

Tom: Hello, this is Pod for the Course and I am Tom Cade, the Director of Communications for Washington Golf. This year, 2022, is the centennial year for Washington Golf, which was initially called the Washington State Golf Association. It was founded in 1922 when the very first Washington State Amateur was held at Yakima Country Club and it was won by Bon Stein.

We've been doing a series of podcasts throughout the year to talk about the history of golf in the state and throughout the region. And we have with us again today, Mike Riste, and Mike is a volunteer lead historian at the BC Golf Museum and the BC Golf House. He is also the official historian for the Pacific Northwest Golf Association. This is now the fourth edition of the podcast that we've done with Mike during this year. And Mike, thanks so much for taking the time again to be on with us today.

Mike: Oh, my pleasure. I guess you're also about to celebrate your Thanksgiving this week.

Tom: We are, yeah. This is Thanksgiving week, so it's a kind of a short work week for people, but of course the history of golf goes on. So today, Mike, we want to touch on a particular personality in the history of golf, not only in Washington, but really throughout the region, because his impact was so wide reaching. And I know that for us on our end, I know your end as well, that when we started doing some research into the history of golf in the state, when we were preparing for the centennial year, we kept coming across the name of Robert Johnstone – everywhere we looked, there was his name. And I know that in your research you kind of had the same experience, is that correct?

Mike: Yes, that's right. For many years I've always wondered about him because he kept popping up everywhere, building golf courses, pros who had worked for him, caddies, club makers. It just seems like he had his finger in everything. So I thought, well, maybe we should find out who this fellow really is. Find out his background.

Tom: So let's begin at the beginning with this person, Mr. Johnstone. I know that he became the head PGA professional at Seattle Golf Club for several years, many years back in the early 20th century, the early 1900s, but he is not from around here. He came from Scotland, I believe. Is that correct?

Mike: Yeah, he came from North Berwick, he was born around 1875 in North Berwick. His father was the greens keeper at North Berwick, the old course. So maybe he wasn't very good in school, who knows, but at a very young age, 13, 14, 15, he started working for one of the prominent pros and club makers in Scotland, Ben Sayers, and he started as a ball maker.

Tom: He started as a ball maker and in North Berwick, that was his first profession.

Mike: And then he moved... It's difficult to say exactly when, but shortly, maybe two or three years after that. He also went to work for Jim Hutchinson, who was also another club maker in North Berwick, not as well-known as Ben. Ben's factory actually made clubs. I think they finally closed in the 1960s or so.

Tom: Must have been a long time.

Mike: Yeah. They were in business for probably a hundred years, and then he moved on, like most of these fellows, they wanted to become prominent club makers, club manufacturers in Scotland. So he moved to St. Andrews, worked there for a while, and then he went to the Gibson factory probably around 1895 and then worked in the Edinburgh factory. Gibson at that time was the largest club manufacturing company in the world. So it would be understandable that he would want to go work for them.

These club makers and golfers, they were all very good golfers, they were not classified as a professional until they earned money teaching. They could earn all kinds of money playing in these money matches, but they weren't really a professional until they actually gave lessons. I didn't know that fact when I started this project.

Tom: So again, what was Mr. Johnstone's main reason for coming to the U.S.?

Mike: I think we should start with a really interesting story that happened at the Gibson factory, because I thought it was so cool. So if you can imagine this really long table and there's lots of pictures showing Gibson Stewart factory, and there may be a dozen club makers around this enormous table, 40 feet long, 10-15 feet wide, and all the supplies are out on the table and they're doing various tasks and one is assembling heads or gripping or putting the shellac on or whatever, and Johnstone told this story, which I thought was so interesting. You have to realize this is pre-1900, okay. And golf really hasn't got started in America yet. Didn't really get started until, oh, maybe 1910 to 1915.

So they're assembling these clubs and of course no club is going to come out perfect. You might make a mistake on whittling the wood, putting the grip on wrong or putting the pin in the face incorrectly. So they didn't throw them away. They always had a large box at the end of the table. And that's where the mistakes went, the discards and on the top was marked for the American market. And the story was that the Americans were too new playing golf, they wouldn't know a good club from a bad club.

So I thought that was pretty cool. So in 1900 in San Francisco, the Presidio Club, that's the forerunner to the San Francisco Golf Club, and they're looking for a golf pro. So they send a fellow by the name of John Lawson, he was the manager owner, I think, of the Guthrie Company in San Francisco. They were also in Tacoma. And he goes over to Scotland, particularly Edinburgh, because that's where most of the pros and manufacturers were, St. Andrews, Edinburgh area, looking for a young professional for their new club. And all the people he interviewed said, well, the most prominent, the best club maker experienced in greens keeping and experienced as a professional, a good player, won a couple of Scottish assistant tournaments, is Bob Johnstone. So he interviews him and he likes him, and he brought him to San Francisco in 1900, April, 1900 to be the first pro at Presidio. So that's how he got to North America.

And when he arrives, he immediately is probably one of the best players in San Francisco, although Will Smith was probably equal or even better. The pros on the East Coast were beginning to start to spend their winters in California and Florida. So

prominent pros in the New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts area were there, but Johnstone, he tells a really cool story about when he arrives. Johnstone was a great storyteller, and I pulled out all the stories and put them in a little bundle in case I ever need some Johnstone stories. And I think for this interview, I'll talk about five of them, but this one is really cool.

So you have to realize they're using gutty balls. The Haskell ball didn't come into effect until 1902 or 1903. That's the wound ball as we know today. So the balls that were used, of course, would get cut up and pieces would fall out. It's a solid ball. And the players in San Francisco, they were just throwing them away. So Johnstone started collecting them because in Scotland, they didn't throw anything away. And these balls had a characteristic. If you put them in hot water, they became malleable again, just like original. So you do anything you want with them. And of course, when Johnstone arrived, he had all his ball making material and his club making material. He brought everything with him. And these balls, they were made in molds. And the molds had various numbers, 26, 27, 28, 29. And that basically was the diameter of the ball. And Johnstone, over time, he said that he could pop a ball into his mouth and tell you if it was a 26 or a 28.

So anyway, he would take these old balls that the clubs were throwing away, and he would put them into boiling water to remake them. And if he thought it was a 28, he would put the material into a 27 or a 26, always a lower number, and he'd remake the ball. They were a bramble design at this time, and dry them and paint them and the members, and same in Scotland, this was a trick that had taught him, the members, especially the better members, discovered, wow, these balls actually went further than the brand new ball. So Johnstone was able to sell them for 60 cent, his remakes, whereas the new ball was only 50 cents. So why would it go further? Why was it a better ball, even though it was a remake? Well, when you put it in a smaller number, you compress the molecules tighter, therefore it became harder, therefore it would go further.

Tom: So you mentioned that he was quite a good player as well, and I noticed in your notes here that he arrived in 1900 in San Francisco, and he won the California State Open in 1901, 1903, and 1904. That's a pretty good player.

Mike: Even though he was playing against some really good U.S. Open players, there's no doubt about it. He played a little different than the U.S. players. He played a Vardon style game, he had shorter clubs, and he played a finesse game, and there's lots of clippings talking about him being an excellent chipper and putter and maneuvering the ball around, whereas the players in America being new players, they all concentrated on distance. They wanted to be able to hit the gutty ball 280 yards. They wanted to be able to hit their woods 150-200 yards. Whereas Johnstone, he wasn't that type of player. And the people in Britain, the pros, the really good players, Vardon, Taylor, Ray, they were finesse players. They could hit it far if they needed to, but they were more of a finesse player. And Johnstone brought that characteristic to the San Francisco area.

Tom: Let's see, again, looking at your notes. He started out at the Presidio course, which is the precursor of the San Francisco Golf Club, and then looks like he laid out a new public course in the Golden Gate Park area of San Francisco. Is that correct?

Mike: Yeah, the San Francisco Parks board, I guess they could foresee that they needed a public golf course, and so he went and laid out a nine-hole course for them. I didn't do the further research to see where it went and when it opened and everything, and then just before he left, which I didn't know, laid out the new Ingleside course for the San Francisco Golf Club, the 18 hole course, just before he left.

Tom: Were these his first efforts at actually designing a golf course? Did he do any of this in Scotland while he was there?

Mike: Not that I found. The Scottish newspaper databases that I have are not extensive. I don't have a complete run of the Edinburgh Times, for example.

Tom: All right. So he is in the San Francisco area, and then in 1905, he goes to Seattle?

Mike: Yeah, probably the biggest tournament held to date in 1905 was the Lewis and Clark, and it was the PPGA tournament, but it was also celebrating the Lewis and Clark expedition arriving in Oregon, and players came from everywhere, to Waverley Country Club in Portland. And this was the first time that a tournament in the Northwest had put up a purse for golf pros. Now, it didn't attract a lot, it only attracted eight, so Johnstone being from San Francisco and being a good player, he was attracted to it.

And a number of players, amateurs came also to play in this event. So that's what got him to Waverley. And then the members at Seattle Golf Club saw this young professional and enticed him to come to Seattle to build the new Highlands course. They were located at Laurelhurst at that time, and they wanted this new 18-hole golf course in the north end of Seattle. So that attracted him. He, in one interview, in oh, late 1920s, early '30s, he recalled that he was really torn whether to come or not. He was very satisfied at San Francisco, but it was the challenge of building this new course and the challenge of coming to an area where golf really was just in the beginnings, not like San Francisco. It was starting to take, and that's what attracted him. And he came in 1905, and he died in 1937.

Tom: So for the rest of his life, he was in the Seattle area.

Mike: And the one that really generated the whole thing was Johnny Dreher (golf writer for *The Seattle Times*). This was from an interview early '30s, right around when he formed the Pacific Northwest Section PGA. No, sorry, it was around 1922. The professional golfers formed in '22, but Dreher used this description of Johnstone, and it is so true: "If you want to be a good player, if you're developing a golf course or you're looking for a head professional, a green superintendent, a manager for your course, if you want to ensure success, you should go talk to Bob Johnstone." And that was just an incredible tribute to this man.

He immediately, when he got to Seattle, in this clubhouse, which the present clubhouse I think opened in 1907, 1909, I can't remember, but he had a room strictly for club making, and he had always had 3, 4, 5, 6 young caddies who wanted to get into the golf business making golf clubs. And from that, I learned a lot actually about the markings on these early clubs.

But these caddies became the first pros, first managers, and when I'm always doing these projects, I'm always trying to identify who was the first local born professional, like in British Columbia, it's Walter Gravlin, he was born in Victoria. He became the pro for United Services, and then Uplands. So who was the first in the Seattle who came out of the caddie ranks through Johnstone, became a pro?

Well, I couldn't quite identify to the month, but the year was 1914, and there were three candidates, and they were all caddies at Seattle working for Johnstone. All three of them were club makers. James Runchey, he became an assistant under Jefferson at Everett around 1912, but he didn't become a full professional until 1914. Harry Pratt, he was another candidate. He became the first pro at Portland Golf Club in 1914. And Walter Ball, he became the first pro at Olympia. So if I found the exact month, I could pin it down, but I didn't go that far.

Tom: So 1905, he arrives in the Seattle area, or the Northwest, I should say, and the Seattle Golf Club people, they hire him away from San Francisco, and he designs and lays out the full 18-hole golf course after they moved from the Laurelhurst area, correct?

Mike: Yes, that's right. As far as I can tell, of course, I don't know exactly what he did in Scotland, but in North America, this would've been his third design, the Golden Gate golf course and Ingleside being the first two. He and A.V. Macan over the years made changes to Seattle Golf Club, but really, Macan had input, but most of the designs, especially before about 1925, were all done by Johnstone. And he got this reputation that if you were building a golf course, even though he may not do the full design, he was fully involved in the development process.

Tom: So let's see. I've gone forward a couple years here. It looks like in 1913, Johnstone spearheaded the exhibition matches between he and Jim Barnes and Ted Ray and Harry Vardon that made a tour through the Northwest. Is that right?

Mike: Yeah. The main person though, for that was Kerry, A.S. Kerry.

Tom: A.S. Kerry. Yeah, okay.

Mike: He financed the exhibition. They would never have come to the Northwest unless Kerry had paid for it. And in order for those two guys to travel to a golf club, Spokane, Seattle, Portland, Tacoma, Vancouver, Kerry actually paid the whole bill. None of those golfers could afford it.

Tom: Sure.

Mike: So Kerry's another fellow that I'm researching right now. His contribution was enormous. Johnstone, he set up the matches, who was going to play against who, but the instigator, the financier was A.S. Kerry. That tour was sponsored by Kerry; and Vardon and Ray, in most instances, unless they felt they needed some other incentive to play, they played for the gate. They felt that they could attract a big enough crowd, that they would be well paid by receiving all the money from the gate. And then they also had another little caveat that if they broke the course record, they were entitled to a hundred dollars. At Victoria Golf Club, they didn't break it the first time. So on their own, they said, we're staying another day so we can set the course record.

Tom: So that was in 1913. And that was the same year that Ray and Vardon lost in a playoff to Ouimet in the U.S. Open. Is that correct?

Mike: Yeah, that was in the fall, and believe it or not, and most people don't believe this, but that event occurred, I believe it was in September. When Ouimet won the U.S. Open in a playoff against Vardon and Ray, and then Spalding convinced them to go on a North America tour, and Spalding sponsored the expenses and everything. And that tour probably did more to expand golf in North America than any other event, especially in the Northwest. All of a sudden, Tacoma had three courses constructed within about two months after that event. And same happened in other areas of the Northwest. That definitely triggered a boom in golf. Unfortunately, the war came, so it got delayed a bit.

Tom: So that was 1913 in the Northwest, the exhibition, but also, as I understand it, that was also the year that they broke ground in building the Jefferson Park Municipal golf course, the first municipal course in the Seattle area. And Johnstone, as I understand it, designed that course. Is that right?

Mike: Yeah, that's right. I didn't realize that he did that course entirely on his own, 1913, and it has a distinction... What is distinction? It's definitely the first public course in the Pacific Northwest. And then one clipping in the Seattle said it was the first public golf course in the West. But I haven't gone and done the research to see what happened to the public golf course Johnstone laid out at Golden State Park in San Francisco. So did that project fall through, and Jefferson really was the first public golf course west of the Mississippi, that I'm not sure of.

Tom: Yeah.

Mike: Historians write that Jim Barnes was involved in Jefferson, but I researched all the clippings. Barnes visited the course a couple of times to look over Johnstone's work, but it was Johnstone's golf course. Jim Barnes, well, he was pro at Tacoma. He had very, very little, if any, real input on that golf course.

Tom: Interesting. So the golf boom in the Northwest really kind of was taking shape between 1910-1920, even during World War I, it still kind of kept going. I believe Jefferson Park opened in 1915, and I also think the Meadow Park Golf Course, the muni down in Tacoma, I think they opened in 1915 as well. And also Downriver GC in Spokane,

another muni, I think they opened in 1916 or '17. I don't know that Johnstone had a role in those, but it was definitely in the mood of the era of this golf boom.

Mike: Oh, absolutely because what happened, the first year... Jefferson could have actually opened in 1914. It was all seeded. It was in perfect condition. Guests were playing it in the fall of 1914. And Seattle parks boards were so worried that this golf course was going to be a flop. 'Oh no, we can't open it. We'll lose nothing but money. So we better wait until the spring when everybody wants to play golf.' Well, they discovered in the first six months they had a gold mine. And once the receipts and the revenue for that golf course started spreading throughout the Northwest, everybody wanted a public golf course. Vancouver wanted one, Victoria wanted one, Macan wanted to build one at Elk Lake. They were going to build one here at the PNE in Vancouver, and Spokane did, and Tacoma did, but everyone, all these municipalities, these town councils, could see, wow, golf, this way we can generate lots of money, and that Jefferson generated lots of money.

Tom: I heard some really kind of crazy number that, so Jefferson opened in 1915, and by 1922, which is when Washington Golf was founded, by 1922, Jefferson was doing 100,000 rounds a year, which is an enormous amount of golf being played on one golf course.

Mike: Absolutely. Even the first public golf course in Vancouver, Langara, which we were really late, 1926, when it opened, it was a Macan course, and they did 100,000 rounds in less than a year. Golf was booming, everybody wanted to play, and it didn't cost hardly anything. When Jefferson opened, I think it was 25 cents you could play all day. When they opened Langara in Vancouver, people camped out in their cars two days before so they could get to play on opening day. It was incredible.

Tom: Yeah. Amazing. So back to Robert Johnstone. In 1915, his design of Jefferson Park GC opened. He must have done other courses during this time as well, you think in the Northwest?

Mike: Yeah, he designed University Golf Course, the first course at University of Washington in Seattle. I think it opened before Jefferson. They were building it at the same time. The nine-hole course was along the canal where the stadium is. The hospital was only one building at that time. And then as the hospital expanded and the stadium got built, the course closed. When I first attended the university in 1965, the map for the university still showed the golf course.

Was the early 1960s when it finally closed. Johnstone built it. I don't know if you've ever gone over to Bainbridge and played the Country Club of Seattle. They still have sand greens. And he did some renovations there for them. And then the next full project was on Mercer Island, and a little nine hole at Earlington in Seattle. He'd worked at it for quite a bit.

Tom: Let's go forward a few more years to 1922. A lot was going on in the administration part in the golf world in the Northwest. Not only was it the founding year of the British

Columbia Golf Association, but it was also the founding year of the Washington State Golf Association and also the Pacific Northwest Section PGA section. The national PGA was founded in 1916, but the Northwest Section of the PGA was founded in 1922. And Robert Johnstone had a significant hand in that, is that correct?

Mike: Yeah, he was the spearhead. He wanted to create an organization so the charlatans couldn't hang out a shingle and say they're a golf pro. He wanted to give some sort of professionalism to this vocation. He wanted to create more open tournaments, so these young pros could earn money. And so that was the basic reason for forming the Pacific Northwest Section PGA. They really didn't have a whole lot to do with the national body. The national body didn't really start dividing up the United States into sections until, oh, I can't remember if it was right after the war or just before the Second World War.

But these associations operated independently. There was a California professional golfers association. There was one in the Midwest, but they sent players to the PGA tournament, but there was not a lot of coordination between them. Johnstone set up this little independent group mainly for his people in the Northwest. And most of the pros had all come through Johnstone, all the young assistants had all been caddies. One day I'm actually going to list them all because everyone says, 'oh, I was a caddie at Seattle Golf Club.' Well, you became an assistant, you worked in the shop where they manufactured these clubs. So I think the list could be, oh, 30 or 40 people easily.

Tom: Well you mentioned that not only did he mentor a lot of these young professionals, but he was a golf instructor to a lot of the really good local amateur players. Is that right?

Mike: Yeah. Well you mentioned earlier the first Washington State Amateur champion was Bon Stein. Well, Bon Stein came through the caddie ranks at Seattle Golf Club. He didn't become a professional, but he was very good player, and he was one of Johnstone's pupils. I think if you look down your list of probably the first 10 Washington State Amateur champions, if they're all from Washington, which I think they are, because I think that was a restriction originally, they probably were all caddies at Seattle Golf Club and all had instruction from Bob Johnstone. The women, definitely. As that original quote from Dreher indicates, if you wanted to be a good player you should definitely go and see Bob Johnstone, that was what you did.

Tom: Well, I think that the original, what was called the 'Big Four' players, which was Bon Stein, Lee Steil, Clare Griswold, and can't remember, I'm sorry, the fourth player. Remember the fourth player's name?

Mike: Oh gosh. The first three you mention were all caddies at Seattle Golf Club.

Tom: Yeah, that's what I mean. Oh, here we go. Yeah, it's Bon Stein and Clark Spiers. Yeah, but you're right, I think all four of them started out as caddies at Seattle Golf Club, and they were public course players. They played at Jefferson, but they all trained at Seattle Golf Club basically, and I believe they even became honorary members at Seattle Golf Club, and I'm sure that Robert Johnstone had something to do with that.

Mike : Sure, yeah.

Tom: Yeah.

Mike: And Chuck Hunter out of Tacoma, he was not a caddie at Seattle Golf Club, but when he went to Seattle, he took lessons from Johnstone. So there's another Washington State Amateur champion. The whole list of all those early players, Bob Johnstone probably had his finger in their career in some way or other, and same with all the early pros who won the Washington State Open. Johnstone, he played this role in everybody's career, the managers, you wanted a manager, well you went to Johnstone because maybe they'd worked as a system manager at Seattle Golf Club. You needed a greens keeper, well you came there because there was probably a guy that trained under the superintendent at Seattle Golf Club. So, yeah, he played this role in everybody's life.

Tom: And looks like from your notes here, Johnstone served as the president of the Pacific Northwest Section PGA from 1922 until 1930.

Mike: I think that's the date. I didn't check it, but it's 1930 or so, and it was because he had this connection to all the golf clubs. When Washington State was arranging their amateur and open championship, well, Johnstone did all the arranging. And Johnstone convinced the PGA because he was a close friend with Kerry, that there should be a Pacific Northwest Open the first two days before the PNGA. And Johnstone played a role in making sure the PNGA courses were the best.

Macan did most of the renovations for those courses before the PNGA and Open came there. And it was logical that Johnstone should maintain this presidency because he was so well connected and this organization had just started. And he acted as an arbitrator. One story, Willie Black, he'd signed a contract with Grays Harbor CC to be their pro. Well, within a month he signed a contract with Bellingham G&CC to be their pro. So Grays Harbor was livid. So they appealed to Johnstone – what's he going to do? So to solve the problem, he found them a better pro, Morty Dutra, who later on then went to Inglewood.

Tom: And so just to remind some of the listeners out there, in 1922, the Washington State Open and Washington State Amateur were held for the first time, and they were held back to back consecutively at the same venue, Yakima Country Club. And I'm assuming it was Robert Johnstone's idea to do this, to bring everyone together and then have this week of golf exhibition of some kind. Yeah?

Mike: Oh absolutely. And it was the most convenient. This organization was just starting and it was on nine-hole golf courses, and so it was logical that yeah, let's hold the Open and the Amateur at the same time. And for logistics, Johnstone ran everything. So it would be perfectly logical these would be held on the same venue. You probably know better than I when they finally split, when they started having their own venues.

Tom: Yeah, I think it was 1955. I know during World War II, as you discovered, the Washington State Amateur continued to be held, but the Washington Open did not. So they were

not obviously held back to back during World War II, but they picked it up again in 1946. And again, I'm pretty sure the last year they held it together was in 1955 at Spokane Country Club. And then from then on they held them separately.

Mike: Yeah, that seems to ring a bell when I was doing the research on the Washington State Amateur. They were held together for a while, but like what, 30 years?

Tom: Yeah, yeah.

Mike: Of them together, which is incredible, how'd they get a golf club to give up their course for that length of time?

Tom: Yeah, the Washington Open, I believe was at stroke play, but the Washington State Amateur at that time was match play, and that typically takes longer to do that, and takes up the whole course.

Mike: And a whole week.

Tom: Yeah. For the whole week. That's right.

Mike: You mentioned some other courses that Johnstone was involved in the design. You were involved in the Inglewood history book, well, Macan and Johnstone did the original design for Inglewood. He did the first nine at Rainier and then shortly after the first nine opened, Macan did the second nine, and then the little Glendale course, I think now it's called Glen Acres is it? Next to Rainier?

Tom: Glen Acres. Yes.

Mike: Johnstone and Macan did it, and Johnstone and James did the Olympic course, beautiful golf course in the north end of Seattle, and then he did Jackson Park entirely on his own, which I wasn't aware of, the second public golf course in Seattle.

Tom: Yeah, Jackson Park on the north end of Seattle. That's right.

Mike: I had no idea that, as far as I could tell, and I pulled all the clippings, he did that course entirely on his own. So he did both of those public golf courses for Seattle, basically on his own.

Tom: Wow.

Mike: It's quite a tribute.

Tom: So there was quite a connection between Scotland golfers coming to the Northwest and what I can gather, and from your notes as well, they came here because this is where golf, at that time in the early 1900s, was just beginning and they were the experts and they came here and established the game in the area.

Mike: Without a doubt. And they also came because they may not have been really good players. So in Scotland they probably would've had a difficult time getting a head pro job, but here all you had to have was a Scottish accent and a bit of a golf game and you would know how to lay out a golf course and you would know how to give instruction and make clubs.

Everybody assumed that. So they had a much easier time to get pro jobs with this expanding market, this expanding number of golf courses being built. And every golf course wanted to have a Scotsman associated with their golf course. So, some of them remained in the business and some didn't. But that was another reason why they were attracted to the Northwest. And the Northwest had a very, very, very large British population.

Tom: So Johnstone passed away in 1937. Did he stay at Seattle Golf Club as their pro until 1937? Do you know that, Mike?

Mike: In the newspaper clippings, it was quite interesting. Around 1932, that's when they started to do these interviews with the Scotsmen. Seattle Golf Club made him an honorary member and they hired Bill Zonker to be his assistant. Zonker was an upcoming good player, and Seattle Golf Club was hoping Johnstone would retire, but he kept hanging on and then later they made him an honorary member and then they passed the hat around and gave him this incredible trip back to Scotland hoping that would entice him to stay in Scotland, but no. He got really sick about a month before he died, actually. He died very quickly. I don't know what he had, but Seattle Golf Club members were trying to nicely put him into retirement. But he wasn't having anything to do with that.

Tom: Not having any part of that. Yeah, you have his death listed as October 29th, 1937 after a short illness.

Mike: So I have to tell one lovely story because he loved to play for money. All of these guys did. And one story happened at Seattle Golf Club, and I didn't note the date, but I think it was in the late 1920s, and a guest arrives and he's challenging Johnstone to a match, a dollar a hole, which was fairly big money in that day. Johnstone would play for more, but Johnstone had to give him a stroke a hole. Okay. And they're on the back nine. They never did say this specific part. I don't know Seattle Golf Club well enough to know which par-3 it was, but anyway, the match is all even. And the opponent, Johnstone's opponent, he hits the ball about six inches from the hole, and he gets a stroke. So obviously he's got hole-in-one.

Tom: Net hole-in-one. Yeah.

Mike: So Johnstone's standing on the tee trying to figure out if he gets a hole-in-one, the best he can do is tie the hole. But how can he win the hole? Do you have any idea?

Tom: No, but I'm thinking he's probably got some idea.

Mike: So here's what Johnstone does. He notices the caddies are not on the tee with them. They've taken a shortcut and are standing up next to the green. They're not paying attention. The one player's six inches from the hole, so obviously he's won the hole in their minds.

Tom: Yeah.

Mike: So Johnstone aims his tee shot right at his opponent's caddie and he hits him and ricochets onto the green. Instantly, he wins the hole, in match play he wins the hole.

Tom: Yeah, that's right.

Mike: If he hits his opponent or hits his opponent's caddie or his opponent's bag, his opponent loses the hole.

Tom: Yeah, hit the caddie or the bag. That's right.

Mike: I thought that was so cool.

Tom: You know the rules and use the rules in your favor.

Mike: He knew the rules and the caddies weren't paying attention, so the only way to win the hole is hit the caddie. That was one of the highlights of all these stories I accumulated. But I did in the course of the research finally answer the question. When these golf clubs and Bob Moffitt, Jack Moffitt, Alex Duffy, all these early Scottish pros, they had a stamp with their name, sometimes the name of the club, but it had the word 'maker' on it. And I never really knew if that actually meant that these guys made the golf club. While doing the research for this article, and if there's anybody out there who's a golf collector, this has now been answered by Johnstone.

So in his manufacturing operation at Seattle Golf Club, he stamped all these clubs 'Robert Johnstone, Seattle' on the bottom, it was in an oval, and in the middle is the word 'maker.' Johnstone didn't actually make those clubs himself, but his professionals, these club makers that were working for him, actually made the clubs, and Johnstone ordered beds from a foundry in Seattle, and I assume he probably ordered the shafts from Scotland and the grips and things like that. He may have actually got the grips from a leather shop hide guy in Seattle, probably a plant where they were killing cattle.

But the wooden clubs, Johnstone bought all the blocks in Seattle and they were usually about three by three by four inches wide and six inches long. And Johnstone knew how to make a club out of that block and joint the shaft. And the club makers who worked for him, that was part of their training. They all had to take a block and make a wooden headed club out of it and stamp it to the maker, and in some instances, the interview that he did for special occasions, special members, he would've actually made the whole club himself. So I was always curious. We have quite a few Johnstone's with this mark, a maker on it. And I had no idea if he actually did make them in that shop, but he did. So Duffy, Jack Moffitt, Willy Moffitt, all these pros in the Northwest who stamped 'maker'

on it, they probably make the club, especially if it's a wood, they probably made it from a block. So kind of a neat little story that came out of this research.

Tom: So if they were made from a block, they were almost persimmon, just a solid block of wood rather than laminated wood.

Mike: Well, we didn't have persimmon trees here, and he said he used older birch, sometimes fir, and maple, he said, yes. If he wanted a specific grain, he would make them out of maple. And another little instance, he said, if the wood didn't come out perfectly and he didn't want to leave it natural because there were imperfections in the wood, he stained them dark, a black, and we don't have one with the natural wood, all our woods have all been stained.

Tom: So sounds like Johnstone, he started out as a club maker and a ball maker in Scotland, and he really carried that forward and continued here in the Northwest.

Mike: Oh yeah, definitely. Which was very common. If you do research on the pros on the East Coast in the 1890s, before 1910, they pretty well all made the clubs themselves. Spalding didn't move their plant from England to North America I think until 1905 and McGregor and all these companies didn't really get going until 1905, 1910. So there wasn't a lot of availability of golf clubs. So these pros, they made the clubs, but after 1910 or so, everything comes from one of these big manufacturers.

Tom: Interesting. Okay. Today again, we have with us Mike Riste, the curator of the BC Golf Museum up in Vancouver, British Columbia. And Mike is also the official historian for the Pacific Northwest Golf Association. And again, this is the fourth podcast we've done so far this year with Mike because of this year, 2022, being the centennial history year of the Washington State Golf Association, which is now called Washington Golf.

And today's subject was Robert Johnstone, the native of Scotland who came to the Northwest in 1905 and went on to do many things, designed golf courses, and also founded the Pacific Northwest Section PGA in 1922. And again, Mike, as we talked about today, everywhere you look, when you look into the history of golf in our area, you find Robert Johnstone's name, and he was just not one of those people that you would think about. You know, think about the bigger names like the Chandler Egans and the A.V Macans and Robert Hudsons, but I think Robert Johnstone really needs to be in that conversation with all those folks.

Mike: Oh, I totally agree, and now that I've done the research for Johnstone, and when we were doing the research for the PNGA Centennial book, another man that, well, I'm researching him right now, is A.S Kerry. He financed so many things and had such an influence. He did the first bylaws of the PNGA and then updated them in 1927. He did the original bylaws for the Washington State Golf Association. He was a lumberman.

And I've done the first decade of research on him. Very good golfer, which I wasn't aware of, but he had a heavy influence in the development of golf in mostly Washington state. Nothing British Columbia or Oregon. And another name that's coming up

associated with him, although he didn't have the finances that Kerry had, was Josiah Collins. The other day I found a really extensive article calling him the father of golf in Seattle. I know he was a banker, but I know basically nothing about him. Again, another member at Seattle Golf Club.

Tom: Yeah, we'll have to do some research on him as well then.

Mike: Oh, definitely. And I think it's appropriate because the anniversary for Washington State Golf, this hundredth anniversary, it's time that these people are recognized and their contributions are investigated.

Tom: Mike Riste, thank you again for joining us today. And this again is the fourth installment of a series of podcasts we're doing with you during the year for the centennial. And I'm sure that we're going to do two or three more as we go along here. But thank you again, Mike, for joining us today and we'll speak again soon, okay?

Mike: Okay. Bye.