

Emmet Reflects on Half Century in Junior Golf, Recalls Starts for Dettweiler, Beman, Palmer

By Bob Addie June 19, 1977

Frank Emmet is celebrating his golden jubilee as director of the Washington area's junior golf program and it would have been a nice touch if he had been elected to the World Golf Hall of Fame in Pinehurst, N.C. But he was passed over.

Emmet was nominated on the basis of his contributions to the junior golf program he is credited with founding. He was nominated in the distinguished service category along with Herb Graffis, a magazine writer and author, and the late Donald Ross, called "the father of American golf architects."

"They made it, I didn't," Emmet said. "I knew there was no chance of getting in. But it was nice to be nominated. I consider that an honor in itself. My friends sent out some material with my permission, but they weren't trying to influence anybody. It's a common practice to give background on the candidates in any election and I really am not that well known nationally."

It is true that Emmet has avoided publicity during his 50-year pursuit of his hobby, junior golf. But he is known to virtually every club pro in the country because all junior golf programs are patterned after his.

The junior program in this area will include 35 tournaments from mid-April until Labor Day. The PGA tour only lists 45 tournaments so the boys (Emmet has left the girls' program to other groups) will get great tournament experience.

Emmet, a small, rosy-cheeked man of 77, says it all started back in 1925. His uncle, the Rev. Thomas A. Emmet, was president of Georgetown Prep and urged young Frank to come to Washington.

Emmet graduated from Boston College in 1924 with a degree in mathematics and chemistry. He was working for American Export Lines when he got the call from his uncle.

"I got the job as business manager at Georgetown Prep," Emmet recalled, "and I stayed there 13 years. I noticed that we had some 93 acres of unused land and since I love to play golf, I

suggested that I be given permission to build a nine-hole course. It was granted and the course is little changed today.

"However, my justification was not that the course was for me, the priests and the students. I immediately started organizing a junior golf program getting matches with surrounding prep and high schools."

That was the start, Emmet went on to work for the Department of Justice for 10 years and then for 27 years with the T. A. Cantwell Paper Co. in Landover as a salesman - the job he still holds.

I've had two jobs for 50 years," he says, "and there really isn't any conflict of interest between my vocation and avocation."

Emmet says that when he started his program, there were perhaps only 30 prep and high schools in this area. "Not too many had golf teams then," he recalls. "Where there were maybe only two boys to beat in a tournament, now there are 12. We also have about 100 prep and high schools playing golf in the area now."

Through the years it's been a full-time job running the junior tournaments and assigning starting times! The Emmet household on Williams Lane in Chevy Chase once included four boys and one girl. "We always had two telephone numbers and two extensions," Emmet says, "and my kids were kept busy helping me, along with my wife, Irene. Now, they're all grown with families of their own, but Irene is still at it with me."

The Emmet's have been married 52 years and the only "vacation" she has taken is when Frank goes out of town for a national junior tournament or an intercity team match.

Emmet has seen some great ones come and go. Deane Beman, now the commissioner of the PGA tour and former U.S. and British amateur champion, is perhaps his best-known junior graduate.

"But there were many, many others," he says. "We had Bobby Brownell, who later won the District Amateur title 11 times, and his golf and business partner, Ralph Bogart, who won the Maryland Amateur 10 times. We had Perky Cullinane, the current District Amateur champion, and Jerry McFerren, who won the Maryland Amateur last year. I couldn't begin to count the youngsters that have passed through the junior program, but I would say a good estimate would be 10,000 boys."

One that Emmet remembers well is the late Billy Dettweiler. "His sister, Helen, wa "Billy was a prodigy. He qualified for the U.S. Amateur at 14. That was in 1932 when the tournament was half at Five Farms in Baltimore. I'll never forget that tournament and Billy always talked about it. Billy was paired with the great Francis Ouimet, former U.S. Open and U.S. Amateur Champion. Billy also met Bobby Jones and had a long talk with him. Billy was with the FBI when he died of Hodgkins disease a few years ago."

Emmet never forgets his junior golfers. There is a tournament named for Billy Dettweiler and one for another fine golfer, Bobby Gorin of Woodmont who died young.

Perhaps the most prestigious of these memorial tournaments, if one is to be chosen, is the one named for the late Marvin (Bubby) Worsham, brother of Lew Worsham, the 1947 U.S. Open champion.

Bubby Worsham was on the same Wake Forest golf team with Arnold Palmer in 1950 when he was killed in a car crash. Emmet organized the first Bubby Worsham Memorial Tournament in 1951 and the best young golfers up to the age of 21 were invited.

Appropriately, Palmer won the first tournament. Some years later Palmer donated a trophy to the Worsham event.

Emmet still conducts the Maryland Junior Open and helped organize the South Atlantic Junior and the Inter-club Junior Golf League matches. He is the permanent chairman of the District Golf Association and serves as a consultant to the Middle Atlantic PGA as well as a permanent member of the USGA Junior Committee.

"Commissioner" Emmet admits he is a benevolent tyrant who maintains a strict code of conduct for discipline and proper dress. One boy showed up for a high school match recently wearing knee-length, ragged jeans. "I sent him home to dress properly," Emmet says. "Fortunately, he had a lot of time before his match. When he came back, he was the fanciest dude you ever saw."

There was an occasion last summer at Manor when Emmet was late getting to a junior tournament because of a dental appointment. When he came back, he saw several boys lounging around the 18th green surrounded by a litter of paper cups, soft drink bottles and discarded sandwich wrappers. "Nobody goes anywhere," Emmet thundered, "until the grounds are cleaned up."

Like a college coach, Emmet loses a lot of his stars every year at 18. "But this 'graduation class' hasn't hurt me too much," he says. "Right now, I have one of the greatest crops of 17-year-old I've ever seen. The group includes a boy named Ian Noel from the East Coast of Africa who is attending Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School for a year. Ian tied Clay Fitzgerald, one of our top young golfers, for the Maury Nee Trophy last week.

"Then there are Tony DeLuca, Matt Sughrue and Jack Skilling. We should see some great tournaments this year."

The walls of Emmet's den at his Chevy Chase home are lined with pictures of the youngsters who have been under the supervision of Golf's Mr. Chips. There will be a golden jubilee junior golf tournament June 20 at Robin Dale in honor of Emmet and it should make up for his failure to gain the Hall of Fame.

"The honors don't count," says Emmet. "It's the living, viable thing of seeing these fine young golfers year after year. It's a great avocation. I have no intention of quitting. It keeps me thinking young."