

Remembering My Half Dozen Aces in Golf—Before I Forget

by Joe Barile, March 26, 2014

October 1987 I was on the sixth hole at Emerald Hills Golf Course in Redwood City, CA. I had purchased a monthly \$25 ticket for unlimited weekday golf, and was playing as much as I could on the course, which was in very poor condition. The greens were hard but soft enough for gophers who seemed to own the place. It was the worst I had ever seen this course from when my dad and I used to play it in the 1960's. Then dad seemed more interested in filling his golf bags with walnuts which have long since disappeared. Anyway, I was playing with a young kid who I'd just met and whose name I do not remember. I had a pretty good round going, being a few over par. The sixth hole is one of the most holed-out holes in Northern California because it is downhill, short at 117 yards, and had a hill to the left off of which many a ball would carom off and onto the green. My shot was no such miss and was heading straight toward the hole, but I lost it in the shadows of the oak tree behind it. The young eyes next to me said it went into the hole, but I just said I lost it in the shadows. Nevertheless we both ran down the hill, and sure enough it was in the hole, my first ace ever at the age of 40. My only concern now was to finish up the round in a respectable manner, which I did, shooting one over par. When I reported to the starter in the club house, he seemed to be more impressed with my score than my ace. "Heck," he said, "making a hole-in-one is luck, but shooting one over par on this beat-up course is really something." I would continue to have 4-5 par rounds and one sub-par round there over the years, but my first ace was the most memorable. The kid didn't even want a soda.



ACE #2 happened 18 years later in September 2005 at Palo Alto Golf Course. It was hole number 8 which was a par 3 and 176 yards. I used a 5 iron and hit it straight, but was unable to see it land because of the distance. Nor did anyone else. I was playing with Dick Bagley and Lou Mautone and someone else I do not remember. As we went up to the hole I did not see the ball on the green. Finally, Dick said, "Look in the hole." It was the last place I expected to find the ball. I do not recall my final score of that round, and have not come across my score card. Afterwards, none of the guys wanted anything to drink, but we had a soda or something. Years before when I was in college I remember sitting in that same restaurant and seeing a guy hit a hole-in-one on the 18th, which was then a par 3. It was not a great shot, but rolled low and made a bee-line toward the hole.

ACE #3 came 3 years later on January 19, 2008. It was on the third hole, 122 yards, at Greenhorn Creek in Angels Camp, CA. I was playing with a Forest Meadows friend and neighbor Bob Jackson, Tom Besmer and Jerry Strol (now both deceased). I was very happy to finish out the round with an 83, one of my best scores there. Again, I cannot recall if we had drinks afterwards. (I wonder if the guys were concerned that everyone in the bar would jump on the bandwagon, and they didn't want to saddle me with that. My understanding though is that one buys drinks for his friends and not everyone. I could be wrong though. Anyway, the ball was hit well, landed mid-way on the green to the right and just fed into the hole. Again, I did not actually see it go in the hole, but the others did.

ACE #4 came in the same year 5 months later on May 12, 2008 on the 100 yard par 3, ninth hole at Emerald Hills. I had had cataract surgery 3 weeks before when I told Dr. Angela Kraft that, "Yes, my vision was interfering with my quality of life since I did not see the ball go in the hole on my previous

holes-in-one." Well, I decided to play my first round the morning before my afternoon checkup appointment with the doctor. I had a pretty good round going. Rich Williams had joined me, and we both saw the ball going toward the hole and disappear. I didn't believe it went in, but did see it disappear. Rich was as happy as I, for the ace and carding a par 27 for the day. That afternoon I told Dr. Kraft that the operation must have worked well because I aced the last hole some hours before.

ACE #5. Two years later in October of 2010 Rich Williams and I were playing San Jose Muni GC. It was on the seventh hole near the driving range, measuring 159 to the center, but was in the back and a slight wind was in our faces. I chose a 23 degree hybrid, playing for a 170 shot, and hit a straight and well lofted ball. We lost sight of it over the elevated trap, and I assumed it went through the green. Finally, I think Rich said to look in the hole. I did and found that little orb looking right back at me--it's such a weird feeling. Rich started telling our playing partners that this was the second hole-in-one he's seen me make in two years. I was happy to finish the round with an 84.

ACE#6 came in February of 2014 just after Rich and I had hit a jumbo bucket of balls at Mariner's Point in San Mateo, CA. I spent most of the time trying to hit into a 12-15 foot diameter net bowl at the 100 yard marker with my pitching wedge, and was really concentrating on lining up my feet to the left of the hole, taking a full backswing, and shifting my weight to the front foot on the follow-through. I was using directional rods for alignment and was hitting the ball well, as Rich's friend Pete said. We hadn't planned on playing, but my back was holding up, and so I agreed to play a round there.

The first hole on this course is always into the wind, and since the tees were up at 100 yards I figured on going with a nine iron over a raised bunker. The ball was hit high and true, but neither of us could see where it landed. I cleared the bunker and was glad I did not use an 8 iron which would have flown the green. Rich went to the left of the green with his, but had a good angle to chip on. I was looking for my ball, thinking it went over and into the rough, but then Rich and I looked at each other, and I knew that meant to look into the hole. This couldn't be, I thought, and was stunned once more to see that ball in the bottom of the hole. This was so spooky surreal. Rich kept his composure, made a nice chip and putt in for his par. My concern now, I told him, was not to screw up the rest of the round. All the practice at the range paid off, and I hit the next two greens and parred those holes. I was a little stronger than I thought, and though I struck the ball well, I got into some trouble on two holes and took double bogey 5's, almost getting hit twice by some clown behind us. I lucked out on the 8th hole and drained a 20 putt for a birdie. If I could par the last very short ninth hole (90 yards over water), I would be one over par. I hit the green hard with a bit of a draw and it rolled toward the pond. From there I chipped long and managed to get in for a double again. Three doubles, an ace, a bird, and four pars for an 80, not too bad for a hacker who hits more holes-in-one than he breaks 80.

Rich has seen my last three aces. A beginner then, he thought I was quite the golfer, but I knew better, and now we both know that it was freak of nature to ever have been so lucky. Today as my glaucoma takes its toll, my real good fortune is still being able to play and having good and patient friends who help me see the ball when I can't follow it or take time to plumb-bob the lie of the greens. Now I am elated to break 90, and am working on my short game to help me do so. I've come to accept what my cartoonist friend Bob Englehart called these uncanny accidents as "moments of perfection." Thanks, guys, for your patience on the course, and your forbearance in allowing me to tell this story.