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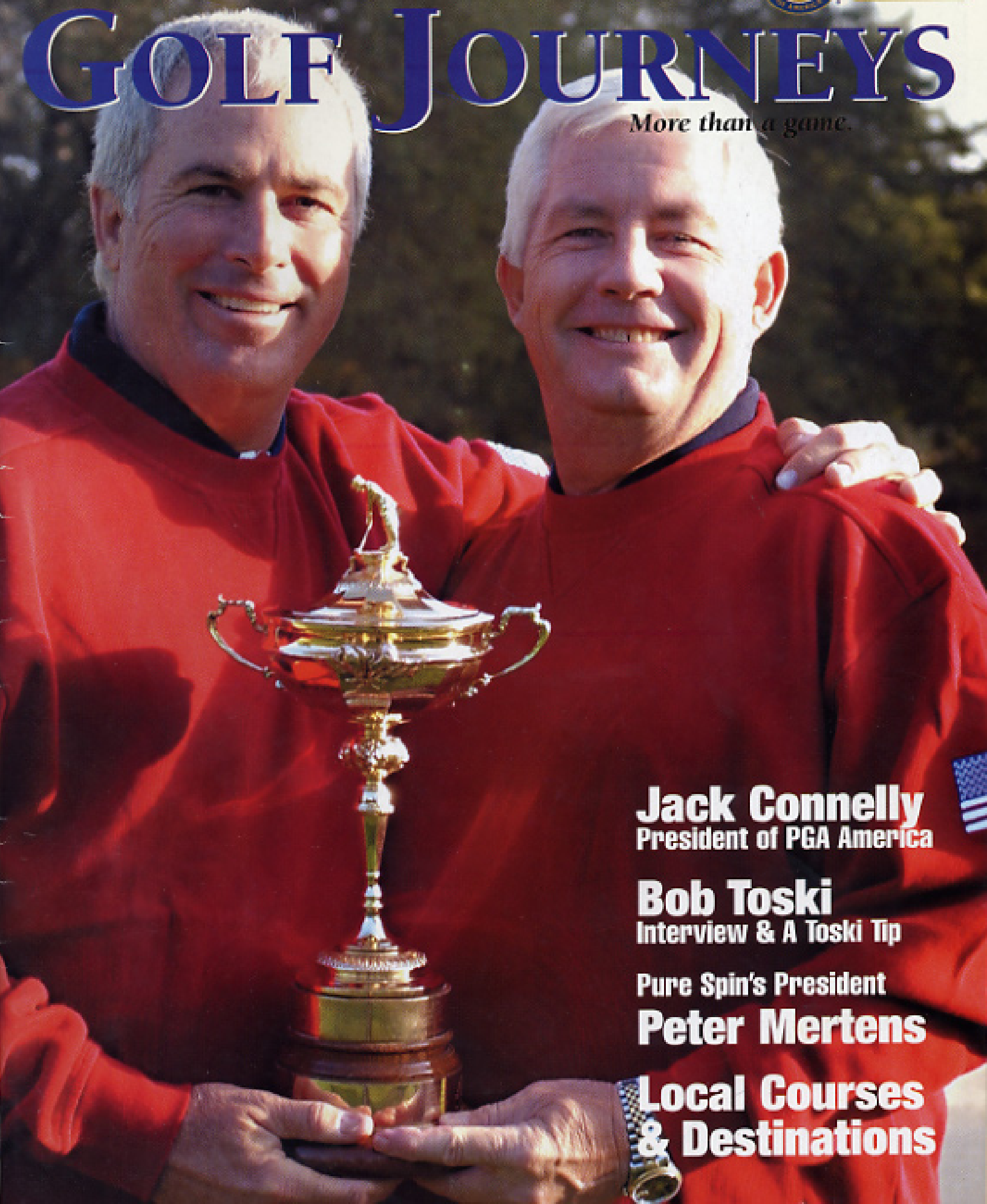
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GOLF JOURNEYS

More than a game.



Jack Connelly
President of PGA America

Bob Toski
Interview & A Toski Tip

Pure Spin's President
Peter Mertens

**Local Courses
& Destinations**

Quest to Conquer the Top 100 Courses in the US

When people see our magazine, the first thing they assume is that it is a magazine dedicated to travel. *Golf Journeys* is really about any personal journey, be it to the driving range, a local course or maybe a destination. In each issue we will also be talking about people who have made some extraordinary personal journeys. This month's feature interview is one of those such journeys.

Larry Berle was introduced to me by a couple I met while I was playing at Pinehurst this past summer. I told them about our new magazine and about our first cover story, Ralph Lapp (Summer 2002 issue) who just played his 1000th different course. They loved his story and mentioned that I might want to talk to their friend who was just finishing up his nine-year quest of playing the current *Golf Digest* Top 100 Courses in the United States. I told them I would love to speak with him, and a few months later, a week after he played his final course, we chatted.

Golf Journeys: I understand you just finished playing the Top 100.

Larry Berle: Yes, I finished on July 20th. The last course I played happened to be the number 100 course on the list, Atlantic GC.

GJ: When did you decide you were going to try to play the Top 100?

LB: Nine years ago my wife and I were playing Pebble Beach and while I was walking up the 18th fairway, which is what some consider the

greatest finishing hole in golf, I started thinking of all the people who played here and the walk they had. I felt like I was walking up the 18th during the US Open. Something came over me then and I thought to myself that I wanted to try to play the Top 100.

GJ: Most wives don't suggest that their husbands play a round of golf on a Sunday. Your wife was supportive of this?

LB: Actually she was the one who introduced me to the game twelve years ago. She is a flight attendant, which really made it possible for me to travel all over the country. She played 26 of the courses with me.

GJ: So, nine years ago you came up with this idea. Did you really think that it would happen?

LB: I actually thought it would be pretty easy.

GJ: I'm assuming that, since it took

nine years, it wasn't as easy as you thought.

LB: No, it wasn't. There were actually times over the years that I was even considering giving up the game all together. You know the feeling you get when you are playing bad and you just get tired of it all.

GJ: I know the feeling!

LB: There were also times when I tried to get on a few courses where I actually had a good connection and the people wouldn't call back. That was pretty frustrating, also.

GJ: There are around 25 private courses in the Top 100. How hard were they to get on?

LB: Well, Augusta National was definitely the hardest. There are only a few members in my hometown of Minneapolis. One happened to work in my building. I would meet him in the bathroom

(which was in between our floors) and strike up a conversation, letting him know how I was doing on my quest. It took me three years to pursue a friendship with him. Then one day while I was in the airport in Utah heading out on a vacation, I got a call saying that someone just backed out of the foursome they had at Augusta and

wanted to know if I wanted to fill in. They said if I could make it the following day, I was in. I flew home that day and flew to Augusta the next day and arrived that night. When I arrived I called Augusta National. They knew me, and even sent a car to pick me up! I actually got to see the Crow's Nest where the amateurs stay, spent 45 minutes in the Masters' Champion's Room and even got to go inside the Eisenhower Cabin. It was definitely a thrill!

GJ: That's a great story. How did you finagle your way into the other 99?

LB: Actually I ended up playing 117 courses that were on the current list throughout the nine years. Some new courses were added and some dropped off. I actually played a few, including Bandon Dunes and Whistling Straights, before they were even on the list. Honestly, without e-mail I would have never gotten it done. When I first started I would send out letter every once in a while to friends I knew had connections or to people who had helped me in the past. It got pretty hard because people were always moving and I didn't have

forwarding addresses. Once e-mail came into vogue, I was e-mailing about 300 people with a message saying these are the four or five courses I was looking to play

and, inevitably, I would get an e-mail back from someone saying they knew someone who could get me on.

GJ: Were there any courses that, no



Larry Berle + Peter Feldman - 18th Tee, Pebble Beach - where the quest was born ...



Larry Berle at #10, Pine Valley - October 9, 1996



Larry Berle at entrance to Atlantic

matter what you did, you just couldn't get on?

LB: There was only one course (Sanctuary in Colorado) that no one knew a member. The problem was that there were only two members ... the owner and his wife who are the co-founders of RE/MAX, and they don't allow public play! They hold a dozen or so charity events a year and that's about it. I actually played the course in the "Colorado State Highway Patrol Benevolent Charity Event." It happened to be a date that worked and was the least expensive. To this day I have no idea what the charity does!

GJ: I guess you have gotten on a few courses with some interesting tricks. Any stick out in your mind?

LB: I was going to be in Columbus, Ohio, and needed to get on the four courses near there that were in the Top 100. I'm in the concert promoting business and Sinbad was playing in Columbus. I sent a letter out to the four courses and said I would trade Sinbad concert tickets for a chance to get on their course. Muirfield was the only course that replied.

GJ: You probably got to meet a few interesting people while on your journey.

LB: I've met two or three people who will be friends until the day I die. After awhile it became more about meeting people and making friends than playing the courses. One guy who I'd never met before and was set up to play Oak Hill with actually insisted on me staying at his house. It's unbelievable the kind of people you can meet!

GJ: How did you meet our cover story from last month, Arnold Palmer's dentist, Dr. Howdy Giles?

LB: Since I'm in the music business, I was asked by a friend to secure some tickets to a Broadway show. I got the tickets and they happened to be for Arnold Palmer's wife, Winnie, and her grandchildren. Dr. Giles found out about my quest and helped me get on both Laurel Valley and Wilmington Country Club. We even got to meet Mr. Palmer's sister when we were at Laurel Valley. The staff were really nice to us. The pro actually took us out to dinner the night before and even stopped by a few times when we were on the course to see how we were enjoying ourselves.

GJ: One of your friends, Jeff May, who told me about your feat, owns a private plane. I'm sure that helped in your quest.

LB: I met Jeff about two-thirds of the way through my journey. A mutual friend invited me to fly with them to a neighboring state when their fourth dropped out. Soon I started planning monthly trips with them. I asked Jeff if he wanted to come along on a few trips. I think he played a dozen or so courses with me. When I would fly with Jeff in his plane it was nice because we could play three courses in three days. If I had to do it flying commercial, the same trip would take five or six days. It was also nice to be able to play with a friend. On ninety percent of the courses, I played by myself.



John O'Neil, Dave Zubke, Larry Berle, and Morgan Clauson at Shinnocock

GJ: Hardest course?

LB: The hardest course I played was Oakmont Country Club in Oakmont, Pennsylvania. I shot 101 there ... the worst out of all the other courses I played. The greens were rock hard and fast. The bunkers were some of the hardest I've seen. The greenside bunkers were shaped like the Nike swoosh, and their rough was the thickest I've played.

GJ: So, what's next?

LB: Well, I have no desire to tackle the World 100! I think I'll just keep current with the next Top 100. They vote every two years and each year 4-8 new courses get added.

GJ: It was nice speaking with you. If you come out to our area, give me a call and we'll play Bulle Rock in Maryland, which might have a chance to hit the Top 100 in the years to come.

LB: I've heard of that course. I'd love to. And if you get to Minneapolis, give me a call.

Author's Note: After speaking with Larry, I'm now on my quest to play the Top 100. I've played four courses so far, and after 25 years of playing, I figure I'm on a pace to get it done soon. ☐

— VANCE DIEZEL

Larry's Trivia

Favorites - Top 10

Pebble Beach
Cypress Point
Merion
Black Diamond Ranch -
The Quarry Course
Victoria National
Laurel Valley
Sanctuary
Augusta National
Muirfield Village
Oakland Hills

Handicap - 16 was as low as a 11
throughout his journey
Money spent playing
the Top 100 - \$20,000.00
Most memorable 24 hours -
Time spent at Augusta

never be a Major there ever again because of the lack of length.