

# Nice guys finish first

Dickson's class, humility and talent to lift Hall's status

BY KEN MACLEOD

On his way to becoming the best amateur golfer on the planet, good enough to ruthlessly take down all comers in the U.S. Amateur and British Amateur in the same year, Bob Dickson must have stepped on a few toes.

If he did, he probably still hasn't stopped apologizing.

"Bob is just what he seems, one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet," said longtime friend Mike Norman, a district judge in Muskogee. "He was kind and courteous and polite. The kind of guy you'd be proud to have your daughter marry."

"He never drank, never smoked, never got a speeding ticket. If he played a bad round, he would say I've got to go hit 500 balls before I play again. And with your own shag bag, that was a two- or three-day process, but he would do it."

Wait a minute. Dickson fesses that there was the time he and a friend snuck off to the woods and "enjoyed" an entire pack of cigarettes, one right after the next.

"You've never seen a kid so sick," he said. "That was the last time for me smoking."

Joey Dills, another former Muskogee running mate, said Dickson's only failing as a golfer, and the reason his professional accomplishments didn't quite match his amateur record, was that he had no mean streak.

"The weakness in his game is that he was just too nice," said Dills, who played and traveled frequently with Dickson in

their early years on the PGA Tour. "Some people don't have a real killer instinct. Bob hit the ball better than anyone I ever saw. He always hit it perfectly straight, a lot like

Johnny Miller. But he was just an incredibly nice person and didn't enjoy traveling that much. He was very content to be at home."

Dickson, now retired and living comfortably with

wife, Carolyn, in Ponte Vedra Beach where he plays the TPC courses almost daily, did get out of his comfort zone this summer for an extended road trip to his old Oklahoma haunts.

He and Carolyn put an exhausting 3,500-plus miles on the family car doing what Dickson called his Friends and Family Driving Tour. The trip went from south Florida to Kansas City, then south through Oklahoma and down to Granbury, Texas.

It was a hard but rewarding trip for the 71-year-old, who on Oct. 25 will be inducted into the inaugural class of the Oklahoma Golf Hall of Fame. Hopefully many of those same friends and family will be on hand when Dickson joins Perry Maxwell, Bill Spiller, Mike Holder, Charlie Coe and Gil Morgan in the Hall during the ceremony at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. Ticket information and more is available at [www.oklahomagolfhof.org](http://www.oklahomagolfhof.org).

**Bob hit the ball better than anyone I ever saw. He always hit it perfectly straight...**

**Joey Dills**



2015 INDUCTEE

*Bob Dickson celebrates a winning putt on the Champions Tour.*

"Never again," Dickson said after arriving back home and resuming his near daily golf outings with friends. "The next trip we make like that, it will be fly to Kansas City, fly to Texas, fly to Oklahoma. The old body doesn't take driving 500 miles a day too well anymore."

The trip had its rewards, however, including visits to the two courses where the young Bob Dickson forged the skills that would take him to the top of the amateur golf world and lead to a successful professional career both as a competitor and administrator.

Dickson grew up in McAlester at what was then a nine-hole course with common Bermuda greens. He lived in a small room

on the top of the clubhouse, built in 1912, where his father, Ben, was both the head pro and superintendent and his mother ran the clubhouse and food and beverage operations. He learned to play golf there at age 4, trailing after his dad and older brother, Ben Jr., with a sawed off club.

This was his first time back since the club added nine holes in 1999 under the auspices of designer and former competitor Mark Hayes. And also since the 400 pine trees his father planted as saplings in 1957 grew into full size guardians that pinch the fairways on the original holes.

"It's a lot tighter than it used to be," Dickson said. "The greens were Champion Bermuda, which we only had common, and they were in great shape. It was a lot of fun to play."

Dickson also stopped by Muskogee Country Club, where

he played his high school golf, winning the Class 2A state championship in 1960, '61 and '62. His older brother, Ben, a great player in his own right, was the head professional there when Dickson began to play there.

"I remember the day he first played with us," Norman said. "It was a cold November afternoon and his brother asked if Bob could join us. We all shot about 40 and he shot 35. As he left for the parking lot, we all agreed we were moving down in the pecking order, because he was the No. 1 pecker by far.

"We never could beat him. I could have gone to Harvard Law School if he hadn't kept taking my money."

Dickson played a round of golf with Dills and some other old friends on his recent trip. He shot 69 on his first visit since Tripp Davis redid the greens during an extensive renovation.

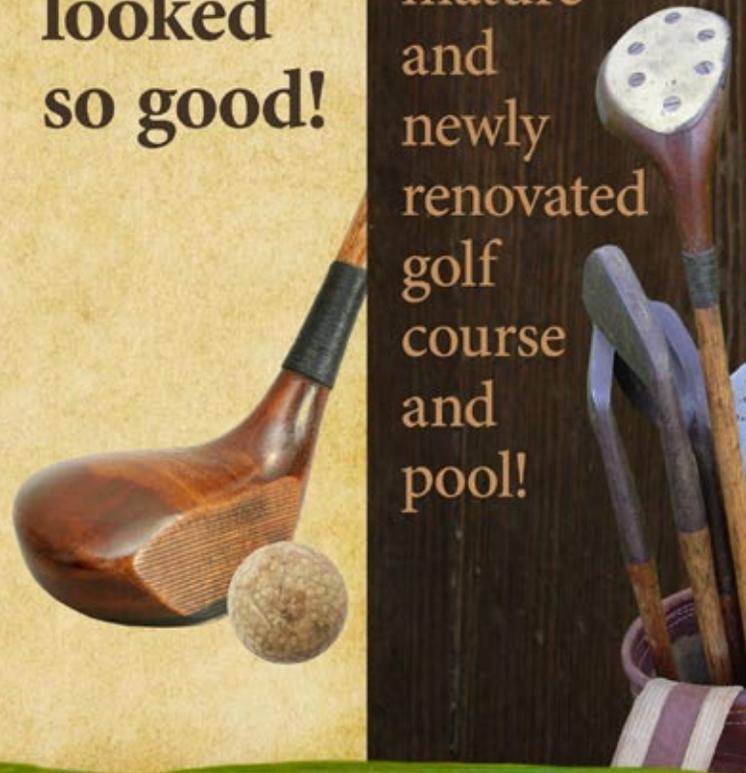


*The U.S. Amateur and British Amateur trophies were his in 1967, the last man to win both in the same year.*



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# OKLAHOMA GOLF HALL OF FAME

"His nickname was Greaser, given him with affection by Mike," Dills said. "It was meant that he always had greasy luck. But when you hit the ball better than everyone else and never miss a green or fairway, you don't need much luck."

After his three state titles at Muskogee, he was off to Oklahoma State to play for legendary coach Labron Harris Sr., where he was a two-time All-American from 1964-66. He won the Oklahoma State Amateur Championship in 1965, but even before that he was given a rare opportunity that inspired him to greater heights.

In May 1965, a glamorous foursome was put together at Southern Hills to help kick off what later became the Fore Tulsa charity event. Included were Charlie Coe, Jack Nicklaus (subbing for Arnold Palmer), Gary Player and Dickson, who was then the Big Eight champion. It was the only round Dickson and fellow inductee Coe ever played together.

"I had not even won the state amateur yet, and they chose me to play with these three champions of golf," Dickson said. "They couldn't have been nicer to me."

The following year Dickson repeated as state amateur champion and added the Oklahoma Open as well, becoming the first and only man to win the two top OGA titles in the same year.

That wasn't to be the last of Dickson's rare doubles. In 1967, he broke through nationally by winning the British Amateur and the U.S. Amateur, the only man to accomplish that feat since Lawson Little in 1935.

It almost didn't happen. Dickson had joined the National Guard in 1967 and put off active duty until after playing for the U.S. team in the Walker Cup. That earned his British Amateur

invite, which he won. He then began eight weeks of basic training and was fortunate

to be given leave at the last minute to compete in the U.S. Amateur at The Broadmoor. Dickson had someone looking out for him on that occasion.

"A U.S. Senator made a call to a commanding general, who, as it turned out, was married to a lady from Rochester, New York, whose father had planted 10,000 trees at Oak Hill," Dickson said. "So I got two weeks off and got to go to play in the Amateur. The only thing I was expecting was that I would get to wear civvies for a few weeks. I had not exactly been beating balls all

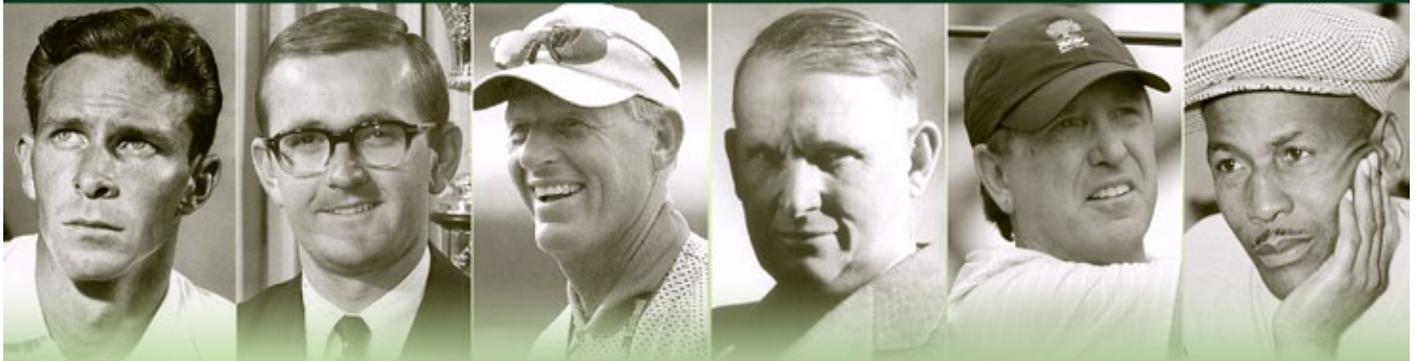


Dickson at the 1967 British Amateur

summer."

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as preparation, Dickson brought home the prestigious title, beating Vinny Giles by a single shot.

It was a crown he should have worn in 1965 at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa.

It was there, in the second round, that Dickson found to his horror that he had an extra club in his bag, a sand iron he had never before seen. It was put there inadvertently by a bag-room attendant, but Dickson alerted USGA rules officials and was assessed a four-shot penalty. He still nearly won the event, but Bob Murphy passed him on the 17th and 18th holes of the final round.

Dickson did cement his reputation in that tournament as a man of integrity and class. He was given the Bob Jones Award for sportsmanship the following year by the USGA.

"That's the best example of what kind of man Bob Dickson is," Norman said. "He never even thought about not calling that penalty on himself."

The country's top amateur turned professional in 1968 and won the Haig Open Invitational his first year out. After 10 years of grinding on the PGA Tour, however, he accepted an offer from Commissioner Deane Beman to join the PGA Tour and help sell and market the new Tournament Players Club and Tournament Players Championship.

There were still two more major chapters of Dickson's career to write before retirement. In 1990, he was tasked with finding 30 title sponsors to launch what was then the Ben Hogan Tour, now



*Bob and Carolyn Dickson*

about going to Q School." She gulped and said, "Go for it."

Well, he earned his card on the Senior Tour and spent eight successful and enjoyable years, including one victory, on what Lee Trevino once called "one of life's great mulligans."

No one deserved it more.



*Bob Dickson, 10, with Oklahoma State Amateur trophy won by older brother, Ben; later won two consecutive years by Bob.*

the Web.com Tour. He ran and strengthened that tour for four years, spending entire summers on the road with Carolyn at his side as a scoreboard calligrapher. His golf game, however, was rusting away.

Then, late in 1993, he surprised himself by shooting a 67 in a casual round with friends. After a few more solid efforts, he called Carolyn in the middle of the night and said

"Honey, I'm thinking

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