

Zach's event adds to Elmcrest's rich tradition

Written by Bob Brooks

Thursday, 28 July 2011 21:13 - Last Updated Thursday, 28 July 2011 21:21



This coming Monday, Zach Johnson and friends are putting on the biggest pro-am this area has ever seen.

A Masters champion (Johnson), a British Open champion (Stewart Cink), next year's coach of the Ryder Cup team (Davis Love III) and a soon-to-be NFL Hall of Famer (Kurt Warner) among others are going to be at Elmcrest County Club for Johnson's first Kids On Course fundraiser.

I thought I might spend a few paragraphs on my experiences at Elmcrest. With that, we go back to the 1930s and early '40s when the course was called Kenmore. It was a public course, owned by a gentleman from Ottumwa. Many of the greens that were put in during the 1930s are still of championship quality today.

The course consisted of a little shack by the first tee, manned by the gentleman pro golfer named Charlie Burkart. He gave golf lessons, took green fees and sold hot dogs. Later on in this area, he became one of the most beloved golf pros this city has ever known.

The maintenance of the golf course was strictly on a cash basis, meaning not much was done. In fact, at this time of year, you could easily lose your white golf ball in the middle of the fairway, because the dandelions had gone to seed. But for a kid who had a sawed-off 2-iron and a couple of beat-up balls given to him by the pro, it was golf as good as it gets.

After World War II, a group of businessmen that included my father, Ira Brooks, thought that another private golf course was needed in Cedar Rapids. So they formed a group that leased the grounds and Elmcrest was born.

They built a clubhouse and started to upgrade the golf course. And a lot of great Cedar Rapids citizens became members. Yes, it had its struggles, but the group kept moving forward and developed Elmcrest into a first-class facility.

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Yes, these champion golfers who will trod the sod Monday will enhance the history of Elmcrest. But they will not have been the first big names to have played there.

Two that come to mind were Gene Sarazen and Ken Venturi. Plus, I had the opportunity to cover the famous golf match of Ann Casey Johnstone of Mason City against Corky Major Nydle for the state women's championship that was 36 holes of match play, with Johnstone the winner.

So Elmcrest does have a history that will be enhanced with the attendance of this day's greatest golfers for a wonderful foundation, enhanced by a major leaguer in Zach Johnson.