

inside SocialGolf

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A mammoth victory with JUMBO

In early 1972 I had a decision to make. At the end of 1971, my second New Zealand Golf Tour season, I had caddied in several events for the talented and eventually prolific winner of events, John Lister. But I had been advised by Lister that he would have a friend of his caddying for him at the **New Zealand PGA Championship at Mt Maunganui** in January.

In that era the New Zealand Golf Tour came at the end of the year and, without the extended schedule that other tours worldwide have had in more recent years, there existed the opportunity for many of the leading players from Australasia to compete. As a result, the five or six events on the New Zealand Tour were well supported by those players who had played well internationally throughout the year.

Without a guaranteed bag at the 1972 New Zealand PGA, I decided to head across to Mt Maunganui a little early from my then home in Rotorua and investigate possibilities for work. I was keen to get a 'good bag' in this event but it would not be easy. There had been word that the tournament organizer and main sponsor, Bob Owens from a company called Stars Travel, had invited several of Japan's leading players to the event and that became a possible option.

Not fully aware of the credentials of the Japanese players who would be in

the field, I asked around and was informed that there were two players who would be the likely stars of the Japanese contingent and I should try and get the bag of one of them. Those players were Takaaki Kono and a young but extremely talented player, Masashi (Jumbo) Ozaki.

"At that time Ozaki was a 23 year old converted baseball player who had already given the indication that he was a future star of Japanese golf."

Travelling with me to the event was an Australian caddy, Steve Donaldson, who had spent Xmas with myself and my family in Rotorua. We decided that as the Japanese players had not brought their own caddies with them we should both try and get one of the Japanese bags. We enquired at the pro shop and outlined our background to the gentleman who was organizing the caddies for the event and were told that if we wanted to caddy for either Kono or Ozaki then they would be available.



I was surprised at Ozaki's length off the tee. He was at least as long, or longer, than John Lister who was a noted big hitter.

Unable to determine the relative merits of either player, sight unseen, we decided that the best way to handle it would be to toss a coin. I can't quite recall if I won or lost the toss but I ended up with Ozaki.

At that time Ozaki was a 23 year old converted baseball player who had already given the indication that he was a future star of Japanese golf. A huge hitter of the golf ball, his distances were accentuated by the fact that the small ball was in use in world golf outside of the USA at that time. John Lister, my first golfing boss, was a big hitter but this guy was as long if not longer than Lister.

My grasp of the Japanese language in 1972 was equal to Ozaki's grasp of English and so as we headed off in the practice round I had little idea just how much he would want from me in the way of assistance or otherwise. We soon came to an arrangement whereby I would offer yardages in English by pointing to a number I would write down in the yardage book I had created. After a few holes' trial

he came to rely on that and would occasionally ask me my thoughts on club selection. That conversation would normally be along the lines of Jumbo getting set over the ball and prior to taking the club away he would look at me and say 'OK?'. It was unnerving initially but it soon became part of our pre shot routine. Did I ever change his mind? Well yes, there were a few occasions and all in all the caddy/ player relationship would work very well that week, especially given the unusual logistics of it.

At the half way mark of the event, Kono was leading and I was rueing that I had not drawn him as my player although Ozaki had impressed me so much early in the tournament that I felt he was still likely to be a factor by Sunday.

There were several incidents during the course of the week where Ozaki hit shots that left me simply stunned at his ability. There was one, however, that still stands out. On the 10th hole in round two

he drove behind a tree to the right of the fairway. I had walked ahead as the tee was back a little from the 9th green and by the time Ozaki arrived at the ball I had already done the yardages although in my own mind there

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was little point as it appeared as if a chip out was the only option. I could not for the life of me see a way of even accessing the fairway further up, let alone the green.

Ozaki looked at me and I gestured towards the chip out but he saw an opening in the trees just ahead.

I saw the opening after he began to indicate he would attempt it but in my mind there was no way he could pull it off. The gap was just too narrow for there to be any margin for error. After a couple of minutes assessing the situation there was the swish of the club and no noise as the ball slipped through the narrowest of gaps and came to rest three feet from the flag some 140 yards away. He looked at me and smiled as if to say – "I told you so," but really, there was little need to verbalise anything. Of course he made the putt for birdie also.

Ozaki moved into a winning position on Saturday and by Sunday he was edging clear of a field that included some of the best from this part of the world. The great New Zealander, Bob Charles and Guy Wolstenholme were fighting it out for second with Charles eventually winning that battle, albeit some six shots behind Ozaki.

It was a great thrill for me as at the age of just eighteen here I was caddying for the first of several winners I would go on to caddy for. As we walked to the clubhouse I was asked to talk to the golf journalists and describe Ozaki's heroics as there was little point in asking the big fella.

Ozaki headed into the clubhouse and about fifteen minutes later came out with extra balls and gloves for me and an amount of money that seemed totally inappropriate at the time. It was nowhere near what I had imagined I would be given or indeed had earned and I was somewhat taken aback by the gesture or lack of it. It was way below my expectations.

I sought out the respected Japanese golfer, Hideyo



Bruce Young
Teeing Off

regular contributor



Jumbo would go on to win more than 100 events in Japan but our victory that week remains his only one outside his home country.

Sugimoto, and indicated that I had worked for Ozaki and I felt that I deserved more than I had been given. I said I was a professional golf caddy and while the gloves and balls were nice to get they were not likely to pay any upcoming airfares across the Tasman to caddy in Australia.

Sugimoto, to his credit, said he would talk to Jumbo and about twenty minutes later Ozaki emerged from the clubhouse with a big smile on his face and proceeded to hand over twice the original amount he gave me.

To be fair to Ozaki, and given the fact that he was playing outside of Japan for one of the first times in his golfing career, he had little idea as to what was

an acceptable caddy payment. I had a better idea and fortunately for me, Sugimoto, as a well travelled Japanese professional, did also.

In 1989 I travelled to Japan, while caddying for Graham Marsh, and met up with Jumbo for the first time since that tournament in early 1972. Since that time he had won over 100 events in Japan but to that day and since, the 1972 New Zealand PGA Championship is the only tournament he has won outside of Japan.

He would have won with any caddy on his bag that week but to have been part of it and in such a strange twist of circumstances is one of the many nice memories my caddying career has given me.

Ozaki's English and my Japanese were about equal. I doubt there was much chit chat going on here!



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