

up close

Man of the Times



Legendary columnist Dave Anderson is the 2007 MGA Distinguished Service Award recipient and an eyewitness to five decades of sports history

By James A. Frank
Photograph by Jeff Weiner

Dave Anderson doesn't quite understand why he was chosen to be the recipient of the Metropolitan Golf Association's Distinguished Service Award. "I told them years ago I shouldn't be considered for it. The people who really deserve it are those who work the tournaments or work in the MGA office. I just did things for the *New York Times*."

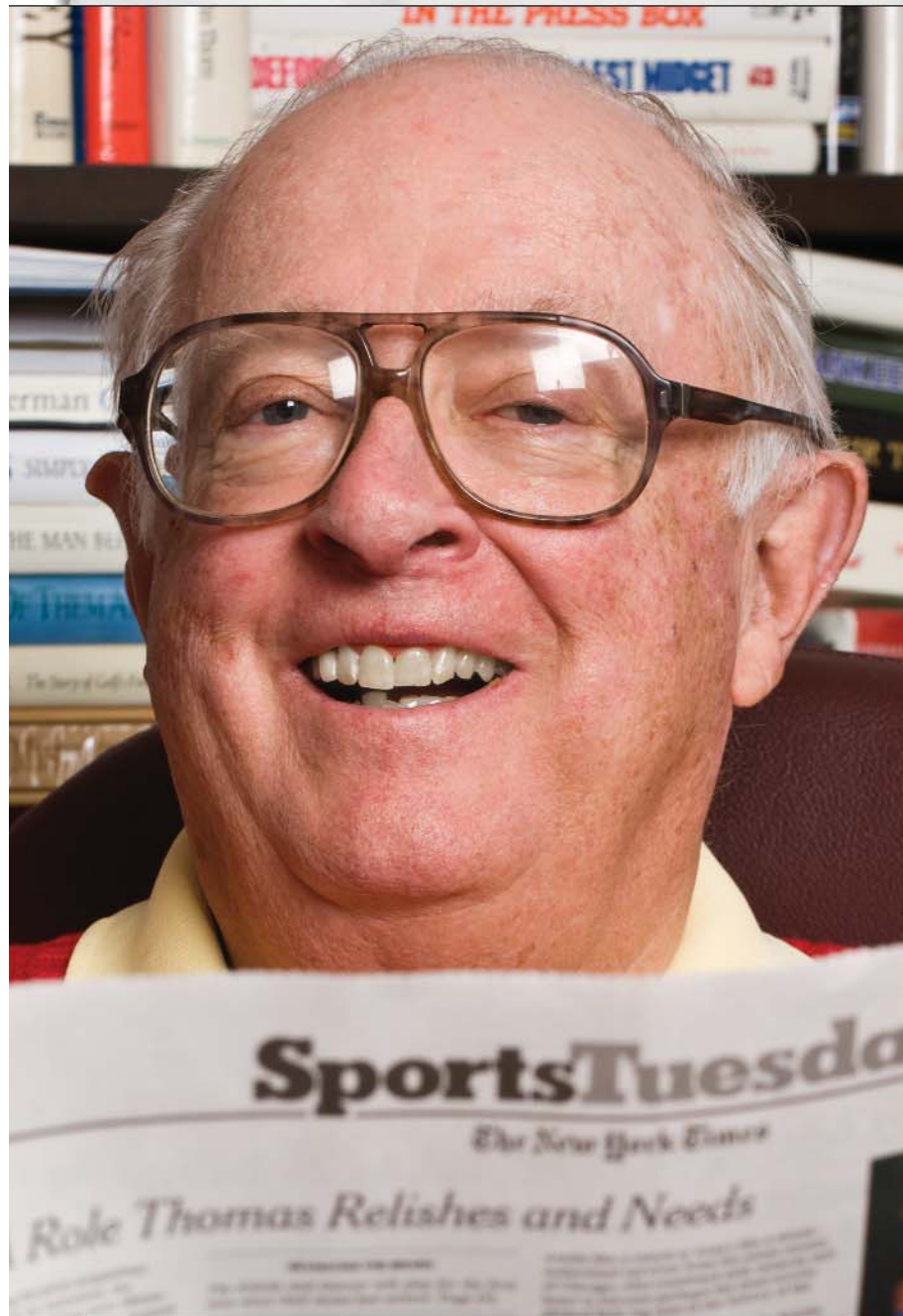
Momentous Occasions

In nearly 60 years, Anderson has witnessed uncountable numbers of great moments in sports. Asked to come up with his favorites, he says there's an obvious first, but the rest are in no particular order.

First: "The U.S. Hockey team beating the Soviets, and then winning the gold medal, at the 1980 Olympics."

After that: "The Brooklyn Dodgers in 1955, the Jets going to the Super Bowl in '69, Nicklaus at

the 1986 Masters, Ali-Frazier fights numbers one and three, Tiger's first Masters win in 1997 (more than the Open three years later because at Augusta he was really still just a kid), the completions of Rod Laver's two Grand Slams, the Rangers winning the '94 Stanley Cup, the Islanders' four cups in a row, the Devils winning three over a few years. And, of course, the Olympics, where the wackiest thing was Ben Johnson in Seoul and the whole steroids story."



Just did things for the *Times*... such as cover New York teams as well as national and international sporting events for the world's leading newspaper for more than 40 years. Give fans insight and appreciation for nearly every sport but especially baseball, football, tennis, boxing, the Olympics, and, of course, golf. Write simply and elegantly. Win a Pulitzer Prize — as well as nearly every other prize a newspaperman can win. Respond to every call or letter from young, aspiring writers with helpful advice. Donate countless hours as a board member to the Metropolitan Golf Writers Association. And be a nice, honest, hard-working guy.

"I'm flattered and I'm honored, but I still don't understand why I'm getting it."

Anderson may not think he is worthy of receiving the MGA's highest honor, but just about any sports fan or person involved with golf in the Met Area would beg to disagree. Although he writes for a global audience, Anderson has always found the time to give back to the game on a local level. For more than a quarter century, he has been an enthusiastic supporter of the MGA and its activities and made dozens of appearances at charity golf events. The Met Golf Writers bestowed the Lincoln Werden Golf Journalism Award on Anderson in 1996, just one of the many awards he has received in recognition of his achievements and contributions.

Perhaps Anderson find time to enjoy the accolades now that he made the decision to reduce his workload. It was announced earlier this year that Anderson would cease working day-to-day for the *Times*, for whom, by his count — and he has the notebooks to prove it — he wrote 5,456 columns between November 1977 and the first week of November 2007, as well as more than 400 magazine articles and 22 books. But slowing down won't mean his byline will disappear; he'll do a dozen or more columns a year. Obviously, after a lifetime of writing, he can't stop.

It started while at Xavier High School in Brooklyn in the mid-1940s. "I worked at the *Sun* during the summers and on Saturdays my senior year. I was a messenger in the mornings and worked in the sports department as a copy boy in the afternoons because there was afternoon baseball. As an evening paper they'd have the box scores and final results of every afternoon game."

The *Sun* said maybe he could come back after college (he attended Holy Cross), but the paper folded his junior year. So in 1951, making \$40 a week, he started in the sports department of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, and, among other duties, covered some Giant and Yankee home games.

In 1952, the Dodgers beat writer, Harold C.

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Burr — Anderson seemingly can remember every writer and editor he ever worked with— was in an accident and suddenly the young reporter had a new assignment. Then the *Eagle* folded in '55, making Dave the last writer from a Brooklyn paper to cover the home team before it moved to Los Angeles in 1957. For that bit of trivia, he is in the Brooklyn Dodgers Hall of Fame, but even that honor does not escape his typical humility, as he says that “anyone who covered the Dodgers on a regular basis” is also enshrined. (Along with some notable opponents, including Stan Musial, Yogi Berra, and, of course, Bobby Thompson).

For the next 11 years he wrote mostly about hockey, tennis, and boxing for the *Journal-American*, moving to the *Times* on October 1, 1966. Two years later he became the beat writer covering the New York Jets — “which was good timing as it was the year they went to the Super Bowl” — while still following boxing, which meant Muhammad Ali. “Between Ali and Joe Namath, I never lacked for something to write about.”

It was in Brooklyn in 1948 that he started playing golf, paying \$25 for a season pass to the city courses and going to nearby Dyker Beach, which was always crowded, or taking a ferry to Staten Island where—for a dime on weekdays, a quarter on weekends—he could walk onto Silver Lake and La Tourette. His only hole-in-one came on the 11th hole at Silver Lake in 1952: He still has the certificate, signed by Walter Hagen, from the Wilson Sporting Goods Company. It's in his office, somewhere among the more than 1,000 books and piles of hats, photos, papers, videotapes, magazines, and other memorabilia from a lifetime of watching and attending games.

“My wife suspects that it's all junk, and in many respects she's correct. But you don't part with this stuff.”

The first major championship Anderson

covered was the 1967 U.S. Open at Baltusrol, which was notable for a number of reasons: It was his first real encounter with Jack Nicklaus; and it was Ben Hogan's last Open, which led to a memorable article, the first of hundreds about the game for the *Times*.

“I think it was Friday, there was a sudden thunderstorm, so Hogan went into the shelter by the 18th tee and his caddie took out the umbrella. When the storm was down to just a sprinkle, this guy came out of the gallery and said, ‘Mr. Hogan, can I hold the umbrella for you?’ Hogan said, ‘Thank you very much.’ The guy held the umbrella over him, walked with him to the tee, and after Hogan hit his shot he asked, ‘Would you like me to keep holding it?’ Hogan said that would be very nice. So this guy is walking down the fairway with Ben Hogan. You'd never see that today, not with Tiger. Steve Williams would deck the guy.

“After Hogan signed his card, the guy — I talked to him afterward — handed back the umbrella and Hogan said, ‘Thank you very much.’ I can still see him, this salesman from Minnesota, holding the umbrella. I wrote all about it.”

In fact, it was the kind of story that became Anderson's trademark — using a small piece of information to illustrate a larger point. That ability to bring events alive on the pages of a newspaper is a main reason why readers could always relate so well to Anderson, and why his work has such a lasting impact on both readers and colleagues.

“The best word, really the only word, to describe Dave is ‘pro,’” says Bill Brink of the *Times*. “In fact, I'd turn it around and say that if you want to describe the word pro, you describe Dave. He's hard-working, supremely skilled, extensively connected — and humble. That's a pretty rare combination.”

Nicklaus went on to win that '67 Open, and so began Anderson's chronicling of the

Anderson, a board member of the Met Golf Writers, presented the Bing Crosby Tournament Sponsor Award to his friend Yogi Berra at the 2005 MGWA Awards dinner.



The Back Nine

In a rapid-fire Q & A, Dave Anderson revealed more details about his life's work.

Story you're sorry you didn't cover:

Billie Jean King vs. Bobby Riggs

Questions you've regretted asking:

None

Easiest player for quotes: Muhammad Ali. But Jack Nicklaus was the best.

Toughest player for quotes: I never considered anybody tough. There were guys who didn't talk, like Thurman Munson, who stopped talking to

writers. So I'd talk to everyone around him. Same with Steve Carlton of the Phillies; I talked to Tim McCarver, Mike Schmidt...that was all I needed.

Favorite golf tournament to cover: U.S. Open... (pause). And the British Open (pause)... And the PGA. The Masters is my least favorite because you can't get inside the ropes.

What he tells aspiring writers who ask for advice: Read.

The future of newspapers: The Internet, whether we like it or not. I'm not an

Internet guy—I only turn on the computer to file stories. I find it easier to write letters on a typewriter.

Favorite sport: I don't have one. You can say golf in the sense that I play it. But not to write about. They're all great.

Favorite team: I'm not a fan, never really was, even as a kid. Once you're in the business, you shouldn't be a fan. Fans are emotionally involved with teams. I've always been the guy that when someone asks, 'Who's gonna win?' I say, 'Hey, let's just enjoy what happens.'



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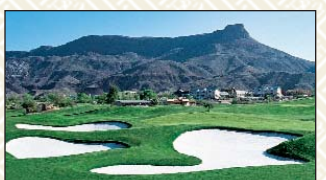
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man he calls "the best interview in any sport." Whenever Nicklaus would talk, Dave would listen. "He wouldn't just give you a brush-off answer, he'd talk for five minutes answering one question. And he'd do it for anybody."

"I don't know how many times I'd be planning to write about something else, then Jack would come in to do his interview and I'd think, 'I'd better go listen to him.' Which I would and I'd wind up writing about whatever he was talking about. Whatever Jack said was always more interesting than what anyone else was saying."

Nicklaus returns the compliment. "There is a reason why I was Dave's favorite interview. It is because I not only like him, but I trust him. I could tell him everything about anything, and I knew I would be treated fairly."

So is Nicklaus also the greatest player he's ever seen? Yes, "until Tiger passes him, which he will as long as he doesn't get hurt. Tiger's edge is that he has Jack's 18 majors to go for. Jack had Bobby Jones' 13 to shoot for, though some of them were [U.S.] Amateurs. I always thought if Jones had won 22, Jack would have won 25."

Tiger was the subject of the only Anderson column the *Times* killed. Just before the 2002 Masters, the paper ran an editorial saying that Woods should boycott the tournament until Augusta National admitted a female member. "The editorial prompted me to do the column," Anderson says. "I said that's not his business and they killed the column. Editors are entitled to do that; I just don't have to agree with them. I'd kind of forgotten about it until 10 days later a reporter from the *Daily News* called me and said they'd heard the column had been killed. The next day it was in the *News* and everything went up in flames. The *Times* finally ran the column the following Sunday and the only thing they took out, which they could have taken out the first time, was a phrase about the editorial.

"I was never as concerned about Tiger as I was about the *New York Times* telling a golfer not to play golf. That's crazy. It was great for about three days. I was on Lou Dobbs. Journalism was at stake, apparently." Anderson doesn't harbor any resentment

toward the newspaper, and understands that one controversy in 40 years is nothing to complain about. As he puts it, "You can't buy the life I've had." While writing about Ali he went to Zaire, Venezuela, Malaysia, Las Vegas, and many other places. He's been around the world covering the Olympics, plus Wimbledon and dozens of British Opens. And whenever he knew he'd have the time, his clubs came along. "Thanks to the *Times*, I've been able to play a lot of courses."

"The last big fight was Mike Tyson and Lennox Lewis in 2002 in Memphis. We played golf there twice." And when the fights were in Las Vegas, "we'd tee off at 7 in the morning to beat the heat."

Another notebook shows that he's played 571 different courses, and — just like his recordkeeping of his columns — he's kept track of every score since 1980. His lowest round was a 74 at a Sunningdale member-guest in 1984. "I'd never broken 80 and it was the easiest thing I ever did. Every ball was in the fairway, every shot on the green, and I made the putts. To show what an aberration it was, I played four times that week and shot 87 the other three times."

A member of Knickerbocker Country Club in Tenafly, New Jersey — "a wonderful Donald Ross course" — Anderson doesn't hesitate when asked to name his favorite places to play. "The obvious ones: Shinnecock, Cypress Point, Pebble Beach, and Knickerbocker, of course." How about five in the Met Area? That's a little harder: "Garden City Golf, I love Quaker Ridge, both Winged Foot courses... I can give you 30..."

At 78, he is in good shape, his memory is razor-sharp, and his attitude is positive. "We're not getting old," he says. "We're here. If I wasn't this age, think of all the things I would have missed. How many people can say they covered Jackie Robinson and the Dodgers?"

As Dave Anderson says, you can't buy the life he's had. You can't buy the Distinguished Service award, either. He's earned it, even if he doesn't think so. ■ James A. Frank, former editor of *GOLF Magazine* and *Golf Connoisseur*, is based in New York City.

A selection of Anderson's columns over the years provides a snapshot into the lives of some of the greatest athletes in boxing, football and golf.