

Golf honors come Smith's way

By M.B.DILLON

Golfer Ben Smith of Birmingham enjoys quoting his wife, Ann, who says, "I used to golf until I got engaged, then one of us had to give it up."

The partner who didn't give it up continued on a journey, stopping by the church hall on his way to another hall — the Michigan Amateur Sports Hall of Fame.

If listed, Smith's accomplishments in golf probably could span a par-5. The highlights include several championships won at the Detroit Golf Club, the Golf Association of Michigan title in 1948, 1949 and 1951, the State Amateur title in 1950, and three State Pro-Am championships.

"It's hypothetical if I said I wasn't proud of my achievements," said Smith. "Being inducted was a surprise, and I'm very gratified."

HOW AND WHEN did Smith get a grip on golf?

"When I was 15 and growing up in Florida," he said. "A bunch of junior high school kids were going out to hit a few and invited me along."

"That's all I needed. I tried it once and fell in love. I've played constantly ever since."

"It cost us only about 25 cents to play at Ft. Meyers Country Club. Anything that cheap in the mid 30s was worth looking at."

Before long, Smith's swing was something worth looking at.

"I guess I had a natural swing," said the current chairman and owner of Pile Electric Supply Co. of Detroit.

"I never took lessons, but the local pro used to help us kids. It wasn't anything organized. I just spent all my time practicing."

Soon Smith was spending his time winning championships. He won the Florida State High School championship in 1938 and 1939 and graduated to the University of Michigan golf team.

AS CAPTAIN in 1943, Smith powered the squad to the Big Ten title and won the individual championship as well — accomplishments that earned him the office of president of the National Inter-Collegiate Golf Association.

Smith later qualified for the National Amateur three times, reaching the fourth round in 1949 and the fifth round in 1950.

He qualified for the State Amateur nine times and has a record of 105. "My handicap has averaged five,"



BEN SMITH

said Smith, "and I've been as low as scratch."

Smith, the only member of the Detroit Golf Club to hold the office of president and to win the club championship in the same year, 1965, says his life is built around golf.

"Our closest friends play golf," said Smith. "It's a great way to keep good friendships going. I've played for years with Dr. Frederick Adams, the pediatrician who delivered our sons — Sandy (28), Robert (23) and David (20)."

"He and I are both governors of the Golf Association of Michigan and have had the privilege of playing together in the GAM father-and-son championships."

"GOLF MAKES SOME people up-tight, but it's relaxing for me. You're out in the country — in the sunshine and rain — away from the telephone and your normal cares."

Has he ever experienced a slump?

"Not really," said Smith, who serves as a director of the Boy's Club of Metropolitan Detroit and is a member of the Detroit Rotary Club. "There was a period of about 12 years ago when I didn't play much competitively. I was building my business."

"And now, during the fall, my Saturdays are spent in Ann Arbor. I'm still a U-M fan."

For years Smith has traveled to Pinehurst, N.C. to get in some winter golf.

I enjoy playing down there," he said, "but I'm limiting the competition to seniors' tournaments."

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