



The Golf Chronicles

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

Number 14 • August 11, 2015



Cotton Hirneisen won a record seven Berks Publinks titles between 1957 and 1984. He also won the state Publinks four times and the state senior Publinks five times. His 103 tournament wins include the 1978 Berks Amateur championship.

State Publinks Champs

Cotton Hirneisen (1960, '70, '78 and '82) is one of eight players from Berks County to win the Pennsylvania Publinks championship. The other state champions are:

- **Dick Adam** (1974 and '76)
- **Emlyn Aubrey** (1984 and '85)
- **Dominic Foscone** (1953)
- **Bobby Millard** (1986)
- **Jim Heck** (1994, played at Galen Hall GC)
- **Greg Volutza** (1998)
- **Rod James** (2011)

Lefty, Gix, Mutz and Cotton Public Course Players Take Center Stage

The Berks County Public Links championship is one of the oldest tournaments in the domain. The tournament was established in 1931 under sponsorship of the City of Reading Recreation Department. This was just two years after the Berks County Golf Association's first amateur championship.

Reading Country Club hosted the Berks County Public Links Championship for the first time in 2015. **Bill Allen** won his second title over a field of 30 players.

That it took 84 years for the Publinks to come to RCC is no surprise. RCC did not become a public course until 2006.

The first Berks County Publinks tournament in 1931 attracted about 100 entries to the now-defunct Riverside Golf Club in Muhlenberg Township. Match play was the game in the early years. This format required a qualifying round to determine flights. The tournament consumed four and sometimes five weekends.

Participation was open to residents of Berks County. Members of country clubs were ineligible, as were caddies and all employees of golf clubs.

Medal play was first used in 1965, with the low 20 qualifiers playing 72 holes. The remaining flights went to match play.

Galen Hall Golf Club staged the tournament from 1982 to 2013, with **Frank Schnee** as tournament director. Because of declining entries, the Publinks was not played in 2014. The Berks County Golf Association added the tournament to its schedule for the first time in 2015. This followed a two-year run of a BCGA Publinks partner's tournament at Flying Hills Golf Club in 2013 and Rich-Maiden Golf Club in 2014. That event did not attract a sufficient number of entries to sustain it, so the BCGA filled the Publinks void with the individual tournament.

This was not the first time the Publinks nearly expired. By 1969, interest in the Publinks waned to the point that the City Recreation Department cancelled the event because of a lack of entries. **Buddy** and **Harold Heckman**, operators of Manor Golf Club, stepped forward to stage an 18-hole tournament. **Jack Shollenberger**, the defending champion, won with a 67 at Manor GC on September 6. The Recreation Department resumed sponsorship and continued through the early 1980s.

A women's Publinks was added in 1974. **Wilma Holland** won the inaugural event, played at Willow Hollow GC. The women's Publinks was last played in 1990 at Galen Hall, Kelly Emes winning her second consecutive championship.

Publinks Hijinks

- **Wilmer "Lefty" Faber** was the first "pure" public-course golfer to win the Berks Amateur. He accomplished the feat in 1939, the same year he won the Publinks for the first time. Faber defeated 17-year-old **Johnny Markel**, the defending champion, 1-up at RCC for the Berks Am crown. Byron Nelson, the RCC pro and reigning U.S. Open champion, served as the walking referee for the match. This was Faber's only Berks Am; Markel won the championship seven times before turning pro.
- Although **Bob Dinsmore** (1934, '35 and '37) and **Dr. A.J. McDowell** (1931 and '36) won the Berks Am prior to 1939 as public-course players (members of Riverside GC), each had previously belonged to a private club.
- **Harold Brossman**, 1943 Publinks champion, had to go through the **Faber** brothers on his way to the championship. He defeated **Lefty**, 2 and 1, in the morning and **Charlie**, the defending Publinks champion, 3 and 2, in the afternoon. Brossman won the Publinks title the next day with a 1-up victory over **Buddy Heckman** in the 36-hole final played at Riverside GC.



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*The most noteworthy USGA Men's Publinks championship was the 2005 edition, held in Lebanon, Ohio. A 15-year-old **Michelle Wie** was on a quest to become the first female winner, which would have earned her an invitation to the Masters. She advanced to the match play rounds, losing in the quarterfinals to **Clay Ogden**, who went on to win the tournament.*

Major Publinkers

Trevor Immelman became the first Publinks champion (1998) to win a professional major championship with his victory at the 2008 Masters. His playing partner in the final round, **Brandt Snedeker**, won the Publinks in 2003.

Michelle Wei and **Yani Tseng**, winners of the Women's Publinks championship, have also won professional majors.

Other Publinks winners who enjoyed success on the PGA tour include **Jody Mudd**, **Billy Mayfair**, **Tim Clark** and **Ryan Moore**.

- **Bucky Spangler**, winner of the first Publinks in 1931, was witness to history in 1937. On the afternoon of April 19, he played in a foursome at RCC that included Stan Giles (the 1909 Berks County high school tennis champion who became Reading's first police commissioner in 1932), **Al Ashmore** and the host professional, **Byron Nelson**. Lord Byron shot a course-record 65, breaking the record of 67 he set that same morning. The 67 eclipsed the 68 carded by professional **George Low, Jr.**, of Philadelphia, in the 1936 Central Pennsylvania Open. The course played to a par of 71, with the 10th hole a par 4, the 12th a par 5 and the 17th a par 4.
- The Berks Publinks debuted four years before the state tournament. The first Pennsylvania Publinks championship was played in 1935.
- Manor Golf Club hosted the 1950 Pennsylvania Publinks. **Wally "Skipper" Kilrea, Jr.**, a 17-year-old from Hershey, defended his championship with rounds of 73-75-71-72—291, 15 over par. **Ernie Meckley**, Manor GC, was second at 297, **Dom Foscone** of Green Hills GC was ninth at 302 and **John Yocum**, Green Hills, was 12th at 305.
- In a July 25, 1950, newspaper article, **Buddy Heckman**, winner of the Berks Publinks in 1944, '46, '47 and '48 and the state Publinks in 1947 and 1948 at Hershey, predicted a state Publinks winning score of 280, or +4, for the 5,550-yard, par 69 Manor course. Heckman turned pro after his 1948 victory and was ineligible for the Publinks. Heckman, the assistant pro at Berkshire CC, shot a record 61 at Manor earlier that month.
- Public links players were permitted to play in the Berks Amateur Championship for the first time in 1931. The first two Berks Ams were restricted to members of the BCGA member clubs, Berkleigh, Berkshire and Reading. **Hawley Quier** won the first Berks Am in 1929 at Berkshire. **Carmi Hicks** won in 1930 at Reading. In 1931 at Berkleigh, 286 golfers posting qualifying scores over the nine-hole layout. **Billy Bair** and **Earle Biehl** were co-medalists at 86. **Dr. A.L. McDowell** defeated Biehl for the championship.
- **Michelle Wie** played the qualifying tournament for the 2004 USGA Men's Publinks championship as a 14-year old. The qualifier was played on June 18 at Manada Golf Club, Grantville, Pa. Played in a threesome with **Andy Levering**, Berks Publinks champion in 1997 and 2001, Wie shot a pair of two-under-par 71s to miss qualifying by two strokes. Levering shot 167.

The USGA Publinks

The United States Golf Association established the amateur public links championship in 1922 for golfers who played on public courses. At that time, entry into the U.S. amateur championship was restricted to members of clubs that were affiliated with the USGA or other national governing bodies. Members of private clubs were barred from entry into the Publinks. In 1979, entry into the U.S. Amateur was opened to all amateurs, whether or not they were club members. In February 2013, the USGA announced that the Publinks would be discontinued after its 2014 edition, and would be replaced by a new men's amateur four-ball championship.

The first Publinks, won by **Edmund R. Held**, was played at the Ottawa Park Course, Toledo, Ohio. The event grew from 140 entries in 1922 to over 6,000 in 1998.

Byron Meath won the final Publinks at Sand Creek Station Golf Course, Newton, Kansas.

The U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links, first played in 1977 at Yahara Hills Golf club, Madison, Wisc., was also discontinued after 2014 and replaced by a four-ball tournament. Winners include **Yani Tseng** (2004), who has won five professional major championships, and **Michelle Wei** (2003), with one professional major. Wei won the Publinks at age 13, the youngest player ever to win an adult U.S.G.A. championship. She first qualified for the Publinks in 2000 at age 10.

In the final women's Publinks, staged at The Home Course, Tacoma, Wash., 15-year-old **Fumie (Alice) Jo** made history by becoming the first player from mainland China to win a USGA title when she outlasted 14-year-old **Eun Jeong Seong**, South Korea, 3 and 2.

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Byron Nelson
RCC Pro
1937-39



Going Low

Cotton Hirneisen has the most Men’s Publinks wins with seven (1957, ‘60, ‘62, ‘63, ‘65, ‘66, ‘84), his first and last wins separated by 27 years. He set the 72-hole tournament scoring record of 64-64-71-65—264, 16 under par, in 1965 at Manor GC.

The 36-hole tournament record of 136 is held by **Jack Shollenberger**, 1976 at Galen Hall GC, and **Craig Gilbert**, 1980 at Exeter GC.

The 18-hole tournament record of 67 is shared by **Dick Arms**, 1968 at Willow Hollow GC; **Jack Shollenberger**, 1969 at Manor GC; and **Herman Fry**, 1972 at Flying Hills GC.

Bill Schultz won the most consecutive titles with four (2003-’06).

Sharon Porter (1987) and **Kelly Emes** (1990) share the Women's Publinks scoring record of 157 for 36 holes at Galen Hall GC.

Kay Geitner and **Wilma Holland** won the most Women’s Publinks titles with three and Geitner has most consecutive titles with three (1976, ‘77 and ‘78).

Berks Men’s Publinks Winners

- 1931 Herbert W. Spangler at Riverside GC
- 1932 Mickey Norton at Riverside GC
- 1933 Art Gable at Riverside GC
- 1934 Al Ackley at Riverside GC
- 1935 Art Gable at Riverside GC
- 1936 Alex Fantilli at Riverside GC
- 1937 John Ciabattoni at Riverside GC
- 1938 John Ciabattoni at Riverside GC
- 1939 Wilmer “Lefty” Faber at Riverside GC
- 1940 Wilmer “Lefty” Faber at Riverside GC
- 1941 Ray Francis at Riverside GC
- 1942 Charlie Faber at Riverside GC*
- 1943 Harold Brossman at Riverside GC*
- *In 1942 and ‘43, the Publinks was combined with the Riverside club championship. The winner of the medal round qualifying won the club championship (Horace Hoffman [150] in 1942 and Lefty Faber [73] in 1943). The players were seeded by their qualifying scores for the Publinks match play championship.*
- 1944 Walter “Buddy” Heckman at Riverside GC
- 1945 Wilmer “Lefty” Faber at Riverside GC
- 1946 Walter “Buddy” Heckman
- 1947 Walter “Buddy” Heckman at Manor GC
- 1948 Walter “Buddy” Heckman
- 1949 Jackie Weitzel at Manor GC
- 1950 Stan “Gix” Geisinger
- 1951 Stan “Gix” Geisinger at Manor GC
- 1952 Jesse Killian at Green Hills GC
- 1953 William “Mutz” Koehler at Green Hills GC
- 1954 William “Mutz” Koehler
- 1955 Scott Weaver
- 1956 Gerry Gerhart at Manor GC
- 1957 Cotton Hirneisen at Manor GC
- 1958 Leon Buchter at Manor GC
- 1959 Joe DeAngelo at Manor GC
- 1960 Cotton Hirneisen at Manor GC
- 1961 Leon Buchter at Manor GC

- 1962 Cotton Hirneisen at Manor GC
- 1963 Cotton Hirneisen at Manor GC
- 1964 Bud Weidenhammer at Manor GC
- 1965 Cotton Hirneisen at Manor GC
- 1966 Cotton Hirneisen at Manor GC
- 1967 at Green Acres GC; not found
- 1968 Dick Arms at Willow Hollow GC
- 1969 Jack Shollenberger at Manor GC
- 1970 Dale Biedler
- 1971 Herman Fry
- 1972 Herman Fry at Flying Hills GC
- 1973 Barry Adams at Rich-Maiden GC
- 1974 Jeff Hartman at Willow Hollow GC
- 1975 Dale Biedler at Arrowhead GC
- 1976 Jack Shollenberger at Galen Hall GC
- 1977 Aaron Aughtry at Blackwood GC
- 1978 Keith Li at Green Acres GC*
- 1979 Nick Meter at Arrowhead GC
- 1980 Craig Gilbert at Exeter GC
- 1981 Dick Adam at Galen Hall GC
- 1982 Dick Adam at Galen Hall GC
- 1983 Herman Fry at Galen Hall GC
- 1984 Cotton Hirneisen at Galen Hall GC
- 1985 Frank Schnee at Galen Hall GC
- 1986 Bob Mogel at Galen Hall GC
- 1987 Bob Mogel at Galen Hall GC
- 1988 Joe Joyner at Galen Hall GC
- 1989 Dan Powell at Galen Hall GC
- 1990 Craig Maloney at Galen Hall GC
- 1991 Craig Maloney at Galen Hall GC
- 1992 Donny Wessner at Galen Hall GC
- 1993 Perry Landis at Galen Hall GC
- 1994 Scott Orr at Galen Hall GC
- 1995 Scott Orr at Galen Hall GC
- 1996 Bill Allen at Galen Hall GC
- 1997 Andy Levering at Galen Hall GC
- 1998 Chris Storck at Galen Hall GC
- 1999 Bob Mogel at Galen Hall GC

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- 2000 Chris Storck at Galen Hall GC
- 2001 Andy Levering at Galen Hall GC
- 2002 Chris Storck at Galen Hall GC
- 2003 Bill Schultz at Galen Hall GC
- 2004 Bill Schultz at Galen Hall GC
- 2005 Bill Schultz at Galen Hall GC
- 2006 Bill Schultz at Galen Hall GC
- 2007 Matt Dolinsky at Galen Hall GC
- 2008 Rick Krick at Galen Hall GC
- 2009 Matt Dolinsky at Galen Hall GC
- 2010 Matt Dolinsky at Galen Hall GC
- 2011 Tom Wenrich at Galen Hall GC
- 2012 Bill Schultz at Galen Hall GC
- 2013 Chris Storck at Galen Hall GC
- 2014 No tournament
- 2015 Bill Allen at Reading CC
- 2016 Jim Yenser at Berkleigh CC
- 2017 Bill Schultz at Chapel Hill GC
- 2018 James Furness at Willow Hollow GC

Women’s Publinks Winners

- 1974 Wilma Holland at Willow Hollow GC
- 1975 Wilma Holland at Arrowhead GC
- 1976 Kay Geitner at Galen Hall GC
- 1977 Kay Geitner at Blackwood GC
- 1978 Kay Geitner at Green Acres GC
- 1979 Darnell Eltz at Arrowhead GC
- 1980 Pat Kopicz at Exeter GC
- 1981 Not found
- 1982 Barb Heckman at Galen Hall GC
- 1983 Wilma Holland at Galen Hall GC
- 1984 Carolyn Hatt at Galen Hall GC
- 1985 Sharon Porter at Galen Hall GC
- 1986 Andee Santangelo at Galen Hall GC
- 1987 Sharon Porter at Galen Hall GC
- 1989 Kelly Emes at Galen Hall GC
- 1990 Kelly Emes at Galen Hall GC

July 19, 2004

Local

Berks County Public Links

Championship

At Galen Hall (par 72)

Final results (27 holes)

Championship flight: Bill Schultz 65-39—104; Bob Mogel 75-33—108; Rick Krick 74-35—109; Donny Wessner 69-41—110; Byron Whitman 72-39—111; Rennie Sacco 73-39—112; Bill Allen 73-41—114; Chris Storck 74-40—114; Jim Herlihy 75-39—114; Joe Butto 76-40—116; Mark Delong 70-47—117; Sam Harter 75-42—117; Gerald Phillips 75-43—118; Brian Sep 74-46—120; John West 76-44—120; Todd Frank 73-WD.

Note: The championship flight was shortened from 36 holes to 27 holes due to rain. Second rounds for the first, second and third flights were washed out.