

CHAPTER 10

Questions And Answers About Hickory Golf

Q: How much does it cost to get started in hickory golf?

A: You can purchase inexpensive hickory clubs for as little as \$25 each. Obviously, these are not likely to be of a premium quality and will probably require work to make them playable. At Classic Golf, we offer fully restored Tom Stewart irons for about \$150 each with a one-year warranty on the shafts against breakage. Our restored woods are about \$250 each for the premium examples. So, a ten-club set with two woods would run \$1,700. A 14-club set would be \$2,300. This compares favorably with the purchase of a premium modern 14-club set where your irons are \$800, your driver is \$400, fairway wood \$200, two wedges at \$125 each, hybrid at \$150, and a putter at \$200 for a total of \$2,000.

Q: Can a beginner or high handicap golfer play hickory golf?

A: Yes. That is how it was done 100 years ago! It can be an advantage starting golf with clubs that require a more precise swing.

Q: Are there reproduction clubs available and are they allowed in hickory tournaments?

A: Reproduction clubs are available from Tad Moore, Barry Kerr, and Louisville Golf. Every tournament has its own set of rules. The National Hickory Championship allows reproductions because pre-1900 clubs are so difficult to find and are very expensive. At the present time there are ample supplies of vintage clubs available for play, but this could change with the increasing popularity of hickory golf. A reproduction set can be a great way to immediately get started playing hickory golf while you piece together a vintage set.

2007 Region 4 Texas Hickory Championship Photo Gallery



Max Hill putts at Onion Creek in Austin, Texas.



This finish position leaves me temporarily speechless!



Andy Reistetter from the fairway.



Selecting the right club at Onion Creek where I hung on for a narrow victory in this excellent 36 hole event.



Ron Lyons putts for birdie.



Willie Ducherer chips from a precarious lie.



Rob Howard prepares to drive.



Tom Hughes lofts one to the green.



Chuck McMullin lags a long one close.

Q: *Where can I play hickory golf?*

A: You can play hickory golf at any golf course. Choose the tees that play between 6,000 and 6,500 yards if you are an average to good player. Pre-1900 play with a reproduction golf ball is a different story. Few courses exist that are really suitable for this. Oakhurst Links in West Virginia, site of the National Hickory Championship and the oldest course in the United States, is a great choice. Keith Foster, the noted golf course architect, is developing some pre-1900 golf courses for use with these early clubs and reproduction balls.

Q: *What kind of golf ball should I play?*

A: Any ball with a soft cover or low compression is good. The Bridgestone B330S was my choice in 2007. Chris McIntyre of San Diego, California is developing some vintage mesh pattern golf balls that will be great to play with 1920s era hickory clubs. Avoid hitting range balls as much as possible. Hitting hard balls will tend to break shafts.

Q: *How good do I have to be to play in a hickory golf tournament?*

A: Most tournaments have several different divisions so that golfers of all abilities can compete. There is usually an open division, a handicap division, a senior division, and a ladies division. As long as you are able to maintain a good pace of play, anyone can compete.

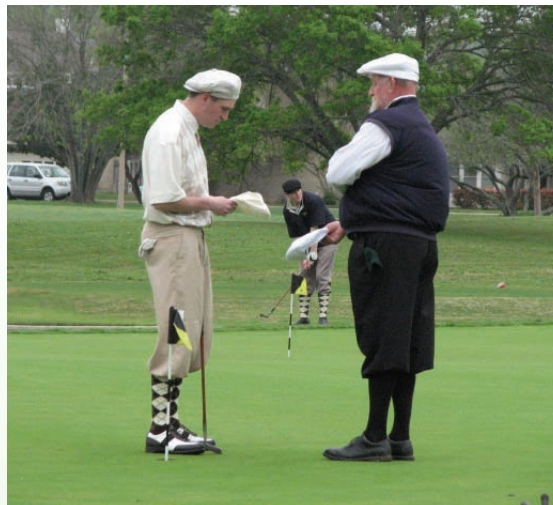
Q: *Do I have to dress in the old fashion style clothing?*

A: Vintage 1920s attire included a shirt and tie and the famous plus-four pants that are often referred to as knickers (women's underwear to the UK crowd!). "Plus-fours" referred to the four extra inches of fabric around the knees that gave these shortened trousers their famous look. In pre-1900 times the socks were often pulled up over the pant legs to avoid soiling the bottom of the pants; plus-fours were not in fashion yet. Hickory golf is about playing with hickory clubs and while it is fun to look the part especially in a tournament, you don't have to. Golfers wore long pants in the 1920s! Most tournaments have a provision against baseball style caps, however, as these were not used during the era. Plus-four pants can be purchased online at a number of different sites, as can the floppy "newsboy" caps that were popular during the hickory era.

2007 Region 4 Texas Hickory Championship Photo Gallery



Edwin Chan, the top Chinese hickory golfer in the world.



Ben Plaunt confers with Rob Ahlschwede.



Trevor Niebergal putts from off the fringe.



Ken Holtz with a Schenectady.



Tim Flynn rolls one up.



Jim Apfelbaum not only writes, but plays hickory golf as well.



Kenny Plaunt is the longest hitter in all of hickory golf. He regularly blasts his drives 330 yards – with a HICKORY driver! Unfortunately, not all of Kenny's balls can be found.

Q: *Are the rules the same?*

A: The short answer is yes. However, any clubs that were legal at any time during the hickory era (except steel shafts) are legal in hickory tournaments even though they were later banned. This includes deep-groove clubs and concave faces among others. Pre-1900 rules are a bit different and the NHC provides a rulebook for play.

Q: *Do women play hickory golf?*

A: Absolutely! The National Hickory Championship has a very competitive women's division and generally women can play in any hickory event.

Q: *Can you play hickory clubs in a modern tournament?*

A: As long as your clubs are all legal, yes. The deep-groove irons, concave faces, and several other rare patent clubs would not be allowed, but everything else is quite legal for play.

Q: *How does hickory golf affect my handicap?*

A: Most hickory golfers keep two handicaps, one for their modern clubs and the other for their hickory clubs. Often they list their hickory handicap under a variation of their name. A hickory handicap is often your normal handicap multiplied by 1.5, so that a 10-handicapper with modern clubs is a 15-handicapper with hickories.

Q: *Do you use riding carts when you play hickory golf?*

A: I do not. Oakhurst Links has no riding carts. Most of the classic courses in Scotland do not have riding carts. Other hickory events allow riding carts if you would like one. There were no riding carts in the 1920s. I personally enjoy the walking aspect of golf quite a bit.

Q: *How far will I hit my hickory driver vs. my modern driver?*

A: You will be 30-40 yards shorter with your hickory driver. Your irons will go the same, loft for loft.

Q: *How often do you break clubs and where do you get them fixed?*

A: How often you break a club is difficult to say. Some players have never broken a club even though they have played for years. If you play enough, it is likely you will break a club sooner or later. Many small shaft cracks are easily repaired if detected early enough. Check your club after or between shots to make sure they are sound. If a club breaks, save the pieces because many times the club can be put back together or the parts can be salvaged. In many areas of the country there is a qualified repair person familiar with hickory clubs. At Classic Golf in Omaha, Nebraska, we offer a full service hickory repair and restoration center with a quick turnaround to anywhere in the world.

Q: *Is there a special hickory swing?*

A: No, but some swings work better with hickory clubs than others.

Q: *How do I care for my hickory golf clubs?*

A: Keep them clean, dry and out of the extremes of hot and cold.

Q: *How much are my old hickory clubs worth?*

A: That is hard to say because it is kind of like saying, "How much is my old car worth?" What kind of car is it? There is quite a difference between a Fiat and a Ferrari. What condition is it in? How strong is the market? A good guide for determining hickory golf club values is Pete Georgiady's "Wood Shafted Golf Club Value Guide". There are several other wood shaft value guides as well.

Q: *What is the best golf movie ever made?*

A: It is hard to vote against "Caddyshack", but in my opinion, "The Greatest Game Ever Played" is the best golf movie ever made; and it has to do with hickory golf! It is about Francis Ouimet, Harry Vardon, and Ted Ray in the 1913 U.S. Open. You should definitely check this one out! There are two other "hickory golf" movies: "The Legend of Bagger Vance" directed by Robert Redford—which I supplied some of the clubs for, and "Stroke of Genius" that told the story of Bobby Jones' life.

Q: *Has anyone helped you with your golf game?*

A: I was self-taught but I would not recommend this for anyone. It is best to find someone to help you spot the flaws in your game. An extra pair of eyes can be invaluable and that is why I recommend using a video camera. A good friend of mine, John Cunningham of Milwaukee, has a very good eye and a penchant for intelligently analyzing and dissecting various aspects of the golf swing. We both have had a lot of fun probing our own swings to make them as good as possible. John has helped me more than anyone else to better dial in my golf swing.

My brother, Tim, also has given me some excellent feedback over the years on my swing. Tim works with me at our business, Classic Golf, in Omaha and in addition to being a low handicap player capable of shooting under par scores, Tim is one of the most skilled and knowledgeable golf repair experts in the world today. Tim tied me in the only hickory event he ever played in with a score of 77!

Q: *How often does one play hickory golf vs. modern golf?*

A: I haven't played modern golf in over eight years. There are a growing number of players who just play hickory golf. Many players switch back and forth. It generally takes a few rounds to get used to the other set, so factor this into your tournament planning.

Q: *Do you breathe in or breathe out during the golf swing?*

A: The old match play trick is to ask someone if they breathe in or out on their downswing! Breathing is obviously very important. You would like to fully exhale just before you begin any golf stroke.

Q: *What is the "stymie" shot?*

A: The "stymie" is a situation that only occurs in match play where you block your opponent's path to the hole on the putting green with your ball. This rule is no longer in use, but it was used during the hickory era with Walter Hagen playing the stymie rule during his four consecutive PGA Championships and Bobby Jones also playing this rule in the U.S. and British Amateur Championships. In stroke play, you must mark your ball on the green if your opponent requests but not in match play unless you were within six inches of the hole or your opponent's ball, in which case the ball would be marked. This "stymie measure" is often indicated on old scorecards or marked on some hickory putter shafts!



Tommy Armour