all had to hear the story of my round with Miss Fantasy over and over again. To this day I don't know when I was a bigger hero; the day I beat The Jerk or the day I just looked like one.

The lowlight was a simple one. I had just graduated from college, worked for a small daily in Green Bay, and was at my first Green Bay Packer media outing at Oneida Golf and Riding Club.

Writers, TV slobs and former Packers were all invited. Former Packer great Ray Nitschke played directly behind me.

I had just finished warming up on the first tee when I had my first meeting with the grizzly linebacker. He sized me up, pulled a \$100 bill out of his pocket, dropped the cash on the ground and said to his three playing partners: "Hundred bucks the skinny kid duffs his tee shot."

Three more \$100 bills hit the ground. Nitschke sized me up again and then stared at me like I was a quarterback who didn't see him blitzing from my blind side. "OK kid, hit away," he snarled.

Not feeling intimidated in the least, I took a couple of good practice swings, set up over the ball and . . . duffed it about ten yards.

"Thanks kid," Nitschke said as he picked up his profits off the ground.

Highlights. Lowlights. Those are the thoughts that went through my mind after the youngster asked how long I had been playing golf. It took me

awhile, but I finally gave the boy the answer he had asked what seemed to be about one hour before.

"I'm sorry if I asked the wrong question," the boy said apologetically.

No kid, you asked the right one. I may not be Nicklaus or Watson. I've never won a championship of any kind. There are no trophies in my family room. The most money I've ever won gambling at golf is less than \$50.

But my highlights are still special to me. My lowlights are special, too.

So thanks, kid, for giving me the opportunity to sit back and remember them.

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