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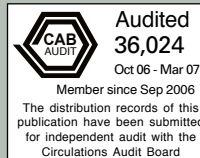
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The Von - my last and lasting memories

Norman Von Nida passed away peacefully on May 20th of this year at the age of 93 leaving behind a legacy as one of this country's great players and one of its great motivators and givers.

I first met 'The Von' in 2000. One of the radio stations for which I provide golf related segments had decided to do a preview of the Open Championship at St Andrews that year and just before I left my Gold Coast home to drive to Brisbane I was contacted by the station to advise that they were keen to get Norman Von Nida on the show by phone that day. I quickly jumped on the internet and searched for information as to when Norman had played at the Open at St Andrews and how he had done but even with that background, whilst driving to Brisbane, I was concerned as to how things would go that morning.

I had not had any contact with Norman previously but was aware of a reputation he had for being feisty and strongly opinionated and was anxious that as a rookie in the business of golf related media he might expose my raw edges. I needn't have worried. Norman was the perfect gentleman and was very encouraging and I was amazed that even at the age of 86, as he was then, he was reeling off specific details of his time at St Andrews and his memories of not only the 1946 Open, where he finished 4th behind Sam Snead, but of other occasions he had visited the 'Home of Golf'.

After the show that day I called Norman to thank him for his

contribution and he asked if I was interested in a game with him at Royal Queensland at some later stage. Of course, that was an offer that was not going to be declined and it so happened that the father of a good friend of mine from New Zealand was on the Gold Coast on holiday at the time and thought he might like to join Norman and I for a few holes of golf.

Bob Glading won the New Zealand Open on two occasions and was just a few years younger than Norman. They had often played together in their respective heydays and so we travelled to Royal Queensland where I met Norman for the first time. We played just nine holes that day but our friendship was cemented and I am honoured to be able to say that in his final years the Von and I became very close.

I would often travel to Scarborough, east of Brisbane, which was Norman's home for many years, or often just call him to chat about things. At his home in Scarborough the first thing offered was a bottle of coke as Norman had a cupboard full in ready supply. Norman regularly drank coke for much of his life after only once drinking alcohol.

I had the opportunity to drive him to several of the functions to which he was invited where he was always the centre of attention and which he loved to be part of. I also recall taking him to Northlakes course north of Brisbane



It is a great source of pride to me that Norman and I became so close in his final years.

one day during the construction of that course there where despite being handicapped with failing site (Norman was categorised as being legally blind many years earlier) he was strong in his opinion of the holes he saw and the changes he thought should be made. I was not always sure he was looking in the right direction but it was typical of Norman, wanting to have his say.

Having gotten to know the man over those first couple of years and having developed a far greater appreciation of his contribution and role in the game, I made the decision that I would like to put together an audio tribute. I wanted the tribute to be not so much on his golfing career as such (although that would be a significant part of it) but more on the role Norman played in helping others. In talking to him, and via other avenues,

it became apparent that Norman had a very philanthropic nature and would help almost anyone who sought his advice.

It was hard to know where to start as so many had been touched by his generosity. Those I called included Gary Player, Peter Thomson, Bruce Crampton, Dave Thomas (a Welsh golfer of the 50's and 60's and now a highly regarded golf course designer) and no matter who I called the response was immediate and consistent. "I would love to be part of it," they all said.

I wanted to include some from outside the golfing world and there was one obvious candidate

and one perhaps not quite so. Scobie Breasley is one of the greatest jockeys in Australian racing history and he and Norman had been great friends over a long period of time. Breasley had a serious race fall in the United Kingdom during an era when Norman was playing there and Norman played a significant role in his rehabilitation back to good health.

The less obvious one was Johnnie Famechon, the great Australian boxer who after his car accident in the early 1990's had struggled to recover. Norman gave several of his trophies and some money to the Famechon Trust and when I asked if he was able to say a

few words on the tribute Famechon provided a moving tribute to a man he had never met.

Norman himself spoke throughout this tribute and those above were interspersed with Norman's thoughts on his own life. At the completion of the tribute Norman summarised his life in a one minute account of what his life had meant to him and how fortunate he had been to have lived the life he had and that he had been able to help others. That account would be played at his funeral on May 25th.

Not long after the tribute had been completed, Norman suffered a serious accident when hit by a car while he was crossing a road. His arm was broken and he suffered significant bruising and to all intents and purposes his golfing life was over. For more than two years Norman was unable to play the game he loved so much. Just prior to the accident he had been a regular visitor to Royal Queensland playing with friends with his fluorescent clubs and balls on a golf course where he knew every blade of grass despite being unable to see them properly. That he was no longer able to enjoy the game that had been so much of his life was an agonising and soul destroying time for him.

"We played just nine holes that day but our friendship was cemented and I am honoured to be able to say that in his final years the Von and I became very close."

In May of 2005 and more than two years after his accident I received a call from Norman asking if I would be able to take him to a golf course on the Gold Coast to see whether it was possible for him to play again. Norman wanted this to be a private affair as he had no idea what he was capable of doing and being a proud man he wanted, at that time, for this to be something between just he and I. After just one hole he said to me that he had had enough and had realised after that very short time that he would never again be able to play to a level that he was prepared to accept. I thought he had done ok but again it was typical of Norman. As I drove



Bruce Young Teeing Off

regular contributor

Norman back to his retirement home that day there was little said between us. Nothing could be said - it was a moment that he as such a highly regarded golfer and I, as his friend who was witnessing his anguish and disappointment, struggled to accept.

With the advent of the Von Nida Tour, it was more than just a case of Norman lending his name to a vehicle for young and emerging players. Whenever asked he would jump at the chance to attend those events in the Queensland area such as the Queensland Open and the Queensland PGA Championships. Despite no longer being able to play the game Norman wanted to be part of it in whatever capacity he could. The last of those events he attended was when I drove him up to the launch of the 2006 Queensland Open and during the event when another friend took him to the third day's play.

Norman's wife Elva's health deteriorated in her latter years and Norman felt uncomfortable about leaving her as much as he had done in earlier times. Whenever circumstances would allow, however, Norman was keen to add his presence and support to not only events such as those mentioned above but other golf related functions. He was always the centre of attention and people were engrossed in the countless

stories he was able to relate. I first heard of the Von's passing just a few minutes after he had passed away with family members at his side at his Gold Coast nursing home. It struck me like a brick. Despite the fact that the quality of life he had been so used to throughout his remarkable time on this earth was no longer available to him, his passing was the end of an era which had incorporated such a great chunk of the evolution of Australian golf.

Norman's funeral brought together many of the countless people whose paths he had crossed in a life where he had lived in Queensland, New South Wales, Britain, Malaysia and the United States. Those who spoke included Peter Thomson, Geoff Scott from the PGA of Australia and Norman's very close friend, Charlie Earp. As the funeral wound to a close it was my privileged honour to say the final goodbye. Although I spoke of one or two of my own experiences with him, we let Norman have the final say by playing the last minute of that audio tribute mentioned earlier.

I am extremely proud, blessed and honoured to have shared a friendship with Norman Von Nida during his last few years. I thank him for that opportunity but importantly I thank him for the endless encouragement and self belief he gave myself and so many others.

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