



From Punts to Pars and Putts

By Rob Schultz

An assistant pro at Northbrook Country Club near Green Bay hoped to go unnoticed among the children who were attending the golf course's junior lessons this summer.

It didn't work. The assistant pro, who was simply introduced as "Craig," was studied closely by the children as he tried to teach them the basics of golf. Seconds later, the secret was out.

In the wake of the Green Bay Packers' Super Bowl victory and the mania it created, it's impossible for any of the players to escape to anyplace in this state without being detected by somebody. Thus, the children at Northbrook knew right away they were being taught how to play golf by Packers punter Craig Hentrich.

Hentrich just finished his second offseason working as an assistant pro at Northbrook, located in Luxemburg. He has set a goal of becoming a club pro when his football career is over.

"So once I'm done with football, which I'm hoping won't be for awhile, I'll be ahead of the game," said Hentrich.

A solid golfer who sports a two-handicap, Hentrich showed off his playing skills at Michael Jordan's celebrity event outside Chicago early in the summer. He finished third. But Hentrich has found out since joining Northbrook that life as an assistant does not consist of playing much golf.

"It's a little different than I thought it would be," Hentrich, who spent the early part of the summer working in the pro shop and ranging the course more than he played or taught. "There's a lot more to do than just teaching and playing. There's marketing, management and keeping inventory. Those are things I didn't think about when I got into it, but I'm learning about now."

Hentrich worked just a few days a week during the off-season. He drew rave marks from head pro Dave Spengler Jr., a former Madison standout.

"He really knows his stuff," said Spengler. "He's an articulate, intelligent person, too. He deals with the public in a highly professional manner."

Spengler hired Hentrich last year after he learned from a Northbrook member that the Packer punter wanted to become a club pro.

I get along great with the people out there, I like being around them, so I've decided to return every year," Hentrich said.

The process of becoming a Class A PGA pro is a long one. Hentrich has barely made a dent in his progress since his time is so limited. For instance, he has yet to attend one of the PGA schools or pass his playing ability test.

But that doesn't matter to Hentrich. "When you find something you love as much as I love golf, it's not a job," he said. "You really look forward to going to work every day."

He almost loves golf as much as football. Almost. "This is my life right now," he said.

Punters are unlike placekickers, who compare their techniques to a golf swing and are usually very good on a golf course. But that doesn't mean Hentrich doesn't find some similarities between what he does on the football field for the Packers and on the golf course for himself.


"I think the mental part is very similar," said the 26-year-old Hentrich. "When you're out there punting the ball and when you catch the ball, you're out there all by yourself. You can't depend on anybody. It's the same on the golf course. You have nobody to blame but yourself when you don't play well. In that respect they are very similar."

Hentrich is envious of players like Spengler, who whipped him by 15 strokes while winning a 36-hole event in the summer of 1996. Spengler is equally envious of Hentrich, who cashed a sizable check for finishing third in Jordan's event.

"It depresses me that he can finish third in that event and make three times what I've ever made for my best check. And that includes the State Open," said Spengler with a laugh. "What's sad is that's what I do for a living."

Spengler continued to chuckle as he described the young golfers mobbing Hentrich for autographs when they figured out who was teaching them.

Hentrich, however, is looking forward to the day when students want him as a teacher long after his football career is over.

"I don't want them to come to me because I play football. I want them to come to be because I'm a good teacher. That's my goal in the future," he said. "I don't want to use football to land me another job. I want to rely on my talents in golf." 

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