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CRAIG HARMON

*Legendary golfer is celebrating 40 years
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Craig Harmon hitting a ball at Oak Hill Country Club in Pittsford. He's been with the club for 40 years already.

Reaching the Pinnacle

Craig Harmon has created long-lasting legacy at Oak Hill

By Amy Cavalier

Craig Harmon, 65, has proudly followed in his father Claude Harmon Sr.'s footsteps as a dedicated PGA professional and premiere instructor.

This year, he celebrates 40 years as head pro at the world-famous Oak Hill Country Club in Pittsford.

Craig may have had his competition cut out for him growing up among masters in golf. The Harmon name is synonymous with the sport. Craig's father Claude Harmon Sr. won the 1948 Masters and mentored many of golf's greats, such as Jack Burke Jr. who won the 1956 Masters and PGA Championship, Dick Mayer who won the 1954 U.S. Open, and 1965 PGA Champion Dave Marr.

Craig's brothers Butch, Billy and the late Dick Harmon are top 50 teachers in the game, and Butch was Tiger Woods' swing coach from back when he was a teenager up until a few years ago. Not to be outdone, Craig has tallied up his own list of impressive accomplishments, setting himself among the top golf professionals in the country.

Take a look at these stats

Craig was hired as head professional at Oak Hill Country Club in Pittsford in 1972 at the age of 25. As the 2004 PGA Golf Professional of the Year, he and his father are the only father-son duo ever to be inducted into the Hall of Fame, according to "Sunrise to Sunset: A PGA Professional's Life," a recent

"I don't think I do anything differently now than I did at age 25 ... age hasn't changed a thing yet."

Craig Harmon

special by CBS Sports marking the association's 95-year anniversary.

The 65-year-old scratch golfer is a five-time Western New York PGA Teacher of the Year. With 40 years under his belt as head professional at one of the most storied golf courses in the country, and having taught golfers like 1988 PGA Champion Jeff Sluman, Craig is a legend in his own right.

"I've said this for years, that if you took my abilities, Butch's abilities and Dick's abilities and added them all up, they still wouldn't add up to Craig's," said his brother Bill.

For Craig, life isn't about the best score, or what other people think of you. Craig's definition of success is setting high standards for himself and meeting those standards.

"He's not a chest beater," said Bill. "He's embarrassed by awards. He's just a very decent, unassuming person that derives his own pleasure from working hard. He never did these things to be recognized or get awards, but he's received the highest

honors in the PGA."

Craig is so humble, he didn't even tell his brothers that he was being inducted into the PGA Hall of Fame in 2004. When Craig's brother Dick asked him why he didn't share the news, Craig said he was embarrassed "because dad's not in the Hall of Fame and he's better than all of us put together."

Claude Harmon Sr. was inducted into the PGA Hall of Fame posthumously in 2009. A youthful prodigy, Harmon Sr. qualified for the 1931 U.S. Amateur at the age of 15. Craig's father spent summers working as the head professional at Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck, N.Y. from 1945 to 1977, and winters at Seminole Golf Club in Palm Beach, Florida from 1945 to 1957. He also worked at Thunderbird Country Club in Palm Springs, Calif. from 1959 to 1977.

Claude was the last PGA club professional to claim a major championship, winning the Masters in 1948, and he was a three-time semi-finalist in the PGA Championship. As the host professional at Winged Foot for the 1959 U.S. Open, Claude finished third, a feat no other PGA professional can boast.

From the time he was a teen, Craig knew he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps as a club pro rather than becoming a touring pro.

"I liked my dad's life," said Craig. "He always seemed happy taking

care of people. We got to know the people at the various clubs. They were all wonderful people he worked around. I just saw this great working environment, saw one of the best in the business do his craft, and I wanted to emulate it."

Greg Rule, general manager at Oak Hill, said the Harmon family's heritage in golf is special, but Craig is one-of-a-kind in his own right.

"I think the thing that makes Craig such a special guy is every day he comes into work he's got the same enthusiasm that I believe he had when he first came here in 1972," he said.

It has nothing to do with being a good golf professional, Craig said.

"It's about being good in life; how you treat people, how you handle

people and how you love what you're doing," he said.

The call that changed his life

After graduating from high school in Palm Springs, Calif., Craig attended College of the Desert and San Jose State before landing his first job as an assistant professional at Lakeside Golf Club of North Hollywood from 1969 to 1971. In the winter of 1971, Craig was working as an assistant under his father at Thunderbird.

Across the country, back in Rochester, Oak Hill Country Club was looking for someone to fill head professional Jack Lumpkin's shoes. Claude had originally recommended Lumpkin for the position, so when they began looking a new head pro,

Oak Hill turned to him once again. He suggested his son Craig for the job. Craig said he thought he had a good shot at landing it.

"I was unusually confident and I shouldn't have been," he said. "It never entered my mind that I couldn't do the job. I always felt I was qualified to do the job. Whether I was or not is another story."

Bill Thaney, a member of Oak Hill since 1946, was on the five-man selection committee. Thaney first met Craig when the two played against one another in the Anderson Memorial Tournament at Winged Foot.

"Another fellow and I from Oak Hill played against two young men, 17 and 15-years-old at the time," said Thaney of Craig and his younger brother Dick. "I'm sorry to say they were victorious. When we finished, I shook the hand of a gentleman and nothing has ever changed my mind about him."

Years later, when Oak Hill began the search for a new head professional, they brought in six candidates, the youngest of which was Craig.

"I somehow swayed them at age 25 that I could do the job," he said.

During the interview, the selection committee asked Craig if a position opened up at Winged Foot five or six years down the line, would he leave to go follow in his father's footsteps?

"I told them that wouldn't happen," Craig recalls. "If I'm lucky enough to be hired as the head professional at Oak Hill, I'll make Oak Hill my Winged Foot."

Craig felt confident that he'd nailed the interview, but it was 10 days before Joe King, president of Oak Hill, and Bill Thaney, chairman of the search committee, called Craig to offer him the job.

"I knew then I had the job because it didn't take two of them to tell me I didn't have the job," he said.

Although the two men have played golf many times since, Thaney said he's never been able to beat Craig. Thaney said Craig has an incredible personality, is a superb teacher and is truly a man of his word.

"If I were chairman of the selection committee and had to go out and find



Craig Harmon with Ben Hogan, one of the top four golfers of all time, taken in mid-1970. The photos is also signed by Ben Hogan.

a head pro, I'd do it all over again with the same man," said Thaney. "He is the best representative a golf club could have."

Despite the fact that he was only 25 and had never held the position of head pro, Craig said he felt prepared to take the job for one of the most prestigious clubs in the country.

"I feel like I was fully trained to do the job, and if I didn't know how to do something, I'd work hard enough to learn how to do it," he said. "I think that's the key."

Where legends are born

Oak Hill was incorporated in 1901, nine holes on 85 acres along the Genesee River, and 137 members. Members purchased the club in 1905 and the course subsequently expanded, adding nine holes and a new clubhouse. In 1921, the University of Rochester proposed a land swap to the members for a 355-acre plot of farmland in the town of Pittsford. The deal included \$360,000 and was sealed in April 1924. Oak Hill boasts two 18-hole courses designed by Donald Ross. Born in Dornoch, Scotland in 1872, Ross designed more than 400 U.S. courses.

Oak Hill gained national recognition when the USGA chose the course as the site of the 1949 U.S. Amateur and the tournaments have been coming ever since. The course is the only club in the world to lay claim to having hosted the PGA Championship, Ryder Cup, U.S. Open, U.S. Amateur, U.S. Senior Open and the Senior PGA Championship, according to Sal Maiorana, a sports writer for the Democrat and Chronicle and author of "Through the Green."

As head professional, Craig has helped organize thousands of club tournaments, and professional tournaments such as the 2003 PGA Championship which drew in the top 100 players in the world. The country club has about 920 members and is preparing to host the 2013 PGA Championships, played twice before at Oak Hill in 1980 and 2003.

In addition to running and owning the pro shop, Craig and his staff of four assistant professionals run

Craig Harmon's scorecard:

His game:

- Coach of 1988 PGA Champ Jeff Sluman
- 2004 PGA Golf Professional of the Year
- 35th inductee into Oak Hill's Hill of Fame in 2003
- Five-time Western New York PGA Teacher of the Year (1986, '91, '95 and 2002, '10)
- 1983 Western New York PGA Golf Professional of the Year
- GOLF Magazine Top 100 Instructor
- Voted 24th best teacher in America by Golf Digest

His family:

- Harmon lives in Rochester with his wife Sandy. They have four children, John, Liz, Joe and Ben, ranging in ages from 23 to 37, and two grandsons, James and Chris.
- His father, world-famous instructor and head professional Claude Harmon Sr., died in 1989.
- His brother Dick passed away about five years ago. His brothers Butch and Bill remain heavily involved in the game.

the active club tournament program, instructional programs, outdoor golf operations including the driving range, golf carts, the bag storage area, and he's in charge of merchandising and tournament operation. Oak Hill runs about 80 tournaments annually for the membership.

Neil Reidy, 30, worked under Craig as an assistant at MacArther Golf Club in Hobe Sound, Fla., from 2008-2010 where Craig serves as director of instruction from January through March.

"Craig Harmon is the best professional in this area, if not as far as I'm concerned the best professional there is," he said. "To have the opportunity to learn my profession from him is invaluable to say the

least."

Recently, Reidy landed the job of director of instruction at Cobblestone Creek in Victor, an accomplishment he accredits to Craig's teaching.

"When I interviewed for the job at Cobblestone, there wasn't anything they could ask me about that I hadn't already gotten experience in working for Craig," said Reidy. "The great thing about working for Craig is you take on all the responsibilities of a head professional as an assistant."

Whether he's working with professionals or an amateur golfer with a 40 handicap, Reidy said, Craig shows the same amount of enthusiasm and excitement over the player's swing.

"Craig loves to get his hands on



Craig Harmon, left, with his brother Bill, Jay Haas (a touring pro), and friend Jerry Edwards taken in the 1980's.

beginners and he just loves to see people improve," he said. "That's a pretty awesome quality because it's not true of all instructors."

From May through the end of October, Craig estimates he works 65 hours a week.

"I wouldn't know what a 9 to 5 is," he said. "I love it. I'm in control of my own hours."

He doesn't get much time to play golf for leisure. During the summer, he might get to hit the links once a week. Over the winter in Florida, he teaches four to six hours a day, so he's able to play more and join his wife Sandy for a game here and there.

There are no negatives to his job, Craig said.

"If there were a negative, I'd turn it into a positive," he said. "I don't deal in negatives."

Never stop learning

A large part of Craig's job as head professional is teaching and helping members improve their game. He

served as co-chairman of the PGA Teaching and Coaching Summit in 1994 and as chairman in 1996. His most famous pupil is Sluman. The Greece native won the 1988 PGA championship under Craig's tutelage. An up-and-coming junior golfer with the 1977 State Amateur title to his name, Sluman sought out Craig when he was about 19 years old.

"In golf, the Harmon name, it doesn't get any better than that name," said Sluman. "I knew if I could get a Harmon to take a look at my golf swing, it was going to help me out."

Sluman said Craig is a "pro's pro," which is one of the highest compliments you can give anybody in the business. Being a pro on tour is not even in the same league as what Craig has done at Oak Hill every day for the past 40 years, Sluman said. His dedication to ensuring that members and their families have a great day on the golf course is admirable, said Sluman, and Craig's success is apparent in the way he is so revered

and loved by the membership.

Now 53 years old, Sluman is on the Championship Tour.

"I've done things that I never thought I'd be able to do, gone to places, traveled and met people a local kid from Greece, New York would never dream about," he said. "It's just been a terrific experience so far. It takes a lot of effort, a lot of work, a lot of skill and a little luck to last as long as I have and play as competitively as I have all these years. That once again goes back to the solid fundamentals that Craig's drilled into me."

Craig and Jeff get to play golf together in Florida. Sluman said the same three to four simple fundamentals that Craig taught him at the age of 19 have seen him through the past 30 years.

"I think I gave Jeff some sound fundamentals on his golf swing that have never changed, so when he starts playing poorly, he goes back to those fundamentals," said Craig. "I've given him the gift of being able to figure

himself out, which is a gift for him because they're out there alone all the time. There's no one that can go out on the course during a tournament. You have to figure it out on your own."

The key to life is to never stop learning. Craig said his father would tell him "It's what you learn after you know it all that counts."

"My whole life has been about educating myself," he said. "If you have someone who isn't getting it, I would blame myself. I might call someone to get some advice or study a little bit more, but it's so unusual for me not to know what to do after all these years. It's so unusual when someone stumps me; I can't even remember the last time that it happened."

As far as a golf professional goes, it's about how you stimulate golf at your club, he said.

"If I can stimulate golf, then we're very successful; if I can't, we go down the tubes, but that's how it is in life," he said. "It's about treating people in life well. It's really how you handle your life. I was raised that way. It was more about being good in life than being a good pro."

Age hasn't changed a thing

"I don't think I do anything differently now than I did at age 25," Craig said. "I'm wiser from trial and error, making mistakes, and improving on those, but age hasn't changed a thing yet."

From the day Craig fell in love with golf at the age of 10, his passion has never wavered one bit, Bill said.

"He's one of the only people I know that's exactly the same person he was before he became successful," Bill said.

Craig said it never occurred to him that he'd be at Oak Hill all these decades.

"Every year I have to be more creative, I've been doing this for so long," he said. "If you can come to work stimulated everyday, everything flows from that."

If he had to pick one area where he's had the biggest impact at Oak Hill, he said, it's the way he's been able to stimulate members—the men,



Harmon at the Oak Hill Country Club pro shop, when he was named PGA Head Professional of the Year in 2004.

women and children of different generations—to enjoy golf.

"I think people thoroughly enjoy coming out here, thoroughly enjoy the treatment we give them, thoroughly enjoy the golf programs we develop to help them get better, and just thoroughly enjoy the game," he said.

Craig isn't hesitant to seek out other professionals for opinions, for advice and even to tweak his own swing.

"As you get older you don't hit as far, and so having been at this place for 40 years you notice it very quickly because 10 years ago you'd shoot much farther than you do now," he said. "It's a stark reminder that you're getting older and you're not shooting

as long as you used to be. That's what you notice most."

But you don't have to stop playing just because you're getting older. There are other ways to shoot a good golf score. Craig said he's given a lesson to Errie Ball, a golfer who played in the first Masters in 1934. Ball still plays golf and gives lessons a few times a week in Florida.

"He's one of the coolest guys I've ever met in my life, he said. "He signed up to take lessons from me because he was ticked off that he wasn't hitting as well as he used to at 97. As long as you're healthy, you can go forever in golf. There aren't too many sports you can say that of, if any."