

TAKING ON THE GIANTS

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Pinehurst amateur Dick Chapman more than held his own against golf's professional greats

By Bill Case



Left to right: Dick Chapman, Frank Stranahan, Ben Hogan and Jimmy Demaret

In the first quarter of 1946, young Pinehurst attorney Leland McKeithen confronted a dilemma. The Pinehurst chapter of the Red Cross stood \$2,500 short of raising the \$7,000 necessary to satisfy the goal for its annual fundraising drive.

But, given Pinehurst's North and South Open and Amateur tournaments, there were already ample opportunities for Sandhills golf aficionados to observe the game's best in action.

For a total of \$500 contributed by a generous Pinehurst donor, two of golf's greatest, Jimmy Demaret and the legendary Sam Snead, agreed to partner in the Red Cross exhibition.

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In an era when the leading golfers were reluctant to lift anything heavier than a cocktail glass, the muscular Stranahan was a conspicuous exception.

So did Chapman. Having won a slew of important pre-war titles including the New York, Connecticut, and French Amateurs.

A Greenwich, Connecticut, native, Chapman had recently acquired a residence in Pinehurst. A month before the exhibition, he along with wife, Eloise, son, Dixie, and daughter Joy, moved into an opulent frame home in the area of McCaskill Road referred to as Millionaire's Row.

Chapman's roots in the town dated back to his earliest days. His parents were respected members of the town's Cottage Colony, and he had visited Pinehurst with the family for decades.

Chapman and Stranahan teamed up as the amateur duo but this time they would be facing a team that was arguably the best ever — the incomparable Ben Hogan and his Texas cohort Demaret.

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Dick Chapman with son Dixie, wife Eloise and daughter Joy

Thus, many of the 725 spectators who paid a dollar to attend the Red Cross exhibition had known Chapman for years and were pulling for their stylish, debonair friend and his chiseled partner to somehow stage an upset over the Snead-Demaret combo.

It appeared the pros might make short work of the amateurs after Demaret holed a birdie putt on the par-3 sixth to put his team 2 up. But the Chapman-Stranahan team clawed back one of the holes on the seventh.

On the par-5 10th, Snead was presented with an opportunity to even the match, but an animal's noise again disrupted the Slammer's concentration.

After the match, Dick and Eloise, hosted a cocktail party at their home, which they now called Winter Haven. In addition to Messrs. Demaret, Snead and Stranahan, several other golf notables attended.

The Red Cross viewed the match a success and scheduled another amateurs vs. pros exhibition on No. 2 for March '47. In order to maximize revenue, the admission ticket was bumped to \$2.

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Gen. George C. Marshall congratulates the players of the 1950 match

Chapman and Stranahan possessed no home course advantage over Hogan, whose breakthrough victory had come on No. 2 in the 1940 North and South Open — an event that he won again in '42 and '46.

On a cool March Monday afternoon, Hogan and his wife, Valerie, motored over to the resort from their lodgings at Southern Pines' Belvedere Hotel.

It appeared the pros would fall 3 down on the 14th after Stranahan's second shot nestled within 10 feet of the hole. But Demaret turned the tables, holing a curling 35-footer.

Over cocktails at the post-match shindig hosted at Winter Haven by the Chapmans, Hogan uncharacteristically took Dick aside and imparted advice on the amateur's swing.

Another tandem of stars challenged Chapman and Stranahan in the March 1948 exhibition — Johnny Palmer and Bobby Locke. Palmer, a good old boy from nearby Badin, N.C., had beaten the field in the 1947 Western Open, then considered a major tournament.

Locke was in the midst of an incredible 32-month span in which he would win 11 PGA tour events. The South African became the first non-British foreigner to distinguish himself on the circuit.

But the Palmer-Locke team could not compare with the draw of the Snead, Demaret, and the admission price was accordingly cut back to one dollar. Those who paid their way were treated to an exciting nip-and-tuck affair.

Perhaps disappointed with the decreased revenue from the series, the Red Cross elected not to hold the professional vs. amateurs match in 1949. But Demaret did stop by Pinehurst to bunk in at the Chapmans' place in mid-April.

Mostly recovered from the horrific crash with a Greyhound bus that nearly cost him his life the previous year, Hogan's game was rounding into form. He and Demaret could post memorable campaigns in 1950 with Demaret winning his third Masters, and Hogan being named Player of the Year after his historic U.S. Open playoff win at Merion Golf Club.

After nailing his rifle-shot iron to the 17th green, Ben Hogan was sure of his par and certain victory. The amateurs were down to their last bucket — a 60-foot putt by Chapman to extend the match.

Gen. George Marshall, national president of the Red Cross, and a seasonal Pinehurst resident, personally congratulated the players on their performances. Marshall presented mementos to mark the occasion.

Eight-year-old Dixie Chapman was home when Ben Hogan stopped by the traditional post-match party at Winter Haven. The youngster was thrilled when Mr. Hogan ordered him to grab a club and meet him in the backyard.

Whatever the case, it appears Hogan's revelation didn't satisfy Chapman's quest for golfing perfection. Something of a mad scientist, he was forever experimenting with new ways to strike a golf ball.

There was one more Red Cross benefit match played in April 1952 that featured a new professional team. The Red Cross landed boyish Jack Burke, Jr., who had played in the Ryder Cup held at Pinehurst in '51, and the tempestuous Tommy Bolt, the winner of the final North and South Open, also held in '51.

Chapman would continue to play great championship golf for another 15 years. He was a member of his third winning Walker Cup team in 1953. He continued to add to his collection of international victories and would compete in 199 Masters tournaments, an amateur record.

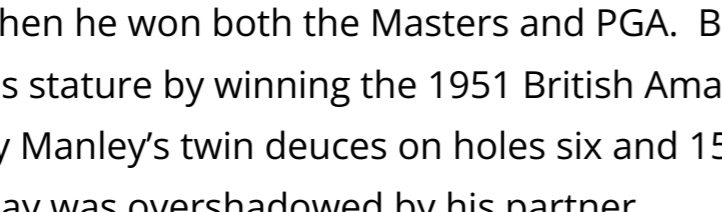
Dick enjoyed competing in all sorts of Pinehurst events. Like his father before him, participating in the Tin Whistles' club championships (he won eight of them) and he relished pairing with Eloise in mixed "Chapman" competitions.

Chapman was inducted into the Carolinas Golf Association Hall of Fame in 1986. He is the only player to have been crowned amateur champion of the United States, Great Britain, France, Canada and Italy, a record bolstered by his remarkable performances in the Red Cross exhibitions.

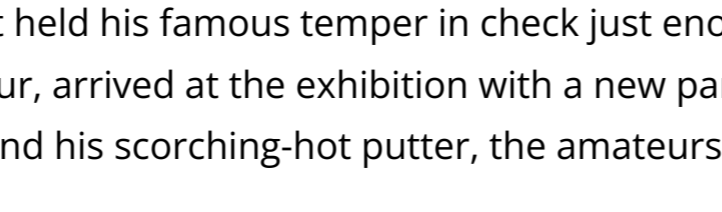
When Dick Chapman passed away, Time eulogized him as the "amateur Ben Hogan." It is likely Ben considered it a personal compliment to be compared to his piney Pinehurst friend whose intense dedication to golf matched his own. PS

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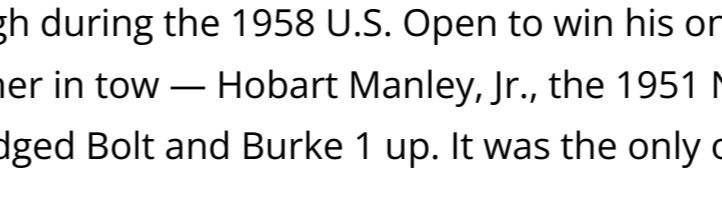
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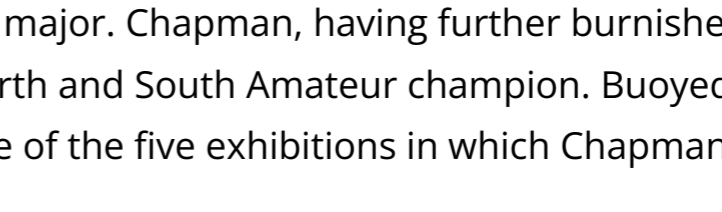
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