

## **The Black Golf Caddy: A Victim of Labor Market Discrimination**

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### **Abstract**

For generations, country clubs and the Professional Golf Association (PGA) Tour featured white golfers crossing manicured fairways, followed by black caddies carrying their bags. Now most clubs rely on golf carts; and pros on the PGA Tour are attended by highly paid white caddies. The transformation of the golf world has mirrored larger shifts in the American workplace, in which the increased status and increased earnings of skilled work have been accompanied by a de facto “push out” of black workers. In the 1960s, the Professional Golf Association (PGA) Tour began being more popular and more profitable. Many observers credit this development during this period to Arnold Palmer’s charismatic, swashbuckling style of play and to the growth of televised golf. The increased popularity of the sport involved wide scale marketing of golf’s big three – Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and Gary Player. By end of the 1960s, Lee Trevino was added to the mix, making the big four. Golf caddying was becoming a respected profession, as the caddies for the big four became famous in their own right. These caddies were Ernest “Creamy” Carolan, Angelo Argea, Alfred “Rabbit” Dyer, and Herman Mitchell, caddies respectively for Palmer, Nicklaus, Player, and Trevino. Since at the time most caddies were black, it is not surprising that two of the four – Dyer and Mitchell – were African American.

The 1960s and 1970s launched the glory years for caddying, as caddies benefited from the increasing popularity and hence increasing money prizes available in professional tournament golf. In fact, Alfred Dyer, Gary Player’s caddy, was able to send a son to Princeton University (Sailor 2003), a financial feat unheard of among caddies before the 1960s. However, as the status of caddies increased, the presence of African American caddies steadily decreased.

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### **Historical Background**

When golf and country clubs were established in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, caddying was a menial low-paying job typically reserved for poor African American youth, some of whom were only eight or nine years old. Into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, black boys caddying merely exemplified wide spread use of child labor, like the armies of children working 14 to 16 hours per day, six days per week in mills and coal mines. Often, black boys filled the caddying ranks because they were not allowed in the dangerous, but slightly higher paying mills and coal mines with white youth (Sinnette 1998). Most caddies were males, until recently, when a few white females began caddying on the PGA Tour. Currently, these females are most often the wives or daughters of the professional golfers. There is no record of a black female caddy who has worked regularly on the PGA Tour.

In their eagerness to earn as much money as possible, a caddy at a country club would walk as many as three 18-hole rounds per day, that is 12 to 15 miles, often carrying two bags, each weighing between 30 and 50 pounds.

Since golf was seen as an idyllic exercise and as another position for the black servant class (Sinnette 1998), and also because it was not as dangerous as factory and mining jobs, national campaigns against child labor excluded child caddies, most of whom were black. Consequently, black youth labored on, making very little money. In the 1920s and 1930s, a caddy could work all day for \$1. By the 1950s, the wages increased to \$2 for carrying a single bag for 18 holes, about 50 cents per hour, and \$3 to carry two bags of golf equipment.

Without child labor laws protecting them, black youth dominated the field into the 1940s and 1950s; many starting when they were less than ten years old. Alfred "Rabbit" Dyer started at nine in the 1940s. He and his father worked at the same country club in Louisiana; his father caddied for Gary Player in the 1960 New Orleans Open. Rabbit then caddied for Player in the 1962 New Orleans Open (CaddyBytes 2007). Jerry Osborn, another black former Tour caddy, started at eight years of age, as did Freddie Burns, the long-time caddy for Hal Sutton.

Currently, most caddies at country clubs are teen-agers; some are older men, especially in the South. As young black caddies aged, they became experienced adults at country clubs and on the PGA Tour. Because the Masters Tournament was hosted by the Augusta National Golf Club, this club launched many caddies who became fixtures on the Pro Tour. Since

all participants in the Masters Tournament had to use local caddies, pro golfers became familiar with them and sometimes brought their favorite caddies onto the PGA Tour.

Because of the Masters Tournament, Augusta National Golf Club was the source of many caddies who became fixtures on the Pro Tour. Several of the Augusta National caddies were legendary. There was Willie “Pappy” Stokes, the godfather of caddies at Augusta National, having won five times as a Masters caddy with four different players between 1938 and 1956. He is credited in caddy circles at Augusta National as the man who taught most of the “name” caddies there how to read the undulating greens. Mostly, the star pros kept the same caddy at the Masters through the years. Willie Petersen won five Masters caddying for Jack Nicklaus. Nathaniel “Iron Man” Avery won four times with Arnold Palmer; O’Bryant Williams won three times with Sam Snead; Fred Searles won twice with Byron Nelson; and Carl Jackson won twice with Ben Crenshaw. Even Augusta National member and avid golfer President Eisenhower had the same caddy through the years—Willie “Cemetery” Poteat (Clayton 2004). As regular caddies for star players over the years, the top Augusta National caddies were instrumental in establishing the role of regular professional caddies.

Caddies on the PGA Tour did not have it easy. Of course, most of these golf servants were black. Until 1961, when the PGA Tour was forced to discontinue its practice of barring African Americans from playing on the Tour, the players were all white and most of the caddies were black. In the 1950s and early 1960s, black caddies traveled from event to event across the country on greyhound buses, segregated to the back of the bus, and changing their clothes in the woods or in the parking lot (Caddy Bytes 2007).

As caddying on the Pro Tour began to rise in status, another significant development occurred in caddying. In 1983 Augusta National Golf Club stopped its practice of requiring players to use club caddies in the Masters Tournament. Players then began to choose their own caddies for the Masters and they were mostly white. This practice reduced the participation of the famed Augusta National caddies, and affected a long-standing tradition at the Masters—white players with black caddies in white coveralls. As Rabbit Dyer explained, “White caddies did not come out on tour until the early 60s – it was below them to caddy back then” (CaddyBytes 2007). Although a 1961 ruling decreed that the PGA Tour could no longer bar African Americans in the Tour, all players were white and most caddies were black, with the exception of Lee Elder who was admitted to the Tour before 1975. He was admitted to play in the Masters

Tournament in 1975.

### **Advent of the Professional Golfer**

The professionalization of golf caddies followed the professionalization of golfers by several generations. Professional golfers were not a privileged group in the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century America. Until Walter Hagen established professional golf by making more money playing golf than teaching it (Smart 2005), the main role of the golf pro was “giving lessons, supervising the pro shop, overseeing the care of the course grounds, and building and repairing golf clubs. He did the bidding of the golf club members, who were from the upper class, and was treated the same way as butlers, chauffeurs, and maids” (Clavin 2005: 37).

Hagen started as a caddie at the Country Club of Rochester and became a club pro in 1912, receiving \$1,000 for eight months’ work. During this time, few pros at country clubs averaged more than \$50 per week. By 1913, Hagen was 20-year old head golf pro, yet he had to beg his employers for time off to play in the 1913 U.S. Open at The Country Club in Boston. This was the historic tournament won by Francis Ouimet, a 20-year old amateur and former caddie at The Country Club who defeated the British golfers Harry Vardon and Ted Ray. Vardon was golf’s first superstar and Ray was the reigning British Open champion. Ouimet’s victory changed the American perception of golf from a sport for rich foreigners to a sport that everyday people could play.

Walter Hagen finished third in the 1913 Open. He was then sponsored by members of the Country Club of Rochester and won the 1914 U.S. Open at Chicago’s Midlothian Country Club. There, for the first time, golf pros could enter the clubhouse. Hagen initiated this practice by marching into the locker room instead of changing shoes in the parking lot as pros had previously been compelled to do (Gabriel 2001). Not only was Hagen the first American professional touring player, he was also a key participant in the creation of the Professional Golf Association (in 1916). After winning the 1919 U.S. Open, Hagen left his club job and become the first golfer to earn his livelihood completely from tournament incomes and endorsements.

**Table 1: Total Purses on the PGA Tour by Decade**

Year	Number of Events	Total Purse
1938	38	\$ 158,000
1950	33	459,950
1960	41	1,335,242
1970	55	6,751,523
1980	45	13,371,786
1990	44	46,251,831
2000	49	157,000,000

Source: J. Luft. 2000. [http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/statitudes/news/2000/08/28/tigermoney\\_statitudes/](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/statitudes/news/2000/08/28/tigermoney_statitudes/)

Professional golf grew steadily during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with sharp increases in status and earnings after 1950. In the 62-year period between 1938 and 2000, purses grew 1,000-fold (See Table 1). The huge increase in total purses between 1995 and 2005 is credited to the impact and popularity of Tiger Woods, who joined the Tour in 1996.

### Professional Caddies

The role of the professional caddy goes beyond carrying the bag and handing the player a club. A good caddy who knows the game of golf can play a major role in the success of his player. Caddies prepare for competitive rounds by walking the course, checking yardages, and finding trouble spots on the course. They may be involved in crucial decisions during play. For example, they advise the pro on club selection, a decision influenced by estimated wind speed and direction and the terrain of the golf hole. They also assist with “reading the greens,” determining the effect that undulations in the green will have on the path of putts.

The early caddies on the PGA Tour were a “ragged crew of itinerant African-Americans who, like their pros, followed the sun from one tournament to the next, eking out a living as they lived on the edge of society. These ‘professional’ caddies were the last in line when it came to respectability” (Babbles 2007). With the increased status of the PGA Tour and the increase in tournament purses in the 1960s, more players began to have regular caddies; and of course, since most of the caddies were black, caddies on the Tour tended to be black.

Caddies are paid according to the earnings of the professional golfer. Caddy pay is a closely held secret and the pay formula varies slightly between golfer-caddy teams. However, the typical formula is widely reported. Caddies on the Tour are generally paid \$1,000 for each tournament played, plus at least five percent of the player's earnings. If the player finishes in the top ten places, the caddy gets seven percent of the player's earnings, and if the player wins the caddy gets 10 percent. Thus, as the prize money for tournaments rose, caddies began earning more as well (See Table 2).

**Table 2: Earnings of Leading PGA Tour Money Winners by Year, with Corresponding Estimates of Caddy Earnings**

Year	Earnings of Leading Money Winners*	Estimated Caddy Earnings
1955	\$ 63,122	\$ 6,176
1965	140,752	13,773
1975	298,149	29,174
1985	542,321	53,066
1995	1,654,959	161,938
2005	10,628,024	1,039,955

\*Source: L. Rubenstein and J. Neuman. 2006. *A Disorderly Compendium of Golf*. New York: Workman Publishing.

The calculations of the 2005 estimated caddy earnings in Table 2 were based on the typical formula—10% for wins, 7% for top ten finishes, and 5% for non-top tens—applied to Tiger Woods' tournament by tournament earnings in 2005, as he was the leading money winner that year. The resulting caddy earnings rate—9.785% of the pro golfer's winnings—was applied to the other years, 1955 to 1995, for the respective estimated caddy earnings.

Currently, about 70 caddies on the PGA Tour make \$100,000 or more for about 30 weeks' work, as few golf pros play in more than 30 weekly events per year.

Steve Williams, caddy for Tiger Woods, has even started a charitable foundation with some of the millions he has made carrying Tiger Woods's bag.

Caddying has established itself so well in recent years that there is a professional association, the Professional Tour Caddies of America (PCTA) which includes some 130 full time PGA Tour caddies. The majority of PGA Tour players are said to employ PTCA caddies. To qualify for membership, a caddy must have worked a minimum of 15 PGA Tour tournaments. The PTCA advocates for caddies by working "closely with PGA Tour Officials



and personnel to assure policies and communications between the PGA Tour and PCTA Tour caddies is accurate and positive” (PCTA 2007). The PTCA operates a mobile restaurant and gathering place for all caddies that is set up at many Tour venues.

### **Disappearance of Black Caddies on Tour**

The professionalization of the role of the caddy has come at the expense of blacks. In 1998, only one of the top 50 golfers on the PGA Tour employed an African American caddy: Freddie Burns, caddy for Hal Sutton. As Burns tells it, “In 1981, there were twice as many black caddies as whites. Now [in 1998] I’m the only one carrying a top-50 bag” (Sailor 2003). In 1998, 55 PGA Tour players earned over \$1,000,000 in prize money, which meant that 54 white caddies earned at least \$100,000, with only one black caddy, Freddie Burns, earning as much (Benet 2002). In 2007, with Sutton past his prime and no longer playing the PGA Tour, the figure has moved to zero. No player in the top 50 and virtually no other player employs a black caddy on a regular basis. Not even Tiger Woods employs a black caddy.

### **What Happened?**

Clearly, African-Americans were prominent among the professional caddy ranks when caddying was first established as a “profession.” However, Africa Americans are no longer at the top levels of their profession. What happened? Several developments undoubtedly affected the status of African Americans as caddies. One was increasing use of motorized golf carts which have replaced caddies at the majority of golf courses. Nationally, only 7.3 percent of the 16,398 golf clubs in the United States with at least 18 holes offer caddie services (Fowler 2007). Another development was the growth in employment options for black youth, along with a growing disdain for such a subservient-appearing job as caddying.

Although the widespread use of golf carts and poor image are relevant to the radical decline in numbers of black caddies, it is critical to note that the position of “the caddy” remains a fixture of golf tour. Only the color of these caddies has changed. African American caddies have been the victims of a process that journalist William Rhoden calls “the Jockey Syndrome” (Rhoden 2006).

### **Similar “Push out” Scenarios**

African Americans dominated the jockey ranks from the era of slavery up through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and they represented an overwhelming majority of professional horse trainers. Former slaves who worked closely with animals naturally continued to work with horses.

Many gained considerable status as winning jockeys and trainers. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, horse racing grew in the United States. However, the emphasis was more on the horse than on the jockey. Between the end of the Civil War and 1900, the status of the jockey increased substantially, with leading jockeys earning between \$5,000 and \$6,000 per year, seven to ten times the income of the average worker of that time (Rhoden 2006). The leading jockey of this era, African American Isaac Murphy, earned more than the entire payroll of the leading major league baseball team during this period. However, by the turn of the century, as horse racing grew in status and in financial rewards, whites became increasingly visible as jockeys, quickly pushing blacks out of their former occupation.

Jimmy Winkfield, the last of the great black jockeys, won the Kentucky Derby in 1901 and 1902, but was forced out of the country to find work as a jockey, as it became extremely difficult, if not impossible, for him to be hired to race. He moved to Russia in 1904, where he became the most celebrated athlete in the country (Hotaling 1999). With the elimination of Winkfield, the pushout of African American jockeys was complete. This process had actually started in 1894 when a racing “union,” the Jockey Club, was established by several prominent thoroughbred owners and breeders. Headquartered in New York City, it became the administrative arm of the horse-racing industry. Among its tasks was the licensing of jockeys. The practice of not licensing black jockeys, combined with the growing reluctance of white horse owners to hire black riders, were driving forces in the demise of black jockeys in America (Rhoden 2006).

This “push out” scenario reflects broad labor market discrimination dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, up to around 1820, a large proportion of the artisans in Philadelphia were free blacks. However, the number of these black artisans had declined significantly by 1837 after the influx of European immigrants and the concomitant “push out” of black workers in skilled trades (Darity 1990).

Other push outs from skilled trades occurred later in the century in the United States in general and in the South in particular. At the end of the Civil War, there were five times as many black skilled artisans as whites in the United States. Many slaves who had been trained in skilled trades became urban contractors; a combination of former slaves and freed blacks dominated the skilled trades (Hine, Hine, and Harrold 2005). Consequently, skilled trades were seen primarily as “black jobs.” However, throughout the latter third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, black skilled artisans steadily lost ground. By 1900, while there were twice as many black skilled artisans



(most of whom lived in the South), as there had been in 1865, blacks represented a rapidly decreasing proportion of the skilled labor force. As southern white workers began crowding into cities and competing with blacks in the traditional skilled trades, the emerging trade unions restricted and eventually prevented the employment of blacks in the transportation service, new mills, and construction, where new techniques and skills were being introduced (Moreno 2006). “Racial discrimination was undoubtedly a major factor in the decline and eclipse of the [black] skilled worker” (Darity 1990:108).

### **Conclusion**

In golf, as in horse racing and skilled trades, as occupations gained status, African Americans were pushed out and replaced by whites. While the golfing establishment did not organize and use unions to exclude black caddies, as had been done in horse racing and skilled trades, black caddies have been the victims of systematic labor market exclusion. The process by which this has occurred may very well be explained with macro-economic principles described by Deidre Royster (2002):

...economists’ concern with formal institutional arrangements, such as contracts, property rights, laws, regulations, and the state, have tended to downplay the potential importance of the ways in which informal norms and networks affect how institutions “act” economically (p. 30).

This perspective argues that white workers continue to engage in customs of black exclusion despite laws and regulations designed to prohibit such action. Royster (2002) described social “networks of inclusion” and “networks of exclusion” that operate to produce racial inequality in labor markets.

The disappearance of black caddies on the PGA Tour—as well as the Champions Tour and the Ladies Professional Golf Association Tour—is a recent example of a phenomenon that has happened several times in African American history: blacks dominate the ranks of an occupation until whites are attracted to it. This attraction is often the result of the work’s increasing in status, which is associated with increased remuneration for the work. Money and status attract whites, who move into the occupation and push blacks out.

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