



The Tates Are A Perfect Pair

By Rob Schultz

Golf is all about atmosphere, about beautiful courses settled in idyllic landscape. It's about peace and solitude among the birds and deer. It's about silence, broken only by the sound of wind whispering through the pine needles or waves crashing along the shore.

Golf is not perfected by shooting par or making a hole-in-one or owning a handicap in minus figures. Golf is perfected when one understands his or her own miniscule role within the atmosphere, the game. Stand back and make sure you don't get in its way. Play by the time-honored rules. Respect the game and all it envelopes.

On a rainy day late in June along the western shore of Michigan, I had the great fortune to meet two of the few people in this world who have perfected golf. For nearly 40 years Tuck and Becky Tate have lived the game and they have added another dimension to the definition of perfection by giving so much back to it.

The day I met the Tates was such a strange day. It began with the rabid excitement of playing one of the world's greatest courses: Crystal Downs, a wonderful Alister MacKenzie creation located outside Frankfurt. But even though Crystal Downs was everything I expected and more—a true links course that gracefully navigates through one of the most spectacular settings in the country—it took a backseat to the Tates, who graciously invited me to play the course with them and taught me so much in the process.

Nearly 40 years ago, Tuck Tate was in the oil business on the East Coast when he decided to chuck his present life and buy a 9-hole golf course located just a few miles away from Crystal Downs in Frankfurt. Tuck, now 82, was the golf course superintendent and turned his place into a well-manicured, respected layout. Becky, now 76, ran the pro shop with a well-trained eye. They were a perfect combination.

Since Tuck and Becky couldn't operate the course year-round, Tuck also invested some money on a large lot located on a Donald Ross-designed course called Sara Bay Country Club in Sarasota, and wintered there.

At the time, Tuck couldn't have imagined what two wise investments he had made. He bought the golf course at a fraction of what it's worth today because, in the 50s, the sport wasn't nearly as popular as it is today. And he bought his Sarasota lot long before real estate prices on golf courses went through the roof.

But as financially wise as Tuck may have been, that didn't matter as much as finding his and Becky's happiness in ways money can't buy. Their happiness came whenever they were on the course, whether it was Tuck planting trees, rebuilding a trap and shaping a green to give his course a better life, Becky operating the pro shop to make sure golfers got whatever they needed, or both of them quietly spending time sharing dreams in their home

located next to the course on the Lake Michigan shore.

Finally, about seven years ago, Tuck decided to sell his golf course and retire. But he wasn't finished giving something back to the game. He took \$100,000 from the profits of selling the course and created an endowment at Michigan State for prospective golf course superintendents.

Since then, the Tates have been spending time playing golf and bringing that aspect of the game to the level it deserves. This is how I met the Tates—stepping back and breathing golf's atmosphere, making sure they didn't get in the game's way—and they left me with an impression I'll never forget.

On a golf trip to Michigan with a friend, John Berman, we met Tuck and Becky at their home prior to our round at Crystal Downs. I expected to knock on their door, shake hands and then jump in the car to begin our conquest of such a great course.

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Tuck introduced me to the correct, honorable way to play golf with guests. He invited us into this home and spent the next hour discussing golf and what the sport means to us. I felt I was at Augusta, in the Jones cabin, talking to Bobby himself. The difference is that I didn't feel nervous. Quite the contrary. Tuck made me feel comfortable.

Finally, we traveled to Crystal Downs and I joined Becky in her cart for the 18 holes. I have never been treated to a better riding companion. I played horribly. To make matters worse, it rained. To be more accurate, it poured. Such things can make me very frustrated. But through it all, 76-year-old Becky never complained; about the rain, or me. To do so isn't the correct way to play golf. Becky just whispered little pearls of wisdom to me, like when I three-putted the par-4 10th hole.

"Next time, just listen for the ball to fall in the cup," she said. "Don't watch it."

In other words, she was saying, I was moving my head when I putted. Most golfers would tell me in a more direct way. But that's not the game. That's not class. With every quiet word, Becky relaxed me.

Tuck and Becky both still play a mean game of golf.

Despite the conditions, Tuck shot around a 90 and Becky was around 100 on a course with a slope rating of 144. Tuck's round was all the more remarkable considering that he wasn't sheltered from the rain in his cart like Becky and I were. At 82, he played through the rain because he wanted his guests to see the whole course and hopefully enjoy the game like he does.

No chance. As much as I love golf, I'll never come close to enjoying the game like the Tates because I don't understand it like they do. The round ended with a trip back to the Tate's home where they continued to be gracious hosts with their hospitality. They turned a round of golf into an incredible experience. As my friend John and I drove away from their home, our discussion didn't center around Crystal Downs. All we talked about were Tuck and Becky.

Sometime during the day I asked Becky if they ever had any children. Becky said they never had the chance to have kids because they were always too busy.

But that wasn't quite correct. Their child is golf and they are the perfect parents. They teach by example. They teach respect. They are completely unselfish. And their love for it shines through.

What is golf? Yes, it's atmosphere, beautiful courses and time-honored rules. But it's also about folks like Tuck and Becky Tate who make the game truly special.

Editorial



An Open Letter of THANKS

By Pat Norton

Recently I was faced with what seemed to be an unwinnable situation. Our Toro Network 8000 central computer had a completely burned out SNC card, which is the central board that runs the NW 8000 programs, and hence, our irrigation system.

After many weeks of waiting, Toro finally informed us that this board cannot be repaired. The damage to this board was similar to, but more serious than, damage to this same component in 1991. In both instances lightning was the culprit. In neither case did we have appropriate lightning surge protection installed. There is a surge interface box for NW 8000, but this never seems to stop incoming power surges.

Anyway, Toro initially informed us that since the board is not repairable, and since lightning is the problem (which voids any warranty), and since our club insurance policy covers lightning damage...the solution to them seemed so simple. Simply purchase a new or reconditioned SNC board for tens of thousands of dollars, submit the claim to the insurance company, and you're back in business. So said Toro, initially.

"Bullhonky," we said. "Not a very good solution," we said. I didn't relish the thought of an insurance claim for the same problem as in '91. In addition, we felt very strongly that Toro/Reinders Bros. should have recommended additional surge protection last year when we experienced "System Error 3124". There were more than a few times when I wanted to correct "System Error 3124" with a pistol shot right into that smug little computer screen.

After too long I called Bob Emmerich of Watertronics (at the timely suggestion of our assistant, Gary Mracek). Right off the bat Bob began to take corrective action. Within 48 hours of our initial chat, Toro agreed to: 1) replace our SNC board at a very, very reasonable price; 2) ship us additional surge protection, and 3) give us complete instruction and assistance in the future if we ever experience additional problems.

That's what I call service! Bob Emmerich stood to gain very little by helping us in such a fashion, yet he did it. Although his association with Toro has formally ended, his concern for Toro's reputation with its customers was evident in his intervention on behalf of Cedar Creek. Heartfelt thanks to you, Mr. Emmerich!

Thanks to Toro also for having the wisdom to help a customer—once the proper people within that company understood the situation, they cooperated with haste. Thanks also to Wisconsin's Toro distributor, Reinders Brothers and MTI, who both offered assistance to us.

It's with this kind of treatment that companies in Wisconsin's green industry win our support and gratitude. Watertronics and Toro just won themselves one very happy customer!

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