

Boo benefits from improved footwear
Rochester Democrat and Chronicle - Rochester, N.Y.
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Date: Aug 13, 2006
Start Page: D.8
Section: Sports
Text Word Count: 1247

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PITTSFORD -- It was one of the things that made Boo Weekley the great story that he was in 2002 when he came from nowhere -- literally nowhere, a real life version of Tin Cup character Roy McAvoy -- to qualify to play on the PGA Tour.

Weekley had anyone who was paying attention at the 2001 PGA Tour Qualifying Tournament asking "Who's this guy?" when they saw him ripping drives down the middle, knocking in putts from everywhere, and doing it all while wearing funky-looking rain pants and sneakers.

"What can I tell y'all," said the 33-year-old Weekley, a good 'ol boy from the panhandle of Florida who speaks in a deep Southern twang that sounds a whole lot more country than country club. "I'm just me. I've got bad feet and a skin rash."

He still has the skin condition that is irritated by cotton or polyester pants, so while stalking Irondequoit Country Club this week during the Nationwide Tour's Xerox Classic, as he does every week, Weekley wears his trademark rain pants.

However, you might notice that he's now wearing golf shoes.

And he has Fairport's Tim Hart to thank for that.

"Tim the shoe man," Weekley said Friday after he got himself into contention with a 67, then headed down to the locker room so Hart could make him a new custom-fit pair of insoles that make it possible for Weekley to wear golf shoes.

When Weekley -- who tacked on a 68 in Saturday's third round to move into a tie for second, one shot behind leader Steve Collins -- came to Rochester last year for the inaugural Xerox Classic, he met Hart, who was participating in a program whereby tournament sponsors get to hang out with the pros. Hart was paired up with Weekley, and for both parties it was a match made in heaven.

The two got to talking and Weekley explained that he didn't wear golf shoes when he played because they hurt his feet. Bad arches, you see.

Imagine his glee when he found out that Hart has his own business called The Balanced Athlete, operated out of The Ski Company store on Jefferson Road in Henrietta, and for the past 25 years he had been custom fitting boots for skiers.

And imagine Hart's glee when, after making Weekley's insoles, the golfer started talking up Hart to his buddies on the Nationwide Tour, so much so that Hart brought his fitting machine to Irondequoit this week and molded insoles for more than 20 players.

All of a sudden he has a burgeoning new branch of his business.

"It's all the same principle," Hart said of making what he calls "shoe beds" for ski boots and golf shoes. "It's about core balance."

Hart explained that not only do the shoe beds provide added comfort, they stabilize the feet throughout the golf swing because the feet don't roll side to side as much during the transfer of weight.

"He told me what he did and asked me if I'd like to try it and I said 'I'll try anything' and that's what I did," Weekley said. "He adjusted them for my arch, and ever since then I've been able to put on golf shoes. It's been great."

What hasn't been great has been Weekley's golf game ever since his shocking qualification for the PGA Tour.

Feeling very much out of place in the big leagues, Weekley missed the cut in his first 10 events and wound up making just five cuts in 24 starts to finish 200th on the money list, and he hasn't been back on the tour since, playing the last 3 1/2 years on the Nationwide Tour.

"It didn't set in until I got home (from Q-School)," Weekley recalled of that unforgettable time in his life when he made the quantum leap from mini-tours to the big time. "Once it did, it was kind of like 'What do I do now? Where am I going to go? How am I going to get there?' I'd always driven everywhere I had to go; I'd probably flown five or six times my whole life until I got my tour card. They call you up and tell you the first event is in Hawaii, and I'm like 'I can't drive to Hawaii.' It was kind of like I was lost and it was hard to focus on what I wanted to accomplish."

Weekley had trouble fitting in with the Polo and Rolex set. He preferred hanging in the caddie tent rather than the clubhouse grill room. Face it, this guy with the dip of chew between his cheek and gum who used to pick cotton and soybeans on his grandfather's farm in Milton, Fla., and spent time working at a Pensacola chemical plant didn't have a whole lot in common with Tiger, Phil and Vijay.

"It's pretty cutthroat out here," Weekley said late in that 2002 season. "I see someone new, I go up and say, 'Hey, how you doing? I'm Boo Weekley.' Around here, they just shoo you off. They don't care if you're here or not. That kind of gets to me."

More than feeling like an outsider, putting is what doomed Weekley on the PGA Tour, and it's doing the same to him on the Nationwide Tour. He has ranked 133rd (2003), 138th (2004), 129th (2005) and 150th (2006) in putts per round on the Nationwide Tour.

"That's what brought me down, and I've been struggling ever since to get my putter to work," he said. "But I figure if it ain't gonna go, it ain't gonna go, there's no use fighting it. If it ain't your turn, it ain't your turn."

But as laid-back as he is -- so laid back that he admits if he could make a living hunting and fishing instead of playing golf, he'd be doing that -- Weekley still believes it will be his turn someday and he's not giving up on making it back to the PGA Tour.

He is currently about \$41,000 outside the top 20 on the Nationwide money list, and a win in the final one-third of the season or a slew of top-five finishes would likely be enough to get him inside the top 20 and give him his mulligan on the PGA Tour.

"I'm going to get there, whether it's this year, next year or five years down the road," he said. "I will be back on that big tour. Nobody can stop me except the good Lord."

And if and when he does make it, he'll be walking in style, and comfort.

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Boo Weekley

Age: 33.

Home: Jay, Fla.

College: Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

Noteworthy: Became a national story at the end of 2001 when he made it through PGA Tour Q-School, as unlikely a Tour player as there has ever been. ... Has wrestled alligators, and his favorite pastime is sitting in a tree stand hunting, or in a boat fishing. ... He leads the Nationwide Tour this season in greens hit in regulation (76.6 percent) and he holds the all-time tour record for most greens hit in a tournament (68 at the Chattanooga Classic earlier this season). ... Played high school golf with PGA Tour player Heath Slocum. ... Given name is Thomas, but he has been called Boo most of his life because growing up his favorite cartoon character was Yogi Bear's sidekick, Boo Boo Bear.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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