



The Golf Chronicles

The story of golf at Reading Country Club and in Berks County



Although club names were commonly used, lofts, lies and shaft flexes were not standard. Assembling a 'matched' set of clubs was a challenge for golfers until standardized sets were introduced in the 1930s.



The brassie gets its name from the brass plate screwed into the sole of the wooden head. The plate adds weight to the club and protects the wood against damage from repeatedly striking the ground.



Club makers carved grooves into the face of woods to help control ball spin. The repeated striking of a hard golf ball could damage the grooves so club makers inserted face plates constructed from a hard, fibrous material to protect them. The plate was affixed to the wood with screws, which is why a well-struck shot was said to have been 'hit on the screws.' Sad to say, only old guys still use this colorful expression.

When Golf Took Brass. And Niblicks.

The May 11 entry in The Golf Chronicles featured Alex Findlay's hole-by-hole description of Reading Country Club's golf course.

Throughout, Findlay refers to players hitting shots with brassies, spoons, cleeks, mashies, niblicks and mashie niblicks. He wrote the article in 1922, when clubs were identified by these picturesque names, not by numbers. The naming tradition dates from the mid-19th century in the British Isles. The origin of most of these descriptive names is uncertain or unknown.

A quest. The old clubs were hand-crafted. Their playing qualities relied on the vagaries of the club head and shaft materials – shafts were wood, mostly hickory – and the club maker's skills. There were no standard lofts. One club maker's mashie may have had the same loft as another's mid-mashie. Indeed, lofts of niblicks produced in the same shop often varied because the crafting was imprecise. Clubs were sold individually; there were no matching sets offering players a combination of club head and shaft with a consistent feel. Assembling a set was a quest.

When the Spalding Sporting Goods Company began manufacturing standardized club sets in the early 1930s, the named irons gave way to numbered clubs. This period also ushered in the era of the steel shaft, which was approved for use by the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, golf's governing body, in 1929. Many of the first steel shafts were finished to a wood-like appearance, all in keeping with the traditional look.

Assigning a number based on today's clubs to yesteryear's named clubs is an approximation at best. Suffice to say, each club had a purpose: a golfer didn't use a cleek when a niblick would do. The list below describes the most commonly used named clubs.

Wooden-headed clubs:

- Driver
- Brassie
- Spoon: a higher lofted wood

Irons, from low loft to high loft:

- Putter
- Driving iron
- Cleek
- Mid mashie
- Mashie iron
- Mashie
- Spade mashie
- Mashie niblick
- Pitching niblick
- Niblick