

RIVALS

The world is filled with rivalries. The ones we associate mostly involve sports. In this State none brings our blood to a boiling point faster and ranks higher than Ohio State vs Michigan football. Other sectors of the country argue. Alabama claims the Crimson Tide-War Eagles tilt is most bitter. Florida-Georgia, Oklahoma-Texas, Harvard-Yale, and USC-Notre Dame withstood the test of time on our list. Perhaps the biggest college football rivalry is Army vs Navy. The Packers-Bears clashes stand out in the NFL. They have been butting helmets since the 1920's, 100 years to be exact.

Other sports also developed harsh rivalries over the years. Baseball calls the Yankees-Red Sox the most intense games in the American League and the Cardinals-Cubs are the National League's biggest rivals. Duke against North Carolina tops the charts in college basketball followed closely by Kentucky's dislike for Louisville. From the days of Bill Russell, John Havlicek, Wilt Chamberlain, and Jerry West, pro basketball's Lakers vs Celtics have been the games to watch.

The rivalries in the individual sports only last until the players fade. It was so much fun watching Super Brat John McEnroe play Bjorn Borg in tennis. Billy Jean King battled Chris Everett on the women's side. WrestleMania brought us Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant. Golf also had their special rivals. There have been many stories about the Arnold Palmer-Jack Nicklaus competitions as the sports all-time best. Eventually, Tom Watson challenged Jack for golf's supremacy. When Phil Mickelson finally learned how to win golf tournaments, Tiger had a legitimate rival. Their times have all passed. This long introduction brings me to the crux of my article.

A long and bitter golf rivalry existed for 40 years in Geneva between Gary Glanzman and Vince Gatto. Bragging rights and excuses over the years stoked the flames under a pot of one-upmanship. They were good golfers, often the best in the field, and their never ending determination to prove it was evident. Their performance and attitude spurred Jack Berger to coin them as "Legends". This moniker sticks with them today.

They appreciated each other's game but they specialized their efforts differently. Powerful hands and wrists and a big body turn in his swing gave Vince a little extra distance. Gary hit more fairways and drained many more putts than most amateurs. You could count on Gary sinking a 25 footer every round. Ten feet and under were automatic. Gary's game from tee to green was something special to watch. From contact to landing, his ball shot through the air like a Roberto Clemente throw from right field to home plate. His Titleist hovered low to the ground with velocity enough to grab squirrels attention as it passed over head. This style left Vince shaking his head and calling these shots mishits but he knew this was Gary's game. To think Vince looked 15 yards behind to see Gary hit his second shot each hole is a myth. Although not as long as his rival, Gary's drives still covered a fur piece.

Opposite Gary's low flying rocket shots, Vince smoked soaring drives and approach shots that looked to intermingle among bald eagles. God could not create a tree high enough to grab his balls. Vince made his share of putts too. His putter head swung back and forth like the hips of a pole dancer but somehow the contact found the sweet spot. If Vince sank a 15 footer, Gary mumbled under his breath. If Gary slapped a low six iron to the green, Vince complained loud and clear. They exhibited a unique form of sportsmanship. That is why they are "Legends".

I remember the first time Chuck Rotter played in the same foursome with Vince and Gary. He staggered from the 18th green, white as a ghost shaking his noggin as if trying to clear his head. I think he believed he was in a real live Hitchcock adventure. His words reflected a shocked man who lost faith golf was a gentlemen's game. Lots of alcohol finally cleared his head.

Unfortunately, time caught up to the rivalry. Mr. Gary Glanzman's golf game has slipped little but not as much as Mr. Gatto. Grudge matches have lost some luster these days and are not quite as intense. "I am a chop" Vince readily admits. For 40 years and hundreds of matches, Gary and Vince played even. Today's matches see Gary give Vince several strokes to even the competition. The hunger to win continues but Gary's mumblings and Vince's criticism occur less frequently.

A new sizzle on the Geneva links burns between two young guns. The hottest rivalry at the Geneva Open these days belongs to Dagon Abdon and Nick Boggess. They are yearly among the best in the Geneva field and they make no bones about the importance to better the other. Each day starts a new challenge and new bragging rights. Dagon and Nick are the best of friends but their rivalry is real. Even playing in different foursomes, they keep apprised of one another's score. Their competitive juices does not end after the round. Anything and everything they do is fierce competition whether it be corn hole, lawn darts, croquet, foosball, or just plain drinking, they play it like it is a world championship.

Dagon and Nick are young. This rivalry is learning to be legendary. Someday in the future, after I am gone, the memories of "The Legends" will fade just as the reputations of Sammy Baugh and Byron Nelson are long forgotten. Dagon and Nick are real today. Perhaps the philosophy of the great Jack Benny (remember him?) is the best way to close. "Age is strictly a case of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter".