

September 2022 – Did You Know? BCC Pros in the 1938 Michigan PGA Championship

“Being a golf pro is not really a job. It seems apart from working people. After all these years I still get a thrill when I turn the key to unlock the door to my pro shop because I know that today I’ll talk more golf, meet new people, and teach someone something about golf.”

FRANK SPROGELL

In digging up information about our early golf professionals, I ran across a 1938 newspaper report on the first round of the 1938 Michigan PGA championship, played in Midland. In its early years the Michigan PGA championship was contested at match play.

The sports page headline for the September 20, 1938, Grand Rapids Press had this:

Local Pros Win in PGA

Weber and Sprogell Cop Matches; Wells Extends Stahl

Midland—(AP)—The opening round of the Michigan Professional Golfers association tournament was featured Monday by the 20-hole victory of Marvin Stahl, Lansing, over Maurie Wells, Grand Rapids, and the elimination of Muskegon’s Lee Kosten by Nick Weber, Grand Rapids veteran.

The references are to our first head pro Nick Weber, plus Frank Sprogell and Marvin Stahl, each of whom would later become our head pro (Sprogell in 1944, then Stahl in 1948). Here's a little history about each man, up to 1938.

Nick Weber was originally from the Chicago area, born in 1902. He became a pro while still a teenager, with a couple assistant club pro jobs, first at Harlem Country Club in Forest Park and then at Green Valley Club in Wheaton. In 1922 the head pro at Green Valley left to take the head pro job at Kent CC. Weber followed him to Grand Rapids as his assistant. He then had a few head pro jobs in West Michigan, with stops at Meceola CC in Big Rapids (briefly, later in 1922), then Holland CC for three years starting when it opened in 1923, then back at Kent CC for the 1926-28 seasons. Blythefield then hired him away from Kent when we opened in 1929. As our first head pro, Nick was part of the exhibition match on June 14, 1929, when Blythefield was formally opened. Here is a photo of Nick that appeared in the GR Herald article announcing the opening match at BCC.



Frank Sprogell in 1938 was head pro at Kent CC. He was born and raised in Pennsylvania, being introduced to golf as a caddie at Aronomink GC. He had a few head pro jobs,

mostly in Pennsylvania (and perhaps in Alabama, the record is unclear) before coming to Michigan in 1925 at age 29, to be the head pro at Saginaw CC. In his first year in Michigan, he won the Michigan PGA championship. (Back then, this was a one-day, 36-hole stroke play event, played that year at CC of Detroit.) In 1929 he moved to Grand Rapids to replace Weber at Kent CC after Weber left Kent to go to the new Blythefield CC. Sprogell's tenure at Kent was mostly during the Great Depression (which started on Black Monday, October 28, 1929, with the great stock market crash). During those tough times, he was not only Kent's golf pro but also its club manager and grounds superintendent. He left Kent in 1936 for a similar role at Meadowbrook CC, but by 1938 was back at Kent with these multiple roles.



SPROGELL.

Marv Stahl in 1938 was an up-and-coming head pro. He had just started at the Country Club of Lansing, having left his prior head pro job at Green Ridge CC in Comstock Park. (The old Green Ridge club still exists today but is now called Egypt Valley CC after its move to Ada in the early 1990's.) Stahl was only age 29, but already had a stellar golfing career, having already won the Michigan Open twice, in 1936 and again in 1938. He had started his golf career at age 13 as a

caddie at Cascade Hills CC, where he was later a starter and then an assistant pro, working for the long-time CHCC head pro Maurie Wells. (Along with Weber, Wells had played in the exhibition match that opened Blythefield back in 1929, and Stahl was one of the caddies in that match.)



Stahl, 1938

There were many ties to Blythefield in the 1938 Michigan PGA championship:

- In the first round that year, Weber beat Lee Kosten, who had been Weber's assistant pro at Blythefield when we opened in 1929. Weber didn't get beyond the first round of that Michigan PGA; he was beaten in the second round.
- Marv Stahl played Maurie Wells in the first round, defeating his old Cascade Hill CC mentor. Marv then won two more matches, getting to the semi-finals where he was beaten by the legendary Al Watrous, head pro at Oakland Hills CC who had earlier been at the old Highlands CC in Grand Rapids. (You may recall that Watrous' grandson, retired police officer Tom Watrous, is now a starter at Blythefield).
- Frank Sprogell went all the way to the finals of the 1938 Michigan PGA, where he was eventually beaten by Watrous.

Despite the Great Depression during Blythefield's early years, our club had a well-deserved reputation as a place where good players, both professionals and amateurs, sought to

be. That was certainly evident not only in 1938, but during the following decades, with some later head professionals playing on the PGA tour and the Senior PGA tour. In the future, DYK will discuss these later head pros as well as prominent amateurs who were BCC members.

Brent Rector

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p.s. Now that we are about to have new tennis courts, it is fitting to feature some history of tennis at Blythefield CC. If you have any information about this – tennis events or tournaments, good players, descriptions of our tennis facilities, etc. – please share this information with me.

Addendum: GR Press articles on the 1938 Michigan PGA Championship

[Grand Rapids Press \[published as The Grand Rapids Press\] - September 19, 1938 - page 13.pdf](#)

[Grand Rapids Press \[published as The Grand Rapids Press\] - September 20, 1938 - page 14.pdf](#)

[Grand Rapids Press \[published as The Grand Rapids Press\] - September 21, 1938 - page 14.pdf](#)

[Grand Rapids Press \[published as The Grand Rapids Press\] - September 22, 1938 - page 22.pdf](#)

[Grand Rapids Press \[published as The Grand Rapids Press\] - September 23, 1938 - page 24.pdf](#)