



Jon Wilkerson's approach to golf is simple. It's a whole lot of John Daly and a dash of Bryson DeChambeau thrown in. Add a whippy, back-breaking backswing for good measure. The result: when Jon hits the ball, it goes a long way. "Swing hard just in case you catch it," says Jon. "That's pretty much my mantra."

While Jon has his share of eagles on No. 18 at Redhawk, it's what he does on the green that amazes many. The man does not miss putts within 10 feet. He is not the kind of guy I'd want to be opposing in match play.

Golf came relatively late for Jon. When he was 18 or so he and his buddies used to head out to the driving range to whack balls. Work, it seems, always came first. Jon started working with his father in the family tree removal and transplant business in Northern California. At age 16 Jon was no stranger to a pick axe, shovel and hard work. The shovel eventually gave way to a backhoe, truck with a crane, and a 40 foot semi-trailer as business picked up. After a short stint as a crane operator in a steel mill, Jon started driving non-union or gypos trucks. There were no benefits but the job required some creative writing skills. The trucks were often overweight and the drivers rarely got enough sleep so each truck had two sets of log books – the real one and the one they showed the highway patrol. Jon enjoyed life on the road and the freedom that it represented but he was getting beaten up by the downside of non-union trucking. He eventually got a driving job with Lucky's supermarkets, which was acquired by Albertson's. He retired from the chain with a full union pension in 2015 but not before winning two truck rodeos with his proficient truck driving skills.

If life on the road was his calling, music was his passion. He played bass and rhythm guitar on weekends in his teens as part of a casual band. But to get into the venues Jon needed to be 21. "For a while I was Ralph Klein," he said referring to his fake ID. In fact, it was while he was sitting in with a group called

Jerry and the Cave Dwellers that Jon met his wife, Brigitte. Good thing she wasn't picky about the company Jon kept because his fellow band mates really "looked like cave dwellers," he said.

Jon still plays to crowds. But now they are virtual. Google Jon Thomas (his stage name) Sings and you'll find some videos of Jon playing some country tunes and his all-time favorites:" Desperado" and "Truck Drivin' Man." His distinctive baritone voice is a dead ringer for Johnny Cash.

Guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree; Jon's father was in Vaudeville during the 1930s, playing everything from Peoria to the Cotton Club in Harlem.

To keep his back in one piece after swinging so hard at the little white ball, Jon stays in good shape. He's worked out at gyms for the past 35 years. When Covid closed the gyms, Jon could be seen walking the loop around his home on Hole No. 16. But it wasn't the same. "The gym was a lot more entertaining than walking around Redhawk," he said.