

THE GOLF ASSOCIATION OF PHILADELPHIA

By Rick Woelfel

HALL OF FAME

As a player, administrator and benefactor, John Wood Platt was perhaps the single most influential figure in the history of the Golf Association of Philadelphia.

A seven-time Philadelphia Amateur champion and four-time Joseph H. Patterson Cup winner, Platt was the only man to serve as Association president on two different occasions, and the caddie scholarship trust that bears his name has helped numerous young men and women continue their education. This October, Platt and all his contributions will be enshrined in the Golf Association of Philadelphia's inaugural Hall of Fame class.

Platt was born April 16, 1898. His early exposure to golf included hitting balls around an open field on the site of what is now Walnut Lane Golf Club.

He also caddied at North Hills Country Club and at one point



J. Wood Platt (right) in the 1955 U.S. Senior Amateur

apparently ran afoul of the USGA's amateur status regulations; possibly

for earning money as a caddie after reaching his 16th birthday. He was soon reinstated, and in 1918, while playing out of North Hills, won the Philadelphia Junior Boys' Championship, defeating H.L. Newton of Frankford Golf Club in the championship match. (The age limit for juniors was 21 at the time.)

The following year, Platt won three matches at the U.S. Amateur Championship to reach the semifinals including a 38-hole victory over Francis Ouimet in the quarterfinal, before being eliminated, 7&6, by S. Davidson Heron. Heron went on to defeat Bobby Jones in the final.

In 1920, Platt won his first Golf Association of Philadelphia Amateur Championship, defeating Horace Francine of Huntingdon Valley Country Club over the latter's home course.

Platt, by now a member of Whitemarsh Valley Country Club, won additional Philadelphia Amateur titles in 1922, 1924 and 1928 and reached the final on two other occasions before losing, once to his brother Zimmer in 1926. He won the Patterson Cup in 1926 and 1928 and finished second in the Philadelphia Open in 1921. He also won the Silver Cross four times between 1922 and 1928.

When he traveled to England to play in the British Amateur in 1921, Platt was part of an American team that competed against their peers from Britain in a challenge match that was a precursor to the Walker Cup. In 1922, he defeated Tommy Armour in the final of the Nassau Country Club Invitational, one of the country's most prestigious amateur events at the time.

During the 1930s, Platt remained one of the top players in the area. He captured the Silver Cross in 1931 and the Pennsylvania Amateur in 1935 before winning his fifth Philadelphia Amateur in 1938.

That year marked the start of a three-year period when the Amateur was contested at stroke play. Platt was perhaps the most vocal advocate for the change, and observers, then and now, have maintained that he pushed for it to give himself an advantage.

Platt also won his third Patterson Cup that year as well as the Silver Cross. The following year he won his sixth Amateur and seventh and last Silver Cross. In 1941, he won the Patterson Cup for the fourth and last time.

In 1942, the Philadelphia Amateur was restored to a match-play format, and Platt, now 44 years old, reached the semifinals at his home course of Whitemarsh Valley. That year the semifinals and final were played on the same day in sizzling temperatures.

J. WOOD PLATT



Sigel named HOF's first inductee

R. Jay Sigel was announced as the first inductee into the Golf Association of Philadelphia's Hall of Fame. For a look at his spectacular career, refer to the *Golf Association of Philadelphia Magazine* May/June Issue. The Magazine is also available on-line at www.gapgolf.org.

Platt, who had had two bouts with sunstroke earlier in his career, got past George Griffin, 4&3, in the semifinals before facing Duff McCullough in a championship match that was delayed until late afternoon, supposedly at McCullough's insistence, to allow Platt to recover from his morning match.

The championship match reached the 20th hole before Platt prevailed to win his seventh and last Philadelphia Amateur title.

In the following years, Platt continued to compete in tournaments, but focused more of his energy on the administrative side of golf, particularly after becoming a member of the Association's Executive Committee in 1945.

His last great moment as a competitor came in 1955, when he headed to Belle Meade Country Club near Nashville, Tenn., to compete in the first U.S. Senior Amateur Championship. After 18 holes of qualifying and four matches, Platt defeated George Studinger, 5&4, in the 18-hole final to finally claim a USGA national championship at age 57.

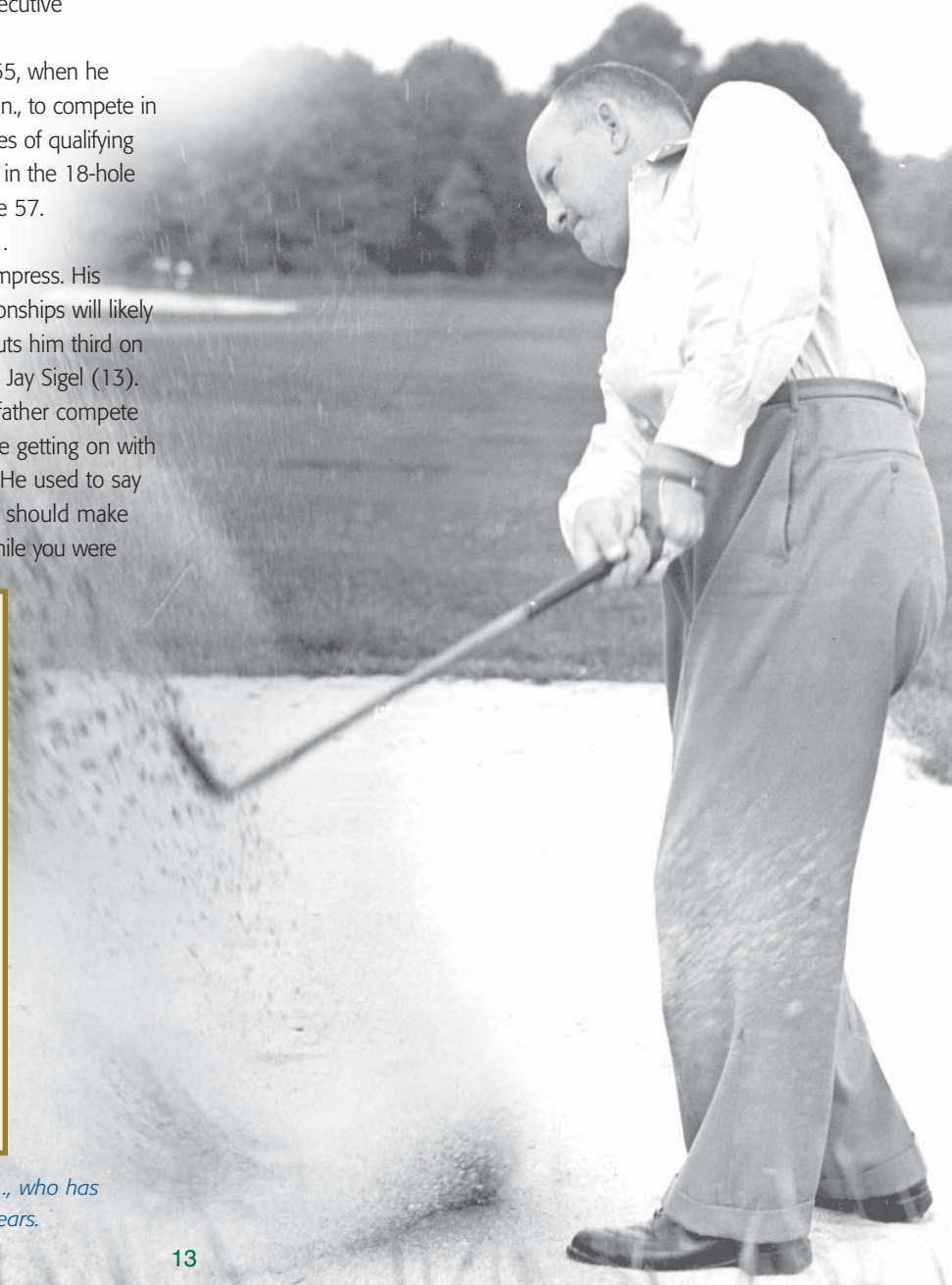
Platt died of a heart attack Dec. 8, 1959 at age 61.

Fifty years later, his accomplishments continue to impress. His seven Golf Association of Philadelphia Amateur Championships will likely never be equaled and his total of 11 GAP Major titles puts him third on the all-time list behind William Hyndman, III (15) and R. Jay Sigel (13).

Platt's daughter, Mary Clay Platt Lee, watched her father compete on a number of occasions and said he wasted little time getting on with his business. "He played fast," she recalled, "really fast. He used to say that you could see where the ball landed and that you should make the decision about what club to use and how to use it while you were

walking up to it. By the time he arrived at his ball he'd made his decision and he would go ahead and hit it."

Apart from his competitive success, Lee remembers how much her father enjoyed the game of golf for its own sake. "He refused to let the stress of the game get to him," she said. "He enjoyed looking at the flowers and the trees, it was part of the beauty of the game."



J. WOOD PLATT RÉSUMÉ

Golf Association of Philadelphia

Amateur Championships 1920, 1922, 1924, 1928, 1938-39, 1942

Silver Cross 1922, 1924, 1926, 1928, 1931, 1938-39

Patterson Cup 1926, 1928, 1938, 1941

Junior Boys' Championship 1918

United States Golf Association

U.S. Senior Amateur Championship

1955 – defeated George Studinger, 5&4, at Belle Meade CC in Nashville, Tenn. (inaugural championship)

Pennsylvania Golf Association

Amateur Championship (1 – 1935)

Rick Woelfel is a freelance writer from Willow Grove, Pa., who has covered golf in the Philadelphia region for the last 13 years.