

Hickory dickory dock, time to turn back the golfing clock

With the World Hickory Open having taken place at Gullane over the last couple of days, Evening News golf correspondent **MARTIN DEMPSTER** couldn't resist an invitation to dig out his plus fours and play the game Scotland gave to the world the old way . . .

MY daughters had a good laugh at my "fancy dress" costume and, to start with, I couldn't tell the difference between an iron and a putter. But, once I'd stopped worrying about what people were thinking about what I was wearing and started to select the correct clubs, I thoroughly enjoyed my first experience of hickory golf.

It came in the PGA World Hickory Open at Gullane, where I joined forces with Alasdair Good, the local professional, and two fellow journalists, one from Sweden and the other from the Netherlands, in a team for the pro-am on the opening day of the 36-hole event.

Having made the effort to dress up for the occasion – after the stick I'd taken before leaving home, I was too embarrassed to stop for a coffee on the city bypass – it was comforting to arrive at Gullane to see so many others, particularly the women, having done likewise.

Lionel Freedman, the man behind the World Hickory Open, and Mike Westmacott, his trusty lieutenant, got me sorted with a set of clubs but, before I even got to the practice area to try them out, I had a problem.

The light leather pencil bag was a delight to carry but it only had one pocket, big enough for just a few golf balls. No space for water-

proofs or even mobile phones – ah, the hickory era must have been bliss!

I'm like a kid with a new toy when I get my hands on a piece of golf equipment and, even with a brassie, mashie, mashie niblick and niblick in my bag, this was certainly no different, though my first two or three shots on the practice area hardly filled me with confidence for the round ahead over Gullane No. 2. Neither did

my opening tee shot, which strayed out of bounds, and, after pulling out a 2-iron instead of the putter when arriving at the green, I was beginning to think I'd make a big mistake.

I was still struggling to hit a straight shot when, on the fourth hole, the Swedish journalist, who'd been practising with his hickories at Craighielaw and The Renaissance Club the previous two days, wandered over and offered me some advice.

"You are being fooled by the clubs," he remarked. "When you swing too fast, the blade opens up. So try and swing a bit slower."

From that moment on, I never looked back. Sure, there were

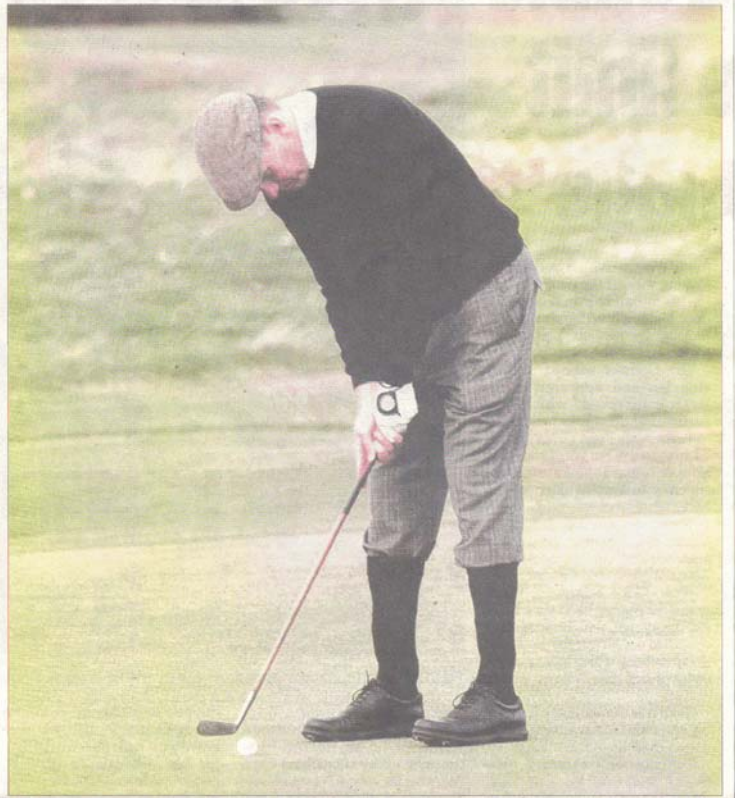
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plenty of times that I didn't quite hit the sweet spot but the chance to play with clubs that the likes of Bobby Jones produced some amazing golf with was a genuine thrill.

Having been brought up on links golf at Dunbar, I've always loved the challenge of trying to

play low shots into greens and, with a hickory in your hand, that's certainly something that's called for. Faced with a bunker between you and the flag, you can forget about flying it high in the air and using those grooves to get a bit of spin on the ball.

By the end, I felt comfortable with the brassie off the tee and even hit it off the fairway a couple of times, the low trajectory ensuring the ball ran a long way. I



EASY DOES IT: Martin Dempster took advice from a Swedish colleague at Gullane. Picture: ESME ALL

also managed to complete the 18 holes without losing a ball, something to be pleased with on a breezy old day up on Gullane Hill. If you've not tried it, I'd certainly recommend the chance to play hickory golf to any enthusiastic golfer. And, if you do, make sure you also do the "fancy dress" bit!
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■ OLDCORN'S POOR PUTTING PUTS PAID TO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP BID

ANDREW OLDCORN bemoaned his putting after missing out on a chance to win the PGA World Hickory Open at Gullane.

The Kings Acre professional, one of three joint leaders after the opening round, had to settle for a share of fourth on nine-over after a second-round 78.

"My putting was horrific today," said the former PGA champion, who is unhappy about not getting an invite for next week's Dunhill Links Championship. "I must have had over 40

putts out there – the first time that's happened in my career."

Oldcorn finished three shots behind winner Mark King, who claimed the £2,000 top prize with rounds of 75 and 73 over the No. 2 Course.

The 38-year-old was delighted to become a world champion but revealed it still wouldn't get him out of his shift today at his base at Kingsfield Golf Centre outside Linlithgow.

Gullane's Alasdair Good shared second spot with defending champion Lindsay Mann.