

LEGENDS OF THE GAME... ...MAX FAULKNER



The champion who was larger than life, bedecked in colourful plus fours and matching golf shoes, he was everything that the era of austere post war golf was not.

The popular extrovert, nicknamed *"The Clown Prince of Golf"*, who in 1951 at Royal Portrush, had the nerve to sign an autograph on a golf ball as Open Champion, before the last round had been played. It is the only time that the Open has been played in Ireland, but it certainly had a significance, because many years later, in 1995, he was to return to the same course to witness his son in law, Brian Barnes win the Senior British Open Championship.

However, let not his devil may care attitude detract from the fact that he was one of the finest players of his time, and winner of numerous tournaments when he returned from his service in the war. He said that he did not pick up a golf club during his service with the RAF in World War 11, he served as a PT Instructor, and took up boxing instead, and was a services champion.

He was born at Bexhill East Sussex, in July 1916, and christened Herbert Gustavus Max Faulkner, his father was a golf professional, and the family owned the golf course at Selsey. It was here that Max was to practice and prepare for the Open in 1951. He set out to enjoy his golf, have fun, and he had a style that was all his own.

He delighted the galleries, once walking on his hands from the green to the next tee, saying he needed to get blood to his brain. He remarked that the huge crater that was between the 8th and 17th holes at Selsey was a present from the Luftwaffe.

At Royal Portrush he was to achieve his great ambition, lifting the Claret Jug with a



score of three under par, despite a fighting last round, beating runner up Argentinian, Antonio Cerda, by two shots. His scores were 71, 70, 70 and 74 a total of 285.

The victory and his success in the Dunlop Masters earned him the inaugural Golf Writers Trophy Award for that year.

His career was mercurial, ever the popular man, not always achieving the results his consummate skill deserved, but people who witnessed his trick shot display were amazed at the things he could make the golf ball do.

He had sixteen tournament wins, included three Spanish Open titles and that very special Open victory, a victory that was not

repeated by an Englishman until Tony Jacklin did so in 1969. His last win was the Portugese Open, when he was 52 years of age.

For the Ryder Cup, he was chosen five times, including that very special occasion at Lindrick in 1957, when Dai Rees and his team defeated the much lauded American side.

Although he did not play in the singles on the final afternoon, he still chased around the course encouraging the other players as they battled to the rare win.

During his heyday, he rarely played with a regulation set of clubs, he was always tinkering with them, and often had a hotch potch set in his bag, which could include

any of the hundreds of putters that he acquired over his career, including some he made himself. He was oft photographed using one made from driftwood.

He was always an enthusiast, playing in many exhibition matches giving golf clinics, raising huge sums for charity. Well into his later years he could still play nine holes at West Chilton, the club in which he had part ownership, in the regulation thirty six shots.

He headed the Butten Boys scheme, which aimed to produce world class golfers through proper coaching, fitness and diet.

Two of those boys achieved world wide success, son in law Brain Barnes and the maestro of the Seniors Tour, Tommy Horton.

Many of his contemporaries considered him worthy of a knighthood for both his golf exploits and for his contributions to society, it was not to be, however, he was finally awarded the OBE in 2001, on the fiftieth anniversary of his famous win.

His most famous quotation was the most poignant, he said *"It was all I ever wanted. The Open meant everything to me"*. Later he felt that he would never win it again, that somehow the desire had gone.

After his tournament career was over he took to farming, he loved the outdoor life, and knew a great deal about nature. The sartorial, charismatic Champion and great entertainer died in 2005 at the age of 88.

Michael Rees

