

Gettin' ready

Here's a golfer's guideline to prepare for O&E outing

By C.J. Rieak
staff writer

GOLF IS NOT, and never will be, an easy game to master.

That's the first lesson I learned upon volunteering for this assignment, which is to get my game together enough to play in the Observer & Eccentric's Men's Golf Tournament Oct. 1-2.

Aiding me in this venture (maybe it would be better to call it an AD-venture) is Gary Whitener, the golf pro for both Livonia's courses, Idyl Wild and Whispering Willows. Both the men's and women's tournaments will be played at Whispering Willows. The women's tourney is slated for Aug. 24. Mind you, winning the tournament is not my objective. Finishing is. Carding a respectable score in third flight would be an attractive bonus.

Since I am a novice to the golfing game, one might ask why I am writing this three-part series. The answer is simple.

THE INTENTION is to help golfers properly prepare, both physically and mentally, for the upcoming O&E tournaments. Who better to coach you on what you need to do to play well than Whitener, the pro at the course the tournament will be played on?

And by instructing a relative beginner, no part of the game will be overlooked. Driving, iron play, putting, trouble shots — all this and a lot more will be scrutinized.

With me, Whitener's task is an arduous one: as I told him, "I'm like clay in your hands. Mold me into a Jack Nicklaus."

But the tips Gary passes on to me, I'll relate during this series. By the finish of the men's tournament in October, we'll all be able to take into account how much our tournament game has improved.

NOW TO TASK. "Gotta start somewhere," as Whitener put it, so our first lesson concerned basics: proper grip and swing. But, beyond that, it also dealt with how to prepare for tourney play off the golf course.

Which is more important than many assume. "The better the player, the more time he'll spend on the driving range," Whitener said.

The reason even the best players hit the range often, according to Whitener, is "as good as you hit one shot, the next one is never automatic."

"In golf, timing is everything. It's the name of the game."

Developing consistency is a must to any golfer preparing for a tournament. And consistency comes from practicing the golf swing until it's natural.

As Whitener told me, "Remember: you don't hit golf balls. You make golf swings."

WITH THAT, he mentioned a half-dozen things to remember when stepping up to the ball:

- **Grip** — The palm of the bottom hand and the back of the upper hand should face the target.
- **Placing of feet** — "Pros still do this, only they do it so fast you don't notice," Whitener said. What they do is step up to the ball with feet together, then step five or six inches forward with the front foot and five or six inches backward with the back foot. That ensures the ball is centered in the middle of your body.

- **Extension** — A cardinal rule of golf — the club should be an extension of your arm.
- **Rhythm and balance** — This is all-important in developing consistency. An easy way to remember how far to stand from the ball is that you should be able to stand up straight and touch the ball with your club. Your weight

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Getting a grip on the game: O&E sportswriter C.J. Rieak gets some instruction on a few of golf's finer points from Gary Whitener, pro at Livonia's two public courses.

Rieak and Whitener will combine on a three-part series on preparing for the O&E tournaments.

Third is a charm for tennis ace T. Harret

For the last three years, Tom Harret and George Grisdale have squared off in the finals of the men's 35-and-over singles division of Farmington's Founders Festival Tennis Tournament.

Each time Harret has emerged victorious.

Harret beat Grisdale a week ago Sunday in this year's finals 6-3 and 6-2. The match was a lot closer than the score would indicate.

"I was very surprised the scores were that one-sided. George played very well," said Harret, who is a sergeant with the Wayne County Sheriff's Department.

"THE GAMES were all hard-fought. There was never a time when I felt I could let up on him. If I did, he would have beaten me," Harret said.

Harret has belonged to nearly every racquet club in the area. Currently, he plays out of Courthouse Racquet Club in West Bloomfield. He has played against Grisdale on numerous occasions the past six years.

"I'd say we are getting pretty familiar with each other," Harret said. Harret has never lost a match to Grisdale.

In the men's 19-and-over singles, Craig Simmons ousted Rick Podolin, 6-0, 6-4.

In the men's doubles, Simmons and his partner Jim Diroff beat Randy Miller and Nick Lessina, 6-2, 6-2.

The Founders Festival Tennis Tournament, hampered by a lack of participation, may become an open tournament next year, according to Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Director David Justus. Justus said he is only considering that possibility. The tourney has always been closed to residents and workers of Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Fast-pitch is dead — Long live The King!

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

THE KING IS big business.

Forget, for a moment, his 6,078-970-293 won-loss-tie record. Forget about his amazing 112,356 strikeouts in 7,541 games. Forget about his 127 perfect games, his 801 no-hitters and his 1,716 shutouts.

Just flat-out forget that The King is probably the finest hurler the game of fast-pitch softball has ever known. That fact has become a little boring for Eddie "The King" Feigner.

The King and his merry band of three, His Court, are no longer just the finest and most entertaining four-man softball team around. They are now a business enterprise and a commercial vehicle for the Miller Brewing Co., Puma Shoes and others.

THE DODGE VAN that will transport the King and His Court from town to town throughout its 38th world tour, the same van that brought the team to Southfield last Sunday to take on a celebrity All-Star team coached by Tom "Count Scary" Ryan, was donated by Miller.

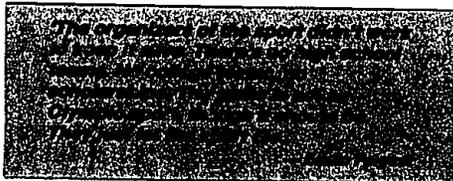
You can order Eddie Feigner autographed softball gloves, designed by The King himself, for just \$54.19.

There are The King and His Court "Official Souvenir Programs" on sale, as well as caps, T-shirts and other paraphernalia. Inside the program are various products endorsed by The King. For example, Feigner in one ad says he's used Harwood softballs for 41 years, "not because it was specially made for him, but because it was the best." An ad on the adjacent page proclaims that The King uses deBeer softballs.

A Puma ad brags that The King and His Court use Puma running and spiked shoes.

A small article tells of Feigner's involvement with International Enzymes Inc., a company that manufactures organic products containing enzymes for foreign and domestic use. (?)

YES, THE KING and His Court still travel around the world putting on entertaining, almost magical, softball demonstrations, like they did for the 1,000-plus people who showed up Sunday at the Southfield Civic Center. But, one gets the feeling the show itself was secondary.



The real reason The King was there, judging from a post-game interview with Feigner, was to promote the seventh edition of his book, "What Little I Know About Pitching and Hitting," and a video cassette tape entitled, "How to Pitch."

Feigner didn't want to talk about his pitching accomplishments. "That's old stuff," he said. He preferred to talk about Edward King Enterprises Inc., 1550 Midland Drive, Reno, Nev. 89509. That's the company putting out Feigner's book and video cassette.

It wasn't always that way. In earlier years, Feigner and His Court would tromp from town to town to make a little money, get a decent meal, and, most importantly, promote fast-pitch softball.

The King and His Court was born from a dare in 1946. After his nine-man team whipped a local opponent in Pendleton, Ore., Feigner's pitching skill was challenged.

IT WAS THEN The King announced, "I will challenge you to a game and use only three other players: a catcher, a shortstop and a first baseman." Some 400 people showed up for the first four-man vs. nine-man game. Feigner pitched a perfect game, struck out 19 and won 7-0. The King and His Court was born.

Since that time, The King and His Court have played in 3,743 cities worldwide, including cities in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Panama, Thailand, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

More than three million miles have been logged by the team and more than 14 million people have watched them play.

The King puts on one heck of a show.

He pitches behind his back. He pitches from second base. He pitches blindfolded. His pitches were once clocked at 116 miles per hour. In short, he's amazing.

The King, with a lot of help from Count Scary and six members of the Birmingham Eagles women's softball team, thrilled a big crowd at the Civic Center last Sunday.

MORE THAN 1,000 people braved the rainy weather to attend the game sponsored by the Birmingham and Southfield Optimists Clubs. Jack Lackner, chairman of the event, said Feigner hopes to be back again next year.

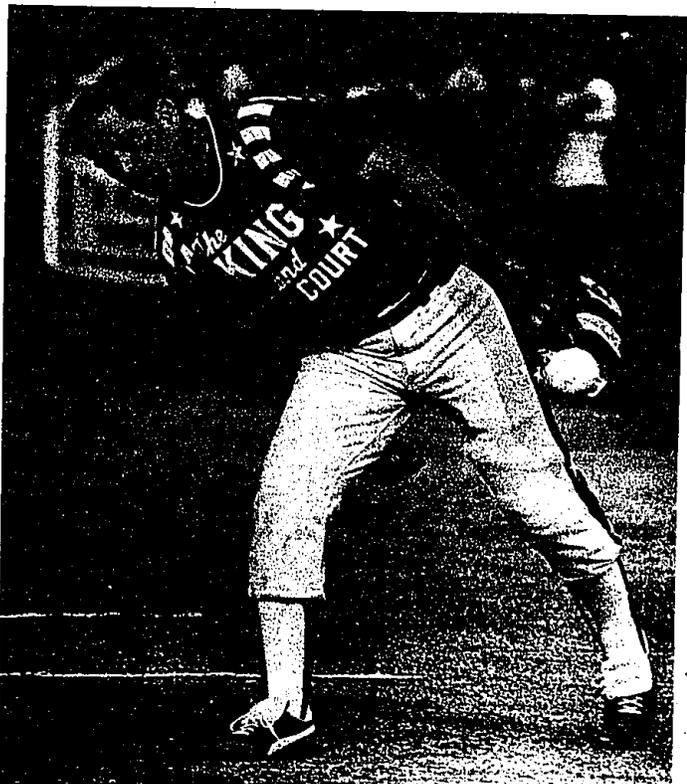
"I haven't thrown hard for years," said Feigner after his performance Sunday. "Not like I once could. But, I still throw harder than anyone else."

When asked how many more years he could continue to play, The King said, "Why quit? I could go for another 10 to 15 years at least." But, the King's sport has died. Fast-pitch softball is virtually extinct in America. The games, dominated by pitching, are low-scoring and lack fan appeal. Feigner has a different opinion as to why the sport died.

"The organizers of the sport didn't work to keep it alive. There's no high school teams. No college teams, no scholarships. The game is not an Olympic sport, though it should be. They just let the sport die," he said.

Perhaps that's why The King and His Court has evolved into a commercial enterprise instead of a promotion vehicle for the sport of fast-pitch softball.

Nevertheless, Eddie Feigner, Dave Barnett, Eddie J.R. Feigner and Gary West — The King and His Court — are still good for a few laughs and a darn good game of fast-pitch.



Eddie "The King" Feigner brought his famous four-man, fast-pitch softball act into Southfield last week in the annual Birmingham and South-

field Optimists Clubs benefit game. The King and His Court dazzled a team of All-Stars coached by Tom "Count Scary" Ryan.