

Did You Know - August 2021 Stories from the Western Open



A goal of DYK is to preserve the oral histories of those who remember Blythefield CC from days gone by. DYK is on a mission to do this while folks who were here “back in the day” are still around. I’ve talked to several people who were at the 1961 Western Open and were willing to share their memories. For most, it was an important event in their youth. They had a good time recalling their personal memories of this big event in Blythefield history.

A word of caution as you read: some details of these personal recollections are not consistent. As memories fade, recollections can get fuzzy. DYK is giving you what I've been told by some of the many people I have talked to about what happened here in June 1961.

Les Prangley

Les is at the top of the list because he is the answer to a trivia question, namely, who is the only president of Blythefield CC who also caddied in the Western Open? Les Prangley, BCC president in 1982, is the answer. Les can't recall whom he caddied for but recalls that his pro did not make the cut. Did Les recall how much he was paid? Unfortunately, no.

As many of you know, Les is still a member here at Blythefield. After his caddie days he became an accountant and founded his own firm here in Grand Rapids.

Bob Nocera

Norman Nocera was the general manager of Blythefield for many years, from 1960 through the 1970's. Bob was his son. Back then there was a house on the southwest side of our parking lot that was the residence for club manager and his family. That's where Bob lived during his youth, so the 1961 Western Open was literally outside of Bob's front door.

Bob was a grade school child in 1960 when his father was hired as our GM. Early in 1961 the board decided to invite the WGA to host the Western Open here, since the WGA needed a replacement venue after Scioto CC withdrew its invitation. Despite being new as GM, Norm boldly favored our board's decision. But Norm was concerned with the potential for an adverse financial impact so he made a deal with the WGA to split financial responsibility rather than having our club have the total risk. Norm thought it was prudent to protect the club financially should it not turn out well. With many others, Norm ran the tournament quite

successfully; it made a profit. Bob remembers that his father was justifiably proud of the success of the Western Open, but rueful of the deal he made with the WGA because he had to share that profit with the WGA.

Another of Bob's memories is getting autographs. He asked players to sign his program, and two autographs stand out: Chi Chi Rodriguez and Charlie Sifford. When he asked young pro Chi Chi Rodriguez for his autograph, Chi Chi playfully said he charged a nickel. Bob began to run back home to get a nickel. Chi Chi called Bob back, signing and laughing that he was just kidding about charging a nickel.

Here's Bob's recollection of getting Sifford's autograph:

The other autograph experience I have never forgotten was with Charlie Sifford. From my bedroom window I saw him pull up in his car and get out to open his trunk to get his clubs. I ran out to get his autograph and two things have stayed with me all this time. The first was the soft tenor of his voice. He looked at me and said very softly, "You really don't want my autograph." I said "Sir, I certainly would." (I didn't know who he was; just knew he was a pro golfer.) I offered the Western Open program to him and a pen and he signed. Two things about his autograph stood out, the first was how tiny his writing was. By far the smallest autograph of any professional. (He signed it "Charles Sifford".) It was also the most precise and beautiful handwriting of any autograph I received, with Arnold Palmer's autograph in second place. It was only later, as I grew older, that I came to comprehend his role in integrating professional golf at that time.

Bob now lives in Vermont where he is in the insurance industry. A devoted MSU Spartan, he returns to Michigan occasionally to visit his sisters who live here.

Nancy (Nocera) Schuyten

Nancy is one of Bob's sisters, a few years older than Bob. Her memories:

- I remember we (even us kids) had official badges we had to wear on the club grounds. I think officials checked cars coming up the drive for badge wearers. We felt very important!
- I remember very long lines by the putting green for autographs from Arnold Palmer and Gary Player. Palmer signed a few, then waved the others off and entered the clubhouse. Player stayed and signed tons of autographs, even when his line kept getting longer, not shorter. That impressed me as a 12-year-old.
- I also remember hearing that Tommy Bolt got so mad at the hole by the Rogue River, he threw his club into the water. That was something I still remember. I didn't see it but heard all about it.

Nancy is retired and lives in the Detroit area.

Tom O'Donovan

Tom was in high school in 1961, playing on the Catholic Central golf team. Along with many other young guys he went to a caddie class held at Aquinas College, preparing to caddie in the Western Open. He caddied for Butch Baird in the tournament but didn't get Baird's bag until Thursday's first round. Earlier in the week before the tournament started Tom looped for others. He remembers going doubles one day when Sam Carmichael, one of his players, broke 30 on the back nine in a practice round.

Getting Baird's bag was a little awkward. Baird had brought his brother to caddie for him, but there was a WGA rule that players had to use a local caddie. Tom remembers that on Thursday caddie master Dave Kamm took Tom over to introduce Baird to Tom and tell Baird that Tom would be his caddie for the tournament. Tom caddied for Baird all four rounds, including in the final pairing on Sunday.

Baird wasn't very talkative. Tom didn't know why but sensed that Baird didn't like having to use a local caddie rather than his brother. Even though not much was said between them, Tom did speak up on Friday when Baird pulled out his 5-iron for his second shot on no. 18. Tom knew that was too much club for Baird since Tom would need a 5-iron from there and Baird was longer than Tom. Tom boldly advised Baird to hit a 6-iron. Baird took the advice, and then holed the shot for eagle. The Saturday GR Press had a photo of Baird holding his 6-iron.

[Click Here to View - GR Press Article, June 24, 1961](#)

Tom has some memories from the final round. Baird was in the last group, paired with Palmer and Snead. There was a sizable gallery following them. WOOD-TV televised the last few holes, which was not common back then. He remembers that Palmer was friendly and polite, but Snead was not. One incident Tom recalls was walking to no. 4 tee. Snead was irritated and told Tom to "get the @\$% out of my way." Caddying in the last group of the final round was a big deal for Tom as a kid.

Tom made several friends from his caddie days. Tom is retired now and spends more time boating than playing golf. The story of Tom's older brother is next.

John O'Donovan

John was at Aquinas College in 1961, a good player on the golf team there. John entered the Western Open and played in the Tuesday qualifying round but did not make it into the tournament field. Many years later John happened to run into Butch Baird in Florida. Baird still remembered the Western Open and his eagle on no. 18. He confirmed that his caddie advised him to hit a six and also that the Western Open was his first big check as a professional.

John has another memory, about Snead and Palmer in the locker room at Blythefield after Sunday's round. John and Hermie Miller Jr. were there with Herm's father. John and Herm Jr. wanted to see Arnold when he came out. When he was leaving, he stopped

and talked to them for a couple minutes. While waiting for Palmer to come out, a member asked Snead to sign his program for his grandson. Sam said, "I don't have time for that. I have to get to the airport!" That same member asked Arnie to sign the program. Palmer asked what his grandson's name was, and then signed to "Dear Jimmy" from "Your friend, Arnold Palmer". Needless to say this made big impression on Hermie and John.

John spent his working career in West Michigan in the paper business. He is still well-known in local golfing circles, not only for his own accomplishments but also for his volunteer work for the USGA, the GAM and administering local tournaments.

David Kamm

In 1961 Dave was a college student at Aquinas College. His summer job that year was caddie master at Blythefield, hired by caddie chairman Duane Kress. Some memories of the tournament week:

- Len Bridge, Sr., a BCC member and business manager for WOOD radio and TV, was treasurer of the local Western Open organization for the tournament. The WGA required that he had the \$30,000 purse in the bank before the tournament started. His son Len Bridge, Jr., a friend of Dave's, was a contestant in the tournament.
- The weather was horrible the first two days, so bad that there were a few snowflakes mixed with the rain. Saturday and Sunday were wonderful.
- Dave overheard a conversation between Gardner Dickenson and Sam Snead. Dickenson commented on his errant shot that hit a spectator: "I nearly killed another of the sons a' bitches today."
- Palmer liked to fuss with his clubs, one day changing the grip on a club in the pro shop. When Palmer was in Barnum's back room, he was very chatty. He couldn't have been nicer to the pro shop staff.

- One day Dave carried Cary Middlecoff's golf bag from parking lot to the course. The strap was too low, going down below Dave's waist. It was also quite heavy to lift.
- In the final round Snead birdied the first hole, stifting it to the pin.
- Dave saw the \$500 check that Palmer paid his caddie, which was 10% of the winner's prize. The check was signed by Arnold's wife, Winifred Palmer, known as "Winnie". Dave recalls that she took care of all the finances when Arnold was on tour. She was not about to have him distracted by such things.

Dave later went to law school, then spent his legal career at the Kent County Prosecutor's office. He is now retired, playing winter golf in Florida and summers up here.

Frank Kloska

Frank was a regular caddie at Blythefield, starting when he was in grade school. In the Western Open he caddied for Bob Rosburg, who made the cut. He gave Frank \$175 for the week. Frank remembers that Rosburg was in the first pairing out on Sunday, playing in a little over two hours. After finishing his caddie duties, Frank went back out on the course to watch. Along with the large gallery, he saw Palmer finishing at no. 18. Later, as Palmer was leaving the club, he dumped out his shag bag in the parking lot and told the caddies to "enjoy".

One of his caddie friends back then was Bill Heibel, who caddied for Arnold Palmer that week. Frank's recollection is that Palmer gave Bill \$250 for the week, which might have been larger except for an incident on the last day. Frank recalls Bill telling him about it. Palmer and Snead were playing the same brand of ball, the Wilson Staff. On no. 18, Bill said that he went to Snead's ball by mistake, that Palmer saw the error and told Bill: "That will cost you, caddie." (Ouch!)

Frank and Bill remained friends for years after their Blythefield caddie days, playing golf together until Bill passed.

Tom Miknavich

Tom was a caddie as a kid, but not at Blythefield. He later became a good golfing friend of Bill Heibel, who was Arnold Palmer's caddie at the Western Open. Bill has died, but Tom was able to give me some information that he heard from Bill about Bill's caddie experience with Arnold Palmer. Some of Bill's stories:

- Bill was introduced to Palmer at the beginning of the week. They met at Carl Herrud's house (now Mike Manica's) on no. 2 fairway. Palmer was friendly, telling Bill not to worry about yardages or stuff like that because Palmer would do his own.
- On the last day, with Palmer paired with Sam Snead and Butch Baird, Bill made a mistake on no. 11 green. Palmer had marked his ball on the green and gave it to Bill to clean. Bill returned the ball to Palmer but by tossing it back – big mistake. Palmer missed the toss, and Snead saw what happened. Snead told Palmer that Palmer should fire that caddie right now. Bill was so upset he started to cry. Palmer put his arm around Bill, calming him down. He told Bill that Snead was just engaging in gamesmanship, that they wouldn't be leading if not for Bill, so forget about it and let's go win this thing. Bill calmed down immediately with this reassurance
- Also in the final round, on no. 18 the drives of Palmer and Snead finished close to each other. They both played Wilson Staff balls. Bill mistakenly set up in front of Snead's ball. Palmer fortunately caught the error and went to his own ball.

After his caddie days Tom went into the Army, returning to Grand Rapids for college. For many years he worked for Kent County as the manager at Kaufman GC, and still enjoys playing the game he learned decades ago as a caddie.

(Aside: Did Bill's error on no. 18 cost Bill, as Frank Kloska recalled hearing from Bill? Frank recalls Bill saying that he made \$250 for the week. Although Tom does not recall Bill telling him what Palmer paid Bill for the week, Tom believes it is not likely that Palmer would have cut the amount because of Bill's mistake. That would be

inconsistent with how Bill described Palmer's demeanor. Dave Kamm says he saw the check given to Bill; it was for \$500. That may settle it.)

Tom Cook

In the Western Open, Tom caddied for Bob Bruno who was paired with Tommy Bolt and Tommy Aaron for the first two rounds. Bruno did not make the cut. Tom recalls that Bruno pumped two balls out of bounds on no. 1. He was understandably irritated, and a short while later began taking clubs from where Tom had put them in the bag and putting them in a different spot. Bruno also remarked that "I always get the worst caddie." (When I recently interviewed Tom, I suggested that his player was probably frustrated. Tom modestly observed that Bruno "may have been close to correct. I was a real rookie.")

Tom later went to college Western Michigan University, and stayed in Kalamazoo for much of his working career. He continued playing golf after his caddie days, and now splits time between Michigan and Florida.

Mike Manica

Mike and Linda Manica live in the stately white home on Rogue River Road near no. 2 green. (Aside: Did you know that this was the original farmhouse for the farm on part of our property that was here before Blythefield was founded?) Manica's weren't at the 1961 Western Open (much too young!) but their home played a part in it. Back then a member named Carl Herrud lived in this home. The Herruds had a houseguest during the Western Open; it was Arnold Palmer. Many years later Mike asked Palmer for a letter about his stay at their home. Here it is:

arnold palmer

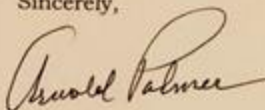
9000
bay
hill
boulevard
orlando,
florida
32819

April 12, 2013

Dear Mike:

I can confirm I was the guest of Mr. Carl Herrud at his home at 3350 Rogue River Road, NE, Belmont, MI 49306 at the time I was privileged to win the Western Open on June 25, 1961. The Western Open in 1961 was held at the Blythefield Country Club and Mr. Herrud's home was on the second fairway close to the green.

Sincerely,



Arnold Palmer

AP/jch

Michael J. Manica
3350 Rogue River Road, NE
Belmont, MI 49306

Bob Miller

Bob is a son of long-time Blythefield member. Hermie Miller, Sr., his father, was a member from the 1950's and 1960's and was a very good amateur player back then, good enough to be exempted into the field for the Western Open. Bob himself later joined Blythefield and was a member here for several years.

In 1961 Bob caddied for Canadian Stan Leonard, the Western Open defending champion. Although Bob was quite familiar with golf and caddie work, he took the required caddie courses at

Aquinas that Blythefield arranged before the tournament. Here is a photo of Bob from the 1962 BCC yearbook:



Bob got Leonard's bag courtesy of Blythefield member Duane Kress, who was the caddie chairman. Duane introduced Bob to Leonard in the pro shop, giving Bob a compliment this way: "Bob knows every blade of grass out here."

In the Wednesday practice round Leonard played with brothers Lionel and Jay Hebert. The first two tournament rounds were with home pro John Barnum and Sam Snead. For the third round Leonard was paired with Mike Souchak and with Billy Casper on Sunday.

In the practice round, on no. 13 before crossing the bridge to the tee, Leonard asked Bob what he should take back to the tee. Bob suggested 3-iron and 4-wood because that's what his father used. Leonard asked why he should care what Bob's father used. Bob replied that his father was also a contestant in the tournament. On other occasions Leonard asked Bob for help. Bob recalls that he was asked "to confirm the yardage and club selection, which really increased the intensity – fingers, legs crossed and a Hail Mary to boot!" Bob was helped by the fact that Blythefield had 150-

yard markers – miniature pine trees that had been removed just prior to the tournament. Bob remembers pointing out their locations during their practice round.

Bob remembers Leonard as a nice guy even though Bob did have a couple lapses.

- During the practice round, at no. 2 fairway Leonard asked Bob if there was a bunker behind the green. Bob didn't remember. Leonard commented wryly on Kress's claim of Bob's great knowledge of golf course.
- On the first tournament round, in cleaning Leonard's ball Bob left a blade of grass. Leonard: "Get that g__ d__ ball clean." Other than that expletive, Leonard was respectful, a true gentleman.

Leonard finished in a tie for tenth, winning \$870. He paid Bob \$80 for the week, plus six balls and two golf gloves.

Bob also remembers Sam Snead, who was popular with news media that called him "Slammin' Sammy" because of his long drives. Bob observed that Snead was not nice to be around, cantankerous and disrespectful to spectators and others on the course. Once, when a fan asked him for his autograph between the 9th green and 10th tee, Snead refused, suggesting the fan go to the pro shop and buy a hat with Snead's signature.

Bob is now retired, and still living in Michigan.

Herm Miller, Jr.

Herm is Bob's older brother. Herm remembers that the Miller family had houseguests during the tournament week, touring pros Al Geiberger and Jackie Cupit.

In 1961 Herm was in college. During the tournament he worked at the club, assigned to an informal dining area and locker room (it was in what we now call the golf building near a porch that is no longer there). One day Herm was serving a drink to Al Balding in the dining area. Sam Snead and Tommy Bolt had a disagreement and were yelling at each other from across the dining

room. When they started to go after each other, Herm and the bartender intervened, breaking it up.

Another story Herm shared also involved Snead, who locked his putter in his locker at night. Herm had a master key for the lockers. Herm and brother Bob went into Snead's locker to "borrow" the putter for some late-night practice on the carpet in the locker room aisle. They carefully returned the putter to the same spot in Snead's locker.

Herm learned to play golf at Blythefield because of his father's membership, and later was a long-time BCC member himself. Herm was also a very good player, anchoring several of the Blythefield winning teams in the West Michigan Districts.

Bruce Corey

In the Western Open, Bruce caddied for Henry Ransom who did not make the cut. Ransom played directly in front of Gary Player's pairing. Bruce stayed around for the third round the next day. He parked his mother's 1959 Dodge across Northland Drive and was near the first tee when the car's horn started blaring. Bruce quickly ran across the road to shut it off.

Bruce continued caddying at Blythefield until he graduated from high school the following year. Former Blythefield golf professional Marvin Stahl (who preceded John Barnum and later joined Blythefield as a member) encouraged Bruce to apply for the Evans Scholarship. Bruce attended MSU as an Evans scholar, and then spent his working career in public accounting.

Chris Mile

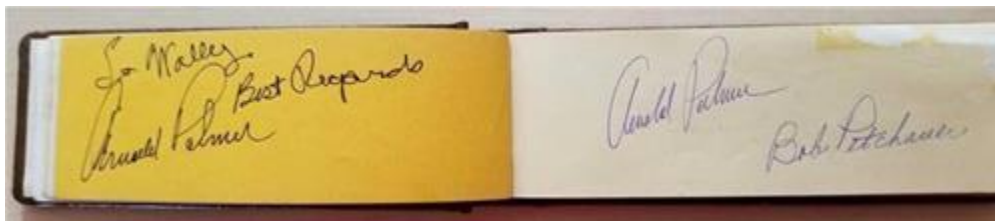
Chris was a young teenager and avid golfer living in Stanton, Michigan at the time of the Western Open. His father took him to the tournament. He recalls that the turf both on fairways and rough was dry and firm, so tee shots would roll out. Driving into the rough often produced good results, since the rough was not thick and there were not very many trees back then.

Almost 20 years later he joined Blythefield and was a member for the few years until he moved from the Grand Rapids area. He now lives in Ann Arbor, where he founded Miles of Golf, a golf shop and driving range.

Wally Swanlund

Wally is a long-time Blythefield member. Wally attended the Western Open when he was a teenager. He had a special pass to the tournament, courtesy of his brother-in-law Bob Petchauer, who was a contestant in the Western Open. (Wally's sister is Jackie Petchauer, who still lives on Rogue River Road near our second tee.) After Bob missed the cut, Bob gave Wally his player's pass (a black armband) giving Wally access to the clubhouse, locker room and inside the ropes for the last two days of the tournament.

Wally remembers collecting autographs from the pros. He had his brother-in-law Bob sign on the same page as Arnold Palmer. Many years later Wally showed the book to Arnold Palmer, who Wally had met through a mutual friend. Palmer signed the book again, on the page opposite his original autograph.



Wally's autograph book, with both AP signatures



Wally getting AP to sign, again

Wally was also in the locker room after the final round. He asked Sam Snead to sign his book. Wally described it this way: “I was a 16-year-old in the player’s locker room, too young-looking to be there. Snead was surly (‘What the hell are you doing in here’) but he signed it while he was changing shoes.”

Wally also has a memory of watching “Doug Sanders (who dressed in bright-colored attire and patent leather shoes) hit three balls into the water on 13 before knocking one over the river. He then proceeded to throw his clubs into the Rogue River (one at a time) in disgust. The crowd was quiet as a church mouse. After the last club went in, he turned to his caddie and had him retrieve them so he could finish the tournament.”

Is this true? Wally: “I do remember that his caddie carried his bag across the river but . . . that was 60 years ago and my memory isn’t the best and exaggeration telling this story over the years may have kicked in, too!”

Wally is still a very active BCC member. He and Marilyn live on Rogue River Road, near our third hole.

Bob Phillips

Bob was a caddie at Blythefield for a few years in the early 1960's but didn't caddie in the Western Open because he was too young. Boys had to be age 14 and he was only 13.

Pat Tietema

Pat was a regular caddie at Blythefield for a few years. For the Western Open he had Howard Brown's bag. Brown was a big guy who played left-handed. Pat remembers that Brown drove a red Thunderbird convertible which he parked just right of the fairway on no. 1. Brown arrived just before the tournament started, so his first round on our course was Thursday. In the second round on Friday, it was raining so hard that Pat held Brown's cigarette while Brown played his shot up to no. 16 green. Brown missed the cut. After the round Pat took Brown's bag to his car. He paid Pat \$70 for the two rounds he played. Pat also made some cash from helping during the tournament. After Brown missed the cut, Pat worked as a forecaddie. On Monday after the tournament ended, he helped take down gallery ropes. For the week he made over \$100. That was huge to Pat.

Pat remembers that one day Tommy Bolt got so angry with his tee shot on no. 1 that he threw his driver down the fairway.

Pat's other story involved how he would get to Blythefield. As a boy Pat lived near Burton and Division, and regularly hitchhiked to the course. One of the Western Open contestants was Charlie Sifford, who stayed at a southside GR hotel during the tournament. One day Sifford picked up Pat. Pat told Sifford he was caddying at Blythefield, so Pat got a ride all the way to the course. Before Pat got out, Sifford told Pat that he would also take him the next day if Pat was on the corner when Sifford came by, so Pat rode with Sifford the next day too. Pat appreciated the rides all the way to the course and also remembers that Sifford drove a new white Pontiac which smelled of smoke from Sifford's cigars.

Mike Palmer

Mike was a young teenager in 1961. His dad bought him a ticket for the Thursday round of the Western Open, the first tournament of any kind Mike had attended. Mike was standing in the right rough on no. 10 as Arnold Palmer's pairing came by. He saw Palmer hit his shot to the green, followed by a loud cheer from the gallery. Palmer had holed it for an eagle! "I was a distance away and I saw him make the shot. I lost track of the ball until it hit the green, and the only way I knew he made the shot was because of all the noise around the hole."

Mike also remembers following the Gary Player pairing that day, along with a sizeable gallery that included several ladies who apparently were enamored with Player, maybe because he was young and handsome or maybe because he had just won The Masters two months earlier. Jacky Cupit was in the next pairing. Cupit was yelling at them for poor manners while he was trying to make a shot.

James Badaluco

Jim is a son of James A. Badaluco who was a Blythefield member in the 1950's and 1960's until his too-early passing in 1964. Young Jim was one of the club's junior golfers at the time of the Western Open we hosted. Before the tournament Jim went to caddie training at Blythefield, conducted by then assistant pro Tom Rosely and maybe Tom's brother, who also worked in the pro shop.

In the tournament Jim caddied for Jack Burke, Jr., who was the 1956 Masters and PGA champion. Jim got Burke's bag courtesy of our head pro John Barnum, who made sure that Jim had a good loop for the week. A bonus for Jim was that Burke was paired with Arnold Palmer in the first two rounds, so Jim was on no. 10 when Palmer made eagle there in the first round. Jim recalls that Palmer reached the green in two shots, barely missing the hole for an albatross and then making a short putt for eagle.

Burke made both the cuts (after Friday and Saturday) so Jim caddied all four tournament rounds. Burke paid Jim \$80 for the week.

Jim stayed in Grand Rapids after graduating Aquinas. He and his wife Linda were Blythefield members for several years. He is still active in commercial real estate in this area.

Brent Rector

I'll end with my own story. My boyhood home was in Belmont. I started caddying at Blythefield in 1960. Having the 1961 Western Open at the course where I caddied (and got to play on caddie day, Monday afternoons) was beyond exciting for a young boy who had just become exposed to the game of golf. Sadly, I did not attend the 1961 Western Open. Instead, right after school was out for the year, my family went on an extended vacation across the country. My parents wanted us to see national parks and to experience Disneyland, which had just opened in 1955. During the tournament week we were in California, visiting an aunt who lived in suburban Los Angeles. I'll never forget that trip and how much fun Disneyland was, but also my disappointment at missing the biggest golf event ever back home. I can still recall reading the LA Times sports section each day, with a "Belmont, Michigan" dateline. The LA Times reported that my hero Arnold Palmer was winning the Western Open. I was missing it, and all because of a trip to Disneyland. Sad!

Brent Rector

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